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If God's Existence is Unprovable, Then is Everything Permitted? : Kant, Radical Agnosticism, and Morality

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IF GOD’S EXISTENCE IS UNPROVABLE, THEN IS EVERYTHING PERMITTED? KANT, RADICAL AGNOSTICISM, AND MORALITY

– Robert Hanna –

Abstract. This essay is about how four deeply important Kantian ideas can significantly illuminate some essentially intertwined issues in philosophical theology, philosophical logic, the metaphysics of agency, and above all, morality. These deeply important Kantian ideas are: (1) Kant’s argument for the impossibility of the Ontological Argument, (2) Kant’s first “postulate of pure practical reason,” immortality, (3) Kant’s third postulate of pure practical reason, the existence of God, and finally (4) Kant’s second postulate of pure practical reason, freedom.

Keywords: Kant, ontological argument, God, existence, freedom, agency, morality.

The famous ontological (Cartesian) proof of the existence of the highest being from concepts is only so much trouble and labor lost, and a human being can no more become richer in insight from mere ideas than a merchant could in resources if he wanted to improve his financial state by adding a few zeroes to his cash balance.

I. Kant (*CPR* A602/B630)¹

¹ For convenience, I refer to Kant’s works infratextually in parentheses. The citations include both an abbreviation of the English title and the corresponding volume and page numbers in the standard “Akademie” edition of Kant’s works: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Königlich Preussischen (now Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften (G. Reimer [now de Gruyter], Berlin 1902–). I generally follow the standard English translations, but have occasionally modified them where appropriate. For references to the first *Critique*, I follow the common practice of giving page numbers from the A (1781) and B (1787) German editions only. Here is a list of the relevant abbreviations and English translations: *CPJ* – *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. P. Guyer, E. Matthews, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000; *CPR* – *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer, A. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997; *CPrR* – *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. M. Gregor, [in:] *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 133–272; *GMM* – *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor, [in:] *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 37–108; *Rel* – *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. A. Wood, G. Di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998; *WiE* – *An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, [in:] H. Reiss (ed.), *Kant’s Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1970, pp. 54–60.

A **postulate** of pure practical reason ... [is] a *theoretical* proposition, though not one provable as such, insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid *practical* law.

I. Kant (*CPrR*5: 122)

There are three existence-spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, the religious.... The ethical sphere is only a transition-sphere, and therefore its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The esthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious the sphere of fulfillment, but, please note, not a fulfillment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack with gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space, and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful.

S. Kierkegaard²

"Take that money away with you, sir," Smerdyakov said with a sigh.

"Of course, I'll take it! But why are you giving it to me if you committed a murder to get it?" Ivan asked, looking at him with intense surprise.

"I don't want it at all," Smerdyakov said in a shaking voice, with a wave of the hand. "I did have an idea of starting a new life in Moscow, but that was just a dream, sir, and mostly because 'everything is permitted'. This you did teach me, sir, for you talked to me a lot about such things: for if there's no everlasting God, there's no such thing as virtue, and there's no need of it at all. Yes, sir, you were right about that. That's the way I reasoned."

F. Dostoevsky³

If good or bad willing changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world, not the facts; not the things that can be expressed in language. In brief, the world must thereby become quite another. It must so to speak wax or wane as a whole. The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy.

L. Wittgenstein⁴

² Kierkegaard [1997a] pp. 170-186, at p. 182; see also Kant (*Rel*6: 57-202).

³ Dostoyevsky [1958] vol. 2, p. 743.

⁴ Wittgenstein [1981] prop. 6.43, p. 185.

I. Introduction

This essay is about how four deeply important Kantian ideas can significantly illuminate some essentially intertwined issues in philosophical theology, philosophical logic, the metaphysics of agency, and above all, morality. These deeply important Kantian ideas are:

(1) Kant's argument for the impossibility of the Ontological Argument on logico-semantic grounds alone, which entails both the logical unprovability and scientific unknowability of God's existence and God's non-existence alike,

(2) Kant's first "postulate of pure practical reason," *immortality*, which basically says that even though we cannot either logically prove or scientifically know either that our souls are immortal or that they are not immortal, we must nevertheless morally believe in the rational Idea that our deaths we will have an endless human personal existence in a world that is wholly known and governed by God, and in which eventually all the morally virtuous people are made happy and all the wicked people are punished,

(3) Kant's third postulate of pure practical reason, *the existence of God*, which basically says that even though we cannot logically prove or scientifically know either that God exists or that God does not exist, we must nevertheless morally believe in the rational Idea that that God exists in order to unify happiness and virtue in a desperately nonideal world filled to the brim with "the crooked timber of humanity" and "radical evil," and in which, it seems, nothing will ever be made straight, and "no good deed goes unpunished,"

and finally

(4) Kant's second postulate of pure practical reason, *freedom*, which basically says that *because* we cannot logically prove or scientifically know either that God exists or that God does not exist, we must *therefore* morally believe in the rational Idea that we are both transcendently free and also practically free in order to rule out:

(i) the impossible pseudo-science of transcendental theology,

(ii) the self-stultifying threat to our transcendently free intentional agency of a world in which, it seems, on the *one* hand, that the past is completely filled with deterministic and impersonal causes (the rock) and, on the *other* hand, that the future is randomly indeterministic and heart-breakingly completely filled with possibilities for bad luck (the hard place), and

(iii) the self-stultifying threat to our practically free moral agency of a world in which, it seems, moral chaos reigns and “everything is permitted.”

Otherwise put, this essay is an investigation in what I call *existential Kantian moral theology*. By *existential* I mean to pick out all the profoundly value-laden, inherently anthropocentric, and metaphysically irreducible facts targeted by the 19th and 20th century philosophical and literary movement of Existentialism, which is concerned with our anxious search for a coherent, meaningful, and morally good life in an otherwise absurd, meaningless, and amoral world existing seemingly without a God, either because God has apparently withdrawn from Her Creation (theistic Existentialism—e.g., Kierkegaard) or because God apparently does not exist at all (atheistic Existentialism—e.g., Sartre).⁵ But I also intend *existential* to convey the specifically *logico-semantic* sense of *existential predication*, i.e., either particular quantification (as in “Some Fs are Gs”) or direct reference (as in “Kant exists” or “*This* exists”). That this perhaps surprising conjunction of existential-moral-theological and existential-logical notions is not in any way conceptually incoherent, but on the contrary is *normatively cogent*, was fully grasped by the early Wittgenstein:

[Wittgenstein] used to come to see me every evening at midnight, and pace up and down my room like a wild beast for three hours in agitated silence. Once I said to him: “Are you thinking about logic or about your sins?” “Both,” he replied, and continued his pacing.⁶

II. Kant's Philosophical Theology and The Incoherence Problem

Kant's philosophical theology is notoriously difficult to understand. This is principally due to an apparent inconsistency between the four proper parts of his theory.

Part 1. First, Kant works out a devastating logical, semantic, and epistemological critique of any possible proof for God's existence, including The Ontological Argument, The Cosmological Argument, and The Design Argument—a.k.a. “the physico-theological argument” or The Teleological Argument—which has the immediate further implication that any possible proof for God's *non*-existence is *also* impossible, including The Argument from Evil, in either its classical “metaphysical” version or its more modern “evidential” version. More precisely, Kant argues that God's existence or non-existence is not only

⁵ See, e.g., Crowell [2012].

⁶ Russell [1975] p. 330.

unknowable but also *uncognizable*, although at the same time God's existence remains *thinkable*.

Now for Kant, "scientific knowing" or *Wissen* is the same as a true belief that *P* which is sufficiently justified by reasons in both a subjective sense (in which case it is "conviction" or *Überzeugung*) and also in an objective or universally intersubjective sense (in which case it is "certainty" or *Gewissheit*) (*CPR* A822/B850). Apart from sufficient justification by reasons, scientific knowing also has two further substantive necessary conditions, namely

(i) truth or "objective reality," which is the formal correspondence of a cognition with an actual or real-world object,

and

(ii) empirical meaningfulness or "objective validity," which is the necessary relatedness of any cognition to direct, non-conceptual sensory acquaintances or encounters with real individual worldly objects, i.e., "empirical intuitions" (*empirischen Anschauungen*).

By sharp contrast to scientific knowing, "cognition" or *Erkenntnis* is either

(i) according to the very broad construal in the 1781 or A edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, any object-directed consciousness whatsoever (*CPR* A320/B376),

or else

(ii) according to the quite narrow construal in the 1787 or B edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, an empirically meaningful (objectively valid) judgment that *P*, which is the same as a "judgment of experience" or *Erfahrungsurteil* (*CPR* Bxxvi, B142, B147).

On either the (i) broad or the (ii) narrow construal of *Erkenntnis*, however, it is possible for a cognition to be either not objectively valid (i.e., not empirically meaningful) or not objectively real (i.e. false), hence the notion of cognition is not equivalent with the notion of knowledge, which on the contrary entails both objective validity (i.e., empirical meaningfulness) and objective reality (i.e., truth), in addition to sufficient justification by reasons. In any case, objective validity is a necessary and sufficient condition of the truth-valuedness of any belief, judgment, or statement. More specifically, the failure of objective validity for any putative belief, judgment, or statement entails that it is nothing but a mere *thought*

which lacks a truth-value altogether – “thoughts without content are empty (*leer*)” (CPR A51/B75) – and thereby is a “truth-value gap.”⁷

Correspondingly, “thinking” or *Denken* in the 1787 or B edition of the first *Critique* is minimal consistent conceivability, which entails the bare logical possibility of the object which is thereby thinkable, but does *not* guarantee the real or metaphysical possibility of that object, much less its actuality or reality (CPR Bxxvi), much less the truth-valuedness of that thought.

Part 2. Second, Kant works out a devastating logical, semantic, and epistemological critique of any possible proof for the existence or non-existence of an immaterial, substantial soul, which has the direct implication that any possible proof for the immortality or non-immortality of the soul is also impossible. More precisely, Kant argues that the immortality or non-immortality of the soul is not only scientifically knowable but also uncognizable, although at the same time the immortality of the soul remains thinkable.

Part 3. Third, Kant argues that the rational or reasons-responsive content of “belief” or “faith” (*Glauben*) in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, and more generally the rational or reasons-responsive content of theology and religion, is strictly *moral or practical* in character, and not scientific or theoretical in character.

Part 4. Fourth – and most puzzlingly of all in view of the other parts of his theory – Kant also argues that believing in God’s existence and the immortality of the soul are *necessary presuppositions* of morality, in the strong sense that without these rational commitments, not only would morality itself would be empty and pointless, but also my personal commitment to morality would be self-alienating and self-stultifying:

I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted. (CPR A828/B856)

Parts 1, 2, and 3 are clearly consistent. The equally clear problem is that **Part 4** apparently contradicts **Parts 1, 2, and 3**: How can believing in God’s existence and the immortality of the soul be constitutive presuppositions of morality, on the assumption that morality exhausts the rational content of theology and religion, if all proofs for God’s existence and the immortality of the soul are impossible? For convenience, let us call this *The Incoherence Problem*. In order to make any

⁷ See Hanna [2001] ch. 2, esp. section 2.2.

headway at all towards solving The Incoherence Problem, I think that we must especially emphasize and understand three special features of Kant's theory.

The **first** special feature is the fact that Kant's critique of arguments for God's existence and for the immortality of the soul yield the conclusions that we *scientifically know* that neither God's existence nor God's non-existence can be proved, and also that we *scientifically know* that neither the immortality of the soul nor the non-immortality of the soul can be proved, although at the same time they remain thinkable. In other words, for Kant we *scientifically know* that God's existence or non-existence is unknowable and uncognizable, and we also *scientifically know* that the immortality or non-immortality of the soul is unknowable and uncognizable, although they remain thinkable. Let us call this feature *radical agnosticism*, since it is not ordinary agnosticism or *epistemic neutrality* as between opposing beliefs. On the contrary, it is a special form of *epistemic certainty* with respect to the inherent scientific unknowability and uncognizability alike of *both* members of certain contradictory or contrary belief-pairs, while at the same time accepting the thinkability of both propositions. Radical agnosticism is nothing more and nothing less than the permanent rational suspension of belief in a thinkable proposition (or doctrine) and its negation alike. Or otherwise put, *radical agnosticism is having objective epistemic certainty about that which is objectively epistemically uncertain.*

The **second** special feature is that for Kant the rational attitude of *believing-in* is *not* the same as the rational attitude of *believing-that*. For example, I can believe *in* global justice, and thereby be volitionally committed to global justice, and indeed be prepared to die for the sake of global justice, even if I also strongly believe *that* contemporary post-industrial capitalist world politics are inherently corrupt and evil, and there is no true justice anywhere on the face of the earth. Conversely, I can believe with a priori rational intuitive certainty that $7+5=12$ even if, as Kant very aptly remarked, I would not be prepared to die for this belief.⁸ Let us call this special feature *believing-in-as-volitional-commitment*.

And the **third** special feature of Kant's account is that for him there is a crucial distinction between

(i) *believing that P* when you have no sufficient epistemic justification for believing that P,

and

⁸ See Stevenson [2003] pp. 72–101, at p. 85.

(ii) *choosing or acting as if, counterfactually, you believe that P*, even though in fact you have no sufficient epistemic justification for believing that P.

Propositional attitude (i) cannot be rational in any sense. It cannot be epistemically rational to believe that P without sufficient epistemic justification for believing that P, nor can it be practically rational to believe that P without sufficient epistemic justification for believing that P. In other words, you cannot have a good practical reason to have an epistemic belief in a proposition you know you have no good epistemic reason to believe.

But by sharp contrast, propositional attitude (ii) *can* indeed be fully *practically* rational:

Only in a practical relation...can taking something that is theoretically insufficient to be true be called believing (*Glauben*). (CPR A823/B852)

More precisely, what propositional attitude (ii) says is that you choose or act in such a way that you *would* act, *were* you to believe it, even though either (a) you *do* not epistemically believe it, or else (b) you *cannot* epistemically believe it. Hence a case of propositional attitude (ii) can be fully practically rational if you have a sufficient practical reason for comporting yourself in the same way as you *would* comport yourself, *were* you to epistemically believe a certain proposition that P, even though you scientifically know that this proposition is unknowable and uncognizable, and indeed even though you scientifically know that the denial of this proposition P is also unknowable and uncognizable, although at the same time both the proposition and its denial remain thinkable. In other words, propositional attitude (ii) can be both fully practically rational and also fully consistent with *radical agnosticism*. You can have a sufficient practical reason to comport yourself *as if, counterfactually, you epistemically believe* a proposition that P, even though you *scientifically know* you have no good epistemic reason to believe that P or disbelieve that P. In this way, propositional attitude (ii) is not a *doxic* propositional attitude (i.e., an epistemic belief), but instead a *commissive* propositional attitude (i.e., a practical belief). For example, I can have a sufficient practical reason for comporting myself *as if, counterfactually, I epistemically believe* that nearly all people are generous and good-hearted, since that way of comporting myself keeps me committed to working towards global justice in the face of a large body of otherwise very disheartening evidence which shows that the purely decision-theoretic interests of multinational corporations will always trample on and trump the basic human interests of ordinary people, and even though I have no good epistemic reason whatsoever for believing or disbelieving

that nearly all ordinary people are generous and good-hearted. When a case of propositional attitude (ii) has a categorically sufficient, or *moral*, practical reason supporting it, then Kant calls *moral belief* or *moral certainty*:

[In moral belief] it is absolutely necessary that something must happen, namely, that I fulfill the moral law in all points. The end here is inescapably fixed, and according to all my insight there is possible only a single condition under which this end is consistent with all ends together and thereby has practical validity, namely, that there be a God and a future world; I also know with complete certainty that no one else knows of any other conditions that lead to this same unity of ends under the moral law.... The conviction is not **logical** but **moral** certainty, and, since it depends on subjective grounds (of moral disposition) I must not even say "It is morally certain that there is a God," etc., but rather "I am morally certain" etc. That is, the belief in a God and another world is so interwoven with my moral disposition that I am in as little danger of ever surrendering the former as I am worried that the latter can ever be torn away from me. (*CPR* A828–829/B856–857).

Kant's notion of "moral certainty" plays a very interesting variation on Descartes's notion of "moral certainty" in his *Principles of Philosophy*, about which Descartes says:

Moral certainty is certainty which is sufficient to regulate our behavior, or which measures up to the certainty we have on matters relating to the conduct of life which we never normally doubt, though we know it is possible, absolutely speaking, that they may be false.⁹

In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes also explicitly contrasts moral certainty with "metaphysical certainty,"¹⁰ i.e., with what Kant calls *logical* certainty. It is also importantly ironic that in that particular text in the *Discourse*, Descartes is explicitly contrasting the *metaphysical certainty* of his proof for the existence of God and the soul with the merely *moral certainty* of

... everything else of which [people] may think themselves more sure—such as their having a body, there being stars and an earth, and the like.

⁹ Descartes [1985a] vol. 1, article 205 (first sentence of the French edition), p. 289 (AT 327).

¹⁰ Descartes [1985b] p. 130 (AT 37–38).

For Kant, by sharp contrast, there can be *no such thing* as metaphysical or logical certainty about the existence of God and the immortality of the soul; there really can be and is *scientific knowledge* about the existence of one's own body, the earth, the stars, "and the like"; and there really can be, and only *ought to be*, moral certainty about the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. In this sense, Kant can consistently hold that

(i) it is cognitively impossible either to *believe-that* God exists or to *believe-that* God does not exist,

and also that

(ii) it is morally obligatory to *believe-in* the rational Ideas of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.

In this sense, Kant's most philosophically insightful and knowledgeable biographer, Manfred Kuehn, is strictly speaking mistaken when he says that

It was clear to anyone who knew Kant personally that he had no faith in a personal God. Having postulated God and immortality, he himself did not believe in either.¹¹

Strictly speaking, what Kuehn *should* have written is that

It was clear to anyone who knew Kant personally that he had no **belief-that a personal God either exists or does not exist**. Having postulated God and immortality, he himself did not **believe-that** either.

I will come back to all of these important points again in section IV.

III. The Unprovability of God's Existence or Non-Existence

Kant's critique of "transcendental theology" (*CPR* A631/B659) occurs in chapter three of the Transcendental Dialectic, and is called "The Ideal of Pure Reason" (*CPR* A567-642/B595-670). There he argues for the logical unprovability of God's existence in four steps by arguing that

(i) there cannot be an ontological proof,

(ii) there cannot be a cosmological proof,

(iii) there cannot be a physico-theological proof (i.e., a sound argument from design, or a sound teleological argument), and that

¹¹ Kuehn [2001] p. 3.

(iv) there are only three possible proofs for God's existence.

In fact, Kant's critique of the ontological proof, *on its own*, suffices to show that God's existence is logically unprovable and scientifically unknowable, since only the ontological argument even purports to be a logical—or analytic a priori—argument for God's existence. The cosmological proof, if sound, would yield God's existence as a synthetic a priori truth; and the physico-theological proof or design/teleological argument, if sound, would yield God's existence as a synthetic a posteriori truth. But the negative criterion of the syntheticity of any proposition, whether synthetic a priori or synthetic a posteriori, is that its negation is logically consistent (*CPR*: A150–158/B189–197). Therefore, even if the cosmological proof or the physico-theological proof were sound, this would not entail that God exists *in every logically possible world*. In other words, even if these proofs were sound, then logically and analytically speaking, God still might not have existed. But that leaves open an epistemological and ontological gap into which an atheistic skeptic can always introduce a significant doubt. So showing that the ontological proof is impossible suffices to show that God's existence is logically unprovable in the sense required for *epistemic necessity*, which according to Kant is a belief which involves not merely "conviction" (*Überlegung*), thereby having a subjectively sufficient justification, but also involves "certainty" (*Gewissheit*), thereby having an objectively sufficient justification (*CPR* A820–822/B848–850). In other words, showing that the ontological proof of God's existence is impossible also shows that authentic scientific *knowledge* of God's existence is impossible.

The chapter on the Ideal of Pure Reason follows the Paralogisms and the Antinomies, and completes Kant's transcendental logic of illusion, or the dialectic of pure reason. The Dialectic is triadically organized according to three basic types of Idea of Pure Reason:

- (i) the Idea of an absolute subject of cognition, or the Cartesian immaterial soul (the Paralogisms),
- (ii) the Idea of an absolute object of cognition, or nature as a cosmological totality (the Antinomies), and
- (iii) the Idea of an absolute ground of both the subject and the object of cognition, or God (the Ideal).

The dialectical error in the Paralogisms is the invalid inference from the fact of transcendental apperception or the "I think," to the existence of a simple substantial immortal Cartesian soul; and in the Antinomies the dialectical error is failing to draw the fundamental ontological distinction between appearances or phenomenal entities and things-in-themselves or noumenal entities. In the Ideal,

the error is the invalid inference from the fact that every part of the actual or real world is completely determined, to the existence of a single absolutely real being (God) which is the ground of (i.e., is necessary and sufficient for) the complete determination of the actual or real world.

Ideals, according to Kant, are the Ideas of Pure Reason *incarnate* or *reified*: they are individual beings which contain in themselves the completed totality of conditions that is represented by the content of every Idea insofar as it is a third-order "absolutizing" concept or "notion" that applies to the logically fundamental second-order concepts, or pure concepts of the understanding. The concept of God, in turn, depends on the very concept of a "concept." Logico-semantically speaking, a concept is a unified self-consistent inherently general semantic content that functions as a predicate of judgments. For every such concept (e.g., the concept of a cat, or the concept of the cat's being on the mat), given the unity and self-consistency of its semantic content, there is a corresponding logically possible object or logically possible state-of-affairs (e.g., a cat, or a cat's being on the mat). For every such concept, there is also a corresponding contradictory concept (e.g., the concept of a non-cat, or the concept of its not being the case that the cat is on the mat). Now consider the total set of all such concepts together with their contradictories: this constitutes our total human conceptual repertoire, or what Kant calls "**the sum total of all possibility**" (*CPR* A573/601). From this repertoire, a *logically possible world* can be cognitively constructed as a total set of mutually consistent concepts such that the addition of one more concept to the set would lead to a contradiction. In the jargon of contemporary logic, this is called "maximality." So a logically possible world for Kant is nothing but a maximal consistent set of concepts. Now consider the set containing every maximal consistent set of concepts. This is the set of all logically possible worlds. A "determination" for Kant is an empirical concept insofar as it is actually applied or at least applicable to an empirical object: in contemporary terms, a determination is a *property* of an object. Now according to Kant, everything that is actual or real must be completely determined. This means that for every actual or real thing, and for every concept of things, either the concept or its contradictory applies to the thing, but not both. Obviously this ontological principle corresponds directly to the classical logical Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC):

For all predicates P and all objects x , necessarily $\sim(Px \ \& \ \sim Px)$.

But the ontological significance of complete determination is that the reality or actuality of a thing expresses a logically complete systematic selection of properties from the totality of possible properties. Otherwise put, every actual

or real thing is identical with the total set of mutually consistent concepts that apply to it. This corresponds to Leibniz's idea that every monad or metaphysically real individual has a *complete individual concept* that completely determines its essence. And this in turn corresponds to Leibniz's Laws: *The Identity of Indiscernibles*, which says that necessarily, any two things sharing all properties in common are identical, and *The Indiscernibility of Identicals*, which says that necessarily, identical things share all their properties in common. Now according to Kant, the concept of God is the concept of a single noumenal being that is the ground of (i.e., is necessary and sufficient for) the complete determination of the actual or real world. Again, the concept of God is the concept of a single thing-in-itself that contains within its essence all of actuality or reality: hence Kant calls the concept of God the concept of the *ens realissimum* (CPR A577/B605).

Given this framework, the fallacy of the Ideal can be construed in two different ways: **first**, to infer invalidly from the objectively valid thesis of the complete determination of every actual or real thing, to the noumenal concept or Idea of a single "really real" being that completely determines all of actuality or reality (false reification); or **second**, to infer invalidly from the concept of the *ens realissimum*, or the concept of the ground of the sum total of all possibilities, to the existence of what is described by that concept (false existence proof).

As I have mentioned already, The Ontological Argument (OA) is the analytic a priori argument from the concept of God to God's existence. The original version of The OA is to be found in Anselm's *Proslogion*. But probably the best known modern version of it is to be found in Descartes's fifth *Meditation*. Here are quick glosses of those two arguments:

Anselm's OA

- (1) The concept of God is the concept of that-than-which-nothing-more-real-can-be-thought.
- (2) That-than-which-nothing-more-real-can-be-thought could not exist merely inside the mind (as a concept or idea), for then it would be possible to think of something more real than it: i.e., its existing outside the mind.
- (3) Therefore that-than-which-nothing-more-real-can-be-thought must not exist merely inside the mind (as a concept or idea). That is, it must also exist outside the mind.
- (4) Therefore it is necessarily (i.e., logically, analytically a priori) true that God exists.

Descartes's OA

- (1) The concept of God is the concept of a perfect being.

- (2) The concept of a perfect being is the concept of a being whose essence contains all perfections.
- (3) Existence is a perfection.
- (4) Therefore the concept of God is the concept of a being whose essence entails its existence.
- (5) Therefore it is necessarily (i.e., logically, analytically a priori) true that God exists.

Here is the substance of Kant's reply to The OA in any of its classical versions:

I answer: You have already committed a contradiction when you have brought the concept of its existence, under whatever disguised name, into the concept of a thing which you think merely in terms of its possibility. If one allows you to do that, then you have won the illusion of a victory, but in fact you have said nothing; for you have committed a mere tautology. I ask you: is the proposition **This or that thing** (which I have conceded to you as possible, whatever it may be) **exists**—is this proposition, I say, an analytic or synthetic proposition? If it is the former then with existence you add nothing to your thought of the thing; but then either the thought that is in you must be the thing itself, or else you have inferred that existence on this pretext from its inner possibility, which is nothing but a miserable tautology. The word 'reality', which sounds different from 'existence' in the concept of the predicate, does not settle it. For if you call all positing (leaving indeterminate what you posit) 'reality', then you have already posited the thing with all its predicates in the concept of the subject and assumed it to be actual, and you only repeat that in the predicate. If you concede, on the contrary, as in all fairness you must, that every existential proposition is synthetic, then how would you assert that the predicate of existence may not be cancelled without contradiction?—since this privilege pertains only in the analytic propositions, as resting on its very character. I would have hoped to annihilate this over-subtle argumentation without any digressions through a precise determination of the concept of existence, if I had not found that the illusion consisting in the confusion of a logical predicate with a real one (i.e., the determination of a thing) nearly precludes all instruction. Anything one likes can serve as a **logical predicate**, even the subject can be predicated of itself; for logic abstracts from every content. But the **determination** is a predicate, which goes beyond the concept of a subject and enlarges it. Thus it must not be included in it already. **Being** is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves. In the logical use it is merely the copula of a judgment.... [T]he little word '**is**' is not

a predicate, but only that which posits the predicate **in relation** to the subject. Now if I take the subject (God) together with all its predicates ... and say **God is**, or there is a God, then I add no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit the **object** in relation to my **concept**. Both must contain exactly the same, and hence when I think this object as given absolutely (though the expression, 'it is') nothing is thereby added to the concept, which expresses merely its possibility. Thus the actual contains nothing more than the merely possible. A hundred actual dollars do not contain the least bit more than a hundred possible ones. For since the latter signifies the concept and the former its object and its positing in itself, then, in case the former contained more than the latter, my concept would not express the entire object and thus would not be the suitable concept of it. But in my financial condition there is more with a hundred actual dollars than with the mere concept of them (i.e., their possibility). For with actuality the object is not merely included in my concept analytically, but adds synthetically to my concept (which is a determination of my state); yet the hundred dollars themselves that I am thinking of are not in the least increased through this being outside my concept. Thus when I think a thing, through whichever and however many predicates I like (even in its thoroughgoing determination), not the least bit gets added to the thing when I posit in addition that this thing **is**. For otherwise what would exist would not be the same as what I had thought in my concept, but more than that, and I could not say that the very object of my concept exists.... Now if I think of a being as the highest reality (without defect), the question still remains whether it exists or not.... Thus whatever and however much our concept of an object may contain, we must go out beyond it to provide it with existence. With objects of sense this happens through connection with some perception of mine in accordance with empirical laws; but for objects of pure thinking there is no means whatever for cognizing their existence, because it would have to be cognized entirely *a priori*, but our consciousness of all existence (whether immediately through perception, or through inference connecting something with perception belongs entirely and without exception to the unity of experience, and though an existence outside the field cannot be declared absolutely impossible, it is a presupposition that we cannot justify through anything. (*CPR* A597-601/B625-629)

Reduced to its essentials, Kant's critique of the OA consists of three distinct parts.

(Part i) "Exists" is a logical and not a "real" or "determining" predicate: more precisely, "exists" is a second-order concept C_2 which says of some first-order concept C_1 that C_1 has at least one instance.

(Part ii) The category of existence, when schematized, yields the schematized category of reality or actuality (*Realität, Wirklichkeit*).

(Part iii) Objectively valid and true existence-judgments (e.g., "Socrates exists") are synthetic (hence their meaning and truth is based on intuition), not analytic (hence their meaning and truth is not based solely on concepts).

Each of these theses needs to be unpacked more. I will do that separately and then re-combine them into a single thesis about The OA.

Re (Part i). According to Kant, *logical predicates* or *logical concepts* are those concepts whose application to another concept does not change or augment the semantic content of the second concept, although it may nevertheless change or augment the second concept's psychological or logical form. For example, applying the logical operation of analytical decomposition to the concept BACHELOR yields the several ordered constituents of its conceptual microstructure, i.e.,

<UNMARRIED + ADULT + MALE>

but does not in any way change or augment the semantic content of that concept. Nevertheless the decomposition operation itself *does* generate new semantic information, i.e., direct insight into the microstructure of that concept. (This, by the way, would be the key to a Kantian solution of the "paradox of analysis.") Again, applying the logical operation of negation to the concept CAT yields NON-CAT but does not in any way change or augment CAT's semantic content. CAT's semantic content is its *intension*, and this intension uniquely determines CAT's cross-possible-worlds *extension* or semantic value, i.e., the set of all actual and possible cats. Nevertheless the negation operation as applied to CAT itself *does* generate a new semantic value, namely the set of all non-cats.

By contrast, *real predicates*, *determining predicates*, or *determining concepts* are precisely those concepts whose application to another concept does indeed change and augment the semantic content of the second concept. For example, RED is a real or determining concept whose application to the concept ROSE modifies the latter's content by further specifying it and also correspondingly narrows its extension.

Now EXISTS is merely a logical concept in that applying it to the concept of, say, ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS, does not in any way change or augment the latter's semantic content. Notice that Kant does *not* say that applying EXISTS to another concept is either meaningless or vacuous. Having an existent one hundred dollars in my pocket is quite different from a merely possible one hundred dollars. Similarly, Kant does *not* say that EXISTS is *not* an authentic predicate: on the

contrary EXISTS *is* an authentic predicate. It is just that it is a logical predicate and not a real or determining predicate.

Q: What more precisely does the logical concept EXISTS mean when it is applied to another concept?

A: The concept EXISTS is a second-order concept which says that the concept to which it is applied has instances in some non-empty domain of objects. So EXISTS is a second-order predicate that functions in essentially the same way as the existential quantifier of first-order predicate logic.

Re (Part ii). For Kant, the concept EXISTS is empirically meaningful or objectively valid only when it is schematized by the representations of time and space, and says that the concept to which it is applied has empirically intuitable or sense-perceivable instances at some time or another in the empirical world. Otherwise put, the schematized concept EXISTS means the same as the concepts REAL and ACTUAL. The Anticipations of Perception tell us that for something to be real is for it to be an empirically intuitable object of sense-perception having some positive degree of intensive magnitude (force). And the Postulates of Empirical Thought tell us that for something to be actual is for it to be given in empirical intuition at some time or another.

Re (Part iii). If EXISTS is a logical predicate but not a real or determining predicate, and if the concept EXISTS is a second-order concept which means that the concept to which it is applied has instances in some non-empty domain of objects, and if the schematized concept EXISTS means the same as REAL and ACTUAL, then to apply EXISTS to another concept in an objectively valid judgment (e.g., "Socrates exists") is to say of the second concept that it has empirically intuitable real or actual instances in the empirical natural world. Hence "*X* exists" is true if and only if something falling under the concept *X* has empirically intuitable real or actual instances in the empirical natural world. Any judgment whose whose meaning and truth depend on empirical intuition is synthetic. Hence every objectively valid and true existential judgment is synthetic.

How does this all apply to The OA? In two ways.

First, The OA fallaciously and fatally errs by treating the concept EXISTS as if it were a real or determining predicate. But EXISTS is neither a real or determining predicate nor is it ever contained analytically in any other real or determining predicate. Therefore all arguments purporting to show that the concept EXISTS is analytically contained in the concept GOD are fallacious and unsound.

The very same point also goes for NECESSARILY EXISTS. This is simply because NECESSARILY EXISTS, just like EXISTS, is a logical predicate but not

a real or determining predicate. Hence the objection which is sometimes made against Kant's critique of The OA and in favor of some or another post-classical version of the OA,¹² to the effect that even if EXISTS is not a real predicate, nevertheless NECESSARILY EXISTS can be a real predicate of God, is doubly mistaken. First, it is mistaken because it wrongly assumes that Kant's technical term "real predicate" means the same as "authentic predicate," whereas as we have seen that in fact it means the same as *real or determining* predicate, which is a completely different notion. And second, it is mistaken because if EXISTS is a second-order predicate which does not operate like a first-order real or determining predicate, then obviously NECESSARILY EXISTS is also *another* second-order predicate which also does not operate like a first-order real or determining predicate.

Second, consider the judgment or proposition "God exists." It is true just in case (i) GOD is objectively valid, and (ii) GOD has empirically intuitable instances. But GOD is not objectively valid, hence "God exists" is a truth-value gap. Moreover even if, *per impossibile*, "God exists" were true, that judgment could only ever be synthetic, not analytic.

There are also three extremely important logical, semantic, and epistemological consequences of the OA.

First, as I noted above, the impossibility of The OA generalizes to the impossibility of any strict scientific proof or strict scientific knowledge of God's existence.

Second, Kant's critique of The OA also entails a general solution to a longstanding problem in philosophical logic: the problem of the correct analysis of negative existential propositions, a problem which goes back at least as far as Plato's *Sophist*, but which also has seriously worried Frege, Russell, and many other major philosophical logicians. The problem is this: If a word has to have a reference in order for it to be meaningful, then how can existence ever be truly denied of anything? In other words, it seems paradoxical to assert "*X* does not exist" wherever what replaces '*X*' is a meaningful word: e.g., "Superman does not exist." Kant's critique of The OA shows us that wherever existential predications are made, the subject-term of the proposition *stands for an objectively valid concept, not an object*. And some objectively valid concepts have a null real-world or actual-world extension, e.g., the empirical concept SUPERMAN. So it is not generally true that a word has to have a reference in order for it to be meaningful: words can stand for concepts, and concepts need not be instantiated

¹² See, e.g., Oppy [2009] esp. sections 3 and 6-9.

in the real or actual world. Then when a word—e.g., ‘Superman’—stands for a concept that has no real or actual instances, then it can be truly and non-paradoxically said that X does not exist. Thus an existential proposition is true just in case (i) the subject concept of the proposition is objectively valid and has some real or actual instances, and a negative existential proposition is true just in case (ii) the subject concept of the proposition is objectively valid and has no real or actual instances.

Third, the concept SUPERMAN and the concept GOD are radically different concepts. The concept SUPERMAN is an objectively valid empirical concept with (as it so happens) a null real or actual world extension. But the concept GOD is *not* an objectively valid concept, and therefore *not* an empirical concept. On the contrary, GOD is a noumenal concept, i.e., a “notion,” or an Idea of Pure Reason. Hence GOD is not cognizable, but instead only thinkable. This means that *neither* the proposition “God exists” *nor* the proposition “God does not exist” has a classical truth-value: indeed, both “God exists” and also “God does not exist” are *truth-value gaps*. This in turn means that *atheism* is every bit as closed to logical proof or strict scientific knowledge as *theism* or *deism* are. For example, and perhaps most importantly, both the metaphysical and evidential arguments for atheism from the existence of evil are impossible, just as The Ontological Argument is impossible. *Philosophical theology contains unprovable propositions*. As we will see in the next section, this is a logico-semantically profound result which is comparable in its *moral and practical* significance to the *cognitive and theoretical* significance of Kurt Gödel’s logico-semantic demonstration in the 1930s that the system of elementary or Peano arithmetic (i.e., elementary logic plus the five Peano axioms) contains unprovable sentences.¹³

It is relevantly interesting and philosophically ironic in this connection that Gödel *also* developed a version of The Ontological Argument.¹⁴ It seems clear that Gödel intended his version of the OA to be strictly a pump for *rational intuition*, which for the later Gödel can exceed logical provability in the narrower senses of either decidability or formal provability in elementary logic or elementary arithmetic¹⁵—hence Gödel did not hold that the existence of God is logically provable in those narrower senses. Nevertheless, this indirectly shows that Kant’s strictures on *analytic* logical provability significantly anticipate and mirror Gödel’s strictures on logical provability in the *narrower* senses.

¹³ See Gödel [1967] pp. 596–617.

¹⁴ See Oppy [2009] section 6.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Gödel [1984] pp. 470–485.

IV. Existential Kantian Moral Theology: The Immortality Postulate, The God Postulate, and What They Really Mean

We know from the Paralogisms and the Ideal of Pure Reason that both the idea of the human soul and the idea of God are *scientifically unknowable Ideas of pure reason*. Correspondingly, both the immortality of the soul and the existence of God are *logically and scientifically unprovable propositions*. Neither their truth nor their falsity can be demonstrated. Hence the correct philosophical attitude to take towards them *is radical agnosticism*. But the Ideas of immortality, of freedom, and of God's existence still can have regulative, practical significance as *postulates of pure practical reason*. Here is what Kant writes:

The production of the highest good in the world is the necessary object of a will determinable by the moral law. But in such a will the *complete conformity* of dispositions with the moral law is the supreme condition of the highest good. This conformity must be just as possible as its object is, since it is contained in the sane command to promote the object. Complete conformity of the will with the moral law is, however, *holiness*, a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence. Since it is nevertheless required as practically necessary, it can only be found in an *endless progress* toward the complete conformity, and in accordance with principles of pure practical reason it is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our will. This endless progress is, however, possible only on the presupposition of the *existence* and personality of the same rational being continuing *endlessly* (which is called the immortality of the soul). Hence the highest good is practically possible only on the presupposition of the immortality of the soul, so that this, as inseparably connected with the moral law, is a **postulate** of pure practical reason.... For a rational but finite being only endless progress from lower to higher stages of moral perfection is possible. *The eternal being*, to whom the temporal condition is nothing, sees in what is to us an endless series, the whole of conformity with the moral law, and the holiness that his command inflexibly requires in order to be commensurable with his justice in the share he determines for each in the highest good is to be found whole in a single intellectual intuition of the existence of rational beings. All that a creature can have with respect to hope for this share is consciousness of his tried disposition, so that, from the progress he has already made from the worse to the morally better and from the immutable resolution he has thereby come to know, he may hope for a further uninterrupted continuance of this progress, however long his existence may last, even beyond this life, and thus he cannot hope, either here or in any foreseeable future moment of his existence, to be fully adequate to God's will (without indulgence or dispensation,

which do not harmonize with justice); he can only hope to be so only in the endlessness of its duration (which God alone can survey). (*CPrR*5: 122–124)

Happiness is the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence *everything goes according to his wish and will*, and rests, therefore, on the harmony of nature with his whole end as well as with the essential determining ground of his will. Now, the moral law as a law of freedom commands through determining grounds that are to be quite independent of nature and of its harmony with our faculty of desire (as incentives); the acting rational being in the world is, however, not also the cause of the world and of nature itself. Consequently, there is not the least ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between the morality and the proportionate happiness of a being belonging to the world as part of it and hence dependent upon it, who for that reason cannot by his will be a cause of this nature and, as far as his happiness is concerned, cannot by his own powers make it harmonize thoroughly with his practical principles. Nevertheless, in the practical task of pure reason, that is, in the necessary pursuit of the highest good, such a connection is postulated as necessary: we *ought* to strive to promote the highest good (which must therefore be possible). Accordingly the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature, which contains the ground of this connection, namely of the exact correspondence of happiness with morality, is also *postulated*. However, this supreme cause is to contain the ground of the correspondence of nature not merely with a law of the will of rational beings but with the representation of this *law*, so far as they make it the *supreme determining ground of the will*, and consequently not merely with morals in their form but also with their morality as their determining ground, that is, with their moral disposition. Therefore the highest good in the world is possible only insofar as a supreme cause of nature having a causality in keeping with the moral disposition is assumed. Now a being capable of actions in accordance with the representation of laws is *an intelligence* (a rational being), and the causality of such a being in accordance with his representation of laws is his *will*. Therefore the supreme cause of nature, insofar as it must be presupposed for the highest good, is a being that is the cause of nature by *understanding* and *will* (hence its author), that is, **God**. Consequently, the postulate of the possibility of the *highest derived good* (the best world) is likewise the postulate of the reality of a *highest original good*, namely of the existence of God. (*CPrR*5: 124–125)

[The postulates of pure practical reason proceed from the principle of morality, which is not a postulate but a law by which reason determines the will immediately; and this will, just because it is so determined as a pure will, requires

these necessary conditions for the observance of its precept. These postulates are not theoretical dogmas but *presuppositions* having a necessarily practical reference and thus, although they do not indeed extend speculative cognition, they give objective reality to the ideas of speculative reason in *general* (by means of their reference to what is practical) and justify its holding concepts even the possibility of which it could not otherwise presume to affirm. These postulates are those of *immortality*, of *freedom* considered positively (as the causality of a being insofar as it belongs to the intelligible world), and of the *existence of God*. The *first*, flows from the practically necessary condition of a duration befitting the complete fulfillment of the moral law; the *second* from the necessary presupposition of independence from the sensible world and of the capacity to determine one's will by the law of an intelligible world, that is, the law of freedom; the *third* from the necessity of the condition for such an intelligible world to be the highest good, through the presupposition of the highest independent good, that is, of the existence of God. (*CPrR*5: 132)

As I mentioned above, the first postulate of pure practical reason, *immortality*, basically says that even though we cannot either logically prove or scientifically know either that our souls are immortal or that they are not immortal, we must nevertheless morally believe in the rational Idea that we will have an endless human personal existence in a world that is wholly known and governed by God, and in which eventually all the morally virtuous people are made happy and all the wicked people are punished. And the third postulate of pure practical reason, *the existence of God*, basically says that even though we cannot logically prove or scientifically know either that God exists or that God does not exist, we must nevertheless morally believe in the Idea that God exists in order to unify happiness and virtue in a desperately nonideal world filled to the brim with "the crooked timber of humanity" and "radical evil," and in which, it seems, nothing will ever be made straight, and "no good deed ever goes unpunished." I will come back explicitly to the second postulate, *freedom*, in section V.

But bracketting The Freedom Postulate for the moment, what does Kant mean by all this? He certainly does not hold that we have *logical or scientific justification* for believing either that personal immortality is really possible or that God exists. Moreover, neither personal immortality nor God's existence can be "proved through experience" in an essentially non-conceptual, directly volitional way, as practical freedom can (*CPR*: A802-803/B831). Hence neither personal immortality nor God's existence has *practical reality* in the sense that freedom has practical reality – i.e., there is no "Fact of Reason" for either personal immortality or God's existence, as there is for freedom:

The consciousness of this fundamental law [of pure practical reason, which says: so act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of universal law giving] may be called a fact of reason, since one cannot ferret it out from antecedent data of reason, *such as the consciousness of freedom* (for this is not antecedently given), and since it forces itself upon us as a synthetic proposition a priori based on no pure or empirical intuition... In order to regard this law without any misinterpretation as given, one must note that it is not an empirical fact, but the sole fact of pure reason, which by it proclaims itself as originating law. (*CPtR* 5: 31, underlining added—see also *CPtR* 5: 42, 47, and 55–56)

So here is what I think The Immortality Postulate and The God Postulate really mean. I think that Kantian philosophical theology is radically different from any form of transcendental theology. More precisely, I think that in order to solve The Incoherence Problem, then Kant's philosophical theology should be understood as what I will call *existential Kantian moral theology* or EKMT. I also believe that EKMT is independently philosophically defensible, quite apart from Kant's own texts. Here is a preliminary sketch of EKMT in eight steps.

First, EKMT contains **Parts 1-4** of Kant's philosophical theology as I described them in section II.

Second, EKMT contains the three special features I also described in section II: (1) radical agnosticism, (2) believing-in-as-volitional-commitment, and (3) moral certainty.

Third, Kantian radical agnosticism means my taking the scientific knowledge that God's *non*-existence is scientifically unknowable and uncognizable every bit as seriously as I take the scientific knowledge that God's *existence* is scientifically unknowable and uncognizable, although still thinkable.

Here is where classical arguments for atheism from the existence of natural evil and moral evil become directly relevant to EKMT.¹⁶ The classical *Metaphysical Argument for Atheism from the Existence of Evil* runs as follows:

(1) Assume that God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. Or in other and fewer words, assume that *a 3-O God* exists. (Premise.)

(2) Assume that evil exists in the world—both natural evil (e.g., disasters and disease) & also moral evil (wicked choices and acts, or just bad things that happen to people). (Premise.)

¹⁶ See, e.g., Tooley [2010].

(3) Then EITHER a 3-O God is responsible for the existence of evil, in which case a 3-O God is Her/Himself evil and not all-good, which is a contradiction with God's assumed 3-O-ness. (From 1 and 2.)

(4) OR a 3-O God is not responsible for the existence of evil and yet knew that it was going to happen and could not prevent it – so a 3-O God is not all-powerful, which is also a contradiction with assumed God's 3-O-ness. (From 1 and 2.)

(5) OR a 3-O God would have prevented evil but did not know it was going to happen, and is not all-knowing, which is another contradiction with God's assumed 3-O-ness. (From 1 and 2.)

(6) Therefore, given the existence of evil, necessarily a 3-O God does not exist. (From 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.)

If The Metaphysical Argument from Evil were sound, then it would show that it is analytically necessary that a 3-O God does not exist.

In the classical theistic critical response to The Metaphysical Argument from Evil, it is claimed that it is at least logically possible that God has a sufficient reason for permitting evil that we are either capable of knowing or else simply incapable of knowing, given our finite epistemic powers. Perhaps this sufficient reason is The Best of all Possible Worlds doctrine, perhaps it is free will, perhaps it is moral progress, perhaps it is all of these taken together, or perhaps it is something else completely unfathomable by us. Let us call this classical response *Theodicy*. In response to Theodicy, the neo-classical *Evidential Argument for Atheism from the Existence of Evil* says that even if it is logically possible that God has a sufficient reason for permitting evil, nevertheless it is significantly more rationally justified to believe that God does not exist, than to believe that God exists.

But as we have seen in section IV, for strictly logico-semantic reasons, neither God's existence *nor* God's non-existence is scientifically provable. Hence not only The Metaphysical Argument from Evil, but also Theodicy, as well as The Evidential Argument from Evil, are *equally* rationally ungrounded. This radically agnostic fact, in turn, puts The Problem of Evil in a completely new light. If natural evil and moral evil both exist, and there is lots of it all over the place, but God's existence and non-existence are both scientifically unprovable, then natural evil and moral evil *are entirely up to us to deal with*. We and we alone must deal with natural evil and moral evil, as best we can, by cleaning up or fixing up the natural world when it breaks down, by responding morally to even the most horrific and monstrous moral evils, and by trying wholeheartedly to be morally good in a thoroughly nonideal world. Either God does not exist, and evil is simply

a massive natural and moral challenge for us; or else God does exist, it is all part of God's plan, and we must do God's work. But since both options are *equally* scientifically unprovable, and yet at the same time *equally* intelligible and relevant to us, then we must comport ourselves *accordingly*. I will come back briefly to this fundamental point again at the end of section VI.

Fourth, it is *not* Kant's view that we have a sufficient practical reason to believe what we do not have sufficient epistemic to reason to believe, namely that God exists and that there is immortality of the soul. Instead it is Kant's view that we have sufficient practical reason for *choosing and acting as if, counterfactually, we believe* that God exists and that there is immortality of the soul, even while also *scientifically knowing* that these propositions are scientifically unknowable and uncognizable, while still remaining thinkable. This is the same as *believing-in* the Idea of God's existence, i.e., the same as having moral *certainty* or *Glaube* in God's existence.

Fifth, according to Kant, given radical agnosticism, the notion of believing-in-as-volitional-commitment, and the notion of moral certainty, then for me to believe-in God's existence and for me to believe-in the immortality of the soul, is *non-cognitively equivalent* to my believing that life itself has absolute moral meaning and also to my believing that my own life has an absolute moral meaning, which in turn are *non-cognitively equivalent* to my being morally certain that life itself has absolute moral meaning and also to my being morally certain that my own life has an absolute moral meaning. This extremely deep idea was later adopted by the developers of 19th century literary and philosophical Existentialism, particularly by Kierkegaard, and also by the early Wittgenstein:

To believe in God means to understand the problem about the meaning of life. To believe in God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter. To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning.¹⁷

Sixth, therefore according to Kant, my *soundly but non-scientifically proving* that God exists and that there is immortality of the soul is non-cognitively equivalent to my *soundly but non-scientifically proving* that life itself has absolute moral meaning and that my own life has an absolute moral meaning, which in turn are non-cognitively equivalent to my *becoming morally certain* that life itself has absolute moral meaning and that my own life has an absolute moral meaning.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein [1979] p. 74e.

Seventh, therefore according to Kant, *the only acceptable way* of soundly but non-scientifically proving that life itself has absolute moral meaning and that my own life has an absolute moral meaning, which in turn are non-cognitively equivalent to my becoming morally certain that life itself has absolute moral meaning and that my life has an absolute moral meaning, is *by actually going forth and having a morally meaningful life* by means of my autonomous power of choice, and the pursuit of good willing and the worthiness to be happy, under the constitutive presuppositions that I choose and act *as if, counterfactually, I believe* that God exists and that there is immortality of the soul

Eighth, therefore according to Kant, the only acceptable way of soundly non-scientifically proving that God exists and that there is immortality of the soul is *by soundly non-scientifically proving myself as a moral agent*—i.e., by actually going forth and having a morally meaningful life—and thereby *by actually becoming the kind of person I would be* if God *were* to exist and if there *were* immortality of the soul, although I *scientifically know* that these propositions are both scientifically unknowable and uncognizable, yet still thinkable. This emotional and practical project begins as a fundamental “loss of faith” or anxiety (*Angst*), particularly in the face of The Problem of Evil, but it ends as a fundamental moral “leap of faith” or groundless affirmation, as in Kierkegaard’s sublime version of the story of Abraham and Isaac,¹⁸ when this is interpreted in terms of radical agnosticism, the notion of believing-in-as-volitional-commitment, and the notion of moral certainty.

This is not a scientific proof of God’s existence and the immortality of the soul in the *classical logical* or analytic sense of a valid or sound argument in first-order bivalent polyadic quantified logic with identity, but rather a non-scientific proof in the sense of *Intuitionistic constructivist* mathematics or logic,¹⁹ which provides for an inherently ruled-governed step-by-step generation of an actual token of the ideal type whose existence you are demonstrating. And just as in Intuitionistic logic, so too in EKT the classical logical Principle of Excluded Middle does *not* apply to God’s existence, for as we have seen, it is strictly logically unprovable and scientifically unknowable either that God exists or that God does not exist. Because it is strictly logically unprovable and scientifically unknowable whether God exists or not, then precisely the right emotional and practical attitude to take towards the question of God’s existence or non-existence is radical agnosticism. But for someone to believe-in God’s existence or believe-in the

¹⁸ Kierkegaard [1997b] pp. 93–101.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Iemhoff [2009] and Van Atten [2009].

immortality of the soul, and then to non-scientifically prove it, *is for her to prove non-scientifically, in an Intuitionistic constructivist way, that her life has a meaning by virtue of its categorically normative moral content, via her steady step-by-step pursuit of a life of wholehearted commitment to her own projects, along with other rational human agents, or real human persons, as fully embedded in the larger natural world, under absolute moral principles, thereby producing an actual token in her own life of the ideal types whose existence she is non-scientifically demonstrating.*

If these eight steps are cogent, then Kantian moral theology is not a *transcendental* theology in any sense, but sharply on the contrary, it is an *existential* theology of an altogether unique kind, specifically because of its important formal analogies with Intuitionistic constructivist mathematics and logic. For not only does modern Existentialism clearly flow historically from EKMT, but it also seems to me that contemporary moral theorists could significantly learn from EKMT, in view of its solid foundations in Kant-inspired but also independently defensible philosophical logic and philosophy of mathematics, and in view of the very real importance of Kantian ethics in contemporary moral theory. What ultimately matters, then, is actively believing-in and having moral certainty about the real possibility that your life has a meaning and categorically normative moral content, via radical agnosticism about about God's existence and the immortality of the soul alike. If a person actively believes-in the real possibility that her life has a meaning and categorically normative moral content, then just by virtue of that moral commitment itself, and her Intuitionistic constructive non-scientific proof of this, then her life necessarily *does* have a meaning and categorically normative moral content. This is a truly remarkable *existential bootstrapping* feature of the moral metaphysics of rational human agency. Unlike moral virtue, which, as everyone knows, and as Kantians always emphasize, can often be extremely lonely, self-repressing and therefore depressing, unpleasant, and very unrewarding in an everyday sense, despite its absolute intrinsic value, rational human agency genuinely *can be* and *is* its own reward. So *ought* implies *can*, and with active believing-in, *can* also implies *is*.

V. The Freedom Postulate and the Two Fallacies of Freedom-Inauthenticity

I turn now to the second postulate of pure practical reason, *freedom*, which basically says that *because* we cannot logically prove or scientifically know either that God exists or that God does not exist, we must *therefore* morally believe in the rational Idea of our own transcendental freedom and practical freedom in order to rule out:

- (i) the impossible pseudo-science of transcendental theology,
- (ii) the self-stultifying threat to our transcendently free intentional agency of a world in which, it seems, on the *one* hand, that the past is completely filled with deterministic and impersonal causes (the rock) and, on the *other* hand, that the future is randomly indeterministic and heart-breakingly completely filled with possibilities for bad luck (the hard place), and
- (iii) the self-stultifying threat to our practically free moral agency of a world in which, it seems, moral chaos reigns and “everything is permitted.”

In order to understand this three-part doctrine properly, we I will briefly unpack some preliminary points in Kant's metaphysics of free will, and then in the metaphysics of free will more generally.

Kant's theory of transcendental freedom is his metaphysics of free will. Transcendental freedom is how a person can, “from itself” (*von selbst*) (CPR A533/B561), be the spontaneous mental cause of certain natural events or processes. If I am that person, then insofar as I am transcendently free, it follows that certain events or processes in physical nature are *up to me*—or to use Kant's own phrase, *in meiner Gewalt* (literally: “in my control” or “in my power”; CPR 5: 94–95). So otherwise put, transcendental freedom is deep freedom of the will, or up-to-me-ness (as it were, *In-Meiner-Gewalt-Sein*).

Transcendental freedom is the same as absolutely spontaneous mental causation:

By freedom in the cosmological sense ... I understand the faculty of beginning a state **from itself** (*von selbst*), the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature. Freedom in this signification is a pure transcendental idea, which, first, contains nothing borrowed from experience, and second, the object of which cannot be given determinately in any experience.... But since in such a way no absolute totality of [natural] conditions in causal relations is forthcoming, reason creates the idea of a spontaneity, which could start to act from itself, without needing to be preceded by any other cause that in turn determines it to action according to the law of causal connection. (CPR A533/B561, underlining added)

Although transcendental freedom is a particularly robust kind of *mental* causation, in the second *Critique* Kant sharply distinguishes transcendental freedom from mere *psychological* freedom:

These determining representations [i.e., instincts or motives] themselves have the ground of their existence in time and indeed in the *antecedent state*, and in

a preceding state, and so forth, these determinations may be internal and they may have psychological instead of mechanical causality, this is, produce actions by means of representations and not by bodily movements; they are always determining grounds of the causality of a being insofar as its existence is determinable in time and therefore under conditions of past time, which are thus, when the subject is to act, no longer within his control and which may therefore bring with them psychological freedom (if one wants to use this term for a merely internal chain of representations in the soul) but nevertheless natural necessity, leaving no room for transcendental freedom which must be thought of as independence from everything empirical and so from nature generally, whether regarded as an object of inner sense in time only or also as an object of outer sense in both space and time; without this freedom (in the latter and proper sense), which alone is practical a priori, no moral law is possible and no imputation in accordance with it. (CPrR5: 96-97, underlining added)

Otherwise put, psychological freedom is the subject's subjective experience or consciousness of choosing or acting without being prevented, and without inner or outer compulsion. As Kant explicitly points out, and as Hume and Leibniz also noted in anticipation of contemporary Compatibilism, it is both logically and metaphysically possible to be psychologically free without being transcendently free. This is what Kant very aptly and famously calls "the freedom of a turnspit" (CPrR 5: 97). So psychological freedom is not a sufficient condition of transcendental freedom. Nevertheless, according to Kant psychological freedom remains a *necessary* condition of transcendental freedom. And this seems independently highly plausible. No one could be transcendently free and also at the same time undergo the subjective experience or consciousness of being prevented from choosing or acting, or of being inwardly or outwardly compelled to choose or act. Indeed, as the second Analogy of Experience explicitly shows, psychological freedom is necessarily built into the mental representation of *any* objective causal sequence, via what Kant calls the "the **subjective sequence** of apprehension," whose ordering is always subjectively experienced as "entirely arbitrary" (*ganz beliebig*) and not necessitated (CPR A193/B238).

When we ascribe transcendental freedom specifically to the will of a real human person, then in addition to the positive factor of absolute spontaneity, which confers deep freedom or up-to-me-ness on the real human person's choices and acts, and psychological freedom, which guarantees the subjective experience or consciousness of being unprevented and uncompelled in one's choices and acts, there is also a negative dimension of freedom which guarantees the person's choices and acts occur independently of all "alien causes," that is, independently

of all pathological inner and unowned outer sources of nomologically sufficient compulsion:

The will is a kind of causality that living beings have so far as they are rational. Freedom would then be that property whereby this causality can be active, independently of alien causes determining it; just as *natural necessity* is a property characterizing the causality of all non-rational beings—the property of being determined to activity by the influence of alien causes. The above definition of freedom is *negative*. (*GMM*4: 446, underlining added)

This is where practical freedom comes on the scene. Practical freedom presupposes but also exceeds transcendental freedom, in that practical freedom is the absolute spontaneity of the will independently of all alien causes and also independently of *all sensible impulses* (empirical desires):

Freedom in the practical sense is the independence of the power of choice (*Willkür*) from **necessitation** by impulses of **sensibility**. For a power of choice is sensible insofar as it is pathologically affected (through moving-causes of sensibility); it is called an animal power of choice (*arbitrium brutum*) if it can be **pathologically necessitated**. The human power of choice is indeed an *arbitrium sensitivum*, yet not *brutum*, but *liberum*, because sensibility does not render its action necessary, but in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses. (*CPR* A534/B562, underlining added)

But this is merely a negative characterization of practical freedom. As positively characterized, practical freedom also involves the capacity for *self-legislation* in conformity with the Categorical Imperative or moral law. Or in other words, practical freedom is necessarily equivalent with autonomy (*GMM* 4: 440–441, 446–463).

It may seem, on the face of it, that there should be no direct connection whatsoever between the person's absolutely spontaneous, psychologically free, autonomous will and her existence in physical nature. But in fact Kant himself explicitly asserts otherwise:

Practical freedom can be proved through experience. For it is not merely that which stimulates the senses, i.e., immediate affects them, that determines human choice, but we always have a capacity to overcome impressions on our sensory faculty of desire by representations of that which is useful or injurious even in a more remote way; but these considerations about that which in regard to our

whole condition is desirable, i.e., good and useful, depend on reason. Hence this also yields laws that are imperatives, i.e., objective **laws of freedom**, and that say **what ought to happen**, even though it never does happen.... We thus cognize practical freedom through experience, as one of the natural causes, namely a causality of reason in the determination of the will. (CPR A802-803/B830-831, underlining added)

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me [i.e., nature] and the moral law within me [i.e., freedom]. I do not need to search for them and merely conjecture them as though they were veiled in obscurity or in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence. (CPrR 5: 161-162)

Now although there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible ...: yet the latter should have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom. (CPJ5: 176, underlining added)

In other words, Kant is explicitly saying that transcendental freedom is both really (i.e., synthetic a priori) possible and real.

Now *Universal Natural Determinism* is the doctrine that the complete series of settled past events, together with the general causal laws of nature, causally necessitate the existence and specific character of all present and future events, including all the choices and acts of persons. This can be formulated even more carefully. Let us adopt the following symbolic conventions, where 'p' stands for an arbitrarily chosen proposition about the natural world:

C-NEC: It is causally necessary that

Pa: All settled past events are taken together as a complete series

Ln: All the general causal laws of nature are conjoined

FEp: Every fact that p about every present and future event is fixed

Then Universal Natural Determinism can be explicitly stated as:

(C-NEC) [(Pa & Ln) → FEp]

If Universal Natural Determinism is true, then it specifically follows that whatever I am choosing or doing now is necessitated by the Big Bang, or by whatever it was that actually constituted and determined the causal and nomological origins of the physical world. Furthermore, Universal Natural Determinism entails that

Causally necessarily, if any two events E_1 and E_2 have *exactly the same past*, then E_1 and E_2 will also have *exactly the same presents and futures*.

Let us call this *The Closed Future Rule*. The basic idea of The Closed Future Rule is that the present and the future of the larger natural world and all the persons in it is antecedently fixed with causal necessity, and that natural history and the lives of persons do not contain any inherently random factors. It also follows directly from Universal Natural Determinism that if someone were able to know all the relevant natural facts about the past and also the general causal laws of nature, then she would be able to predict all present and future events a priori with scientific certainty.

For clarity's sake, it is crucial to distinguish Universal Natural Determinism from a much stronger doctrine which says that the complete series of settled past events, together with the general causal laws of nature, *logically necessitate* the existence and specific character of all future events, including all the choices and acts of persons. This is *Fatalism*. Let us also adopt this convention:

L-NEC: It is logically necessary that

Then Fatalism can be explicitly stated as:

(L-NEC) [(Pa & Ln) → FEp]

In other words, according to Fatalism there *is no logical contingency whatsoever in the causal processes of natural history or the lives of persons*. Otherwise put, according to Fatalism all the *causal links* in nature or in us are also *logically necessary links*. It follows directly from Fatalism that if someone were able to know all the relevant natural facts about the past and also the general causal laws of nature, then she would be able to predict all present and future events a priori with *logical* certainty.

While Fatalism is consistent with Universal Natural Determinism, nevertheless Universal Natural Determinism does not entail Fatalism. You can consistently affirm Universal Natural Determinism and deny Fatalism. Even if every present and future moment's existence and specific character is in itself *logically contingent*, in the sense that it logically could have been otherwise, given all the actual facts about the past and the laws of nature, Universal Natural Determinism can still be true. Universal Natural Determinism says only that any present or later event in time is *causally* necessitated to exist and have a certain

specific character, *given* that the past exists in the specific way that it does exist, and *given* the specific character of the general causal laws of nature. But the past did not *logically have to be* just that way, nor did the general causal laws of nature *logically have to be* just that way. To be sure, the logical necessity of the past and the logical necessity of the general causal laws of nature are not automatically entailed by Fatalism. Yet they are still *consistent with* Fatalism.

Moreover Fatalism does not entail Universal Natural Determinism, on at least one interpretation of Fatalism. If it turned out that both the past and the general laws of nature were *logically* necessary—if, in effect, the essence of the physical world directly mirrored a system of classical logic, as e.g., in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*—then this ultra-Fatalism could hold true even if Universal Natural Determinism were false. Indeed, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein claims that all necessity is logical necessity and that causal necessity is not only impossible but even unintelligible:

5.133 All inference takes place a priori.

5.135 In no way can an inference be made from the existence of one state of affairs to the existence of another entirely different from it.

5.136 There is no causal nexus which justifies such an inference.

5.1361 The events of the future *cannot* be inferred from those of the present. Superstition is the belief in the causal nexus.

6.37 A necessity for one thing to happen because another has happened does not exist. There is only *logical* necessity.²⁰

Wittgenstein's extremely interesting philosophical response to his own ultra-Fatalism is what I will call *Mystical Transcendental Compatibilism*:

6.421 It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one.)

6.423 Of the will as the subject of ethics we cannot speak. And the will as a phenomenon is only of interest to psychology.

6.43 If good or bad willing changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world, not the facts; not the things that can be expressed in language. In brief, the world must thereby become quite another. It must so to speak wax or wane as a whole. The world of the happy is quite another than the world of the unhappy.

²⁰ Wittgenstein [1981] pp. 109 and 181.

6.44 The intuition (*Anschauung*) of the world sub specie aeterni is its intuition as a limited whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling.²¹

Wittgenstein's ultra-Fatalism clearly brings out the crucial point that Universal Natural Determinism is about the *causal* necessity of the future, not about the *logical* necessity of the future. Similarly, Universal Natural Determinism cannot logically guarantee that any particular moment of time will actually exist. For all that Universal Natural Determinism says, it is logically possible that the world *might never have existed*. Of course, the world does actually exist now. So either the world always existed, or perhaps the world started to exist and then continued to exist until now, or else the world pops in and out of existence discontinuously. But in any case, it is always logically possible that it might also *fail* to exist at any later time.

I now want to focus on a particular aspect of Wittgenstein's Mystical Transcendental Compatibilism, as a segue to a fundamental doctrine of EKMT. When, heavily influenced by Schopenhauer's metaphysical neo-Kantianism and proto-Existentialism, Wittgenstein says that "ethics cannot be expressed," "ethics is transcendental," "ethics and aesthetics are one," and that "of the will as the subject of ethics we cannot speak," I think he is asserting essentially the same thing that Kant is asserting at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason*:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me [i.e., nature] and the moral law within me [i.e., freedom]. I do not need to search for them and merely conjecture them as though they were veiled in obscurity or in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence. (*CPrR* 5: 161-162, underlining added)

In other words, what Kant and Wittgenstein are both asserting, in a shared proto-Existentialist spirit, is that is my sense of myself as an intentional and moral agent is *an indispensably necessary and affectively salient phenomenal character* of "the consciousness of my own existence." What Wittgenstein calls "the world of the happy," and so very sharply contrasts with "the world of the unhappy," is then, for all intents and purposes, a volitionally-oriented and freedom-oriented version of the moral-psychological phenomenon that the existentialists called

²¹ Ibidem, pp. 183, 185, and 187.

authenticity. Correspondingly but negatively, what Wittgenstein calls “the world of the unhappy,” and so very sharply contrasts with “the world of the happy,” is then, for all intents and purposes, a volitionally-oriented and freedom-oriented version of the moral-psychological phenomenon that the existentialists called *inauthenticity*. The moral-psychological phenomenon of inauthenticity also appears in Kant’s writings, in at least three slightly different guises.

The **first** is the almost shockingly stark picture of the person who dogmatically and slavishly accepts the precepts of some existing philosophical system such as the Wolffian philosophy:

He has formed himself according to an alien reason, but the faculty of imitation is not that of generation, i.e., the cognition did not arise **from** reason in him, and although objectively it was certainly a rational cognition, subjectively it is still merely historical. He has grasped and preserved well, i.e., he has learned, and is a plaster cast of a living human being. Rational cognitions that are objectively so (i.e., could have arisen originally only out of the reason of human beings themselves) may also bear this name subjectively only if they have been drawn out of the universal sources of reason, from which critique, indeed even the rejection of what has been learned, can also arise, i.e., from principles. (*CPR* A836-837/ /B864-865, underlining added)

The **second** is the equally stark picture of the essentially immature and cowardly person who refuses to acknowledge the fundamental moral idea behind “enlightenment” or *Aufklärung*, which is to think for yourself with resolution and courage:

Enlightenment is the human being’s emergence from his self-inflicted immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-inflicted if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding! [O]nce the germ on which nature has lavished most care—the human being’s inclination and vocation to think freely—has developed within its hard shell, it gradually reacts upon the mentality of the people, who thus gradually become increasingly able to *act freely*. Eventually, it even influences the principles of governments, which find that they can themselves profit by treating the human being, who is *more than a machine*, in a manner appropriate to his dignity. (*WiE* 8: 35 and 41-42, underlining added)

And the **third** is the perhaps even more stark picture of the person who hides from himself the self-defining fact of his own “radical evil” (*radicale Böse*) by pretending that evil is nothing but *bad historical consequences of human activity*, and not the direct result of our deep or transcendental freedom of the will:

This dishonesty (*Unredlichkeit*), by which we throw dust in our own eyes and which hinders the establishment in us of an authentic moral disposition (*ächter moralischer Gesinnung*), then extends itself also externally, to falsity or deception of others. And if this dishonesty is not to be called malice, it nonetheless deserves at least the name of unworthiness. It rests on the radical evil of human nature which (inasmuch as it puts out of tune the moral ability to judge what to think of a human being, and renders any imputability uncertain, whether internal or external) constitutes the foul stain of our species—and so long as we do not remove it, hinders the germ of good from developing as it otherwise would. A member of the English Parliament exclaimed in the heat of debate: “Every man has his price, for which he sells himself.” If this is true (and everyone can decide for himself), if nowhere is a virtue which no level of temptation can overthrow, if whether the good or evil spirit wins us over only depends on which bids the most and affords the promptest pay-off, then, what the Apostle says might indeed hold true of human beings universally, “There is no distinction here, they are all under sin—there is none righteous (in the spirit of the law), no, not one.” (*Rel 6: 38-39*, underlining added)

Human practical reason is our living, spontaneous capacity to exercise the power of choice for the sake of instrumental or non-instrumental principles. In these ways, inauthenticity in the Kantian sense is just to comport yourself *as if you were nothing but a machine*, wholly determined by natural causal laws, and neither alive nor practically free. Or in other words, inauthenticity in the Kantian sense is the *self-automating* denial of your own capacity for practical freedom:

[I]f the freedom of our will were nothing else than [an *automaton spirituale* when it is impelled by representations], i.e., psychological and comparative and not at the same time transcendental or absolute, it would in essence be no better than the freedom of a turnspit, which when once wound up also carries its motions from itself. (*CPrR 5: 97*, underlining added)

In relation to our capacities for transcendental and practical freedom, there are two different and yet also intimately related ways in which someone can fall into self-automating inauthenticity.

The **first** way is what I call *The Fallacy of the Rock and the Hard Place*. This is the fallacy of philosophically looking backwards towards the past and also forwards towards the future in ways that self-stultifyingly deny the actual existence of one's own inherent teleology as a rational human intentional agent whose innermost life is aimed at the highest or supreme good.²² Leaving out the inherently teleological character of one's own rational human innermost life, it can seem on the *one* hand, that the past is completely filled with deterministic and impersonal causes (the rock) and, on the *other* hand, that the future is randomly indeterministic and heart-breakingly completely filled with possibilities for bad luck (the hard place). In so doing, one *loses heart*, and then in effect tragically *dies* as an authentic intentional and moral agent, even if neurobiological and psychological life continues on.

The right and authentic existential Kantian moral-theological response to The Fallacy of the Rock and the Hard Place is what Kant calls "believing-in," "faith," or *Glaube*, as specifically applied to the chain of past events and future events. It is, more specifically, a *teleological believing-in or faith in the physico-theological sense*. You morally must resolutely choose and act as if, counterfactually, you believe that the world is designed for us by an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good God, even though you scientifically know, via radical agnosticism, that the existence or non-existence of such a God is both scientifically unknowable and uncognizable. In short, you morally must resolutely choose and act in such a way that you thereby convert the world in which you choose and act into *the world of the happy*.

The **second** way to fall into freedom-inauthenticity is what I call *Smerdyakov's Fallacy*. It is a standard strategy for critics of Universal Natural Determinism, whether intentionally or not, to confuse Universal Natural Determinism with Fatalism, whether "ordinary" Fatalism or ultra-Fatalism. For example, if someone sincerely says

"If everything is naturally determined, then whatever *has* happened, was *strictly fated* to happen, and whatever *will* happen, *strictly must* happen, no matter what I choose or do,"

then he is confusing Universal Natural Determinism with Fatalism.

²² A very similar point is made by Korsgaard [2009] ch. 5, pp. 84--89. Oddly enough, however, she concludes her highly insightful discussion by saying that "my point in bringing all this up is not to make a brief for Kant's philosophy of religion, or for the need for agency to be supported by faith" (p. 89). *But why not?*

It is equally crucial to distinguish Universal Natural Determinism from another stronger doctrine which says that nature is initially created and also sustained at every later moment by the irresistible causal powers of an all-knowing and all-good deity. This stronger doctrine is *Universal Divine Determinism*, a.k.a. "Theological Determinism". While Universal Divine Determinism is both consistent with Universal Natural Determinism and indeed *entails* Universal Natural Determinism as a trivial consequence, nevertheless Universal Natural Determinism does *not* entail Universal Divine Determinism. Even if an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, world-creating, and world-sustaining deity does *not* exist, Universal Natural Determinism can still be true.

In this connection, and corresponding to the fallacy of confusing Universal Natural Determinism with Fatalism, there is an important two-part fallacy that consists in confusing Universal Natural Determinism with Theological Determinism, and then unsoundly inferring universal moral chaos from the denial of Theological Determinism, which I dub Smerdyakov's Fallacy:

"If God is dead, then everything is permitted."

Smerdyakov's Fallacy is of course so-dubbed because of the famous passage in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamozov* that I included as the fourth epigraph of this essay:

"Take that money away with you, sir," Smerdyakov said with a sigh.

"Of course, I'll take it! But why are you giving it to me if you committed a murder to get it?" Ivan asked, looking at him with intense surprise.

"I don't want it at all," Smerdyakov said in a shaking voice, with a wave of the hand. "I did have an idea of starting a new life in Moscow, but that was just a dream, sir, and mostly because 'everything is permitted'. This you did teach me, sir, for you talked to me a lot about such things: for if there's no everlasting God, there's no such thing as virtue, and there's no need of it at all. Yes, sir, you were right about that. That's the way I reasoned."

Here is the crucial point. From the standpoint of EKMT, the *moral significance* of someone's sincerely asserting

"If everything is naturally determined, then whatever *has* happened, was *strictly fated* to happen, and whatever *will* happen, *strictly must* happen, no matter I choose or do,"

and Smerdyakov's Fallacy are exactly the same. He has thereby given himself a license to choose and do whatever he feels like choosing and doing, without any regard for non-self-interested, non-selfish, non-hedonic, and non-consequentialist moral principles, and constrained only by natural causal laws. He thereby comports himself as if he were nothing but a fleshy deterministic or indeterministic Turing-machine, running a decision-theoretic program for satisfying self-interested, selfish, hedonic, or consequentialist desires. This sort of highly self-deceived and highly self-serving reasoning—ironically and tragically enough, only a really and truly free agent could ever engage in this sort of duplicitous reasoning—is the quintessence of *freedom-inauthenticity* in the Kantian sense.

VI. Conclusion

I am now at last in a position to re-raise the quasi-Dostoevskian question posed in the title of this essay: If God's existence is unprovable, then is everything permitted, i.e., is human morality really impossible? The EKMT-based answer I am offering is: *No*, and in fact the truth of the matter is precisely the other way around. *Only if* God's existence or non-existence is logically unprovable and scientifically unknowable, is rational human morality really possible; *only if* God's existence or non-existence is logically unprovable and scientifically unknowable, will we be able to face up to The Problem of Evil adequately; and *only if* God's existence or non-existence is logically unprovable and scientifically unknowable, can life have a moral meaning either generally or first-personally. Radical Agnosticism tells us that a morally meaningful human life *begins* at the inherent limits of classical logic and natural science, and that it also *presupposes* those limits. You cannot rationally be *either* a theist/deist *or* an atheist. The logic of moral life is *deeply* non-classical, Intuitionistic, and constructivist. This profound doctrine of EKMT is therefore *neither* theism/deism *nor* atheism—on the contrary, it is the doctrine that there ought to be and therefore morally must be, for each and every one of us who is capable of seriously considering these matters, a rational, freely chosen, and entirely wholehearted step-by-step constructivist transition from the logical unprovability and scientific unknowability of God's existence or non-existence, to moral authenticity.²³

²³ I am grateful to Robert Pasnau for extremely helpful critical comments on an earlier version of this essay.

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