

Kantian Origins: One Possible Path from Transcendental Idealism and to a “Post-Kantian” Theological Poetics

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Kant’s Ambiguous Metaphysics

After two centuries of Kant interpretation there is still no general agreement over the nature of Kant’s most basic philosophical commitments. One issue in particular about which it is difficult to find consensus is his metaphilosophical attitude towards the very project of metaphysics itself. Recently, a type of *deflationist* reading of Kant has been appealed to in order to address the problems inherent in his more traditional construal as a *metaphysical* skeptic who denies us the capacity to have any knowledge of “things in themselves”, but who nevertheless seems to centrally rely on the existence of just such things.¹ But how is either deflationism or skepticism consistent with Kant’s avowed intention in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to put metaphysics on the path of *science*,² or with his signaled but unfulfilled intention to write a “Metaphysics of Nature”?³

The persistence of distinctly metaphysical themes in Kant has in turn given rise to a wave of *neo-metaphysical* readings. Some stress the continuity of transcendental idealism with Kant’s pre-critical writings and, ultimately, the rationalist metaphysics of Leibniz,⁴ while others establish their metaphysical claims more in terms of the essential role played by *practical* reason within Kant’s overall thought.⁵ In all these approaches—deflationary, skeptical and neo-metaphysical—“metaphysics” generally means what philosophers had traditionally taken it to mean (and mostly still do): a knowledge of how the world ultimately and “really” is, independently of the way in which we know it in empirical experience—in Bernard Williams’s happy phrase, the way the world is “anyway”.⁶ But among those parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason* expressing a positive, non-skeptical attitude to metaphysics is a well-known passage in the “Preface” to the first edition where Kant says of metaphysics that it “is the only one of all the sciences that may promise that little but unified effort ... will complete it ... Nothing here can escape us, because what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself as soon as reason’s common principle has been discovered”.⁷ Passages like this, I suggest, indicate a quite different

understanding of what metaphysical knowledge is concerned with: in metaphysics reason is properly concerned entirely with *its own products* rather than with what exists *anyway*. I will call this stance, which is compatible with the otherwise “deflationary” reading of metaphysics, “Strong Transcendental Idealism” (or “Strong TI”) and contrast it with the skeptical and realist interpretations, which I’ll call *weak TI*.

While in weak TI, “metaphysics” means what it traditionally meant, strong TI urges us to think of metaphysics in a different way. It is the science of what reason produces *out of its own activity*, not the science of what ultimately exists “anyway”. From this point of view, traditional “pre-scientific” metaphysicians simply had an erroneous conception of their own activity. This is the frame of mind reflected, for example, in Kant’s claim to understand Plato, surely the paradigm of a metaphysician, better than he understood himself.⁸ Elsewhere I have argued that it is such elements of strong TI that Kant’s “German idealist” followers drew upon, attempting to extract its “spirit” from the “letter” of weak TI.⁹ Here I will avoid the substantive interpretative question as to whether Kant *intended* TI to be understood in weak or strong ways. Rather, I want to trace the consequences that Kant’s apparent ambiguity over “metaphysics” has for his thoughts about religious belief, as this is an area in which many interpreters have recognized a tangle of similar controversy-ridden ambiguities.

Kant’s attitude to metaphysics must, of course, have direct consequences for his attitude to the objects of religious belief since God and the immortal soul are central objects of the rationalist discipline of “special metaphysics”.¹⁰ From the perspective of Kant’s Copernican turn, the rationalists’ claims to *knowledge* of such purported supersensible things in themselves could not survive, and this collapse is reflected in the section on the “Ideal of Pure Reason” in the Transcendental Dialectic (Division 2) of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant famously undermined all traditional proofs of the existence of God. But if this critique gave hope to his contemporary secularists, such hopes would have been disappointed by his doctrine, most well known from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, of the necessity of “postulating” the existence of God from the perspective of *pure practical* reason.¹¹ A whiff of this apparent ushering in of God through Transcendental Idealism’s *practical* aspect is already apparent in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant mentions the famous need to “deny knowledge in order to make room for faith”.¹² There Kant states that empirical experience may reveal the world to be a mechanistic realm, but we should not take that to undermine our concepts of freedom of the will or of God. First, we can still coherently *think* these latter notions, as they are not internally contradictory, and, next, the doctrine of the limitation of our

knowledge *to appearances* will necessarily cut both ways in relation to theology. We cannot infer the existence of God from empirical knowledge, but neither do we have good reason to *deny* the existence of such a purported supersensible object merely from a scientific knowledge of *appearances*. Later in the first *Critique's* "Transcendental Doctrine of Method", and anticipating the "postulates" doctrine of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant attempts to give the concept of God more positive standing by declaring the idea of God to be a necessary *supplement* to practical knowledge of the moral law because "without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization".¹³

As with Kant's position in general, I here want to avoid the substantive interpretative question about Kant's actual beliefs about God: what I am more concerned about are the consequences that follow from the adoption of one or other of strong or weak interpretations of transcendental idealism itself. However, at the level of interpretation, I do want to suggest that looking at Kant's conception of God provides evidence for a strengthening of the strong interpretation when one follows the changes in Kant's views between the classical period of transcendental idealism and his latest writings of the *Opus Postumum*.

In the following sections I explore some of the implications for Kant's moral theology of these different ways of understanding the project of transcendental idealism, and then examine the significance of the changes that Kant's own transcendental idealism was undergoing in the late 1790s.

Moral religion understood from the perspective of Weak TI

On the weak reading of TI, given that we can have no knowledge of "things in themselves", we will be able to neither prove nor disprove the existence of God on *theoretical* grounds, but Kant's doctrine of "pure practical reason" from the *Critique of Practical Reason* appears to promise an *alternative* for the establishment of such a metaphysical entity. How to take Kant here, however, has long been the source of dispute. The basic problem is captured well by Sebastian Gardner who notes that with the doctrine of the postulates of pure practical reason Kant seems to aspire "to reach a reality that is not in this way merely transcendently ideal, i.e., a reality which is (and is known to be) the way it is, independently of our subjectivity and its representation, an aspiration which, Kant seems to claim, morality fulfills". However, "if the ground supplied by practical reason, through [pure practical reason], for attributing objective reality to the ideas of reason is also purely subject-oriented and Copernican, then this is not the case: we may know that our representations of God and immortality are not

subjective in the same sense as our cognition of empirical objects, since they are not conditioned by our forms of sensibility, but we still do not know that they match transcendental reality.”¹⁴ Kant thus seems to hover, and his interpreters will predictably divide, between realist and non-realist theologies. But neither seems satisfactory. “A nonrealist reading of practical cognition makes it intelligible that theoretical reason should accept the postulates: it simply need not take their claim with full cognitive seriousness. However, a nonrealist interpretation makes it hard to see what value the theological postulates could be thought to have and all too easy to understand why Kant’s rational faith should have been attacked by his contemporaries as mere ersatz religion: what use are God and immortality as mere ‘as-if’ representations, mere ‘Fictionen’, as Jacobi put it?”¹⁵

In his discussion of the practical postulates Kant repeatedly stresses that the existence of God is established from the perspective of *practical*, not theoretical reason, but exactly how we are meant to take this is far from clear. After all, the paradigmatic form taken by the determinations of practical reason is that of the *imperative* rather than the declarative, but, as Paul Guyer notes, the postulates “have the same form as any theoretical proposition, namely, that of asserting that a certain object or property with certain predicates exists”.¹⁶ Certainly in places the postulates seem to have a merely psychological significance of *enabling a certain type of action*, with their objects limited to a merely “as if” status, making Kant’s approach to theology look like a type of naturalistically based projectivist “error theory”, elements of which can be found in Guyer’s own interpretation.¹⁷ Elsewhere, however, Kant seems intent on giving a more robust “objectivity” to the concept of God that leads to those interpretations that support a theistically *realist* reading. This is most apparent in Kant’s central strategy from the second *Critique* which is to argue from the necessity of the categorical imperative to that of the “highest good” as a necessary *object* taken by the moral will. We know the way of the world means that morally acting agents are not necessarily rewarded with happiness, but from a moral point of view, Kant thinks, we nevertheless think that a situation in which goodness is rewarded *should* prevail: we *must* thereby *will* it. Thus this combination of rightness and happiness—the highest good—has become *internal* to the good will itself. But as God is the only being capable of bringing about the highest good, this suggests that some *quasi-logical* connection can be established between willing the highest good, and a belief in God. But as Gardiner asks, how can such a doctrine cohere with the “unrestricted Copernicanism” that characterizes Kant’s metaphilosophy, the view that “all objects without qualification are to be considered as having to ‘conform to our cognition’” (CPR, B xvi)?¹⁸

I suggest that both opposing projectivist and realist readings of the postulates are alternatives within what I have been calling weak TI. We might make this interpretation of transcendental idealism more articulate by thinking of it as combining an *Aristotelian epistemology* with a *nominalist ontology*. Kant had been trained as an Aristotelian, and his conception of logic was that of an Aristotelian *term* logic. This is reflected in his way of conceiving of the logical form of judgment as involving the joining of two concepts¹⁹—a sortal concept in subject position and an attributive concept as predicate. This role played by sortal concepts in subject position effectively means that for him, as for Aristotle, there can be no genuine role in reasoning for *singular* judgments, that is, judgments whose subject term is a singular term, such as a proper name. Within Kant's framework, then, perceptual judgments about individual things have to take the logical form of, what for Aristotle, were *particular* rather than singular judgments. To play a role in cognition, a singular judgment like, say, "*Socrates is pale*", has to be given the form of a particular judgment, as in, "*This man is pale*". As we will see, this problem of singular judgments is clearly going to be felt when Aristotelian philosophy is engaged with the God of *monotheistic* belief.²⁰

The Aristotelian logical structure of judgment is reflected in Kant's quasi-Aristotelian category theory, but here the difference to Aristotle is crucial. Whereas Aristotle thought of the categories as structuring *being*, Kant's "idealism" is just the commitment to *anti-realism* about such categorical forms. That is, Aristotle had thought of the logical structure of judgments as mirroring the ontological structure of being, while Kant thinks of the logical structure of judgment as primary and as deriving from the knowing subject itself rather than from the world. We might say that construing Aristotle's categories idealistically commits Kant to a *nominalist* ontology, as nominalism just is a denial that the world is structured by Aristotle's categories.²¹

Thinking of transcendental idealism as weakly interpreted in this way may help make sense of just those places where Kant seems to attempt to provide a place for a *bare knowledge* of God's *existence* as detachable from anything else we might know about him, as the medieval nominalists had similarly made God unknowable to human reason in this way, making God primarily the object of *faith* rather than knowledge. Aspects of Kant's discussions of the postulates of pure practical reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason* seem to typify such a view. Thus, Kant says of the ideas of freedom, immortality and God that we are instructed on the basis of the apodictic practical law that these ideas "*have objects*, although we are not able to show how their concepts refers to an object, and this is not yet cognition *of these objects*". Kant

glosses what it is to have no *cognition* of these objects by saying that one cannot ... “judge synthetically about them” ... nor “determine their application theoretically” nor make “theoretical rational use of them” (5:135).²² But this is apparently not a worry as “our concern with these ideas is not for the sake of theoretical cognition of their objects but only with whether they have objects at all” and here we can indeed be reassured “*that an object really exists*”, because such existence “is sufficiently assured them by an object that practical reason presents beyond doubt in the concept of the highest good” (5.136). We see here that the basis for Kant’s separating the question of the divine object’s *existence* from all theoretical *cognition* of it is in fact the same that had allowed him to critique all traditional proofs of God in the first *Critique*: existence is not a property and so need not be expressed in the form of a predication. For a singular object such as God, we can have no contentful judgments of which we *could* make “theoretical rational use” by slotting them into patterns of inference, but perhaps that doesn’t preclude our having a *bare knowledge of God as existing* on the basis of a necessary inference from something, the real possibility of which we can be assured, the highest good.

And yet, surely, it might be argued, we have to know *something* about the existent God beyond the fact *of* his existence in order to be able to think of what it is *that* exists *as God*? Beatrice Longuenesse has recently argued that in the first *Critique* Kant is able to establish a critical version of the traditional rationalist notion of an all of reality, a *totum realitatis* or *omnitudo realitatis*, “not only as an idea, but as something really existing ... It is a sensible, conceptually indeterminate whole necessarily presupposed as the background of any empirical given.”²³ But this existence of which we may be theoretically assured is as close to the existence of God that we can get from theoretical inquiry, and in the second *Critique* Kant indeed points out that from the viewpoint of any cosmological inquiry “the concept of God always remains ... a concept of the perfection of the first being not determined precisely enough to be held adequate to the concept of a deity”. From the perspective of cosmological inquiry, we would only be able to arrive at the traditional *predicates* of God, omniscience, all-beneficence and omnipotence, etc., by the process that he there treats as involving the realization, hypostatization and personalization of the *ens realissimum*, and that process he thinks of as an involving an illusion, the “transcendental illusion”. Thus, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he maintains that it is only when we bring the idea of God in relation to *practical reason* that such theological predicates can properly come into view, such predicates clearly being determined by the precise role the idea of God is meant to play. God “must be *omniscient* in order to cognize my conduct even to my inmost disposition in all possible cases and throughout the future, *omnipotent* in order to bestow results

appropriate to it, and so too *omnipresent, eternal, and so forth*” (5.140). But this means that the *robust objectivity* of which we were assured with respect to the question of *existence* cannot be extended to the *predicates* by which we know *what it is* that does, in fact, exist. Thus we are told that it is only “to the extent that this is determined merely through such predicates as necessarily belong to the pure *practical purpose* given a priori and to its possibility”. The idea that is it *God* that we know to exist again seems to degenerate to a status approaching that of a necessary illusion functioning as mere psychological aid.

Moral Religion and Strong TI.

We have so far been considering Kant’s moral theology, caught up in its thicket of problems, from the basis of what I have been calling a *weak* interpretation of Transcendental Idealism. But what might it look like from the *strong*? The strong interpretation, it will be recalled, no longer accepts the traditional idea of metaphysics as an inquiry into the nature of the world as it exists “in itself”. Rather, it regards the realm of traditional metaphysical inquiry as *properly* concerned with “what reason brings forth entirely out of itself”. We might think of idealism here as working at a metaphilosophical level. It is *idealist* in the sense that what “is”, in *its* sense of “is” is *reason* dependent. But it is *not saying* anything about the way the world is *anyway*, for example, not saying that the world is somehow at bottom *mind-like*. One way of making this sound a little less mysterious is to say that the type of existence captured by metaphysics is akin to that pertaining to what we usually think of as *normative* entities or properties. When thinking of *rights* for example, we are unlikely to think of them as reducible to natural properties of individuals, properties that exist “anyway”, that is, independently of their being recognized by the sort of beings which can respond to them. On this reading then, which is more in line with the metaphilosophical “generalized Copernicanism” of strong TI, presumably God will be one such entity—some *product* of reason with a primarily *normative* status. Indeed, as we will see, in the *Opus Postumum*, Kant conceives of God as a *locus of rights*.

From the point of view of *weak* TI this will look like a strongly deflationary reading of theology, and seems to cohere with Kant’s account in the “Ideal of Pure Reason” of the process via which the traditional concept of God is generated via the realization, hypostatization and personalization from the “*ens realissimum*” and fits those places in which he stresses the “as if” nature of our knowledge of God. On such a view of God as a product of reason, clearly God should not be thought to have the type of reality that is to be thought of as “there anyway”, but as somehow bound up with and *dependent upon* the existence of his human *creatures*. The most common way to understand such a take on Kant’s account of God is to think of theological talk in a

type of “expressivist” or “projectivist” manner, and as involving a type of error, but I want to suggest that this can still seem to presuppose elements of the outlook of weak TI, as what is erroneous is the view that God has existence *anyway*. But strong TI is just trying to get us to abandon this way of thinking of the objects of special metaphysics.

With error theories of purported existents—of God, of moral facts, or whatever—it is usually said that purported factual claims about the entities in questions should be understood as expressing some type of human attitude, orientation or ideal. We might think of Feuerbach’s theology in this light. But there are difficulties in reading the strong TI view of God in this way as for strong TI human agents *themselves* have be equally treated as products of reason, and error theories typically presuppose some type of underlying naturalistic approach to human subjects, the existence of something *less problematic* than God or moral facts *from which* the latter can be projected or expressed.²⁴ Rather, what starts to emerge within strong TI is a conception of God more like that found in Hegel’s “absolute” metaphilosophical idealism, in which *all the relevant* realities involved, God and individual subjects who recognize God and each other within patterns of objective spirit, have an *ideal* rather than naturalistic or “real” existence. Is there any evidence for such a view of God in Kant? I think that such a view may be like that which we find in that sketchy final version of transcendental idealism found in those notes making up the so-called *Opus Postumum*.²⁵

The nature of Kant’s position in the *Opus Postumum* and its relation to transcendental idealism of the “classical” period is itself extremely controversial, but it is commonly argued that a number of aspects of Kant’s position there suggest some sort of movement towards features typically found among the post-Kantian idealists.²⁶ These include: Kant’s Fichtean sounding doctrine of “self-positing”, the *Selbstsetzungslehre*; his *reversal* of the relations between understanding and reason such that *reason* is now grasped as more basic faculty;²⁷ the apparent *parity* or *unity* given to theoretical and practical reason, in place of the clear priority given to practical reason in the classical doctrine of “pure practical reason”; and finally, a conception of rational subjectivity that is a much more embodied one than what is found in classical transcendental idealism, an approach which suggests some sort of reconciliation with Spinoza, whom Kant for the first time starts to refer to in positive terms, even referring to Spinozism as a form of transcendental idealism.²⁸

In relation to the conception of God in the *Opus Postumum*, Eckhart Förster has argued that Kant has there effectively abandoned the classical postulates doctrine of the second *Critique*, and come up with an alternative approach which stresses that the

existence of God cannot be thought of as in any way “external” to reason. This, of course, is inconsistent with the interpretation of weak TI as I have characterized it as combining Aristotelian epistemology with a nominalist ontology, which renders God’s existence radically *beyond* the structures of reason. Thus Kant now says, for example, that:

It cannot be denied that such a being exists; yet it cannot be asserted that it exists outside rationally thinking man. (22: 55, Op 214).

And, perhaps most strongly:

Religion is conscientiousness (*mihi hoc religions*). The holiness of the acceptance [*Zusage*] and the truthfulness of what man must confess to himself. Confess to yourself. To have religion, the concept of God is not required (still less the postulate: “There is a God”). (21.81, OP 248)

Förster suggests that Kant’s changed position in the *Opus Postumum* goes along with a change in the *logical form* of the purported “postulates” doctrine. Classically, the moral postulates doctrine was meant to establish the *objectivity* of the concept of God by giving it *a priori* synthetic status via its link to the categorical imperative, but from the time of *Religion within the Limits* the idea of God is seen as directly and *analytically* linked to the very idea of moral duty and the categorical imperative. Specifically, the focus is now directed to the idea of grasping the Categorical Imperative *as if* it issued as a divine command expressed in the voice of God, bypassing the role of the necessity of the highest good.²⁹

The categorical imperative does not presuppose a supremely commanding substance which would be outside me, but is, rather a command or prohibition of my own reason. Notwithstanding this, it is nevertheless to be regarded as proceeding from a being who has irresistible power over all. (22.51; OP 211)

There can be no doubt that no command or prohibition can really have been issued to man by a holy, powerful being, or, if this were to have happened, that man could not have perceived this voice and convinced himself of its reality. Thus there is *no alternative* but to regard that knowledge of our duties as *instar* divine commands, which do not lose any of their authority because of the inevitable ignorance of such prophecy. Therefore, the moral imperative can be regarded as the voice of God”. (22.64)

But why, we might ask, does Kant want to retain the necessity of the idea of God at all, even in its “as if” form? Paul Guyer treats Kant’s position here as invoking a naturally formed, but actually erroneous belief, as a type of psychological aid—in short, as putting our *sensible natures* in the service of reason. But for reasons alluded to above, this seems to underestimate the radical nature of Kant’s idealism here. In the remainder of this paper, and more in line with the idea of a strong interpretation of transcendental idealism, I will suggest an approach to Kant’s idea of God from a different angle, suggesting that it forms part of a response to a structural problem within classical transcendental idealism, one expressed most forcefully in its Fichtean variant, a problem of which Kant perhaps become increasingly aware. The diagnosis of this problem, commonly attributed to Hegel and referred to by Terry Pinkard as the “Kantian Paradox”, a paradox concerning the coherence of the way that Kant classically conceives of the moral will. The idea of God as lawgiver, I will suggest, is Kant’s attempt to resolve this incoherence.

Kant’s Response to the “Kantian Paradox”.

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant describes the will as “not merely subject to the law but subject to it in such a way that it must be viewed as also giving the law to itself”, a law “of which it can regard itself as the author”. (GMM 4: 431). William Bristow sees a paradox at the heart of this claim that he glosses by saying that for Kant we “can regard judgment as our activity only if the principles according to which judgment is governed also have their source in our activity. ... If judgment were bound by an externally legislated principle, it wouldn’t be judgment at all. Hence if judgment is understood as something we do, something we are responsible for, then the constraint on our combination (which constitutes the objectivity of representation) can be nothing else than the subject’s self-legislation”.³⁰ The paradox is just the one that Pinkard has called “the Kantian paradox”: it is a paradox inherent in the concept of “the will’s being subject only to those laws it gives itself”. Pinkard sees this as requiring the agent “to split himself in two, to ‘double’ himself – in effect, for ‘me’ to issue a law to myself that ‘I’ could then use as a reason to apply the law to myself”.³¹ For Pinkard, Hegel had solved the problem with a move to the “sociality of reason”,³² a move analogous to that found in the Wittgenstein’s response to the structurally similar “private language” problem. For both Hegel and Wittgenstein, rather than being self-legislating, rule-following agents must be regarded as belonging to a rule-governed social life.³³ But rather than pursue these well known Hegelian themes, I here want to examine Kant’s appeal to the objectivity of the concept of God, or at least the concept of God’s voice, in just this light, given the fact that one form taken by Kant’s appeal to the necessity of the idea of God is to

appeal to the postulate of an external being who *issues* the imperatives that make up our practical knowledge of the moral law. The Categorical Imperative cannot, as it were, be heard as expressed in the voice of the moral agent him or herself, it must be heard as expressed in a different voice—the voice of God—even though this God has no existence *external* to reason.³⁴

Evidence for reading Kant's appeal to the voice of God in terms of a response to his own perception of the Kantian Paradox can be found, I believe, in Kant's discussion of despotic states in "Perpetual Peace" where he attempts to capture the rationality of a republican constitution by appealing to the structure of the logical syllogism:

Every form of government which is not representative is, properly speaking, without form. The legislator can unite in one and the same person his function as legislative and as executor of his will just as little as the universal of the major premiss in a syllogism can also be the subsumption of the particular under the universal in the minor.³⁵

The difference between well-formed republican states and formless despotic ones hangs on the relationship that exists between the legislative and executive functions in each. A republican constitution is one which *subordinates* the actions of a particular executive to a representative legislature giving expression to the public will — essentially, the Rousseauian *volonté générale*. In contrast, despotism exists where the executive *itself* legislates such that "the public will is administered by the ruler as his own will".³⁶ For Kant this can be captured logically because a syllogism exhibits the relationship between the particular act *executing* a law, represented in the minor premise, and the *condition* or *ground* of that act, the legislation establishing the law itself, represented in the major. It seems then that for Kant, as for Hegel and the later Wittgenstein, there is something *incoherent* with the idea that a *single* conscious subject can legislate the very rules to which it subjects itself in execution. To avoid this incoherence, then, the Categorical Imperative must be conceived as issuing *from* a subject who is irreducibly other to the agent who acts on it.³⁷

Kant himself might then represent at best an *imperfect* exemplar the "Kantian paradox", and perhaps Fichte, is a better one. Thus, for example, as George di Giovanni points out, for Fichte in his early "Kantian" work on religion, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*, the moral law is regarded as a product of the *same will* shared by God and human beings and the question of whether the law "is therefore presented as the product of man's moral agency or God's is a purely formal question". Thus for Fichte, says di Giovanni, God "has significance ... only because he (God) is an objective projection of the individual's own subjective commitment to morality".³⁸

In this respect, di Giovanni comments, the young Hegelians were in fact more Fichtean than Hegelian, but we might also add, more Fichtean than Kantian.³⁹ It is just this Fichtean equivalence or symmetry between the will of God and the human will that Kant was struggling to deny, perhaps because of the increasingly otherwise Fichtean features of his position in the *Opus Postumum*.

So, from the perspective of the *strong* interpretation of TI, while God should be thought of as a “product of reason”, this should not be thought of as any projection on the part of an individual finite rational agent. Kant’s reasons for this now extend beyond that suggested earlier, that individual agents are *themselves* no less products of “reason” than is God. Kant describes both God and individual moral agents as “persons”—bearers of rights and duties, or loci of normative statuses, the existence of which, as the German idealists were to argue, is dependent on their recognition by others, rather than some kind of determinately propertied objects that exist “anyway”. But as Kant repeatedly stresses, the difference between the idea of God and the idea of the human being as persons is that God is a person with rights *but no duties*. Presumably, to think of God with rights *and* duties, just like us, would be too anthropomorphic a conception of God, and an overly deifying conception of ourselves. Perhaps Kant’s point here is that without the conceptual distinction between the divine and human willing, while *individual* humans will grasp their own wills as bound by duties towards others, as a *kind* they risk conceiving of their collective will as *entirely* unfettered by duties—a feature perhaps of Rousseau’s *general will*, for example. This, of course, coincides with a common sentiment expressed by religious people: without God, they think, humans will try to put themselves *in the place of God*. But Kant seems to want to make this not so much a failure of religious sentiment, but a failure of *reason* itself. As *rational* beings we must grasp ourselves as responsible to norms that cannot be thought of as mere projections of our own practices. Reason itself is not our plaything, but something in relation to which we have necessary obligations but no rights.⁴⁰

Kant’s last writings represent an Enlightenment transformation of the early modern conception of norms as *actually* originating in the will of a God conceived in a metaphysically realistic way: as what ultimately exists *anyway*. The residuum of this belief for Kant is the idea of God as the voice of the categorical imperative which addresses us as voice of reason itself. That reason speaks *with a voice* is essential to reason, but the entity speaking can be thought of as having no existence outside the fact of its recognition by finite reasoners so addressed. But Kant’s later approach goes beyond the anthropomorphic, projectionist reading of this move that is more typical of the Enlightenment. God’s voice is not the voice of any entity beyond ourselves, but it

cannot be heard as *our own* voice. On this interpretation, Kant's final moral theology, I suggest, represents neither a traditionally realist /theist one, nor a standardly anti-realist /atheist one. It is rather an idealist theology when idealism is interpreted in a metaphilosophical way, the way that I have attempted to characterize with the idea of *strong* transcendental idealism.

¹ The “deflationist” view is most associated with Henry Allison’s path-breaking *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983; revised and enlarged edition, 2004).

² “Now the concern of this critique of pure speculative reason consists in that attempt to transform the accepted procedure of metaphysics, undertaking an entire revolution according to the example of the geometers and natural scientists”. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bxxii. This is, of course, the “Copernican Revolution” in philosophy sketched in preceding paragraphs of this “Preface” to the second edition.

³ Ibid., Axxi.

⁴ As found, for example, in Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

⁵ See, for example, Karl Ameriks, “The Critique of Metaphysics: The structure and fate of Kant’s dialectic”, in Paul Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶ By and large, recent attempts to revive Kant’s “metaphysics”, like that of Langton, construe metaphysics in the traditional sense. They belong, then, to my category of weak TI, being its *anti-skeptical* variant.

⁷ Ibid., Axx.

⁸ Ibid., A314/B370.

⁹ Paul Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁰ In the rationalist tradition that emerged from Leibniz, metaphysics considered as Aristotle’s dual sciences of that of “being qua being” and that of the “highest” being (of *Metaphysics* books gamma and lamda respectively) emerged as the disciplines of *general* and *special* metaphysics respectively.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), (for all of Kant's works other than the *Critique of Pure Reason*, pagination will be given by volume and page references to the German Academy of Sciences edition as reproduced in the margins of the translations used). On the more general notion of postulate, see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A232-5/B285-7.

¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.

¹³ Ibid., A813/B841.

¹⁴ Sebastian Gardiner, "The Primacy of Practical Reason", in G. Bird (ed.) *A Companion to Kant* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 271. The internal quote is to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxvi.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 272. For a recent synoptic defense of the *theistic* reading of the postulates, see Frederick C. Beiser, "Moral faith and the highest good", in Guyer, *Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*. For a *non-theistic* reading of the postulates, see for example Onora O'Neill, "Kant on Reason and Religion", *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 18 (1997), pp. 267–308).

¹⁶ Paul Guyer, "From a Practical Point of View: Kant's Conception of a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason", in *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 365.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 369–71. See also Guyer's "The Unity of Nature and Freedom: Kant's Conception of the System of Philosophy", in Sally Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Gardiner, "The Primacy of Practical Reason", p. 271.

¹⁹ See, for example, Kant's discussion of the *form* of the categorical judgment in the *Jäsche Logic*: "In categorical judgments, subject and predicate constitute their matter; the form, through which the relation (of agreement or of opposition) between subject and predicate is determined and expressed, is called the *copula*." Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, ed. and trans. J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 601. Kant treats the other judgment forms (hypothetical and disjunctive) as depending on the form of the categorical judgment in as much as that categorical judgments constitute the *matter* of the others (ibid.).

Kant's position on logic, however, is complicated by the fact that for *transcendental* (rather than formal) logic, Kant's approach in fact anticipates Frege's later radical break with term logic. Thus in the "Transcendental Analytic" of the first *Critique*, Kant seems to reject the idea that a judgment involves the relation between independent terms. "I have never been able to satisfy myself with the explanation that

the logicians give of a judgment in general: it is, they say, the representation of a relation between two concepts. ... I remark only that it is not here determined wherein this **relation** consists.” On the Fregean aspects of Kant’s transcendental logic see Mary Tiles, “Kant: From General to Transcendental Logic,” in Dov. M. Gabbay and John Woods, (eds.), *Handbook of the History of Logic: Volume 3, The Rise of Modern Logic: From Leibniz to Frege* (Amsterdam, Elsevier, 2004), Manley Thompson, “Singular Terms and Intuitions in Kant’s Epistemology,” *Review of Metaphysics* 26 (1972–3), 314–43; Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and The Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Charles T. Wolfe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Robert Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), and my *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, ch 3.

²⁰ In the medieval tradition, the problem was confronted by treating singular judgements as having the same logical form as universal judgments on the basis of the affirmative forms allowing no exceptions.

²¹ Such a claim was argued at the end of the 19th century by Francis E. Abbot in *Scientific Theism* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1885). In a critical notice (*Mind* vol. 11, no. 43 (1886), pp. 409–14) James Seth, while critical of Abbot’s *uniformly* nominalist reading of Kant, nevertheless acknowledged that “it may be granted that Kant was himself a Nominalist, and that his Nominalism is the clue to much that he says of the ‘object,’ the ‘thing-in-itself’, etc.” (p. 410). The idea of Kant as a qualified nominalist was repeated in the mid 20th century by Theodor Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Stanford University Press, 2001): “I believe that you would be well advised to convince yourselves that Kant’s starting point is that of nominalism and that in this respect he finds himself in line with the rejection of a conceptual realism that has prevailed since the end of medieval philosophy.” And yet while “we can say that the foundation of Kantian philosophy is still nominalist ... Kant stands on the threshold of a development in which the considerations that led to a radical nominalism begin to turn against themselves” *Ibid.*, 124–5.

²² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5:135 (pagination is here given by volume and page references to the German Academy of Sciences edition of Kant’s works).

²³ Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, p. 308. Longuenesse further develops this reading of Kant’s transcendental ideal in Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant on the Human Standpoint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 8. Henry

Allison has argued that while the givenness of the *omnitudo realitatis* is a “product of transcendental illusion,” Leibniz’s metaphysical error properly hangs on the *hypostatization* of the notion and “the subsequent identification of the *ens realissimum* with a being whose existence is absolutely necessary,” that is, God. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 404–5. Allison points out, however, that this does not mean that Kant’s account of the *omnitudo realitatis* and the *ens realissimum* are free from problems, with one source of these resting on Kant’s continued use of the scholastic idea of “the priority (both logical and ontological) of realities or positive predicates over negative ones” (Ibid., p. 399), a distinction already contained in the categories of “reality” and “negation” from the “Transcendental Analytic.” Certainly Kant’s treatment of the category of “reality” in the “Anticipations of Perception” in terms of “intensive magnitude” makes it look as if the appropriate “negation” of reality would, as represented by an intensive magnitude of 0, be conceived of as a “lack” rather than a “deprivation.” As with the other conceptual triads of the categories, however, it is clear that Kant’s third, in this case “limitation,” cannot be simply understood in terms of the other two, and that the negative predicates of “limitation” cannot be understood as privative concepts in the traditional sense. Certainly with *his* idea of determinate negation, Hegel is strongly resistant to the logical and ontological prioritizing of positive predicates over negative ones.

²⁴ Cf. Paul Guyer’s reading of the practical postulates.

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Opus Postumum*, ed. Eckart Förster, trans. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²⁶ In particular, this was argued by Burkhard Tuschling, *Metaphysische und transzendente Dynamik in Kants opus postumum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), “The Concept of Transcendental Idealism in Kant’s *Opus postumum*”, in R. M. Dancy (ed.), *Kant and Critique: New Essays in Honor of W. H. Werkmeister* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993), and “Apperception and Ether: On the Idea of a Transcendental Deduction of Matter in Kant’s *Opus Postumum*”, in Eckart Förster (ed.), *Kant’s Transcendental Deductions: The Three ‘Critiques’ and the ‘Opus postumum’*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

²⁷ Thus Kant now writes that “Ideas precede appearances in space and time” (21.88; OP 252), see Eckhart Förster, *Kant’s Final Synthesis*, ch 6.

²⁸ See in particular, Jeffrey Edwards, “Spinozism, Freedom, and Transcendental Dynamics in Kant’s Final System of Transcendental Idealism” in Sedgwick, *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy, and Substance, Force, and the Possibility of*

Knowledge: On Kant's Philosophy of Material Nature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²⁹ The theme of duties as divine commands also appears in Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:443-4.

³⁰ William Bristow, *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 35. While this is most explicit in Kant's moral theory, Bristow, stressing the theme of the normativity of judgment that underlies Kant's account, sees it also as operating in theoretical judgment as well. For Kant, the objectivity of judgment, he says, implies "a constraint on how we must combine representations. It implies a rule for the combination of representations, a rule that holds universally and necessarily" (ibid., p. 32). But for Kant, according to Bristow, such a rule can only *be* my rule if I can be thought as somehow having *legislated* it: "the (universal and necessary) rules of combination that constitute the objectivity of representation have their source in—are indeed nothing but expressions of—the necessary self-relating activity of the knowing subject as such" (ibid., p. 34).

³¹ Terry Pinkard, "Subjects, Objects, and Normativity: What Is It Like To Be an Agent?", in Karl Ameriks and Jürgen Stolzenberg (eds), *International Yearbook of German Idealism, vol 1* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), p. 210. Pinkard continues: "However, splitting the agent in two *per se* does nothing to solve the problem, since such a view cannot adjudicate which of the two sides of the same agent is to have priority over the other; it cannot, that is, show how splitting myself in two somehow 'binds' one of my parts because of legislation enacted by the other". Ibid. Pinkard adds, that "Wittgenstein's arguments about private languages and rule-following only reinforce such a view".

³² As developed in Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

³³ But this is not meant to establish some higher order or superindividual agent—"society" itself—as the legislator. Utilizing Hegel's notion of recognition, the revisionist Hegelians conceive of the rules as holding, as it were, simply between agents. The rules to which I hold myself are the rules to which I equally hold others. It is only because these others reciprocally hold me to the same rules that I can hold myself to them, and of course the same applies to these others. The rules themselves, as contemporary advocates of externalist approaches to mental content point out, not primordially *in* my mind, nor in that of any other finite agent. But neither are they in the mind of some supra-individual entity, they are simply immanent within the forms of life within which we all participate. But at the same time, Hegel is still a Kantian

idealist rather than a Platonic realist about the *status* of the rules. The rules exist there only to the extent that agents actually *do* hold themselves and others to them, and in *this* sense they are “mind-dependent”. But we shouldn’t over-literalize this phrase to conceive of a *thing* on which they are dependent in the way properties might be conceived as dependent on a substrate. They are not *in* a mind.

³⁴ In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5.129), Kant invokes the centrality of the idea of “duties as divine commands”, but there embeds the idea in the account of God as the all-powerful being capable of bringing about the highest good. It’s this latter which seems abandoned in *Opus Postumum*, with all that is retained being the bare idea of duties as divine commands.

³⁵ Immanuel Kant, “Zum ewigen Frieden”, *Sämtliche Werke*, (Leipzig, 1938), Band 7, p. 244, translated by Lewis White Beck as “Perpetual Peace” in *Kant on History*, (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1963), p. 96.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For a consideration of a similar apparent paradox in Kant’s conception of the normativity of *logic* see Clinton Tolley, “Kant on the Nature of Logical Laws”, *Philosophical Topics* vol. 34 nos 1–2 (2006), pp. 371–407, esp. pp. 386–9.

³⁸ George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and his Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 211. For a consideration of the same quasi-logical paradox in Fichte see also Charles Larmore, *Les pratiques de moi* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), p. 149. Larmore also attributes this contradiction to Kant in “Back to Kant? No way”, *Inquiry* (2003), pp. 260–271.

³⁹ Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant*, p. 212.

⁴⁰ Thus the Kant that comes into view when his later ideas on theology are considered seems a thinker critical of the ultimate value of autonomy with which he is traditionally associated. The doctrine of the categorical imperative as uttered by the voice of God might then represent a stance towards reason as a type of *receptive* capacity, a stance appealed to, for example by Charles Larmore in his *criticism* of Kant. Larmore, “Back to Kant? No way”, p. 270.