

# The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy

*Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*

*Edited by*

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# 1

## The Unity of Nature and Freedom: *Kant's Conception of the System of Philosophy*

PAUL GUYER

### I

In the last stage of his last attempt at philosophical work, the “First Fascicle” of the *Opus postumum*, Kant was apparently trying to unify his theoretical and practical philosophy into a single system of the ideas of nature and freedom. In this work, Kant seems to have wanted to show that the constitution of nature through our forms of intuition and understanding must be compatible with the content of the moral law and our capacity to act in accordance with it, as represented by our idea of God as supreme lawgiver, because both the concept of nature and the idea of God have their common ground in human thought itself. One of the many drafts of a title page that Kant wrote for this never-completed work suggests his intent:

THE HIGHEST STANDPOINT OF  
TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE SYSTEM OF THE TWO IDEAS  
BY  
GOD, THE WORLD, AND THE SUBJECT WHICH  
CONNECTS BOTH OBJECTS,  
THE THINKING BEING IN THE WORLD.  
GOD, THE WORLD, AND WHAT UNITES BOTH  
INTO A SYSTEM:  
THE THINKING, INNATE PRINCIPLE OF MAN IN  
THE WORLD (*MENS*).  
MAN AS A BEING IN THE WORLD,  
SELF-LIMITED THROUGH NATURE AND DUTY.

(*OP*, I.III.4, 21:34; Förster, p. 237)<sup>1</sup>

Some commentators<sup>2</sup> have interpreted texts like this to mean that in his final years Kant undertook a radical revision of his previous critical philosophy. On this view, Kant's earlier “critical idealism,”<sup>3</sup> which argued that human beings could and must impose on a single experience grounded on an unknowable external reality two different but compatible frameworks, the theoretical and

practical points of view defined by the forms of intuition and understanding on the one hand and the formal principle of practical reason on the other, would be replaced by a more dogmatic metaphysical doctrine in which the natural and moral worlds would be seen as two products of a single common substratum, human thought itself. This new metaphysical doctrine would be akin to Spinoza's conception of the orders of nature and thought as two modes of the single substance God, a conception that was enjoying a revival in the 1790s among the emerging German idealists such as Schelling and his followers. I will argue, however, that Kant's final attempt to unify the *ideas* of nature and God in the common substratum of human thought was a project continuous with his earlier view that the laws of theoretical and practical reason, or of nature and of morality, must be unifiable within a theory of *reflective* judgment, or a theory of the necessities of *human* thought that claims no validity beyond the human point of view. Kant's numerous references to Spinoza in his final writings are only meant to emphasize the *difference* between his own theory of the systematicity of human thought as a product of reflective judgment and what he took to be the dogmatic monistic metaphysics of Spinoza as revived by Schelling and his followers. The philosophers of Schelling and his generation may have acquired their taste for a single all-embracing philosophical system of reality from Kant, but rebelled against his restriction of such a system to the realm of reflective judgment or mere "ideas."

Some well-known statements from Kant's three *Critiques* might suggest that he had originally considered the concepts and laws of theoretical and practical reason to constitute two compatible but independent systems of thought rather than the single system of ideas contemplated in the *Opus postumum*, and thus that Kant's late work represents a radical change in his views. This remark from the published Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* is often invoked in defense of the interpretation of Kant's Critical philosophy as an insuperable dichotomy of theoretical and practical viewpoints: There is "an incalculable abyss fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that no transition is possible from the first to the second (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason)" (*CJ*, Introduction II, 5:175–6). Although the paragraph from which this remark is taken immediately proceeds to argue that there must be some way to bridge this gulf, the subject matter of the ensuing body of the work, the realm of the aesthetic on the one hand and of a methodological conception of teleological judgment on the other, seems to imply that any unification of the two realms of theoretical and practical thought can only take place in the highly subjective realms of analogy, symbolism, methodological principles, and so on, and that the theoretical and practical must remain two essentially distinct forms of thought.

I will argue, however, that there is much less difference between the conception of the systematic unity of nature and freedom in Kant's three *Critiques* and

the conception to which he was apparently working in his final days as a functioning philosopher than may initially meet the eye. In fact, Kant had always insisted that the systems of nature and freedom, of theoretical and practical reason, must themselves be able to be conceived as comprising a single system of nature and freedom, although this conception would itself be valid only “from a practical point of view” – precisely as the citation from the *Critique of Judgment* suggests, which after all denies only that the gulf between the domains of nature and freedom can be bridged *by means of the theoretical use of reason*. Although Kant worked at refining his characterization of the practical point of view to the end, there are no arguments in his last writings to suggest that he had fundamentally revised the fundamental content of this conception. Specifically, I will defend the following theses:

- (1) In all three *Critiques*, Kant argues that we must be able to conceive of *nature*, and not any other realm, as receptive to the realization of the intended outcome of morality, in the form of the *highest good*, and thus be able to conceive of the realms of nature and freedom as constituting a single system, although such a conception of the single system of nature and freedom is held to be valid only from a practical point of view.
- (2) In the *Opus postumum*, Kant suggests that it is the possibility of the recognition and performance of *duty* that must be reconciled with the universality and necessity of natural law by seeing both as having a common ground in human thought; but in my view this represents more of a change of emphasis than a fundamental change in doctrine, not only because the compatibility between nature and duty is already insisted upon in the second *Critique*, but also because there is an essential and intrinsic connection between the concepts of duty and of the highest good. The latter is not a hybrid concept of the merely natural end of happiness as constrained by the moral condition of duty, but is rather a conception of the *object* or intended *outcome* of duty, although not an appropriate characterization of the morally praiseworthy *motivation* for the performance of duty.
- (3) Throughout the three *Critiques*, Kant suggests that the concept of the highest good is a necessary and sufficient ground, from a moral point of view, for the postulation of the existence of God as an author of nature distinct from ourselves. In the *Opus postumum*, he states that the idea of God is nothing but a representation of our own capacity to give ourselves the moral law and act in accordance with it, an “idea, the product of our own reason” (e.g. *OP*, VII.X.1, 22:117, Förster 201). Yet this does not constitute a fundamental change in dogma, only a clarification of the subjective significance of the idea of God that had always been part of the meaning of Kant’s claim that the postulation of the existence of God was valid only from a practical point of view.

- (4) Finally, even if the conception of nature and God as constituting a single system because grounded in the single substratum of human thought did represent a fundamental departure from the earlier conception of the realms of nature and human freedom as constituting a single system because grounded in a single author of nature, this would hardly count as a move *toward* Spinozism, on which nature and human thought are merely two modes of a real God. Rather, it would be an even more radical statement of the theoretical and practical anthropocentrism to which Kant had been working throughout his mature philosophy.

In what follows, I will argue for these theses by a commentary upon key arguments of the three *Critiques*, followed by a commentary upon some representative notes from the final stages of the *Opus postumum*, the Seventh and First Fascicles.

## II

Kant's first introduction of the concept of the highest good as well as his first statement of the argument that this concept can serve as the ground for the conception of God is found in the "Canon of Pure Reason" of the "Doctrine of Method" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>4</sup> By a "canon," Kant means the "sum-total of the a priori principles of the correct use of certain cognitive faculties in general" (*CPuR*, A 796/B 824),<sup>5</sup> or a set of positive rules that can serve as grounds for further thought or action rather than a mere critique of unfounded thoughts or actions. The point of the section is to argue that while sensibility and understanding supply a canon for theoretical inquiry and judgment, theoretical reason does not, furnishing instead only metaphysical illusions; it is only reason in its practical use that can supply a canon, in the form of the pure principles of reason that are the foundation of morality and the further assumptions necessary for us to act on these principles. This thesis is stated in the first section of the "Canon," which announces that "the ultimate end of our pure use of reason" is grounded "uniquely and solely in its practical interest" (A 797/B 825). After providing an initial statement of his theory of freedom in this first section, Kant goes on in the second to give his first account of "the ideal of highest good, as a determining ground of the ultimate end of pure reason" (A 804/B 832): Suggesting that he will abjure detailed discussion of the question "What should I do?" as purely practical (although he does not entirely do so), he proposes to discuss the highest good in answer to the question "If I do what I should, what may I then hope?" as "simultaneously practical and theoretical" (A 805/B 833). The key points about the highest good that Kant makes in the "Canon" are themes that will remain constant throughout the rest of his career: First, that the maximal happiness that it includes should be conceived of as the appropriate outcome of virtuous action; second, although there is some ambiv-



alence about this, that this happiness must be conceived of as realizable in nature, thus as requiring a unity of the systems of nature and freedom and their ground in a common author; but, third, that this postulation of the realizability of the highest good and thus of the reality of the single system of nature and freedom and of their author can only be conceived to be valid from a practical point of view.

- (1) Kant begins the discussion by drawing a firm distinction between the practical law that has *happiness* as its  *motive*, which would be merely “pragmatic,” and the practical law that has *worthiness to be happy* as its sole motive, which would be “moral” (*CPuR*, A 806/B 834). But he proceeds to suggest that happiness in accord with moral laws must be conceived to be possible because such happiness would be the intended although not motivating *outcome* of virtuous action, and it would be incoherent to undertake such action if its intended outcome were impossible. Kant defines “the world as it would be if it were in conformity with all moral laws” as a “moral world,” and says that in the first instance the conception of the moral world is also the conception of an “intelligible world, since abstraction is made therein from all conditions (ends) and even from all hindrances to morality in it.” Yet he also states that this idea of a moral world should be conceived to have “objective reality, not as pertaining to an object of an intelligible intuition . . . but as pertaining to the world of the senses” (A 808/B 836). In other words, the idea of a moral world does not give us theoretical knowledge of a world existing independently of or beyond the sensible world; rather, it gives us a practical ideal for the guidance of our conduct in the same sensible world that we know by means of the senses and the understanding.

Next, Kant claims that “in an intelligible world,” “a system of happiness proportionately combined with morality also can be thought as necessary, since freedom, partly moved and partly restricted by moral laws, would itself be the cause of the general happiness, and rational beings, under the guidance of such principles, would themselves be the authors of their own enduring welfare and at the same time that of others” (*CPuR*, A 809/B 837). Kant’s subsequent works will suggest that this claim is grounded on the following argument: (i) since what the law of pure practical reason to which we should be motivated to conform by the virtuous desire to be worthy of happiness rather than by the merely natural desire for happiness itself requires us to do is to respect rational agency in ourselves and others, and (ii) since what making rational agency in both ourselves and others our ultimate end in this way requires is that we do what we can to preserve and promote the

necessary conditions for ourselves and others realizing our other ends, whatever they may be, and even strive for the realization of those ends, to the extent that so doing is compatible with the general respect for rational agency itself,<sup>6</sup> yet (iii) since happiness is just the term for the maximal collective satisfaction of the ends of agents, which can in fact be brought about only under the condition of this general respect for agency itself, therefore (iv) the respect for rational agency itself would in fact bring about maximal collective happiness under the ideal circumstances in which each agent acted in conformity with this ideal and no natural conditions external to these agents intervened between their actions and their intended outcomes that would disrupt those outcomes. Under these conditions, a group of agents all motivated by respect for rational agency and the desire to be worthy of being happy would produce their own maximal collective happiness, even though that outcome of their actions would not be the motive of their actions.<sup>7</sup> Kant is quick to observe that no individual is relieved from his obligation under the moral law by anyone else's failure to live up to it, but at the same time he continues to maintain that the connection between "the hope of being happy [and] the unremitting effort to make oneself worthy of happiness" is "necessary" (*CPuR*, A 810/B 838). Subsequent works will suggest that what this means is that it would be irrational for us to act to bring about an end or object that we did not believe to be possible – or knew to be impossible – even if bringing about that end is not the *motivation* of our action. Thus it will be rational for us to act as morality requires only if the sphere within which we have to act can be conceived as one where it is possible to realize the outcomes of our action; it is in this way that nature and freedom must constitute a single system.

- (2) Such a necessary connection, Kant next claims, "can be hoped for only if it is at the same time grounded on a **highest reason**, which commands in accordance with moral laws, as at the same time a cause of nature" (*CPuR*, A 810/B 838).<sup>8</sup> If we have to think of the laws of nature as compatible with the realization of an end that is in fact commanded by the moral law, then we have to think of nature as being caused in a way that makes this true, and the most natural way for us to do this, given our own understanding of causation, is to think of nature as being caused by an intelligent author who in designing it takes the demands of morality into account as well, "a wise author and regent" (A 811/B 839). Kant then introduces an argument, prominent in both of the two subsequent critiques as well, that only morality can lead to a *determinate* conception of God as "single, most perfect and rational," a specification of His predicates to which "speculative theology" could never lead even if it could legitimately lead to the idea of a first cause at all (A 814/B 842).

At this point, Kant takes a next step that will not be repeated in his subsequent expositions of the doctrine of the highest good. He argues that although “we must assume the moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the sensible world,” the senses “do not offer such a connection to us,” and the realization of the highest good that we must be able to suppose to be a consequence of our conduct must therefore be supposed to lie in “a world which is future for us” (*CPuR*, A 811/B 839), a “world which is not now visible to us but is hoped for” (A 813/B 841). Here Kant treats the postulates of both God and immortality as conditions necessary for the realization of the maximal happiness contained in the concept of the highest good. He postulates God as the cause of the connection between virtuous action and its appropriate outcome, but defers the realization of this happiness to a life beyond the sensible world, thereby having to postulate immortality as well. This partially undermines the unity of nature and freedom that has just been established, for now it seems as if nature must be conceived as necessarily compatible with the *intention* to do what morality requires of us, but not as necessarily compatible with the *realization* of the appropriate outcome of virtuous action, which apparently can be deferred beyond the realm of nature.

What would have to be a key premise for any such argument for an afterlife—namely, the assumption that happiness proportionate to virtue is not just *not evident* in the sensible world but actually *impossible* in the sensible world—goes undefended here, although without such a premise one could argue that the laws of nature merely need to make such happiness *possible* for action that would have it as its intended outcome to be rational.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Kant retreats from this position almost as soon as he states it, for he next argues that “this systematic unity of ends in this world of intelligences” must be conceivable as both a sensible and an intelligible world, and thus “leads inexorably to the purposive unity of all things that constitute this great whole, in accordance with laws of nature”; he goes on to say that “the world” – without qualification – “must be represented as having arisen out of an idea if it is to be in agreement with that use of reason without which we would hold ourselves unworthy of reason,” and that for this reason “[A]ll research into nature is thereby directed toward the form of a system of ends, and becomes in its fullest development physico-theology” (*CPuR*, A 815–16/B 843–4). Here Kant again suggests that we can only make the actions required by the moral use of reason fully rational if we conceive of a single world – that in which we act – as being described by the laws of both nature and freedom, and of those laws as constituting a single system describing one and the same world.

- (3) No sooner has Kant argued that the postulation of a determinately conceived author of nature is the necessary condition of the highest good than he also insists that we must hold this concept of God to be correct “not because speculative reason has convinced us of its correctness but because it is in perfect agreement with the moral principles of reason”:

Thus, in the end, only pure reason, although only in its practical use, always has the merit of connecting with our highest interest a cognition which mere speculation can only imagine but never make valid, and of thereby making it into not a demonstrated dogma but yet an absolutely necessary presupposition in reason’s most essential ends. (*CPuR*, A 818/B 846)

Kant argues that we cannot infer a theoretical *is* from a moral *ought*: we can treat God and the unity of the natural and moral that he grounds as a presupposition of our conduct but not as an object of our knowledge.

Just what this means is a difficult issue, about which Kant will have something but perhaps not enough more to say. At this juncture, however, I only want to suggest that in the few pages of the “Canon of Pure Reason” Kant has already staked out three claims from which he will not depart in more than style and emphasis even in his last writings: (i) the appropriate outcome of virtuous action is the highest good, (ii) we must conceive of the world in which we act as described by a single set of both natural and moral laws with a single author for it to be rational for us to act as duty requires, but (iii) the postulation of this systematic unity of nature and freedom and its ground must always remain a presupposition of conduct and not a claim of speculative theology or dogmatic metaphysics.

### III

I now turn to Kant’s treatment of the highest good in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.<sup>10</sup> The treatment of the highest good and of its implications for the systematic union of nature and freedom in the second *Critique* is largely continuous with that in the first. Thus, as before, the main points are first, that the collective maximization of happiness contained in the concept of the highest good is in fact an appropriate object of virtuous conduct, not its motive, but also not a merely natural end that is externally constrained by the requirement of virtue; second, although there is still some wavering on this issue, on the whole Kant treats the happiness-component of the highest good – indeed, even more than the virtue-component – as something that must be capable of being realized in nature or the sensible world, which requires that the laws of nature be compatible with the laws of morality and that nature have a moral author; but third, again Kant insists that the postulation of such a common author of the enabling legislation of both the natural and the moral world is valid only from a

practical point of view, and now he spells out a little more clearly what that restriction means.

- (1) The *Critique of Practical Reason* initially appears to be the most formalistic of Kant's ethical writings: Its opening exposition of the fundamental principle of morality equates the categorical imperative with the requirement of the universalizability of maxims<sup>11</sup> and omits any mention of the requirement of respect for rational agency as the end in itself that even in the *Groundwork* is adduced as the ground of the possibility of the categorical imperative.<sup>12</sup> This makes Kant's introduction of the highest good opaque, and has led some<sup>13</sup> to suppose that the concept of the highest good is a hybrid concept, which combines the moral but purely formal requirement of virtue as a concern for universalizability without regard to ends with a merely natural concern for happiness that may be subjected to a requirement of maximization by reason as a general striving for the unconditioned but not by practical reason in any specifically moral sense. On this account, the requirement that virtue be perfected or maximized *constrains* the pursuit of happiness, or subjects it to a moral condition, but does not entail any properly moral interest in the realization of happiness, let alone in the maximization or systematization of happiness. But it is clear that this is not Kant's position, although he does not make his grounds for rejecting it very clear. On the contrary, although he is again at pains, as he was in the "Canon," to stress that an interest in happiness cannot be any part of the  *motive* for the pursuit of the highest good (*CPracR*, 5:109, 113), Kant is again also at pains to stress that the happiness-component of the highest good is a genuine *object* of morality. This is clear in the following *locus classicus*:

That virtue (as the worthiness to be happy) is the **supreme condition** of all that which may seem desirable to us, thus of all our striving for happiness, thus that it is the **supreme good**, has been proven in the Analytic. But it is not on that account the whole and complete good, as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings; for in order to be that, **happiness** is also required, and not merely in the partial eyes of the person who makes himself into an end, but even in the judgment of an impartial reason, who considers the former in general as an end in himself in the world. (*CPracR*, 5:110)

Although highly compacted, this passage is significant both in what it says and what it does not say. It does not say that the desire for happiness is a merely natural desire, or a desire of a merely natural being; on the contrary, it suggests that the desire for happiness is a *rational* desire of a finite being, and one that is recognized by reason as such in regarding a being who is both rational but also placed in a world as an end in himself. Thus, although talk of an end in itself has heretofore been

excluded from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, at this crucial point it appears, suggesting that what underlies the concept of the highest good even here is the view that what morality requires, out of respect for reason rather than a mere desire for happiness, is respect for rational agency as such. But rational agents or ends in themselves are finite creatures who *have* ends, so that what respect for them *as* ends requires is respect for, or the preservation and promotion of, their capacity to *have* and *pursue* ends; and since what happiness consists in is the attainment of ends, virtue therefore actually requires and does not just constrain the impartial pursuit of happiness. It is in this way that the happiness-component of the highest good is part of the object of morality – the other part, of course, being the cultivation of the virtuous *motivation* of duty itself – and not just a merely natural end externally constrained by morality.

- (2) Second, although there is still one point of obscurity on this issue, for the most part the second *Critique* stresses more clearly than the first that the happiness that comprises part of the highest good is to be conceived of as realizable *in nature* and therefore requires the postulation of a morally motivated author *of nature*. Early in his discussion, Kant argues that the proposition that striving after happiness itself produces a virtuous disposition is “**absolutely false**,” but that the proposition that striving after virtue produces happiness is not absolutely but only “**conditionally false**,” for it is false if considered as a claim about a “form of causality in the sensible world” but might be true if “my existence is thought of as a noumenon in an intellectual world” (*CPracR*, 5:114). This might be taken to imply that the happiness that is to be connected with virtue in the highest good need not and perhaps cannot be thought of as a happiness that is to be realized within the sensible realm of nature, but somewhere else. Kant does not, however, draw this conclusion. Rather, he only denies that the connection between virtue and happiness in nature is *immediate*: He states that “it is not impossible that the morality of disposition have if not an immediate than a mediate and indeed necessary connection as cause (by means of an intelligible author of nature) with happiness as an effect in the sensible world” (5:115). Such a connection would be merely contingent in the case of a nature that contains merely our own powers as revealed by our own senses, but, Kant implies, if nature is regarded *both* as object of the senses and as the product of an intelligent author, then the connection would be necessary rather than contingent.

By bringing God into the argument from the highest good in the form of the intelligent author of nature, in other words, Kant implies that the happiness required by the highest good must be realizable within nature

and not elsewhere. He continues to imply as much when he dramatically separates the postulation of immortality from the postulation of God in the ensuing discussion. Conceiving of the highest good as requiring the maximization of both virtue and happiness (not, as he is sometimes taken to suggest, mere proportionality between the two),<sup>14</sup> Kant argues that the maximization of virtue, or development of a holy will, cannot be expected to occur in a finite phenomenal lifetime, and that we must think of that as something that takes place in immortality (*CPracR*, 5:122–3). But he does not go on to say the same thing about happiness and God as its ground. Instead, he argues that the existence of God must be postulated as the “cause of the whole of nature” in order to explain “the possibility of the second element of the highest good.” This only makes sense if the happiness that is required by the concept of the highest good is envisioned as occurring within nature.

Kant’s argument for this point is tricky. He begins by stating that the “acting rational being in the world is not at the same time the cause of the world and of nature itself,” and thus that there cannot be a ground of a “necessary connection between morality and the happiness proportionate to it” in the constitution of an ordinary agent considered by itself (*CPracR*, 5:124). The next claim Kant makes, however, is not what we might expect, namely that God must be postulated as the ground of such a necessary connection; rather, he argues that a supreme cause of nature must be postulated as “the ground of the agreement of nature not merely with a law of the will of rational beings but of the representation of this *law*, in so far as they make it into the **supreme determining ground of their will**, thus of agreement not merely with the form of morals, but with their morality as the determining ground of that, i.e., with their moral disposition”; thus the highest good is only possible “insofar as a supreme cause of nature is assumed which has a causality in accord with the moral disposition” (5:125). In other words, a moral cause of nature is postulated here in order to insure that human beings as natural creatures are capable of forming moral intentions, or being virtuous. Nevertheless, Kant goes on to claim that the God so introduced, as the “**highest original good**,” is the ground of “a **highest derived good** (of the best world),” and then to argue that it is our duty “to endeavor to produce and advance the highest good in the world” (5:126). Since it is the complete highest good and not just virtue as one of its two components that is to be produced in the world, the implication is clear that not only virtuous intention but happiness as its intended outcome must be conceived by us as possible within the world, not somewhere else, and that God as a moral author is being postulated as the ground of the possibility of both virtue and happiness in the world, the same sensible world where we

ourselves could connect these two components only contingently but where God can make their connection, or the systematic union of nature and freedom, necessary.

- (3) As in the first *Critique*, however, Kant also immediately restricts the force of this argument with the claim that it is valid “only from a practical point of view” (*CPracR*, 5:133). This is now presented as a complex restriction: the coherence of moral conduct requires (i) that we postulate the *possibility* of the realization of the happiness called for in the concept of the highest good in the sensible or natural world, which in turn requires (ii) that we postulate the *actual existence* of God, where, however, (iii) that postulation is not entailed by any theoretical considerations whatsoever but is only a practical presupposition of our conduct in accord with the demands of morality and where, moreover, (iv) the *predicates* for the *determination* of this concept of God cannot be furnished by any theoretical speculation but only by the demands of morality. In order to understand Kant’s notion of a postulate of practical reason and thus the epistemic status of his conception of the systematic unity of nature and freedom, we need to touch on each of these points, even if only briefly.

(i) What we must postulate in order to make action rational is the *possibility* of realizing the end foreseen and intended by that action, not a guarantee of the actual realization of that end. Thus at the outset of the section from which we have been quoting Kant says that the moral law must “lead to the possibility of the second element of the highest good” (*CPracR*, 5:124), and at the end of its first long paragraph he writes that “the postulate of the possibility of the **highest derived good** (of the best world) is at the same time the postulate of the actuality of a **highest original good**, namely the existence of God” (5:125). This point is important, for it sometimes seems as if Kant thinks an endeavor is rational only if its success is in some sense guaranteed,<sup>15</sup> but here he clearly suggests that as long as an enterprise is *motivated* by sufficiently weighty grounds, as morality above all is, then its pursuit is rational as long as its successful outcome is *not impossible*.<sup>16</sup>

(ii) To explain how we can conceive of nature as a sphere in which the realization of the highest good is even guaranteed to be *possible*, however, we must think that the *actual* ground of its existence is the existence of God, not merely that God is a possible cause of it. Presumably the thought here is that if God is merely a possible cause of nature, but there are other possible causes of it as well, then if one of those other causes is the actual cause of nature, the realization of the highest good in nature may not even be possible; but if God is the actual cause of nature, then the realization of the highest good is assuredly possible. Thus the



content of the postulation of God is an existence-statement, not a merely possibility-statement: “the possibility of this highest good . . . occurs only under the presupposition of the existence of God” (*CPracR*, 5:125).

(iii) At the same time, however, Kant hedges the semantically existential *content* of the practical postulate of God with restrictions on its epistemic *force*. Thus he immediately follows the last remark cited with the statement that “this moral necessity is **subjective**, i.e., a need, and not **objective**, i.e., itself a duty; for there cannot be any duty to assume the existence of a thing (since this pertains merely to the theoretical use of reason)” (*CPracR*, 5:125). Alternatively, he goes on to say that from a theoretical point of view the assumption of the existence of God would be, as a ground of explanation, a mere “hypothesis,” although with regard to “an object set for us by the moral law” it can be a “**belief** and even a pure **belief of reason**” (5:126). Kant clarifies this distinction by suggesting that there are two conditions for a practical postulate. First, the concept to be postulated must itself be *not impossible* or free from contradiction, even from a purely theoretical point of view. Second, the affirmation of the reality of the concept, even if itself unwarranted by any theoretical ground, must still not be arbitrary, for then it would be mere theoretical hypothesis; instead, it must be something that we must believe if it is to be rational and coherent for us to act in a certain way, where acting in that way is itself morally requisite. Kant suggests these two conditions when he writes, first, that the postulates of practical reason are “(transcendent) thoughts in which there is nothing impossible,” which implies that they must have noncontradictory theoretical content, and then that what would otherwise be “**transcendent** and merely **regulative** principles of speculative reason” become “**immanent** and **constitutive** insofar as they are grounds for **making actual** the **necessary object** of pure practical reason (the highest good)” (5:135). This, perhaps especially the use of the phrase “making actual,” suggests that a rational belief is something that must be believed in order to make a form of conduct coherent, but that it has no force outside of that context.

Thus far, then, we have the claims that the highest good must be considered to be *possible* in nature, and that its ground, a moral Author of nature, must be considered to be *actual* from a practical point of view, where that in turn means that it must be *theoretically* possible and a necessary presupposition of a mode of *conduct*, but not otherwise grounded. Finally, Kant adds the last element of his position, the claim that (iv) the concept of God can be given *determinate content* only from a practical point of view, that is, the only predicates that can be ascribed to him in order to amplify the vague conception of him as the author of

nature are those that are necessary to conceive of him as the ground of the realizability of the highest good. This argument is expanded beyond the hint at it offered in the “Canon,” but still not developed at the length it will be in the *Critique of Judgment*. The argument is essentially a tacit response to Hume’s critique of the argument from design in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*: Kant agrees with the Philo of Dialogue XII<sup>17</sup> that the most that we could infer from the amount of “order, design and magnitude” we observe in nature is that it has an author who is to *some* degree “wise, beneficent and powerful,” but responds that we can only infer that this author is “all-knowing, all-good and all-powerful” (*CPracR*, 5:139) on the ground that these are the qualities necessary for him to ground the possible realization of the highest good. Thus, God must be conceived of as “**all-knowing** in order [for him] to know my conduct in its innermost disposition in all possible cases and throughout the future,” or in order to judge my virtue, and he must be “**all-powerful**” and “**all-present**” in order “to apportion to it the appropriate consequences” (5:140). Thus, Kant’s moral theology consists not merely in the claim that only morality gives us a ground for *believing* in the *existence* of God; it also includes the claim that only morality gives us a *determinate conception* of God.

On the basis of this conception, however, we can then conceive of the systematic union of nature and freedom through their common author; the concept of this single system is thus reached through the concept of the highest good, which is itself a morally necessary concept, and is therefore valid though only from a practical point of view, as itself a postulate for which God is the ground. Let us now see whether Kant modifies that thought at all at the next stage of his thought.

#### IV

The *Critique of Judgment* is a work of great complexity as well as obscurity. One measure of the complexity of the work is that although its division into the two main parts of a *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* and a *Critique of Teleological Judgment* might be taken to suggest that there are two main objects for the single power of reflective judgment that is supposed to be under analysis in the work as a whole, namely objects of beauty on the one hand and natural organisms on the other, in fact at least *five* distinguishable objects of reflective judgment are actually discussed: two in the aesthetic sphere, namely (i) particular objects of *beauty*, the internal quasisystematicity of whose parts is recognized by aesthetic judgment rather than by conceptual judgment, but which may be either naturally occurring objects or products of human intentional artistic activity, and then (ii) boundless regions of nature, which are the

causes<sup>18</sup> of the experience of the *sublime*; and three connected with the idea of teleology, namely: (iii) individual natural objects, the internal organization of whose parts can be judged under a concept of reciprocal causation rather than by merely aesthetic judgment, or *organisms*; (iv) the system of empirical scientific *concepts* standing under the purely formal laws of nature furnished by the categories and manifesting further internal organization in the form of homogeneity, specificity and affinity; and, finally, (v) the whole of *nature* itself as a system, including but by no means limited to those internally systematic parts of nature that are themselves systems, that is, organisms. Kant explores many relations and analogies among these various objects, making his argumentation in this work particularly dense.

But in fact the work begins and ends with a claim with which we are already familiar. This is the claim that even though – or precisely because – the great abyss between nature and freedom cannot be bridged by the *theoretical* use of reason, it can and must be bridged by the *practical* use of freedom, from whose point of view nature must be able to be seen as a realm within which morality's demands on both our actions and their outcomes can be satisfied. In Kant's words, the concept of freedom “**should** have influence” on the concept of nature, “namely the concept of freedom should make the end which is set forth through its laws actual in the sensible world; and nature must therefore be able to be so conceived that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the end which is to be effected within it in accordance with the laws of freedom” (*CJ*, Introduction II, 5:176). That is to say, in this work Kant reiterates two theses already made clear in the previous *Critiques*, that the fundamental principle of morality does not just constrain our natural ends but itself sets an overarching end for us, the highest good, and that this end must be capable of being realized in nature in order for our actions that have it as their end to be rational and coherent; and the reiteration of this theme within a general theory of reflective judgment and its regulative principles only clarifies the position, already suggested as “the practical point of view,” that this conception of the unity of nature and freedom is to be treated, like a maxim for the conduct of inquiry, as a principle that may have the form of a proposition about objects but that is not asserted to have an ordinary objective truth-value.

The argument underlying Kant's *Critique of Teleological Judgment* can be outlined like this. Starting from the side of theoretical judgment,<sup>19</sup> we see that the peculiar complexity of individual organisms makes it necessary for us to conceive of them as if they were products of intelligent design, that the necessity of so conceiving of individual organisms also makes it inevitable for us to conceive of nature as a whole as a systematic product of intelligent design, but that although there is thus a purely theoretical impetus for us so to conceive of nature as a whole, it is not in fact possible for us to form any *determinate* and *unique* conception of nature as a whole as a system except by treating some

part of that system, namely humankind, as *its* end because it is an end *in itself*, a characterization that is possible only from a moral point of view. At the same time, morality itself requires that we conceive of humankind as an end in itself and also conceive of the moral perfection of humankind, in the form of the highest good, as something possible within nature and indeed as the end of nature as a whole. So the ultimate argument of Kant's teleology is that the scientific point of view contains an idea of systematicity that can only be satisfied by the moral point of view, and conversely that the moral point of view requires us to conceive of nature as a sphere within which humankind can successfully work out its moral vocation. Yet whether we start from the scientific or the moral end of this argument, in either case what we get is a regulative principle of conduct rather than a theoretical principle of cognition.

Kant's commitment to such an argument is confirmed by several striking outlines of it among his notes. The first such outline, which neatly shows the steps from individual organisms to a view of nature as a purposive system as a whole and then the need to bring in moral considerations in order to make that system determinate, apparently dates from the 1780s:

**Moral proof.** We find **ends** in the world; these give our insight an indication of a being which would be in accordance with **the analogy** of an **intelligent cause** of the world. But its **concept is not determined** through this [analogy] either for the theoretical or practical principles of our use of reason: Because it **explains nothing** in regard to the former and **determines nothing** in regard to the latter.

Only reason, through the **moral law**, gives us a **final end**. This cannot be attained through our powers, and yet we are to have it as our aim. It can be brought about **only in the world**, consequently so far as **nature agrees with it**. A nature, however, which agrees with a moral final end, would be a **morally effective** cause. Thus we must assume a being **outside** of nature as its author, which would be a **moral being**, a cause of the world equipped with understanding and will. (R 6173, 18:477–8)

The first paragraph shows that the idea of particular systems within nature introduces at best an indeterminate idea of nature as a whole as a system; the second paragraph shows that the final end of morality, the highest good, necessarily introduces a certain view of nature as compatible with that end and of its author as determined above all by the moral predicates necessary to explain that compatibility.

A second note from the next decade outlines the second stage of this argument particularly clearly:

First the representation of the world as a system of the *nexus finalis physici* (*causarum finalium physicarum* among which mankind must also be). Thus an intelligent primordial being, but not yet God, because the concept of the perfection of the world from experience is not adequate for that. Now the representation of the world as of a *systematis causarum finalium moralium* for the highest good. For humankind, which is a member of the *nexus finalis physici* but also touches on a principle of a higher *nexus*

*finalis* in itself, also relates its existence in regard to the same intelligent author; but the concept of that is that of a being as the author of the highest good, because this alone is appropriate to the end-relation of the moral human. (R 6451, 18:723).

Here Kant skips the first step of the argument, but again spells out clearly that only a moral conception of God that is in fact based on the moral end of human beings can provide a determinate conception of the world as a whole as a system of causes.

Let us now look at the details of this argument in its fullest exposition in the *Critique of Judgment*.

- (1) First, the Introduction to the third *Critique* lays out the framework of Kant's argument: the critique of teleological judgment is to bridge the gap between the realms of nature and freedom precisely by showing us that it is *possible* to realize within nature the final end the pursuit of which is made *necessary* by practical reason. As Kant puts it,

The effect in accordance with the concept of freedom is the final end [*Endzweck*] which (or the appearance of which in the sensible world) should exist, for which the condition of its possibility in nature (in the nature of the subject as sensible being, namely as human being) is presupposed. What the power of judgment presupposes *a priori* and without regard to the practical yields the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from the lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter, in the concept of a **purposiveness** of nature: for thereby is the possibility of the final end known, which can become actual only in nature and in harmony with its laws. (*CJ*, Introduction IX, 5:195–6).

That is, a teleological view of nature that is not itself dictated by morality will nevertheless show nature, above all our own nature as creatures in the sensible world, to be suitable for the realization of the final end that is dictated by morality.

- (2) Next, the opening move of the *Critique of Teleological Judgment* in particular is to argue that the teleological viewpoint that is forced upon us by the attempt to comprehend individual organisms in nature also makes it natural for us to conceive of nature as a whole as a system that is designed by an intelligent author and must therefore have or be compatible with a final end. In my view, Kant's interest in making this point is what motivates him to discuss the problem of understanding organisms at all.<sup>20</sup> For present purposes, we will have to take for granted Kant's argument that organic processes such as growth, self-maintenance, and reproduction (*CJ*, §64, 5:371–2) involve a kind of reciprocal causation that cannot be understood through our mechanical model of temporally unidirectional causal influence, but instead require, precisely

in order to accommodate them to our ordinary conception of the temporal direction of causation, the postulation of an antecedent design of the organism and therefore an antecedent designer (§65, especially 5:373) – an argument that has, to say the least, been put into question by the modern synthesis of genetics and natural selection. The point to be emphasized here is Kant’s next move, the argument that once we have conceived of particular organisms or “physical ends” as systematically organized products of design, it then becomes irresistible for us to conceive of nature as a whole as a systematic organization with an end. This is in fact the final move of the “Analytic of Teleological Judgment”:

It is only matter, insofar as it is organized, which necessarily carries with it the idea of it as a natural end, since its specific form is at the same time a product of nature. But now this concept necessarily leads to the idea of the whole of nature as a system in accordance with the rule of ends, to which idea now all mechanism of nature in accordance with principles of reason must be subordinated (at least for the investigation of natural appearance thereby). The principle of reason is permissible only subjectively, i.e., as a maxim: Everything in the world is good for something, nothing in it is in vain; and through the example which nature gives in its organic products one is justified, indeed invoked to expect nothing in it and its laws except what is purposive in the whole. (*CJ*, §67, 5:378–9)

. . . if we have once discovered in nature a capacity for bringing forth products which can only be conceived by us in accordance with the concept of final causes, then we go further and may also estimate those which do not (either in themselves or even in their purposive relation) make it necessary to seek out another principle for their possibility beyond the mechanism of blindly efficient causes as nevertheless belonging to a system of ends. (5:380–1)

Two points must be noted here. First, as Kant stresses in the first of these paragraphs, in the following §68, and then in the whole of the following “Dialectic of Teleological Judgment,” from a purely theoretical point of view we are not justified in conceiving of a teleological view either of natural organisms or of the whole of nature as anything more than a heuristic, methodological or regulative principle intended to encourage and guide us in investigations ultimately aimed at discovering mechanical explanations of natural phenomena (of precisely the type that modern evolutionists have discovered): The term “purposiveness” “signifies only a principle of the reflective, not the determinant power of judgment and therefore should not introduce a special ground of causality, but only add to the use of reason another sort of research than that in accordance with mechanical laws in order to supplement the inadequacy of the latter itself for the empirical investigation of all the particular laws

of nature” (*CJ*, §68, 5:383). Even from the theoretical point of view then, let alone the practical point of view, the conception of systems within nature, and presumably the idea of nature as a whole as a system that is suggested by the first, remain subjective ideas rather than objective dogmas. Second, as Kant stresses at the outset of §67, the idea of nature as a system as a whole, room for which is created by the special condition necessary for us to conceive of organisms, does not itself yield any *unique* and *determinate* way of seeing nature as a whole as a system: we might think that grass is necessary to nourish cattle and cattle in turn to nourish humans, but from a purely scientific point of view we cannot see any reason why we should not instead think that the purpose of both cattle and humans is just to facilitate the growth of grass (5:378; §82, 5:427).

- (3) Kant’s next move, then, will be to argue that in order to form a unique conception of nature as a determinate system aimed at the promotion of any particular end, we must introduce the idea of something that is intrinsically final or an end in itself, something that is not just chosen arbitrarily as the endpoint of a system of final causes but that must be conceived as an end and that imposes on us a view of the other elements of nature as organized in its service. Such a conception can only be provided by morality, which dictates that we conceive of mankind and its highest good as an end in itself; and morality in turn requires that we be able to conceive of nature as an arena within which the end it imposes can be achieved. Thus the teleological perspective that is necessitated by the intellectual puzzle of organisms opens up for us a possibility of seeing nature as a whole as a system, but this cannot be made determinate without appeal to morality, and in any case morality requires us to take a view of nature as well as reason as purposive, so the possibilities of the scientific view of nature and the necessities of the moral view of nature ultimately coincide. This is the complex point for which Kant argues in the “Methodology of Teleological Judgment,” precisely because this is nothing less than the investigation of the ultimate conditions for the *application* of teleological judgment.

Kant begins the “Methodology” by reiterating that teleology furnishes no constitutive principles for either natural science or theology, but only reflective principles, principles for the critique of the use of judgment that will show us how natural science and theology must ultimately, although only subjectively, be combined (*CJ*, §79, 5:417). Next, going beyond his earlier suggestion that teleological principles have a purely heuristic function in encouraging and guiding us in the search for mechanical explanations, he argues that mechanical explanations of the development of natural forms, even a completely worked out

theory of evolution<sup>21</sup> (§80, 5:418–19), “only push the explanation further back” (420) and still require some explanation of why it is purposive for nature to be constituted with such mechanisms, which can only be provided by an appeal to an end and its intelligent author (421). We must thus conceive of the mechanisms of nature as “the instrument of an intentionally acting cause, to whose end nature in its mechanical laws as subordinated” (§81, 5:422). Kant then asserts that “the possibility of the union of two such different types of causality” must lie in the “supersensible substrate of nature,” for there our ignorance prevents us from explaining but at the same time prevents us from precluding such a combination; but he then also insists that we can conceive of an intelligent and purposive creation of nature through mechanical means only if we can find something *in* nature that is itself intrinsically final and gives the rest of nature a point. Reiterating his claim that the means-end relation we introduce into the system of nature as a whole must not be arbitrary, Kant in effect lays down two conditions on the nonarbitrary end of nature.

First, he states that “the ultimate end of creation here on earth” must be one “which can form a concept of ends for itself and can through its reason make a system of ends out of an aggregate of purposively formed things” (*CJ*, §82, 5:426–7). Kant does not state explicitly why the final end *in* nature must be capable of forming a conception of ends when that final end is also conceived of as the final end *of* a supersensible cause; but we can take this claim to be a reminder that we are after all within the realm of reflective judgment, and that this whole story of ends is an artifact of our own judgment that will be inconceivable unless we ourselves can conceive of ends and of nature as a system of and for this end. In any case, however, the requirement that the ultimate end of nature itself be able to form the conception of ends is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for the view of nature as a system of ends. For Kant next argues that the end that this ultimate end of nature conceives must not itself be a merely natural end, such as mere happiness, but an unconditional end the value and the setting – if not the realization – of which is independent of nature. Kant stresses the most obvious reason why a merely natural condition such as happiness per se cannot be the ultimate end of nature, namely that nature does not seem particularly well adapted to produce this condition (§83, 5:430–1); but he leaves tacit the more important point that even if nature did produce happiness, then there would still be nothing to distinguish this natural condition as the putative end of nature from any other natural condition and thus give a unique end to the system of nature as a whole. So what is necessary is an end that makes its agent an end in itself from a rational and not