

Kant on Hoping for a Miracle

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B I. Belief and its alternatives

Kant sees more clearly than other early modern figures that faith about supersensible things, even if it is rational, is categorically different from the kinds of attitudes we take toward humdrum propositions about the objects of experience, or toward necessary truths. It’s not just a difference in degree of confidence or degree of justification, according to Kant; rather, it’s a difference in *kind* of attitude and *kind* of justification. In some passages he describes it as firm Belief or Faith (*Glaube*), in others he calls it “Acceptance” (*Annehmung*); either way, though, he makes it clear that this kind of assent (literally: “holding-for-true” (*Fürwahrhalten*)) differs from the kind involved in knowledge (*Wissen*), hypothesis, and opinion (*Meinung*).¹

Given that the paradigmatic instances of Belief – including the postulates of practical reason – have to do with the supersensible entities of traditional monotheism, it comes as something of a surprise when Kant says at the very end of the *Critique* that religion is NOT primarily concerned with Belief (*Glaube*) but rather with “hope” (*Hoffnung*). In the Canon of Pure Reason, Kant says that all of our rational interests are united in three fundamental questions -- “What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?” -- and that the answer to the third question is found in the philosophy of religion.² Many

¹ I will use “Belief” to refer to the technical Kantian notion here, and “belief” to refer to our ordinary

² He later decided, in a letter to C.F. Stäudlin on May 4, 1793 that he needed to add a fourth – viz., “What is humanity?” in order fully to characterize his own projects in philosophy (11:420ff). He iterates these four in the Introduction to the Jäsche *Logic* of 1800 (8:25).

commentators just ignore this by lumping Belief and hope together,³ but in fact hope is yet another kind of attitude, one that we can rationally take towards doctrines that are not able to be brought within the bounds of bare practical reason.

But why does Kant think that questions about mere *hope* are what concern us in the philosophy of religion? As just noted, Kant's own discussions of God's existence and the immortality of the soul in the *Critiques* are usually conducted in terms of *Vernunftglaube*, and the Christian creeds he would have known refer explicitly to *Glaube* rather than *Hoffnung*. Indeed, the German term "*Credo*" -- like our "creed" and "credence" -- is from the Latin *credere*—"to believe." Even when the traditional object of the virtue of hope—namely, the afterlife—is referenced in the creeds, it is in doxastic terms: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting," says the creed that is recited in nearly every Lutheran and Catholic mass.

One possible answer to this question is that Kant thinks that the various needs and interests of reason described in the *Critiques* can motivate firm Belief, and that when a stronger attitude is available to us we should adopt it. The postulates are not robust *religious* doctrines so much as they are fundamental tenets of *reason* itself (Kant sometimes says they comprise the "religion of reason," but that is misleading given what he elsewhere says religion is). The role of a philosophy of religion is to see what if anything can be added to those postulates by performing the experiment of *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (see 6:12-13). As described in the second preface, the

³ See e.g. Cohen 1971, esp "The Messianic Idea," pp.122ff. Hope comes up more often in Kant's later critical writings, and some readers have been tempted to conclude that Kant was weakening his earlier and very strong claims about the necessity of firm rational Belief -- perhaps, as Heine would have it, in response to his own fading religious commitment. In fact, though, the question about hope is already there in the 1781 A-edition. It's just that, as Kant tells Staüdlin in the 1793 letter, he hadn't had a chance to discuss religion in detail prior to writing *Religion*.

Religion is not a fourth *Critique* exactly, but it does seek to display the extent to which pieces of an “alleged revelation” can be brought within (or at least close to) the ambit of rational Belief.

Another answer to our question—one that was mentioned earlier—is this: perhaps Kant noticed that what many religious people have towards these more robust and particularist revealed doctrines sometimes doesn’t look or *feel* like firm Belief. In focusing on the question “what may I hope?”, we encounter an approach to philosophy of religion that turns away from the focus on knowledge, epistemic justification, and belief that dominates the contemporary analytic discussion, as well as the focus on non-epistemic justification and (Kantian) Belief that dominates discussion among contemporary Kantians, in order to consider the kinds of attitudes that (I submit) many religious people actually have, towards the kind of robust and particular doctrines – such as the Christian doctrine of grace – that many religious people actually contemplate, especially in their liturgical or devotional practices.⁴

In the next section, I spend some time trying to isolate our intuitions about the proper objects of hope, and thus about the conditions under which hope is rationally permitted.

⁴ Kant was hardly the first among Western religious thinkers to claim that hope is worth discussing in a religious context. There is a Pauline precedent for conceiving hope along with faith as near the top of the list of theological virtues, though not quite as important as love (*1st Corinthians* 13:13). Augustine has a longish discussion of hope in *The Enchiridion: Faith, Hope, and Love*, as well as a few comments on the virtue of hope in his tractates on the *First Letter of John*. Peter Lombard dedicated some of his *Sentences* to the topic of hope, and as a result of this nearly everyone in the later medieval tradition remarked on it in their *Sentences*-commentaries. Bonaventure is a prime example, though his account of hope is unusual in that he construes it as a kind of meta-virtue--the *sustained affective commitment* that helps us keep our faith constant and our loves properly ordered. In most of the rest of these thinkers, the comments about hope are sandwiched between much longer discussions of faith and love. As far as I know, no one prior to Kant suggested that hope is *the* central attitude in religion, and thus *the* central topic of the philosophy of religion. After Kant, by contrast, there have been further efforts in that direction, typically by authors who are themselves deeply influenced by Kant -- Ernst Bloch (1959), Jürgen Moltmann (1965), and, much more recently, David Kelsey (2009).

In the third section I sketch a way in which the appeal to hope rather than belief or Belief might resolve one of the long-standing conundrums in Kant's philosophy of religion.

II. The objects of hope

This paper is part of a longer project that seeks to articulate the *objects, nature, and goals* of *Vernunft Hoffnung* in order to understand the role that this attitude plays, for Kant and later figures, in our cognitive, affective, and religious lives. Here I restrict the focus to the first issue -- about the legitimate *objects* of hope (or, put another way, the objects of rational hope).

So: what do we hope or hope for? Or, rather, what *may* we hope for? (Or, in an effort to avoid bad grammar, "For what may we hope?") An initially appealing answer might just be: *anything at all*, or at least anything we want -- there are no rational constraints on hope. If someone were to *believe* things that were deeply implausible, many of us would be tempted to haul out our W.K. Clifford and tell him that he ought not to believe without sufficient evidence. But, so this line of thought goes, mere hope wouldn't provoke such responses, no matter what it is for. Let a thousand hopeful flowers bloom!

Further reflection reveals, however, that there are some at least minimal rational constraints in the region. Suppose I told you that I really hope to become a married bachelor this year. You wouldn't think: "Aha, that's something really daring to hope for!" or "Oh, the scoundrel: he's going to have his cake and eat it too!" Rather, you'd be puzzled or worried that I'm deluded or malfunctioning, or at the very least suspect that I haven't grasped the concept of *bachelor* (or marriage!) adequately. One simply can't reasonably hope to be a married bachelor—it's a conceptual impossibility. So it seems

that there are rational constraints on hope that are related to the modal status of its propositional objects. Perhaps this is what is behind Kant's statement of his third question: what *may* I hope—the verb is “*dürfen*” – “to be allowed or permitted to.”

But are the constraints merely conceptual-cum-logical, or are they broader than that? In order to sketch the general pattern here, and the principles underlying it, it would be useful to consider a series of examples, starting with weaker notions like the probable and the improbable, and then returning to various conceptions of necessity and impossibility, focusing in each case on the hoping subject's evaluation of the proposition's status, rather than any objective probability or modal status it enjoys.

A. ***The Probable***. Examples: the car will start tomorrow; the dog wants to go for a walk.

Clearly there isn't a rational prohibition on hoping for something that we take to be probable. This is true if the state of affairs in question is *in fact* probable, and even if it is not in fact probable but the subject *takes* it to be probable. Often we don't bother to form such hopes, of course, and instead combine our desires with doxastic expectations – “the car *will* start tomorrow” or, more cautiously, “the car *will probably* start tomorrow.”

Hope, which need not involve expectation, may be permitted in these cases, but it rarely occurs. This suggests that we have a general policy of hoping only when that is the strongest attitude that our understanding of the situation licenses.

B. ***The Improbable***: I will win the lottery; it won't snow in South Bend next year; the U.S. team will win the next World Cup.

Under normal circumstances, propositions describing such scenarios are inappropriate objects of belief--even the very weak or partial forms of belief that early modern philosophers called “opinion” -- but they do seem to be suitable objects of hope, at least when the subject knows that they are highly unlikely to be true. I can rationally hope to win the lottery, even while admitting that it is not something I should bank on, so to speak. We sometimes speak of “giving someone false hope” when we lead him to hope for something that is extremely unlikely. But the falseness in false hope is not a function of the fact that *any* sort of hope would be irrational, but rather that the subject—the hoper—is being improperly distracted from or misinformed about how unlikely the object of his hope really is. We wouldn’t consider it false hope if he were to hope for what he *knows* is a highly improbable cure (think of cancer patients who claim that they are going to “be the 1%”).

Another way in which hope for the highly improbable can seem irrational is if it leads to behavior that indicates that the hoper *expects* the hope to be realized (refusing to make a will in the cancer case, say, or purchasing a million dollar yacht on credit in the lottery case). Something has clearly gone wrong in these cases, but the malfunction is also clearly downstream from hope. It’s the subsequent expectation and behavior, rather than the hope that occasions them, that exemplifies the irrationality (note: this also shows that hope *simpliciter* cannot be analyzed, as some have suggested, into a desire for some X plus an “acting as if” X obtains, though there may be an important species of hope that can be so analyzed).

C. *The Causally Impossible*: I am able to fly just by flapping my arms; the dead will rise.

Miracles aren't just unlikely: they are causally impossible. Or so we tend to think. There are a few philosophers such as Malebranche and Leibniz who conceive of miracles as in accordance with a "higher order," even though they are ruled out by the "lower" or "subordinate" laws of nature that we aim to capture in scientific theories. But let's suppose for a moment (with Locke and Kant, as I read them) that miracles are genuine causal impossibilities -- they involve the suspension of the normal order, or the impeding of normal causal powers.

Regarding a miracle so conceived, normally we think it would be crazy to *expect* that it will happen -- i.e. to believe or opine that it will happen --even though we might admire someone who "expects a miracle" in such cases in certain ways (ways that are consistent with also thinking that the person is being irrational or even a little crazy). On the other hand, we can quite reasonably *want* the miracle to happen or *wish* that it had happened: the constraints on rational desire and wish are much looser than the constraints on rational belief.

What about hope? Can we rationally *hope* for what we reasonably take to be causally impossible? I am uncertain about this. It seems as though the answer depends on whether we emphasize "reasonably" or "hope" in stating the question. Can I REASONABLY hope that a 99-year-old woman can conceive a child, or that I'm going to fly away just by flapping my arms? The standards for reasonable hope rise dramatically when the question is put in such a way, and now it seems as though the answer is no. But can I reasonably HOPE that the dead will rise to greet us tomorrow, or

that the sun will not? Now the emphasis is on “hope” (and its ability to reflect a good character in this case), and the standards go back down such that hoping seems okay (“it’s just a *hope*, after all”). That said, if I have background beliefs about the existence of a superbeing (Superman, Zeus, God, et al.) who can suspend causal powers or laws, then such hope may be reasonable—perhaps without even knowing anything about that being’s powers and intentions. And if I do know something about that being’s general intentions, and I justifiably believe that the being has reason to suspend the normal order at just this juncture, then perhaps I can reasonably expect or even confidently believe that a miracle will occur in a given case—that Superman will arrive and save Lois Lane, that Abraham and Sarah will conceive despite their age, that the normal powers of Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace fire will not burn Abednego, and so forth. If one can reasonably expect or believe in such a case, then it certainly seems reasonable (though perhaps under-motivated) to hope.

We can use a *ceteris paribus* clause to isolate our intuitions here. Other things being equal (and thus setting aside background beliefs about supernatural beings), is it reasonable to hope that my dead relative will rise tomorrow and meet me at the breakfast table, or that I will walk out of this conference room and be able to fly just by flapping my arms? (I’m interested in your responses to this.) It is clearly more *common* simply to want such things than it is to hope for them, though our friends would still worry if we were to invest a lot of emotional energy in such desires. That said, it is also more *typical* to hope for such things than it is to believe or even *weakly opine* that they will occur, other things being equal. So this seems to be an instance in which the rationality conditions on hope make it diverge from assertoric, categorical kinds of judgment, and go

instead with desire and wish. That doesn't mean that hope is just the same thing as desire or wish, however: you can rationally desire or wish for something if you are *certain* that it did not or will not obtain. But you can't rationally hope for such a thing.⁵

[Insert Leibniz material]

D. ***The Causally Necessary***: the sun will warm the earth tomorrow; the apple will fall when dropped from the tree

If I don't know that it's causally necessary that the sun will warm the earth tomorrow, I can reasonably hope that it will. But what if I know that it's determined: can I still reasonably hope that it will happen? My sense is that I can, even though (as in the case of the probable) I won't often bother to do so, or at least I won't do so self-consciously, since something stronger—full-blown expectation—is also rationally justified.

Someone might point out here that an acceptable response to the question, “Will the sun warm the earth tomorrow?” is something like: “Well, I certainly *hope* so!” But here the speaker is reporting a much weaker state than she actually has in order to implicate something about the silliness of the question. The speaker asserts something that would be more appropriate if the object in question were a mere causal probability (“I hope so”), but intones her response in a way that draws attention to the fact that the questioner is asking something to which he should already know the answer. So this isn't really a violation of the ‘assert-the-stronger attitude’ rule mentioned earlier.

⁵ The German “*hoffen*” and “*wünschen*” operate in a similar way, though the fact that “*wünschen*” is typically used as a reflexive verb brings out even more clearly that “wish” has a subjective aspect: “*ich wünsche mir zum Weihnachtsfest...*” etc.

Interestingly, on the Leibnizean picture there might be more room for rational hope than there is on the view according to which the natural laws have genuine efficacy. For Leibniz, recall, the normal order of things is characterized by what, in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, is called the “subordinate maxims” of God’s will and what in later works are just called “laws of nature.” These are the uniformity principles that we assume in everyday life and seek to approximate in empirical science. But by this time (mid-1768), Leibniz is convinced that there is a higher, “universal law of the general order” which describes the way the world is *actually* arranged. This principle is inscrutable to us, for reasons Leibniz doesn’t fully explain. (Indeed, this seems somewhat out of keeping with his general commitment to what Rutherford calls the “principle of intelligibility” (1995, 240ff)). The gap between these two principles is the place where genuine miracles fit in – the “miracles of the highest order” that “surpass all the powers of all limited natures” (see *Discourse* 16; AG 48-9). Included among these are divine acts like creation, incarnation, and annihilation (Adams 94ff).

So for Leibniz, from 1768 onwards, what is “causally necessary” is not really, geometrically necessary at all: it is simply what follows from the subordinate maxims, and so there may still be reason to *hope* that it obtains (for discussion of the change in Leibniz’s view here, see Garber 2010, 235ff). Indeed, given that the annihilation of souls are “miracles of the first order,” it seems rational for those of us who are fond of existence to hope that the causally “necessary,” rather than a miracle such as this, obtains. On the other hand, given that Leibniz also indicates that creation-qua-conservation is a “miracle of the first order,” it looks like those of us who are fond of existence to hope for

what is strictly speaking causally impossible (i.e. impossible for finite substances given the laws) as well.

E. The Past: the Bears won the Superbowl in 1986; my parents met each other

Regarding events in the past, we again have to separate the epistemology from the metaphysics: do we already know that the team lost the game? If so, then (setting time travel⁶ and atemporal beings aside) it seems irrational to hope that they won the game. It seems equally irrational to hope that they lost the game (but that's just because hope involves desire, and in this case the desire has been satisfied). If we don't know one way or the other what happened, however, then it is still rational to hope that they won the game, even though in fact the question has already been settled in the world (and we know that it has). Once we find out one way or the other, though, then we can't keep rationally hoping. The "accidental necessity" of the past is judged from the vantage point of the present.⁷

⁶ Time travel is a tough call, even setting Kant's views about the ideality of time aside. That's because it is unsettled among metaphysicians, theoretical physicists etc. whether the kind of possibility we're talking about in such cases is causal or not. On the view I'm defending here, if it isn't known to be metaphysically impossible to travel through time, then it is reasonable to hope to do so. And thus it also may be reasonable to hope that the past will change even when we know that it's been settled. Consider the recent troubles encountered by the CERN particle accelerator: a well-known Danish physicist, Holger Bech Nielsen, became so perplexed at how many things were going wrong that he seriously opined that physicists from the future were coming back in time and shutting CERN down because they knew what terrible things happened when it was fired at full strength. In such a case, the physicists from the future are hoping that what they know at $t + n$ to be the facts about what happened at t did not in fact occur at t . If time travel is at some point known to be metaphysically impossible, on the other hand, then we have to put hopes for such objects in the next category.

⁷ On "accidental necessity" see Freddoso (1983). The question of whether I can rationally hope that my parents didn't meet goes beyond difficulties regarding the accidental necessity of the past. The question is really: can I rationally hope that something happened such that I do not now exist? I will set this issue aside here, but I don't see an in principle reason why this would be irrational, especially if it seems that the

F. **The metaphysically, conceptually, and logically impossible**: My brother is identical to a dolphin. Chelsea Clinton had parents other than Bill and Hillary Clinton. Water is not H₂O. There is at least one bachelor who isn't male. *P* and not-*p*.

Can we reasonably hope for something that is metaphysically, conceptually, or logically impossible? We have seen that if something is *epistemically* possible for us, then it is still rational to hope that it is actual or not actual (other things being equal). We have also seen that if something is known to be causally impossible it may still be rational to hope for it, and vice versa. But when its modal status as an impossibility of one of these stronger sorts is *known* (or even justifiably but falsely believed), then hoping for it to be actual or possible seems irrational in a way that hoping for a causal miracle or a highly improbable state of affairs is not.

G. **The really and conceptually/logically necessary**: Gold is AU. All bachelors are male. $2+2 = 4$. If *p*, then *p* or *q*.

Again, if there is non-culpable ignorance about the necessary truth of one of these propositions, then hoping that it is true (or false) is, other things being equal, perfectly rational. The epistemic possibility is what is relevant. But although hope for what one *knows* to be causally necessary is permissible – albeit odd—, hope for something that is known to be necessary in one of these stronger ways just seems ludicrous. It would be

world as a whole, or someone I really care about, would be much better off as a result of my never having existed.

silly to bother hoping that all bachelors are male or that my mother is not one of my parents. Here the ‘adopt-the-stronger-attitude’ principle is in full force.

(Side note: this looks like a problem for someone like Sydney Shoemaker who thinks that the natural laws are metaphysically necessary. Shoemaker might have to insist, implausibly to my ears, that it is downright ludicrous to hope that the sun will shine tomorrow unless there is some kind of epistemic opacity in place (that is, unless the subject doesn’t know that the state of affairs is causally necessary). Perhaps this is why Spinoza, a full-blown necessitarian, says that hope is *always* grounded in a kind of uncertainty or doubt, and thus that it is the counterpart of *fear* rather than of despair.⁸)

What about intermediate cases where the subject knows that a proposition is necessarily true or necessarily false, but doesn’t know which? A philosophically sophisticated religious agnostic, for instance, will know that it is either necessarily true or necessarily false that God exists; a mathematician will be aware that it is either necessarily true or necessarily false that Goldbach’s conjecture holds, and so forth. In such situations it seems clear that the subjects *can* reasonably hope that God exists, or that Goldbach’s conjecture is true. Indeed, Christian Goldbach himself was presumably in precisely that position.

Our reflections above suggest, once again, that there is an important epistemic access constraint on hope. We can hope for things that are necessary OR impossible in a stronger-than-causal sense, even if we know that they have this modal status, as long as we don’t know *which* of the two options obtain. If both the world and the mind are

⁸ “Hope is a joy not constant, arising from the idea of something future or past about the occurrence of which we sometimes doubt” (*Ethics*, Book III, d.12). To doubt about the occurrence of something is to be unsure whether it did or will occur. So for Spinoza, at least, hope trades on uncertainty.

settled (e.g., p is a metaphysically necessary truth and we are aware of that) then it's not rational, I submit, to hope one way or the other. In such a case the most we can rationally do is expect that p and, perhaps, wish that $not-p$.

An important upshot of this brief armchair analysis, then, is that there is at least one important necessary condition on rational hope: we can rationally hope that p only if p describes an event or state of affairs that we do *not* know to be metaphysically impossible. If we know, or justifiably believe, that it's metaphysically impossible, then we can't reasonably hope that it will obtain.

Our results also suggest that that there is reason to steer clear of formulations that focus solely on epistemic possibility, such as

S 's hope that p is rational only if, for all S knows, p .

We should avoid this because, in the case of hoping for a miracle, the subject might very well *know* that $not-p$ in a given case, and yet still hope that p . For example: given the causal laws, I may very well know that the ice cream cone that just slipped out of my hand will fall down into the gorge and be lost forever, but at the same time hope that it will defy gravity somehow and come back up into my grasp. Of course, if what I have is knowledge in the first place, then my hopes will ultimately dashed along with the ice cream cone (knowledge is factive). But that needn't entail that they are irrational hopes. The same sorts of consideration work against the slightly weaker principle like

S 's hope that p is rational only if, for all S justifiably believes, p .

The principle we should endorse here, then, is the even weaker one that

(H) *S*'s hope that *p* is rational only if, for all *S* justifiably believes, *p* is metaphysically possible.⁹

III. Kantian religion and the role of hope

III.a. Hope in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

In the passage from the Canon of Pure Reason mentioned at the outset, Kant tells us that all “interests” of reason are “united” in the three questions about knowledge, ethical action, and religious hope. The third question, he goes on to say, is “simultaneously practical and theoretical, so that the practical leads like a clue to a reply to the theoretical questions and, in its highest form, the speculative question.” In other words, by reflecting on the fact that “something ought to happen,” we can make “inferences” about what we may hope to be true, even if we can’t know that it is true or even possible (A805/6/B833-4).

Kant goes on to describe the perfect “moral world”: a world in which everyone does his duty perfectly, and thus one in which human freedom and the moral law are in perfect accord. The real possibility of such a world is a condition, given the ought-implies-can principle, of its being the case that everyone *ought* always to will the moral law. And so, Kant says, when we will the moral law (impersonally: as binding on all rational beings), we implicitly accept that a moral world is (or was) really possible. We can’t rationally

⁹ Another way to interpret this is as a kind of lottery case that provides problems for reliabilist conceptions of knowledge/justification. That is, the reliabilist conception of knowledge says that we know that the ice cream cone will fall into the gorge, and yet, paradoxically, we are also rationally hoping that it won’t. (Thanks to Troy Cross for discussion here).

hope for a fully moral world anymore, however, but we can and should still hope for a “just world.” Kant says here that

it is equally necessary to accept in accordance with reason in its theoretical use (*eben so nothwendig sei es auch nach der Vernunft, in ihrem theoretischen Gebrauch anzunehmen*) that everyone has grounds (*Ursache*) to hope for happiness in the same measure as he has made himself worthy of it in his conduct, and that the system of morality is therefore inseparably combined with the system of happiness, though only in the idea of pure reason. (*KrV* A809/B837)

This is an odd phrase: “accept that everyone has grounds to hope.” Given the practical context of the discussion, it is clear this “acceptance” is a Belief (*Glaube*) in the technical Kantian sense. What we are accepting, then, is that everyone has grounds to *hope* for happiness in proportion to his own virtue. We are not baldly accepting that there actually *is* a necessary connection between virtue and happiness; rather, we are accepting that such a connection is *really possible* from a practical point of view (that its concept has what Kant sometimes calls “objective practical reality”) and then hoping for its actuality – in our case as well as in that of others.¹⁰ Kant goes on to claim, contentiously, that God’s *actual* existence as well as that of the future life for the human soul are necessary conditions of the real possibility of such a necessary connection, and thus that the very willing of the moral law requires that we adopt a Belief in God and a future life.

These reflections are as familiar as they are controversial, and I don’t propose to make more than a few brief remarks about them here. First, note again that Kant doesn’t say

¹⁰ Michalson misses the modal distinction here and accuses Kant of begging the question by just “assuming at the outset that the universe is fair and proportionate” (1990, 92).

that we can hope for the existence of a moral world. This shows that he is taking into account the conclusive evidence he thinks we have (in our own case as well as others') that this is not a moral world. Hope that the past be different is hope for a metaphysical impossibility.¹¹ Still, we can hold out "hope of being happy" in a *just* world, and thus that our own ultimate moral state is one of righteousness rather than radical evil.

Second, in the *Critique* Kant apparently thinks of the hope for heavenly happiness as providing part of the *motivation* (if not the normative reason) for doing one's duty. The mere weight of rational law isn't going to be enough, most of the time, to motivate creatures like us; rather, we also have to (a) Believe in the real possibility of a just world in which virtue is rewarded with happiness, (b) positively hope that this world is actual and (c) hope that *we* will be made happy in it (by way of being just). This hope – as well as the fear of punishment that is its pendant -- helps to motivate. But, again, Kant thinks it is only rational to hope for something if one has sufficient subjective grounds to Believe that it is really possible.¹²

A related observation: Kant is clearly operating here with a stronger condition on hope than the one that came out of our armchair analysis in Section II above. The conclusion there was that in order for S rationally to hope that p , p must for all S know be metaphysically possible. Kant's claim in the Canon goes further in that it requires the subject to have a certain positive propositional attitude, even if only implicitly. The principle, then, is this:

¹¹ If the ideality of time raises eyebrows here, then perhaps we can think of Kant's refusal to hope for the moral world as resting on the straightforward idea that when a fact is known to obtain (e.g. the world is not perfectly moral), then it cannot reasonably be hoped not to obtain (i.e. one cannot reasonably hope that *A* and *not-A*).

¹² The story about the motivational role of hope seems to change as Kant's moral philosophy develops in the 1780's. In the first *Critique* there is, as David Sussman puts it, a "possible divergence between the authority and motivational power of reason" that Kant later, "decisively rejects" (Sussman 2010, 138).

(H*) S's hope that p is rational only if S rationally Believes that p is really possible.¹³

Although they are consistent, the difference between (H) and (H*) is crucial, since without this stronger principle, we wouldn't make it to Belief in God's actual existence as the guarantor of this real possibility. Instead we would arrive at the conclusion that, for all we justifiably believe, God exists.

Kant's overall position in the *Critique*, then, is that (1) knowledge requires the ability to "prove real possibility" (Bxxvi,note), (2) Belief requires at least some indication – even if only from symbols in art or nature – that the items referred to in the proposition are really possible,¹⁴ and (3) hope requires either that the metaphysical possibility of something be an epistemic possibility or, at most, that the subject rationally accept the thing's real possibility. Kant never lets go of the thought that there must be some kind of modal condition on our positive propositional attitudes if we are to avoid the speculative flights of fancy that afflicted the rationalists, and the reckless enthusiasm that carried away many of the Pietists. With respect to the weakest of these attitudes, however, the condition is also quite weak.

III.b. Hope in *Religion*

¹³ Note: its being positive does not entail that it is *occurrent*. What I say here is intended to be consistent with the claim that these attitudes are often if not exclusively dispositional.

¹⁴ For discussions of (1) and (2) here, see my 2010 and 2011.

The discussion of hope in *Religion* is more prominent and more complex than that in the *Critique*. Although the details of the moral proof have changed by this time, the modal condition on rational hope has not, at least as far as I can see. Recent critics have highlighted significant “conundrums” regarding what Kant says about our moral condition initially (radically evil) and what we can rationally Believe or hope regarding the means to moral regeneration.¹⁵ Chris Firestone and Nathan Jacobs have recently taken up Kant’s cause in their *In Defense of Kant’s Religion*, arguing, against the critics, that their “religiously and theologically affirmative,” “holistic and linear” interpretation shows that “when all relevant resources are brought to bear, a full acquittal of Kant’s *Religion* is the only reasonable verdict.”¹⁶ Firestone and Jacobs’ central move is to claim that “the prototype of humanity” in Parts Two and Three of *Religion* is not Christ or any Christ-like human person at all, but rather a Scotistic universal – one of God’s necessary attributes—that “descends” to us in what they call “pure cognition.” The prototype’s perfect disposition is thus available for voluntary adoption as our own; if we do adopt it, then a fundamental transformation is effected, and God will regard us, at bottom, as righteous.¹⁷

It would be worth going into the details of this controversy, and in particular to ask whether Firestone and Jacobs provide a more satisfying account of how the crucial act of “adopting” the prototype’s disposition occurs,¹⁸ but here I simply want to draw on the

¹⁵ Gordon Michalson (1990), most prominently, but also by Allen Wood (1992), Nicholas Wolterstorff (1991), John Hare (1996) and Philip Quinn (1984), (1986).

¹⁶ Firestone & Jacobs 2008, 233, 3. For different kinds of defenses, see Steven Palmquist (2000) and Jacqueline Marina (1997).

¹⁷ Firestone & Jacobs 2008, ch. 6.

¹⁸ As far as I can see, the authors never explain *how* or in virtue of what we are able to adopt the prototype’s perfect disposition as our own. There is clearly a kenotic aspect to the episode -- the prototype “descends” to us -- but it is unclear how that is sufficient to wrest us out of the torpor of radical evil and

brief analysis of rational hope above in an effort to show how it helps Kant avoid one of the conundrums discussed by his critics without going in the (still very intriguing) Firestone/Jacobs direction.

The most prominent and frequent use of “hope” in *Religion* is as an attitude that we can reasonably take towards a version of the doctrine of divine grace. Kant’s self-professed rigorism says that a free agent is always either oriented toward the bad (and thus “radically evil”) or toward the good: there is no room for a middle, “indifferent” or meliorist position (6:22-24). In Part One of *Religion*, moreover, Kant argues that we all “innately” possess a radically evil propensity for which we are also somehow responsible (!). Our task as ethical agents is to perform the “revolution of the will” that will make us fundamentally good once more. All the same, throughout *Religion* Kant says that we may and even must hope that God will help us in this task. Here is a representative passage:

Reason says that whoever does, in a disposition of true devotion to duty, as much as lies within his power to satisfy his obligation (at least in a steady approximation toward complete conformity to the law), can *legitimately hope* (*hoffen dürfen*) that what lies outside his power will be supplemented by the supreme wisdom *in some way or other* (which can render permanent the disposition to the steady approximation), without reason thereby presuming to *determine the way or know in what it consists*, for God’s way can perhaps be so mysterious that, at best, he could reveal it to us in a symbolic representation in which the practical import alone is comprehensible to us, whereas, theoretically, we could not in the least grasp what this relation of God to the human being is in itself, or attach concepts to it, even if God wanted to reveal such a mystery to us.” (6:171, my emphases; see also 6:48, 6:52-5)

into the revolution of the will. If God’s further assistance is required for the act of adoption, then the whole Scotistic prototype discussion hasn’t obviously effected much. But if God’s assistance isn’t required, then it looks as though we are left with a fundamentally Abelardian picture according to which we just needed to see a perfect example of moral humanity (in this case, the “prototype”) in order to find within ourselves the ability to will the good. But then it’s not clear why the Scotistic prototype perceived in “pure cognition” was necessary, rather than the apprehension of, say, a fully human Buddha or Christ (whom Kant says we should also regard as perfect after all (6:66)).

Michalson, Wolterstorff, Hare, and Quinn highlight the tensions between passages like this – which claim that if we have done our moral best we can “legitimately hope” for divine assistance – and two other basic Kantian commitments. The first is the “ought-implies-can” principle: if we *ought* to be perfectly good, then Kant thinks we *can* be perfectly good (6:50). Grace – special divine assistance to get us to a place where we ought to be – thus cannot be *required*. But, on the other hand, Kant says regarding the “will to the good” that “the human being, in his natural corruption, cannot bring it about on his own within himself (6:143).”¹⁹

Second, and more pressingly, Michalson et al. read Kant as committed to the “Stoic maxim” according to which each individual is fully responsible for his or her moral condition.²⁰ “Man *himself* must make or have made himself into whatever, in a moral sense, whether good or evil, he is or is to become,” Kant warns (6:44). But this is obviously in tension with the claim that divine assistance is in any way involved in our transition to a good will. If supernatural, external help is involved (even if that involvement is not required), then it seems that *we* are not making ourselves what we morally ought to be.²¹

¹⁹ For discussion of the violation of ought-implies-can here, see Wolterstorff, 48-49. John Hare, by contrast, see no necessary violation of ought-implies-can here: from the claim that “we *can* (because we *ought* to) live by the moral law, it does not follow that we can do this entirely by our own work” (1996, 60). My own suggestion below follows Hare on this score.

²⁰ The label “Stoic Maxim” is from Wolterstorff 1991. See also Michalson, 93; Hare, 62ff.

²¹ See also 6:144-5: “That the human being is called to a good life conduct through the moral law; that, through an indelible respect for this law which lies in him, he also finds in himself encouragement to trust in this good spirit and to *hope* that, however it may come about, he will be able to satisfy this spirit; finally, that, comparing this expectation with the rigorous command of the law, he must constantly test himself as if summoned to accounts before a judge – reason, heart, and conscience all teach this and drive us to it” (my emphasis).

Many of the conundrum-theorists leave the discussion there, arguing that Kant fails to steer us adequately through the “moral gap” between the Pelagian Scylla and the

Augustinian Charybdis. Hare sums up the situation this way:

What Kant has to do is to show that the revolution is possible, and he does this by pointing to the possibility of supernatural assistance. His failure, however, is to show how he can appeal to such assistance given the rest of his theory, and in particular given the Stoic maxim. He has to show, we might say, not *how* supernatural assistance is possible, but *that* he can appeal to it given the rest of his theory. This is what he fails to do...²²

I want to suggest, by contrast, that a possible solution to the whole conundrum regarding grace comes into view when we consider that what Kant is recommending regarding this doctrine is neither knowledge nor Belief but rather hope. As we have seen, hope can be rational even where knowledge and Belief are not: a subject does not have to *show* or *prove* that a state of affairs is really possible in order rationally to *hope* for it – only knowledge requires proof of real possibility (again, see Bxxvi,note). Indeed, the subject doesn’t even need practical grounds for Belief that it is actual. Rather, according to principle (H) it simply needs to be the case that, for all the subject justifiably believes, the state of affairs really *is* possible. Alternatively (and this is Kant’s slightly stronger formulation in (H*)), she simply needs to Believe, on a rational, non-epistemic basis, that the state of affairs is really possible. Both of these are quite a bit weaker than what Hare seems to require of Kant, namely that he somehow *show* that divine assistance is possible before asking us to hope for it.

But can even these weaker conditions be met in the case of divine grace? Kant seems to think so: it is “incomprehensible,” as he puts it in the 6:171 passage just quoted,

²² Hare 1996, 61-2.

whether and how the combination of human effort and divine assistance is metaphysically possible. But by the same token we also do not know that grace is metaphysically *impossible*. As long as that is so, we can Believe that it is really possible on practical, non-epistemic grounds and then hope that it is actual.²³ As Kant says, “to Believe (*glauben*) that grace *may* have its effects, and that *perhaps* there must be such effects to supplement the imperfection of our striving for virtue, is all that we can say on the subject” (6:174, my emphasis). Whichever condition on rational hope we accept, then, – (H) or Kant’s slightly stronger (H*)-- the claim that full human agency and divine assistance work together to make us righteous is one that we may rationally hope to be true.²⁴

But here the critics will cry out: wasn’t the source of the conundrum the fact that we take ourselves to *know* or at least have very good reason to believe that the following is an incompatible triad?

(A) S ought to make himself righteous (i.e. convert the maxim of his will).

(B) S can make himself righteous (i.e. convert the maxim of his will).

(C) S requires God’s assistance in becoming righteous.

Kant cannot reject (A), given his overall ethical theory, and he cannot retain (A) and reject (B) without violating ought-implies-can.²⁵ So, says the conundrumist, he is forced

²³ For an account of “non-epistemic grounds” see my 2007a. Eric Watkins raises a question (in correspondence) about what kind of non-epistemic grounds we could have for holding that something is really possible that aren’t also grounds for holding that it is actual. I think Kant’s “moral proof” involving the highest good offers some guidance here, but an adequate discussion of this issue will have to wait for another occasion.

²⁴ That Kant would occasionally conflate (H) and (H*) is not surprising given that (H) effectively articulates a necessary condition on rational Belief in the real possibility of something. Still, it’s clear that this necessary condition can be met without rational Belief actually being formed.

²⁵ This is why it is an incompatible triad, rather than an inconsistent triad; most people, anyway, won’t think of “ought-implies-can” as a logical truth.

either to deny (C) or to deny the Stoic maxim according to which, if an agent is morally responsible for the quality of her will, then she must be solely causally responsible for it as well. In other words, he will have to deny the claim that it is impossible for one person to make herself righteous, and thus worthy of happiness, and yet for another person to provide assistance in making him righteous.

This is the heart of the conundrum. But putting it in such a stark form also makes it clear that Kant may have a way out. For, even if we accept ought-implies-can, the incompatibility of (B) and (C) is not obviously a function of *logical* inconsistency, despite the surface grammar. We simply don't know enough about how ground-consequence relations in substances at the noumenal level work for us to claim to *know* that my being fully responsible for my moral character logically precludes God's also being at least partly responsible for it. It seems much more plausible that the situation here is "incomprehensible" or "inscrutable" for us (6:52), as Kant repeatedly says, or that (B) and (C) can be known, at most, to be noumenally-causally ("nausally" for lack of a better term²⁶) incompatible, rather than logically/conceptually inconsistent.²⁷

What would justify someone in thinking that one state of affairs is nausally incompatible with another? Presumably this conclusion is drawn by extrapolation from

²⁶ I'll use "nausally" here to refer to the *noumenal* analogue of the causal relation. Kant sometimes refers to it as the "ground-consequence" relation (thus referring to the unschematized form of the cause-effect category). We see Kant referring to the "laws" of such relations at, for instance, (REF). The question of what such laws would consist in (or describe) is one for another occasion.

²⁷ Eric Watkins has suggested (correspondence) that the very notion of a free (and thus unconditioned) act may logical entail its being performed without the assistance of any other agent. My sense, however is that whatever the metaphysical fact of the matter, Kant himself didn't think freedom is logically incompatible with theological determination. Otherwise he would have made a more prominent appeal to that fact in his arguments against (Leibnizean) compatibilism. Rather, Kant's typical view here is simply agnostic: "as regards a *concursum morale* or God's free cooperation in the free actions of human beings, such a thing cannot be comprehended in the nature of freedom, but *at the same time it cannot be regarded as impossible*" (28:1110).

beliefs about how joint causal effects are produced in the empirical world. We typically think that if cause *C* is *fully* responsible for some effect *E*, then some other event is *not at all* responsible for *E*. The extrapolated idea, then, is that in the realm of free, intelligible acts, it is likewise impossible for one agent to be fully, nausally responsible for something while also requiring the assistance of some other agent to accomplish it.

One way to counter this claim about nausal impossibility is to say that, for all we know, a version of theological compatibilism at the noumenal level might be palatable: perhaps we can be fully responsible even while God is also partly or fully responsible. Unfortunately, it is pretty clear that while Kant is a compatibilist about noumenal freedom and phenomenal determination, he wants to keep straightforward compatibilism (theological as well as scientific) out of the story about fundamental free acts.

A second response might try to divide the labor in Anselmian fashion, arguing that for Kant we simply have to stop resisting God's grace and allow God to make the requisite change in the maxim of our wills. Although Kant says things in places that suggest this kind of picture, in general it doesn't seem to do much to resolve the tension with the Stoic maxim.

A third response would revert to the fact that this is, after all, the noumenal level, and so we can't *know* that something like grace is impossible unless we can spy a genuine *logical* or conceptual impossibility. And again, most of Kant's language in *Religion* and the lectures suggests that pointing this out is his strategy for avoiding the conundrum: he thinks it is simply inscrutable to us how grace might work at the noumenal level, and thus the weaker modal condition on hope – that *p* is metaphysically possible for all *S* justifiably believes -- is satisfied (see, e.g. 28:1110). But since Kant elsewhere appears to

back the stronger modal condition on hope according to which S must at least have a rational Belief that *p* is metaphysically possible, it is worth discussing whether that condition too can be met in this context.

Thus, fourth, let's suppose that the situation we're imagining--that we are fully responsible for our own righteousness *and* that God is also fully or at least partly responsible—is in fact impossible in the *nausal* sense. And let's suppose, further, that we know or have reason to believe that this is so. Even so, I submit, this *still* doesn't affect Kant's claim about the rationality of hope for grace. After all, what we have here is just a *nausal* impossibility – one that is for all we know still “absolutely” really possible.²⁸ Just as it is rational (for a theist, anyway) to hope for an empirical miracle, even though miracles are causally impossible, so it is rational (for a theist, anyway) to hope for what might be called a moral miracle, even if such things are *nausally* impossible. More specifically, the miracle we rationally hope for is that God helps us to do something that we ought to do, and yet that we are fully responsible for doing it ourselves. Any strangeness that we hear in this is similar to the strangeness in the claim that I can rationally hope that the ice cream cone will defy gravity and come back up out of the gorge and into my hand. It's not something that one could, other things being equal, rationally believe or expect, given the laws. But hope is still permitted, other things being equal.

It is worth keeping in mind here that many early moderns (even the incompatibilists among them) thought that it was metaphysically possible for God to concur in all our free acts while still leaving us fully responsible for them. Kant, at least in some early texts,

²⁸ For Kant's use of “absolute possibility,” even in the *Critique*, see the Postulates of Empirical Thinking (A232/B285).

agrees.²⁹ By the same token, Kant might regard it as metaphysically possible for God to give us special assistance in doing something for which we still end up being fully responsible ourselves.³⁰ Or, at the very least, Kant might regard this as something we can Believe to be metaphysically possible, even if we can't have conviction of knowledge that it is. But Belief is all that is required for rational hope, according to (H*).

The suggestion here, then, is that the attitude of hope can be rationally adopted toward the actuality of divine grace on a Kantian construal. There is no violation of the Stoic maxim or the ought-implies-can principle as long as "can" is read metaphysically rather than causally or nausally. We ought to be righteous and we *can* make ourselves righteous--from a metaphysical point of view--even though from a nausal point of view we require divine assistance.

IV. Conclusion: For what *should* we hope?

In section II I presented a schematic discussion of some aspects of the propositional objects of rational hope and, correlatively, two variations on a general modal condition on hope ((H) and (H*)). But the discussion there also points in a certain direction regarding the *nature* of hope. Simple models construe hope as merely a feeling (Spinoza), or perhaps a kind of desire. We have discovered that rational hope also requires, at the very least, that its object, for all the subject knows or Believes, be

²⁹ Kant seems to endorse this in the pre-critical period *Nova Dilucidatio* (1:415) and Inaugural Dissertation (2:396-414). Watkins 2010 suggests that Kant's ongoing commitment to divine concurrence may allow him to say, in the critical period too, that God is "in" space in some sense, and perhaps even for us to experience God as given in space (see pp. 272-3). Hogan (ms), by contrast, claims that whatever sympathies Kant had for concurrence in the pre-critical period are later abandoned for a Durandus-style conservation account.

³⁰ It would be worth trying to figure out how the counterfactuals would go here. For the time being, however, I will have to leave this as homework.

metaphysically possible. One can't reasonably hope for something that one knows or believes to be metaphysically impossible, though one can still wish for or desire it. Others have sought to add to this belief/desire model a certain stance or comportment toward the apparent possibility: the prospect of its obtaining, however improbable, is an item of special focus and concern; it becomes salient in a way that licenses what would otherwise be unreasonable fixation on a very slim chance.³¹ Whether we should include this further component in a *Kantian* analysis of hope—beyond the satisfaction of the modal condition and a desire that relevant state of affairs obtain—is a question for another day.

The discussion also tells us something about the *goals* of rational hope. “What may I hope *for*?” can be read not as a question about the event or state of affairs that is hoped for but rather as a question about goal-oriented explanation. To or *for* what end (i.e. *wherefore*) do I rationally hope? An *intrinsic* characterization of the goal might just say that hope is a good attitude to have. In much of the western tradition, steadfast hope is a virtue, an excellence of character worth having (at least in part) for its own sake (though cf. with Bonaventure for hope as a second-order virtue – a *habitus* of remaining steadfast in other virtues). A *pragmatic* or *instrumental* characterization would say that because hope makes us into people with other important or valuable traits—people who act optimistically, focus on the bright side, and thus contribute to the occurrence of the thing hoped-for—it is pragmatically rational to hope for something even when it is known to be unlikely.

³¹ For discussion, see Adrienne Martin (forthcoming) and (ms), Philip Pettit (2004), and Ariel Meirav (2008).

Finally there might be a kind of *moral-instrumental* characterization, and this is what gets us back to Kant and the normative aspect of “*dürfen*”: not just what I *may* hope for, but what I *should* hope for. Hope on this view is a natural, practically rational result of willing in accordance with the moral law. The hope in question is that our world will be, if not a “moral world” – one in which everyone freely does the right – then at least a “just world” – one in which virtue is perfectly proportioned to happiness in the life to come. And more than that as well: my hope should be that *I* will do what *I* ought, and in so doing make myself worthy of perfect happiness, even if God has to help me do so.

Kant says in his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* as well as in the published *Religion* itself that the “minimum of theology” or “minimum of cognition” required for true religion is the Belief that God is metaphysically possible and perhaps that if he did exist, then he would command the moral law (28:998; 6:153-4, and note).³² Some commentators have read this as articulating an extremely low standard for religiosity whereby an agnostic or even a certain kind of atheist could achieve it.³³ Others have viewed this position as unstable, or criticized that standard as inadequate to characterize authentic religion.³⁴

Perhaps we can bring these competing perspectives at least a little closer, however, by suggesting that Kant noticed that *hope* for various things (which is what religion adds to pure Kantian morality, and how religiosity psychologically supports our efforts to accomplish the demands of the latter) requires only one “practico-dogmatic Belief”³⁵--

³² By “minimum of cognition” Kant just means assertoric assent: there’s obviously no knowledge, intuition, or proof in the offing.

³³ Wood 1992, 405-406.

³⁴ See the “Introduction” and other contributions to Palmquist & Firestone (eds.) 2006.

³⁵ This is how he characterizes certain kinds of Belief in the *Real Progress* essay at e.g. 20:305ff.

namely, that God’s existence is really possible. In other words, the “minimum of theology” that we must accept is that God is really possible, and yet the religious life lived in conjunction with this Belief may still involve a sophisticated complex of attitudes, desires, and affections—including hope for divine grace—that would not fit very well within an atheistic framework. On the other hand, the attitudes here aren’t doxastic in the way that religious epistemologists have often assumed, and don’t have justification or warrant of the sort that they typically discuss. At his best, Kant opens up for us a new way to be seriously and authentically religious without worrying all the time about what and whether we believe.

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