

Natural Law as Divine Rationality

Kant's Conception of God

Part 1: Introduction

Part 2: Kant's Theoretical Framework

Part 3: Kant on God

Part 4: A Russellian Take on Kant on God

Bibliography

Part 1: Introduction

The essence of Kant's conception of God is that God is *constitutively*, as opposed to *causally*, responsible for spatiotemporal existence: God is responsible for the world not by *creating* it but by *grounding* it. And, so Kant holds, God grounds it by virtue of being *identical* with it (or, more precisely, with its noumenal substrate: see below), with the qualification that, in being identical with it, he infuses it with his own rationality, this being manifested as *natural law*.

Thus, God, for Kant, is sapience (as it is obviously incumbent on God *qua* God to be), and this sapience suffuses the world, its "phenomenal" manifestation being the lawfulness of the natural world.¹ Equivalently, the "noumenal" basis of natural law is a Godly sapience. And

¹ All theodicy should truly be an interpretation of nature insofar as God announces his will through it. Now every interpretation of the declared will of a legislator is either doctrinal or authentic. The first is a rational inference of that will from the utterances of which the law-giver has made use, in conjunction with his otherwise recognized purposes; the second is made by

whereas for contemporary scientists and philosophers of science, natural law is either invariable concomitance or blind compulsion, it is in Kant's view manifestation of God's rationality.

Kant's conception of God does a creditable job of validating, while also eliminating incoherencies from, the common man's conception God. According to this conception, God has three key attributes: (i) He is sapient; (ii) He is moral; and (iii) He is not only responsible for the world's existence but also its day-to-day operations. Kant's God has these three characteristics; moreover, Kant's conception of God is reasonably coherent.

There is no other major philosopher whose conception of God isn't either brazenly incoherent or unacceptably revisionist. Spinoza's conception of God is coherent—but only because, according to it, God is identical with the physical universe and is therefore inanimate.²

the law-giver himself....As a work of God, the world can also be considered by us as a divine publication of his will's purposes.

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 1036-1038). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

² Moreover, I will show below, without the aid of this proposition, that neither intellect nor will appertain to God's nature. I know that there are many who think that they can show, that supreme intellect and free will do appertain to God's nature; for they say they know of nothing more perfect, which they can attribute to God, than that which is the highest perfection in ourselves. Further, although they conceive God as actually supremely intelligent, they yet do not believe, that he can bring into existence everything which he actually understands, for they think that they would thus destroy God's power. If, they contend, God had created everything which is in his intellect, he would not be able to create anything more, and this, they think, would clash with God's omnipotence; therefore, they prefer to assert that God is indifferent to all things, and that he creates nothing except that which he has decided, by some absolute exercise of will, to create. However, I think I have shown sufficiently clearly (by Prop. xvi.), that from God's supreme power, or infinite nature, an infinite number of things—that is, all things have necessarily flowed forth in an infinite number of ways, or always follow from the same necessity; in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows from eternity and for eternity, that its three interior angles are equal to two right angles. Wherefore the omnipotence of God has been displayed from all eternity, and will for all eternity remain in the same state of activity. This manner of treating the question attributes to God an omnipotence,

Aristotle's God is sapience itself, being pure intellect whose sole activity is self-contemplation—but only because, in thus being so unqualifiedly sapient, he is devoid of both emotion and morality.³

As for the common man's conception of God, it is too riddled with incoherencies to be accepted on its own terms: God created the world without being distinct from it, and he is completely objective while caring about us. Since the philosopher has no choice but to reject this conception of God, his job is to produce a 'rational reconstruction' of it, meaning that he must construct a concept that, while being coherent, is sufficiently in alignment with the

in my opinion, far more perfect. For, otherwise, we are compelled to confess that God understands an infinite number of creatable things, which he will never be able to create, for, if he created all that he understands, he would, according to this showing, exhaust his omnipotence, and render himself imperfect. Wherefore, in order to establish that God is perfect, we should be reduced to establishing at the same time, that he cannot bring to pass everything over which his power extends; this seems to be a hypothesis most absurd, and most repugnant to God's omnipotence.

Spinoza, Benedict de . The Works of Benedict de Spinoza: The Ethics, On The Improvement Of The Understanding, A Political Treatise, A Theologico-Political Treatise and More (5 Books With Active Table of Contents) (Kindle Locations 11312-11321). Kindle Edition.

³ And thinking in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thinking in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the essence, is thought. But it is active when it possesses this object. Therefore the possession rather than the receptivity is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.

Aristotle. The Complete Aristotle (Kindle Locations 32547-32551). Feedbooks. Kindle Edition.

common man's conception of God that it can be said to have the same referent. Kant's conception of God does a relatively good of satisfying this requirement, as the present paper will show.

Part 2: Kant's Theoretical Framework

Kant's philosophy as a whole is rooted in his epistemology. The essence of his epistemological system is the contention that not all knowledge can be derived from experience, since knowledge is a *prerequisite* for the derivation of knowledge from experience and, indeed, for experience itself. Kant therefore advocated a form of the doctrine that Chomsky refers to as *nativism*.⁴

Nativism is to be distinguished from rationalism. Rationalism is the position at least some knowledge is derived from reason, as opposed to observation. Nativism is the doctrine that at least some knowledge is inborn. Kant self-identified as a rationalist. He did not clearly

⁴ Our cognition arises from two fundamental sources in the mind, the first of which is the reception of representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second the faculty for cognizing an object by means of these representations (spontaneity of concepts); through the former an object is given to us, through the latter it is thought in relation to that representation (as a mere determination of the mind). Intuition and concepts therefore constitute the elements of all our cognition, so that neither concepts without intuition corresponding to them in some way nor intuition without concepts can yield a cognition. Both are either pure or empirical. Empirical, if sensation (which presupposes the actual presence of the object) is contained therein; but pure if no sensation is mixed into the representation. One can call the latter the matter of sensible cognition. Thus pure intuition contains merely the form under which something is intuited, and pure concept only the form of thinking of an object in general.[B 75] Only pure intuitions or concepts alone are possible a priori, empirical ones only a posteriori.[

distinguish between nativism and rationalism; and he did not use the term ‘nativism’ (any equivalent) to refer to his own position.

Kant held that space and time (or inborn cognitive representations thereof) are necessary to have a coherent stream of experiences; and he also held that inborn representations of categories—similar to those found in Aristotle’s system of logic—are needed to make judgements about, and therefore to derive knowledge from, one’s experiences.⁵ In a word, some kind of innate cognitive structure is necessary to have experiences and derive knowledge from them.⁶

⁵ Space is not an empirical concept that has been drawn from outer experiences. For in order for certain sensations to be related to something outside me (i.e., to something in another place in space from that in which I find myself), thus in order for me to represent them as outside one another, thus not merely as different but as in different places, the representation of space must already be their ground.⁷ Thus the representation of space cannot be obtained from the relations of outer appearance through experience, but this outer experience is itself first possible only through this representation.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 3778-3784). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

Time is not an empirical concept that is somehow drawn from an experience. For simultaneity or succession would not themselves come into perception if the representation of time did not ground them a priori. Only under its presupposition can one represent that several things exist at one and the same time (simultaneously) or in different times (successively).

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 3864-3867). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Insofar as there is to be reason in these sciences, something in them must be cognized a priori, and this cognition can relate to its object in either of two ways, either merely determining the object and its concept (which must be given from elsewhere), or else also making the object actual. The former is theoretical, the latter practical cognition of reason. In both the pure part, the part in which reason determines its object⁷ wholly a priori, must be expounded all by itself,

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 2541-2546). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

Kant uses the term “concept” to refer to mental representations of categories.

According to Kant, many concepts, including our concepts of space and time, are “hard-wired” into us. Having a given such “hardwired” concept involves having knowledge of a kind---knowledge as to how to structure information. For Kant, consequently, there are two kinds of knowledge: Knowledge derived from experience and knowledge that makes such derivations possible. Knowledge is *a posteriori* when derived from experience and *a priori* when it makes experience and experience-based knowledge possible.⁷

⁷ [A]lthough all our cognition commences with experience, yet it does not on that account all arise from experience. For it could well be that even our experiential cognition is a composite of that which we receive through impressions and that which our own cognitive faculty (merely prompted by sensible impressions) provides out of itself, which addition we cannot distinguish from that fundamental material until long practice has made us attentive to it and skilled in separating it out.[B 2] It is therefore at least a question requiring closer investigation, and one not to be dismissed at first glance, whether there is any such cognition independent of all experience and even of all impressions of the senses. One calls such cognitions *a priori*,³ and distinguishes them from empirical ones, which have their sources *a posteriori*, namely in experience.⁸ The former expression⁴ is nevertheless not yet sufficiently determinate to designate the whole sense of the question before us. For it is customary to say of many a cognition derived from experiential sources that we are capable of it or partake in it *a priori*, because we do not derive it immediately from experience, but rather from a general rule that we have nevertheless itself borrowed from experience. So one says of someone who undermined the foundation of his house that he could have known *a priori* that it would collapse, i.e., he need not have waited for the experience of it actually collapsing. Yet he could not have known this entirely *a priori*.⁹ For that bodies are heavy and hence fall if their support is taken away must first have become known to him through experience. In the sequel therefore we will understand *a priori* cognitions not those that occur independently of this or that experience, but rather those that occur absolutely independently of all experience. Opposed to them are empirical cognitions, or those that are possible only *a posteriori*, i.e., through experience.[B 3] Among *a priori* cognitions, however, those are called pure with which nothing empirical is intermixed. Thus, e.g., the proposition “Every alteration has its cause” is an *a priori* proposition, only not pure, since alteration is a concept that can be drawn only from experience.

Kant holds—because he believes it to follow from the position just-described (or, at least, from his specific version of it)—that space and time *themselves* have no objective existence, being mere cognitive categories; and he also believes (partly, it seems, because it is a corollary of his subjectivism about space and time) that we cannot have knowledge of the world as it is, only as it appears to us. To use his terms, we can know *phenomena* (appearances), but not *noumena* (realities).⁸

This must be understood aright. It is obvious and trivial that we know the world *through* appearances, and that appearances both distort reality in some respects and also omit a great deal of important information. But Kant's position is not that we *do* know "noumena", albeit imperfectly and distortedly, but rather that we simply *don't* know them—at least through sense-perception. Kant clearly does hold that we can know *about* them—if only that they are there and that we otherwise are ignorant of them—but he holds that, so far as we do have

⁸ Space is nothing other than merely the form of all appearances of outer sense, i.e., the subjective condition of sensibility, under which alone outer intuition is possible for us. Now since the receptivity of the subject to be affected by objects necessarily precedes all intuitions of these objects, it can be understood how the form of all appearances can be given in the mind prior to all actual perceptions, thus *a priori*, and how as a pure intuition, in which all objects must be determined, it can contain principles²⁰ of their relations prior to all experience.²¹ We can accordingly speak of space, extended beings, and so on, only from the human standpoint. If we depart from the subjective condition under which alone we can acquire outer intuition, namely that through which we may be affected by objects, then the representation of space signifies nothing at all.

knowledge of noumena, that knowledge is *transcendental* (reason-based⁹), as opposed to *empirical* (observation-based).¹⁰

In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant talks about what noumena are *not* (namely, they are not observable or even knowable through observation) but says very little, if anything, about what they are. In the Critique of Practical Reason (“the second critique”), Kant says that God is a noumenon and that any given human soul is a noumenon. In the second critique, Kant

⁹ transcendental, having its origin independently of all experience, merely from pure understanding and reason.

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7730-7732). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ Now from this arises the concept of a noumenon, which, however, is not at all positive and does not signify a determinate cognition of any sort of thing, but rather only the thinking of something in general, in which I abstract from all form of sensible intuition. But in order for a noumenon to signify a true object, to be distinguished from all phenomena, it is not enough that I liberate my thoughts from all conditions of sensible intuition, but I must in addition have ground to assume another kind of intuition than this sensible one, under which such an object could be given; for otherwise my thought is empty, even though free of contradiction. To be sure, above we were able to prove not that sensible intuition is the only possible intuition, but rather that it is the only one possible for us; but we also could not prove that yet another kind of intuition is possible, and, although our thinking can abstract from that sensibility, the question still remains whether it is not then a mere form of a concept and whether any object⁸⁵ at all is left over after this separation. The object to which I relate appearance in general is the transcendental object, i.e., the entirely undetermined thought of something in general. This cannot be called the noumenon; for I do not know anything about what it is in itself, and have no concept of it except merely that of the object of a sensible intuition in general, which is therefore the same for all appearances. I cannot think it through any categories; for these hold of empirical intuition, in order to bring it under a concept of the object in general. To be sure, a pure use of the category is possible, i.e., without contradiction, but it has no objective validity, since it pertains to no intuition that would thereby acquire unity of the object;⁶¹ for the category is a mere function of thinking, through which no object is given to me, but rather only that through which what may be given in intuition is thought.

Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 8596-8612). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

also asserts that, by virtue of being a noumenon as opposed to a phenomenon, the human soul is free.¹¹

This last contention must be understood in terms of the system put forth in the first critique, according to which it is the phenomenal, not the noumenal, world that is to be known observationally and, therefore, scientifically, a corollary being that it is the phenomenal, not the noumenal, world that is law-governed, i.e. governed by natural law and therefore deterministic. A corollary, or so Kant believes, is that the very concept of deterministic compulsion is inapplicable to the noumenal stratum of reality; and a corollary of *this*, in its turn, is that the soul—being as it is a noumenon, as opposed to a phenomenon-- is free.¹² (This is subject to the

¹¹ By this I also understand why the most considerable objections to the Critique that have so far come to my attention turn about just these two points: namely, on the one side the objective reality of the categories applied to noumena, denied in theoretical cognition and affirmed in practical, and on the other side the paradoxical requirement to make oneself as subject of freedom a noumenon but at the same, with regard to nature, a phenomenon in one's own empirical consciousness; for, as long as one had as yet formed no determinate concepts of morality and freedom, one could not conjecture, on the one side, what one was to put as a noumenon at the basis of the alleged appearance and, on the other side, whether it was at all possible even to form a concept of it, since all the concepts of the pure understanding in its theoretical use had already been assigned exclusively to mere appearances. Only a detailed Critique of Practical Reason can remove all this misinterpretation and put in a clear light the consistent way of thinking that constitutes its greatest merit.

Kant, Immanuel. Practical Philosophy (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (pp. 141-142). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹² The ideas of God and immortality, however, are not conditions of the moral law but only conditions of the necessary object of a will determined by this law, that is, of the mere practical use of our pure reason; hence with respect to those ideas we cannot affirm that we cognize and have insight into – I do not merely say the reality but even the possibility of them. But they are, nevertheless, conditions of applying the morally determined will to its object given to it a priori (the highest good). Consequently their possibility in this practical relation can and must be assumed, although we cannot theoretically cognize and have insight into them. For practical purposes it is sufficient for this assumption that they contain no intrinsic impossibility (contradiction). Here there is a ground of assent that is, in comparison with speculative reason, merely subjective but that is yet objectively valid for a reason equally pure but practical; by

qualification that, in this context, the meaning of “free” is closer to “self-determined” than it is to “undetermined.”)

Kant distinguishes between *concepts* and *ideas*, and Kant’s conception of God is to some extent to be understood in terms of this distinction. Whereas a “concept” is a representation that makes thought possible and is therefore a *prerequisite* for thought, an “idea” is a representation---a limiting that serves as touchstone for already existing thoughts. According to Kant, a being cannot *act* (i.e. cannot be an agent) unless it has the idea of freedom, and a being cannot act ethically unless it has the ideas of God and immortality.

The intuitive basis for these claims is clear enough. I can regard myself as unfree *in my capacity as thinker*, but not *in my capacity as an agent*. When it comes to act, the operative conceit is that it is up to me what to do, and any conceits I have concerning my inability to act drop out, to be reactivated only during such respites from as permit philosophical reflection.¹³

means of the concept of freedom objective reality is given to the ideas of God and immortality and a warrant,

Kant, Immanuel. Practical Philosophy (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (p. 140). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

With this faculty transcendental freedom is also established, taken indeed in that absolute sense in which speculative reason needed it, in its use of the concept of causality, in order to rescue itself from the antinomy into which it unavoidably falls when it wants to think the unconditioned in the series of causal connection; this concept, however, it could put forward only problematically, as not impossible to think, without assuring it objective reality, and only lest the supposed impossibility of what it must at least allow to be thinkable call its being into question and plunge it into an abyss of skepticism.

Kant, Immanuel. Practical Philosophy (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (p. 139). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹³ [H]ence he always admits freedom to think, without which there is no reason. In the same way he must also assume freedom of the will in acting, without which there would be no morals, when – as I have no doubt – he wants to proceed in his righteous conduct in conformity with the eternal laws of duty and not to be a plaything of his instincts and inclinations, though

As for the contentions that representations of—and belief in—God and immortality are necessary for morality, this is obviously more questionable, but the idea is clear enough. If we are mortal, then, so it seems, our attitude might as well be *apres moi le deluge*¹⁴; and if there is no God, so it seems (and so Dostoevsky's famous adage goes), then everything is permitted.¹⁵ Kant's own reasons for accepting these three contentions appear to be elaborations of these commonplace conceits.

at the same time he denies himself this freedom because he is not otherwise able to bring his practical principles into harmony with speculative principles. But even if no one were to succeed in this, in fact not much would be lost.

Kant, Immanuel. Practical Philosophy (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (p. 10). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹⁴ This endless progress is, however, possible only on the presupposition of the existence and personality of the same rational being continuing endlessly (which is called the immortality of the soul). Hence the highest good is practically possible only on the presupposition of the immortality of the soul, so that this, as inseparably connected with the moral law, is a postulate of pure practical reason (by which I understand a theoretical proposition, though one not demonstrable as such, insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid practical law).

Kant, Immanuel. Practical Philosophy (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (p. 238). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹⁵ In the preceding analysis the moral law led to a practical task that is set by pure reason alone and without the aid of any sensible incentives, namely that of the necessary completeness of the first and principal part of the highest good, morality; and, since this can be fully accomplished only in an eternity, it led to the postulate of immortality. The same law must also lead to the possibility of the second element of the highest good, namely happiness proportioned to that morality, and must do so as disinterestedly as before, solely from impartial reason; in other words, it must lead to the supposition of the existence of a cause adequate to this effect, that is, it must postulate the existence of God as belonging necessarily to the possibility of the highest good (which object of our will is necessarily connected with the moral lawgiving of pure reason). We shall present this connection in a convincing manner.

Kant, Immanuel. Practical Philosophy (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (p. 240). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

Obviously, these three ideas are not the only ideas; moreover, even though, according to Kant, these ideas are necessary for action, they are not, in his view, necessary for knowledge or even for theoretical knowledge (except, of course, when said knowledge concerns human agency). Kant acknowledges that we have limiting ideas such as *efficient market* and *frictionless surface* (ideas of idealizations, in other words), and his views as to their role in the acquisition of knowledge in line with ‘philosophical common sense’, meaning that they are not substantially different from those advocated by the likes of Hempel and Russell. Kant also acknowledges that we have ideas, such *even number* and *animal*, that, unlike limiting ideas, have real-world referents, albeit abstract ones; and, as before, his views concerning such ideas are consistent with philosophical common sense.

Part 3: Kant on God

Kant’s conception of God is to be understood in terms of his criticisms of two arguments for God’s existence, namely: the Cosmological (*since the space-time manifold cannot have been created by anything in space, its cause must be supernatural and therefore identical with God*¹⁶)

¹⁶ Here I presuppose that something exists, hence an experience, and thus the proof built on this presupposition is no longer derived from pure reason, as was the transcendental proof already discussed. It is, however, the simplest experience that I can presuppose: the experience that I am. Now I infer with Leibniz and Wolff:⁷ I am either necessary or contingent. But the alterations which go on in me show that I am not necessary; therefore I am contingent. But if I am contingent, then there must be somewhere outside me a ground for my existence, which is the reason why I am as I am and not otherwise. This ground of my existence must be absolutely necessary. For if it too were contingent, then it could not be the ground of my existence, since it would once again have need of something else containing the ground of its existence. This absolutely necessary being, however, must contain in itself the ground of its own existence, and consequently the ground of the existence of the whole world. For the whole world is contingent, and hence it cannot contain in itself the ground why it is as it is and not otherwise. But a being which contained in itself the ground of the existence of all things would also have to

and the Physicotheological, more commonly known as the Teleological (*the world embodies lawfulness, and the entity whose rationality is therein embodied is ipso facto God*¹⁷).

Kant rejects the cosmological argument on the ground that it turns God into just another cause, albeit a singularly important one. If God is just a ‘first cause’, then he is indeed just a cause, differing from others in magnitude and significance but not in kind. Therefore, the cosmological argument proves at most that there is an important being that falls short of being God.¹⁸

contain in itself the ground of its own existence; for there is nothing from which it could be derived. – And this is God!

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7861-7864). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹⁷ The physicotheological proof is the one in which we infer from the constitution of the present world to the nature of its author. This proof is nearly identical with the cosmological one; the only difference is that in the cosmological proof the concept of an author of the world is abstracted from the concept of a world in general, whereas in the physicotheological proof it is abstracted from the present world.

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7870-7874). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹⁸ I could never prove God’s omnipotence through experience, even if I assume a million suns surrounded with a million universes in an immeasurably immense space, with each of these universes occupied by both rational and irrational creatures. For a great power could have produced even a hundred million and a thousand million suns. From anything made I could infer only a great power, an immeasurable power. – But what is meant by an “immeasurable power”? A power which I have no capacity to measure, over against which my power is extremely small. That, however, is still not omnipotence. – Likewise, even though I may wonder at the magnitude, order and chainlike combination of all things in the world, I cannot conclude that only one being has produced them. There could just as easily have been several powerful beings, each taking pleasure in working its own field.⁹ Or at least I cannot refute this supposition from my experience of the world.

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7887-7895). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

Kant rejects the teleological argument on much the same grounds. If God is just a ‘first cause’, with the qualification that embodies his sapience in the world, then thereafter ceases to be relevant, and the world is a mere fossil-record, as opposed to living expression, of his sapience.¹⁹

In Kant’s view, both arguments establish the existence of a God-*like* being, his point being that God-*like* falls short of God-*identical*. Kant does not regard either argument as otherwise defective.

By contrast, Kant regards the Ontological Argument (*God has every perfection, including existence, and therefore exists*) as embodying a correct conception of what God is but as being

Theism consists in believing not merely in a God, but in a living God who has produced the world through knowledge and by means of free will. It can now be seen that theologian transcendentalis is set up by pure reason alone, wholly pure of any admixture of experience. But this is not the case with natural theology. In it some kinds of experience must be mixed in, since I must have an example such as an intelligence (for instance, the human power of understanding, from which I infer the highest understanding).

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7771-7775). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

¹⁹ But the physicotheological proof is derived wholly from empirical principles, because here I use my actual perception of the existing world as its ground.[28:1008] But if transcendental theology does not succeed, physicotheology will not succeed either. For physicotheology can never give a determinate concept of God without transcendental theology, and an indeterminate concept doesn’t help at all. The precise concept of God is the concept of a most perfect thing. But I can never derive such a concept from experience, for the highest perfection can never be given me in any possible experience. For example, I could never prove God’s omnipotence through experience, even if I assume a million suns surrounded with a million universes in an immeasurably immense space, with each of these universes occupied by both rational and irrational creatures. For a great power could have produced even a hundred million and a thousand million suns.

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7886-7889). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7883-7886). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

defective and therefore not proving his existence. Kant's position is that existence is not a "predicate", meaning that one cannot meaningfully say of this or that specific individual that he exists, since such an assertion is self-contradictory if false and void of content (and therefore a non-assertion) if true.²⁰

Kant's conception of God is that he is responsible for the world not by causing but by *grounding* it—basically, by the *being* the sapience that informs it.²¹ The question arises: If God is responsible for the world by *being* it, then there is no difference between Kant's position and that of someone who, while denying God's existence, concedes the obvious fact that the universe exists.²²

²⁰ experience, for the highest perfection can never be given me in any possible experience. For example, I could never prove God's omnipotence through experience, even if I assume a million suns surrounded with a million universes in an immeasurably immense space, with each of these universes occupied by both rational and irrational creatures. For a great power could have produced even a hundred million and a thousand million suns.

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7886-7889). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

²¹ I will think of him as the *ens originarium*, as the *ens summum* when I compare him with all things in general and consider him as the highest of all beings and the root of all possible things. The concept of an *ens originarium* as an *ens summum* belongs to transcendental philosophy. This transcendental concept, in fact, is the foundation of transcendental philosophy and there is a special theology in which I think of the original being as the *ens originarium* to which belongs the properties of not deriving from any other thing and of being the root of everything.

Kant, Immanuel. Religion and Rational Theology (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant) (Kindle Locations 7745-7752). Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.

²² Whoever thinks of God merely as the *ens summum* leaves undecided how this being is constituted. But whoever thinks of God as the *summa intelligentia* thinks of him as a living being, as a living God, having cognition and free will. He thinks of him not as

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We will now see that, thanks to his epistemological system, Kant can coherently regard God as being both sapient *and* constitutive of the universe, this being consistent with what his own text sometimes suggests that he believes.

Part 4: A Russellian Take on Kant on God

Like Kant, Spinoza believed it incoherent to regard God as a first cause and, like Kant, inferred that God must *be* the universe. But Spinoza reasoned that, since the universe (setting aside the odd flicker of consciousness) is so much inanimate matter and void, the same is therefore true of God. By contrast, Kant's reasoning is that since God is that the universe is *sapient* (and therefore animate) matter and void, its sapience being expressed in its lawfulness.²³ Leibniz held a similar view, necessary truths, he held, being mental representations of God's.

The obvious response is that 'lawful' is not the same as 'rational.' Natural laws give rise to order and predictability, it will be said, and their manifestations are to that extent similar to those of rational conduct; but 'similar' is not 'identical', and natural laws represent blind compulsion, not intelligence.

²³ We can form a concept of the universal and unconditional subjection of human beings to the divine legislation only insofar as we also consider ourselves his creatures; just so can God be considered the ultimate source of all natural laws only because he is the creator of natural things. It is, however, totally incomprehensible to our reason how beings can be created to use their powers freely, for according to the principle of causality we cannot attribute any other inner ground of action to a being, which we assume to have been produced, except that which the producing cause has placed in it.

Kant's counter-response is that although a world driven by blind compulsion might be predictable, it would not, unlike the actual world, be *intelligible*. This response is obviously both vague and questionable. But following Bertrand Russell (1948), I believe that implicit in Kant's system is another, possibly more cogent response, namely, that were we to be aware of the noumena underlying the phenomena of which observation apprises us, we would see them to be instances of veritable sapience.

Russell (1948, p. 248) writes:

[W]hile mental events and their qualities can be known without inference, physical events are known only as regards their space-time structure. The qualities that compose such events are unknown — so completely unknown that we cannot say either that they are, or that they are not, different from the qualities that we know as belonging to mental events.

In other words, for all we know, it could be awareness that has the formal properties we know mass-energy to have.

Kant's system makes it an option for him to suppose that, indeed, those non-structural properties of objects and events are mental in nature. Kant can, without contradicting himself, take the position that those structural properties are "phenomena" whose corresponding "noumena" are instances of sapience. Indeed, not only is this position open to Kant; it is positively *de rigueur*, given his otherwise indefensible contention that God, while constituting the world, is nonetheless sapient. It also gives substance to his otherwise vacuous contention that the orderliness of the universe expresses *bona fide* rationality, as opposed to blind compulsion.

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