Kant on the Hiddenness of God

ERIC WATKINS
University of California, San Diego

Kant's sustained reflections on God have received considerable scholarly attention over the years and rightly so.[1] His provocative criticisms of the three traditional theoretical proofs of the existence of God, and his own positive proof for belief in God's existence on moral grounds, have fully deserved the clarification and analysis that has occurred in these discussions. What I want to focus on, however, is the extent to which Kant's position contains resources sufficient to answer a line of questioning about the existence of God that has recently been called the problem of the 'hiddenness of God' in contemporary discussions in philosophy of religion. If God exists roughly as the Judeo-Christian philosophical tradition conceives of him, it is puzzling, at least prima facie, why he does not make his existence overwhelmingly obvious to one and all, but rather is hidden from us. For if God is omnipotent, as the tradition maintains, it seems that he would have the power to reveal himself to us and, for that matter, with sufficient clarity that we would be left with no doubt about the matter. And if, as the tradition maintains further, it is important to God that we accept his existence and reject false idols who would pretend to divine status, it would seem that he has a significant reason to reveal himself to us. In short, given that God can make his existence obvious to all, and that doing so would fulfil an important purpose, why does he remain hidden from us?[2]

One line of argument that responds to this question is based on the *practical* consequences that would ensue if we were to encounter God in our immediate experience. If, for example, God revealed himself to us in a booming voice that resounded throughout the earth and that was accompanied by supporting displays of seemingly unlimited power, and if he then announced what we were

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415400001357 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to do and what the consequences of disobedience would be, it is certainly plausible, at least prima facie, to think that this experience would lead us to alter our behaviour and be much more inclined to act as God commanded. Kant draws on this kind of case (and the intuitions that support it) near the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason* and argues that if we had knowledge of God's existence in this way, our actions would no longer have moral worth, since they would be based on hope (for eternal bliss) and fear (of eternal damnation) rather than on the sole morally worthy motive of duty. Only if God is hidden, therefore, could our actions have moral worth, and in so far as giving us the possibility of acting morally is one of God's central purposes in creation, God would have a reason to remain hidden from us that might outweigh his reasons to the contrary. This line of argument can also be developed, however, along slightly different lines. Instead of emphasizing the conditions of moral worth directly, one could argue that knowledge of God's existence and of the severe punishment that he would mete out for any misdeed would in effect serve as a coercive threat such that one could not act freely, or at least not with the kind of freedom that would be morally significant (which might or might not then entail via some further step that our actions have no moral worth). On this version of the practical argument, God would need to remain hidden so that knowledge of his existence would not preclude our ability to act freely.

A second line of argument stems from *theoretical* considerations that Kant develops in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, as well as in his lectures on religion.[3] The main idea one can find in these works is that God could decide whether or not to make his existence obvious to us, on the basis of the practical grounds just mentioned, only if he is *able* to do so, but God, despite being omnipotent, may be said, in a certain sense, to lack this ability. For while God has the ability to do anything logically (or metaphysically) possible, he cannot make his existence known to us *if* what prevents him from doing so is an essential limitation in *us* rather than in him, and in fact Kant repeatedly argues for this position. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, he explicitly denies that we can have theoretical knowledge of God (a denial that is intended to make room for the possibility of a practically based *belief* in God), arguing that God cannot be known to us either by

theoretical reason alone – by means of one of the traditional theistic proofs – or by being an object of experience for us – an object that could be given to us in sensible intuition just as all other objects of experience must be. While Kant's criticisms of the traditional theistic proofs have been discussed in the literature at length and are thought by many to pose significant obstacles to a priori lines of argument, his other, lesser-known reasons for asserting the hiddenness of God have received little attention.[4] This is unfortunate since, on further investigation, these considerations turn out to be both rich and pertinent to understanding more fully the relevant options concerning the hiddenness of God.

In this paper, I first argue (A) that despite the considerable initial intuitive plausibility it has, the practical line of argument is not compelling.[5] For one, at least in one of its versions, it makes commitments that are more controversial than they are convincing. For another, even when a revised version of that argument is developed, one can worry both about its consistency with other systematically important features of Kant's position and about its basic cogency. I then argue (B) that despite the unexpected failure of the practical argument, Kant's theoretical line of argument can be articulated in four different ways and that two of them are quite plausible. What's more, although a Humean might find this general kind of argument congenial, Kant has special resources to offer in support of it, which Hume is not in as good a position to provide. As a result, Kant's most plausible explanation of the hiddenness of God advances powerful considerations that non-Kantians could accept as well. This is not to say that Kant's position is the only possible account of the hiddenness of God.[6] It can lay claim, however, to being a serious and sophisticated possibility that has not received the attention it deserves.

A. Practical Arguments

I begin consideration of the practical line of argument for the hiddenness of God by reconstructing (1) Kant's most explicit argument in the *Critique of Practical Reason* – which one might call the argument from moral worth – refining it further so as to avoid certain immediately obvious difficulties, but ultimately rejecting it on the basis of two fundamental objections. I then turn to reconstructing (2) a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415400001357 Published online by Cambridge University Press

related argument for the hiddenness of God – which one might call the argument from divine coercion – before finding it unconvincing as well, albeit for different reasons.

A.1. Hope, fear, and moral worth

In the final section of the Doctrine of Elements in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, titled 'On the Wise Adaptation of the Human Being's Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation', Kant describes what would be the case if we somehow had all of the theoretical knowledge that we desired. He suggests that, with all of our theoretical aspirations fulfilled, our practical inclinations would first demand that they be satisfied and the moral law would then express both the limits that we should not transgress in the pursuit of our inclinations, and the higher end to which they should be subject. However, instead of a conflict arising in us between our inclinations and our moral disposition – as one might expect and as is actually the case, in Kant's view, where the moral strength of our soul would, it is to be hoped, ultimately (*allmählig*) win out – Kant offers the following description of what our situation would be:

> *God and eternity with their awful majesty* would stand unceasingly *before our eyes* . . . Transgression of the law would, no doubt, be avoided: what is commanded would be done; but because the *disposition* from which actions ought to be done cannot be instilled by any command, and because the spur to activity in this case would be promptly at hand and *external*, reason would have no need to work itself up so as to gather strength to resist the inclinations by a lively representation of the dignity of the law; hence most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, only a few from hope, and none at all from duty, and the moral worth of actions, on which alone in the eyes of supreme wisdom the worth of a person and even that of the world depends, would not exist at all. As long as human nature remains as it is, human conduct would thus be changed into mere mechanism in which, as in a puppet show, everything would *gesticulate* well but there would be no *life* in the figures. (5: 147)[7]

Kant's explicit line of argument in this passage is that if we had knowledge of God's existence, then (i) we would not transgress the moral law, (ii) we would act out of fear and hope (which are to be understood in this case as particular kinds of inclinations) rather than out of respect for the moral law, (iii) because knowledge of the external presence of God would cause inclinations in us that

would conform to the moral law with such great strength that (iv) there would be no need for reason to develop so as to combat any remaining wayward inclinations (since, in this case, there would be none), (v) our actions would have no moral worth, (vi) the entire world would, at least viewed from a divine perspective, be worthless as well, and (vii) human beings would be mechanical puppets rather than genuine, living agents. Since states of affairs (v)–(vii) are to be rejected, we can infer (via extended *modus tollens*) that we do not have the kind of complete knowledge that we seem to desire. As a result, in this context Kant concludes that our cognitive faculties, *including* their limitations, are well-suited to our practical, or moral, vocation, since they allow for the possibility of actions possessing moral worth that make the world valuable by allowing what would otherwise be mere mechanistic puppets to be full-fledged agents.

To be sure, Kant's articulation of this argument involves more points than are minimally necessary for the formulation of an argument establishing the conclusion that God has reason to remain hidden from us. For example, such an argument does not require Kant's claim (in (vi)) that the world would be worthless if human beings did not perform actions that have moral worth. For one can acknowledge that the world might have valuable features beyond morally worthy actions and still hold that, all else being equal, a world with morally worthy actions is more valuable overall than one without. And it is also not necessary to assume that one would be unable to transgress the moral law (in (i)). For one, Lucifer seems to have done precisely that in the face of God's existence.[8] For another, the remaining steps of the argument ((ii) through (vii)) follow even if this point is not explicitly assumed.[9] As a result, in the spirit of charity, one can pare down Kant's argument to the following:

P1 If we had knowledge of everything, then we would have knowledge of God's existence and of his promise of eternal reward and his threat of eternal punishment for our good and bad actions (respectively).

P2 If we had knowledge of God's existence and of his promise of eternal reward and his threat of eternal punishment for our good and bad actions (respectively), then (a) we would have to act out of hope or fear (or a combination thereof) and (b) we could not act out of respect for the moral law.[10]

P3 If (a) we would have to act out of hope or fear (or a combination thereof) and (b) we could not act out of respect for the moral law, none of our actions could have moral worth.
P4 At least some of our actions could have moral worth.
C1 We do not have knowledge of everything, specifically, of God's existence and of his promise of eternal reward and his threat of eternal punishment for our good and bad actions.

This argument, while certainly an improvement in several respects over the more detailed formulation, still encounters two fundamental difficulties. First, Kant's explicit justification for P2 seems problematic. In the passage quoted above, Kant argues that reason would have no need to develop since our inclinations would already dictate that we act in accord with the moral law. However, there is a noticeable gap between the claim that there is *no need* for reason to develop and the further claim that reason *would not* in fact develop and thus would not be capable of leading us to act out of respect for the moral law rather than from inclination. Kant's idea seems to be that our inclinations come first and *only* if our inclinations do not motivate the proper actions would reason be called on to do so.[11] However, one can imagine a number of alternative scenarios here. For example, one view, advanced by Lessing, is that we act out of hope and fear in our early childhood, but increasingly come to act on the basis of reason as we mature, not because inclinations lead us astray and thus force the development of reason, but rather because reason develops on its own and takes over naturally.[12] Put in slightly different terms, this argument presupposes that we would act on the basis of hope and fear when these are present in sufficient strength, but it is simply not clear why inclinations should be accorded such absolute priority and why reason could not come to have a supporting, or, for that matter, even decisive role.

Second, Kant's argument relies on his distinctive and highly controversial claim about the moral worth of actions in P3, namely that they have moral worth only if they are done out of duty, or respect for the moral law, and not on the basis of inclinations. While part of the controversy about this claim concerns the exegetical question of how to understand the role that inclinations might still play for Kant in morally worthy actions (in cases of mixed motives), the part that calls this argument into question is the more fundamental connection that it requires between moral worth and the motive

of duty. For one can maintain that what makes an action morally worthy is either the nature of the action or its consequences (or some combination thereof), in which case our actions would have moral worth even if they were motivated entirely by an intense fear of God's wrath, as long as they were the right kinds of actions or had the best consequences. As a result, both P2 and P3, the central assumptions in Kant's argument, face fundamental objections, and the argument from moral worth must be rejected.[13]

A.2. God, Coercion, and Freedom

One can, however, abstract from the issue of moral worth and identify a second version of the practical line of argument that is prima facie plausible. This version shares a similar starting point with the first, namely that if we had knowledge of everything, including God's existence and his promise of eternal reward and threat of eternal punishment, then we would act out of hope and fear (P1 and P2 (a) above). In short, our knowledge of God's presence would have consequences for how we act. However, it diverges from the first version of the argument by not being committed to the claim that it would prevent our acting out of respect for the moral law (P2 (b)) and thus preclude the possibility of the moral worth of our actions (P3). That is, this version of the argument does not try to prove that our knowledge of God affects the moral worth of our actions as such.

Instead, this version maintains that knowledge of God's existence would have consequences for the prior or more basic question of whether we could act freely at all. It attempts to do so by exploiting the intuition that if we knew of God's existence and his promises and threats, we would be coerced into doing what he commands, since our knowledge of the magnitude of God's rewards and punishments would leave us with no genuine choice in the matter. After all, the benefits of any finite good that we might desire clearly pale in comparison with the infinite suffering we would have to endure as divine punishment for choosing it against his will.[14]

While Kant's primary intent in the passage from which we extracted the first version of the practical argument was to emphasize the (alleged, but not substantiated) connection between our knowledge of God and (the impossibility of) the moral worth of our actions, the passage also contained hints of this second version. For Kant does make the claim – which turned out to be irrelevant

to the first reconstruction – that we would in fact always do what God commanded, and he does also state that what would cause us to do so is primarily the fear stemming from the 'awful majesty' of God and eternity, which suggests that it is the magnitude of God's threat of eternal punishment that would be the relevant factor in our actions. While Kant seems to allow us some freedom in our actions by conceding that God, by means of his commands, cannot directly cause a disposition in us to act as we do, the entire second half of the quotation is devoted to showing that knowledge of God would achieve this result indirectly instead. In fact, the passage concludes rather dramatically by suggesting that in such a scenario we would be mere puppets, where the implicit contrast is with beings that are endowed with freedom and autonomy.

If, therefore, there is a sufficient textual basis for attributing this line of reasoning to Kant, we can proceed to reconstruct the argument in more detail and with greater precision as follows:

P1 Assume we know that God exists and threatens us with eternal and infinite punishment for non-compliance with his commands.[15]
P2 If we know that God exists and threatens us with eternal and infinite punishment for non-compliance with his commands, we are subject to a coercive threat.
P3 If we are subject to a coercive threat, then we cannot exercise morally significant freedom.
C1 We cannot exercise morally significant freedom (from P1–P3).
P4 But we can exercise morally significant freedom.
C2 P1 is false; it is not the case that we know that God exists and threatens us with eternal and infinite punishment for non-compliance with his commands.

Before turning to an evaluation of this argument, it is helpful to be clear about two points. First, the phrase 'morally significant freedom' in P3 requires some clarification, for we have, it seems, conflicting intuitions about the exact nature and consequences of coercion. Sometimes we think that coercion forces one to perform a certain action such that one could not have acted freely, or done otherwise, at all. On this view, coercion precludes (even libertarian) freedom. However, sometimes we think that coercion does not literally *force* one to perform a certain action, since it is still

possible, at least metaphysically speaking, that the person instead accept whatever the threatened consequences are, even if the person would have been absolved of any moral responsibility for the action had it been performed. The classic case of the bank robber holding a gun to my head may illustrate the view that I still *could* in some sense decide not to hand over the money, though I am not morally responsible for handing over the money should I do so. In the latter case, my action, though free in some thin metaphysical sense, is not morally significant. To say that coercion rules out that we can act with 'morally significant freedom' is therefore meant to say either that we cannot act freely at all or that we cannot act freely such that we must also be held morally responsible for our actions.

Second, P2 is a central and extremely complex assumption in the argument, since it focuses on the notion of coercion (rather than on the consequences thereof for moral worth) and subsumes the divine case under it. Even in the absence of a formal definition of a coercive threat, one can identify two factors that form a core part of its content, which can help us to see why one might think that God's threat of punishment would be an instance of it.[16] First, one person, A, threatens another, B, only if B believes that A is in a position to bring about or withhold significant negative consequences for B, and that whether A will bring about or withhold such consequences depends on whether B performs an action, C, that (B believes) A wants B to perform.[17] Second, such a threat is coercive only if the consequences in question are perceived by B to be overwhelmingly negative, where 'overwhelmingly' indicates not any absolute magnitude, but rather a magnitude that is relative to the threshold at which B is no longer thought to have a morally significant free choice about whether to do C.

Given this analysis, it can seem that knowledge of God's existence and the threat of eternal and infinite punishment for transgressions of his commands would be coercive for us (or at least satisfies two central conditions thereof). For if we know that God exists and is omnipotent, then we believe that he is in a position to bring about or withhold significant negative consequences for us, and whether he will do so depends on whether we obey his commands. We also know that the magnitude of the consequences of disobeying God's commands – infinite and eternal punishment – would be maximal and thus as overwhelming for us as anything could possibly be.[18] Thus, both of the conditions that are required for a coercive threat

are satisfied and it can therefore seem that knowledge of God's existence serves as a coercive threat to our acting freely.

Despite the prima facie plausibility of this argument, however, it suffers from two significant problems, one specific to Kant's broader project, the other for the cogency of the argument on its own terms. The first problem is that if the argument were successful, it would make Kant's overall position inconsistent. For if successful, it would show that God must remain completely hidden from us (in so far as we are to be able to act with morally significant freedom), but elsewhere in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant also presents an argument for the existence of God that he takes to be convincing. Granted, it is not a theoretical argument, the possibility of which he rejects in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but rather is based on practical considerations concerning the possibility of our acting morally and is therefore called a 'postulate'.[19] However, regardless of the subject matter on which it is based, if successful, it establishes that we must accept God's existence, which directly conflicts with God's hiddenness.

One might object that the conclusion of Kant's practical argument is not *knowledge* of God's existence, but rather something weaker, namely *belief* (*Glaube*), and maintain that this distinction removes the inconsistency. For belief, as Kant characterizes it, is an assent (literally, *für wahr halten*, or 'holding-for-true') whose justification is only subjectively sufficient and not objectively sufficient, by which he means that we do not have empirical evidence in support of the proposition, but have, none the less, other reasons in its favour that are sufficient for us to accept it.[20] However, if we do not know, but rather merely believe that God exists and will punish us for transgressing against his commands, it might seem that God's threat has lost some of its force, perhaps enough for it to no longer be coercive. If I have some doubts about whether the person making the threatening remarks will actually bring about the negative consequences and thus suspect that this person might rather be bluffing, I might well be reasonably tempted to call the bluff.

However, this objection is based on a misunderstanding of the notion of belief with which Kant's moral argument operates. Despite the objective insufficiency of the justification with which we assent to God's existence according to the moral argument, the justification is still subjectively sufficient, and the assent it supports is completely genuine and not a fictionalist acting *as if* God were to

exist (though in reality he does not). That is, the difference between knowledge and belief concerns not the *degree* either of justification or of assent (strong versus weak), but rather the *kind* of justification (objective versus subjective). As a result, belief in God's threat of eternal and infinite punishment could be just as coercive as knowledge would be and, if the belief is based on practical reason and nothing else (as it is in the argument Kant presents), our assent will be at least as strong as most of our empirical knowledge. Thus, the argument from divine coercion arises even if we believe rather than know God's existence. So this argument still encounters a problem of internal inconsistency with Kant's own argument for the existence of God.[21]

Second, the argument itself (as opposed to its relations to other Kantian doctrines) seems subject to question on three fronts. For one, the picture suggestive of the charge that divine coercion results from knowledge of God's commands and of the punishment that would accompany disobeying his commands, might be thought to be incomplete in important respects. In particular, belief in divine grace can give rise to a somewhat different picture, one that could avoid this charge. For the possibility of divine grace calls into question our putative knowledge that divine punishment will be of infinite magnitude, because God can forgive us for our seemingly inevitable trespasses such that we need not resign ourselves to eternal damnation, even if it is fully deserved.[22] Coming to a proper understanding of the extent of divine grace and of the conditions under which it might be granted is a matter of debate, but the mere possibility of divine grace affects the cogency of the argument from divine coercion by calling into question whether God's apparent threats must be viewed, all things considered, as genuine.[23]

For another, the argument simply assumes without justification that human actions are motivated by their consequences rather than their intrinsic rightness and wrongness. That is, it assumes that it is the magnitude of the divinely enforced consequences of our not doing A that can coerce us into doing A. However, one can certainly imagine rejecting such a view in favour of a position according to which one acts on the basis of the rightness or wrongness of one's action. Indeed, a similar point was made with respect to the argument from moral worth (A.1), since that argument assumed that our actions had to be motivated by inclinations rather than anything

else (whether it be by reason or the intrinsic nature of the action in question).

Moreover, this point becomes particularly important if one considers whether God's commands coincide with or diverge from our own independent moral intuitions of what is right and wrong. If they coincide, then God's 'threat' of eternal punishment could well be completely idle if I am motivated entirely by the rightness of the action. Perhaps, for instance, God threatens to punish acts of paedophilia severely, but my refraining from committing such acts is in no way based on, or motivated by that threat, especially if I have no inclination to perform such acts (e.g. if there is no possible description under which such acts can seem attractive or good to me). God's 'threat' is thus completely irrelevant to me; I act freely in refraining from such actions, even if it is true that I would not act freely, were I to have strong inclinations toward such actions that I was able to resist successfully only on account of God's threats. So, if the external commands coincide with what we think is right on independent grounds, then it is far from clear that we are truly being coerced.[24] If, by contrast, the actions God commands were to diverge from our own independent moral intuitions, the situation would admittedly be more complicated. Two scenarios, however, are clearly relevant. One is that God might want to test one's faith by issuing counter-intuitive commands (and correlative threats), but one's faith can be tested only if we exercise our free choice, so the threat cannot be so great as to remove the possibility of free action. Another is that one might think of God's 'promises' and 'threats' as opportunities for us to show that we are primarily concerned about doing the right thing and thus being morally upstanding persons of integrity rather than bowing to arbitrary external pressure.[25] On either alternative, it is possible to view God's threats not as coercive and as precluding freedom, but rather as occasions for us to demonstrate our autonomy and integrity.

Finally, even if one were to grant the connection between God's threats and the denial of morally significant freedom, the hiddenness of God still does not necessarily follow. For it seems possible, at least prima facie, that God reveal himself and yet not issue any promises or threats regarding our behaviour. That is, one could split P1 apart into two separate premises – with one concerning God's existence and the other concerning his threats – and grant the former, while denying the latter. Alternately, one could grant

that God exists and that he makes threats, but deny his threats have the specific content that would be required to destroy our freedom. (One can imagine, for example, that his threat is: 'Act freely or else!') The question then is whether it is really possible that God could make his existence known and not make the precise kinds of promises and threats that are required. Since Kant distinguishes quite explicitly between God's ontological and psychological predicates (e.g. at 28: 1020–21), it is clear that he accepts the conceptual space for this possibility.[26] Further, while it is plausible to think that given his goodness, God could not actively deceive us (e.g. by feigning indifference toward our actions on the grounds that the trivial undertakings of finite creatures such as ourselves have no importance for a being of his magnitude), it is far from clear that God could not withhold information and simply be silent on this particular issue or act in ways that were even conducive to our acting with morally significant freedom.[27]

Thus, while the argument from divine coercion can seem intuitively plausible, especially when one thinks of a direct confrontation with a divine threat, it turns out that the argument is not compelling when one considers either its consistency with Kant's other commitments or its intrinsic cogency. For it is inconsistent with Kant's practical argument for the existence of God, which is a systematically indispensable component of his larger project, and it is open to three further objections. For one, the possibility of divine grace could lead one to reject the idea that God's pronouncements should really be taken as threats. For another, even if God intends to punish those who disobey his commands, it is not necessarily the case that people must be motivated to act on the basis of these threats, especially if they have no inclination to act contrary to actions that they know, on independent grounds, to be morally required. Third, it seems that God could reveal his existence, while refraining from making any promises or threats at all, much less ones that might preclude morally significant freedom. As a result, the argument from divine coercion is not convincing.

B. Theoretical Arguments

If the practical line of argument for divine hiddenness is thus not successful in either of its versions, the theoretical line of argument still remains, that is, the possibility that God cannot decide to reveal

himself to us, because he is unable to do so, given that he is not the kind of being that we are capable of knowing, because of our cognitive limitations. Kant states the main point succinctly:

> if God should really speak to a human being, the latter could still never *know* that it was God speaking. It is quite impossible for a human being to apprehend the infinite by his senses, distinguish it from sensible beings, and *be acquainted with* it as such [*ihn woran kenne solle*] (7: 63).

After first briefly articulating (1) the basic framework that Kant establishes for considering the possibility that we might have knowledge of God, I consider four different arguments for the hiddenness of God that are based on Kant's explicit claims about God not being an object of experience – though there are significant differences between how direct or indirect the experience might be in each case.[27] The first two arguments, which are based on understanding God either as an object that could not be given to us in space and time (2) or as an unconditioned object (3) are not, I suggest, fully convincing. The second two arguments, which are based on conceiving of God either as a perfect being (4) or as infinite (5), are, by contrast, considerably more plausible. While other thinkers, such as Hume, might agree wholeheartedly with the thrust of these arguments, Kant is in a unique position to support them more fully, given his reflections on the nature and limits of our cognitive abilities, yet *without* thereby relying on the more controversial features of his analysis of cognition that others might find objectionable (6). As a result, Kant's explanation of the hiddenness of God advances considerations that non-Kantians could accept as well.

B.1. On the Conditions of Knowledge and their Application to God

According to Kant, two conditions must be met for an object to be experienced, or known: (1) the object must be *given* to us in intuition (either directly or indirectly, e.g. via inference from immediate experience), where intuition for us must be spatial and temporal; and (2) the object must be *thought* through concepts, or grasped by means of certain forms of thought, which, when stripped of all empirical content, are called categories. Thus, to take an ordinary empirical case, I can know, or experience, the book in front of me (that it is heavy, or at rest) because (1) it is given to me through my senses (that of sight or touch) and (2) I have the concept of 'book',

which I am justified in applying to that object whenever it is given to me in the appropriate way (e.g. when the object is given to me in intuition such that it displays in some manner the various features or 'marks' that are contained in the concept). The position Kant develops in detail in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is naturally much more complex, involving numerous controversial features, but these two very basic conditions, which are intuitively plausible in their own right, represent the core of his account.[29]

If we apply these two conditions to the case of God, we obtain the following two questions: (1) Could God be given to us in intuition? (2) Do we have a concept of God? We can immediately see that the second question is, in one rather trivial sense, unproblematic. We must have at least a rudimentary concept of God (e.g. as, minimally, a perfect creator of the world) in so far as we are able to ask what it is that is supposed to be hidden in the first place. That is, the fact that we have a concept of God is presupposed by our very questions concerning his existence and hiddenness. As a result, difficulties concerning our ability to know God's existence must involve, at least in part, the first question pertaining to how God could be given to us through our senses. As we shall see, however, Kant's arguments end up depending on answers to both questions, albeit in different ways.

B.2. God's Existence in Space and Time

In what could appear to be the most straightforward Kantian line of argument for divine hiddenness, one might suggest that God cannot be known because he would have to be given to us in space and time, but this cannot happen since God's essence or features are incompatible with his being spatio-temporal. There are numerous ways in which one might develop the details of this line of argument. For example, in his General Remarks on the Transcendental Aesthetic added to the second edition of the first *Critique*, Kant objects that if space and time were not forms of intuition, but rather forms of things in themselves (which is how he understands Newton's position), then (i) God would have to exist in space and time and (ii) space and time would also condition God's existence, but this latter claim contradicts the orthodox conception of God as a completely unconditioned being (B71–72). Alternately, one might think that if God existed in space and time and space and time were, as Kant maintains, forms of intuition and, according to the strictures

of Transcendental Idealism, ideal, or subject-dependent, then God would have to be, at least in part, ideal, or subject-dependent, which might seem to be counterintuitive.[30]

Though these arguments are worth pursuing in greater detail, rather than engaging in long-standing discussions of whether or not space and time are forms of intuition and what follows from such an assertion for God's existence, I propose to focus on the following line(s) of thought. God cannot be given to us in *space*, because anything spatial, such as matter, must be, Kant thinks, infinitely divisible, whereas God is traditionally thought to be simple and thus completely indivisible.[31] In his lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion, Kant explicitly argues that God is also not in *time* on the following grounds: 'if God were in time, he would have to be limited. But now he is a *realissimus*, and consequently he is not in time' (28: 1039). As a result, one might argue that since God cannot be given to us in either space or time, God cannot be an object of knowledge for us.[32]

The most immediately puzzling feature of this argument is Kant's claim that anything that exists in time is necessarily limited, since it hardly sounds as if it is analytic and yet no support is provided on its behalf. The claim is clarified to a certain extent by Kant's discussion of the eternity of God later in his lectures on religion. There he asserts:

> the existence of a thing in time is always a succession of parts in time, one after the other. Duration in time is, so to speak, a continuous disappearing and a continuous beginning. We can never live through a certain year without already having lived through the previous one. But none of this can be said of God, since he is unalterable. Hence, since it is a continuous limitation, time must be opposed in quality to an *ens realissimum*. (28: 1043–1044)

Again, we encounter the claim that existing in time is to be viewed as a limitation and thus as something that is incompatible with God as a most real being, but now we can see Kant hinting at why he thinks that this must be the case: an object existing in time is thought to involve a continuous appearing and disappearing as its states come into and go out of existence at each moment of time. Since God is immutable, it is clear that his state could not come into and go out of existence continuously and that God therefore cannot exist in

time. And since objects must be given to us in time to be known, God cannot be known by us.

However, as soon as the argument is spelled out further in this way, it is clear that its force is limited. For it depends on a very specific understanding of how objects exist in time, namely as a series of continuous appearings and disappearings of an object's states. If one were to conceive of God's existence in time differently, the argument would no longer hold. Whether rightly or wrongly, Kant explicitly rejects as contradictory the idea that 'all the consecutiveness of time be thought as simultaneous in God' (28: 1044) (i.e. that God is *simultaneously* aware of states that we know to occur *successively*). However, even if we grant Kant this controversial point, it does still seem that one could represent God as existing in time in the minimal sense that he exists at every moment in time, without thereby being committed to the further claim that God's states come into and go out of existence at each moment of time. Since God's state never changes, there is no reason to think that his state comes into, only in order to go out of, existence. Instead, it seems possible that he is eternal in the sense that he always exists in one and the same unchanging state.[33]

If one could know God as temporal in this very restricted sense, one might still object that he could not be given to us in *space* and that he must for that reason be hidden (if one also concedes that inner sense must get its objects from outer sense). Granted, if God were related to space by having a particular organic body enclosed in a limited region of space as human beings do, then one would be forced into the difficult, but perhaps not impossible position of attributing a kind of finitude to an infinite being. However, just as attempting to attribute temporality to God required careful articulation of God's immutability and eternity, so too trying to ascribe spatiality to God might simply call for a more nuanced understanding of God's omnipresence.

Specifically, one could claim that God is not present in space in virtue of the same factors that finite bodies are, namely by means of the exercise of attractive and repulsive forces.[34] Instead, God could be present throughout space (and thus in all spaces) in some other way.[35] For example, one might think that God *concurs* in the activity of all finite bodies such that they are jointly able to fill determinate regions of space.[36] That is, if finite substances cannot be the ultimate source of their own existence and activities, but instead

require divine concourse, as is commonly (though not universally) held among philosophical theologians in the early modern period, then God might be said to be present in every region of space that bodies occupy by means of his concourse.[37] In this way, God could be omnipresent without being limited, since he exists at every point in space and yet is not acted on by other bodies that occupy other regions of space by means of their own finite activities. Therefore, there is, it seems, an acceptable sense in which God could be viewed as omnipresent in space without being limited, just as there was for God's eternal existence in time. Accordingly, it does seem possible, at least in principle, that God could exist in space and time in these ways.[38]

However, it is one thing for God to exist in space and time, another to be given to us therein. Put slightly differently, even if it were granted that God exists in space and time in the manner described above, could we *experience* God as such? If it is possible for us to experience finite substances as finite and as standing in need of God's concourse at all times, then we could, it seems, also (at least indirectly) experience God as existing in space and time. Accordingly, for this argument for the hiddenness of God to be convincing, one would have to argue that we could not experience finite substances in this way, but it is unclear how this requirement could be met. In fact, given that Kant identifies space and time as forms of intuition, one might think (though incorrectly, in my view) that every object given in space and time is thereby knowable, which suggests that no argument against the possibility of experiencing God in this way could be developed (since it would violate this principle). As a result, this particular argument for the hiddenness of God, while not obviously false, also does not appear to be capable of carrying much independent weight.

B.3. God as an unconditioned object

Since it is not impossible that God could exist in space and time and on that account be an object of experience, it is natural to turn to other features contained in the concept of God that Kant emphasizes to see whether they are inconsistent with God being an object of experience. One of the most fundamental ways that Kant has of conceiving of God is as the unconditioned, more specifically, as an unconditioned object that contains conditions for the conditioned objects that we experience in the world (e.g. A559/B587). This

way of describing God follows directly from his more systematic interests in two ways. First, Kant characterizes reason as the faculty that starts with our judgements about conditioned objects and then searches for their conditions until it attains completeness (or absolute totality) in the series of conditions (e.g. A408ff./B435ff.). Pursued along one dimension, one naturally arrives at the idea of God as the unconditioned condition of the world. Second, Kant's interest in the possibility of metaphysics proper (as consisting of synthetic a priori claims) makes it important for him to find a way to characterize God in terms that can also be used to describe the other objects of traditional metaphysics, such as the immortality of the soul, the world as a totality, and our freedom (Bxxx). Given this broader philosophical interest, it is important for Kant to think of God as an unconditioned condition of the world.

While Kant seems to treat both the notion of a condition and the correlative notion of the unconditioned as primitives – at least to the extent that he does not provide any explicit definition of either one – one can form a first intuitive grasp of them by considering the examples he gives of unconditioned objects.[39] Kant repeatedly asserts that our free or spontaneous actions are unconditioned and what he has in mind is that such actions are first causes (i.e. causes that are not caused by any prior event to bring about the effects that they do). Kant also describes the world as a totality as an unconditioned object. In this case, his idea is not that the world as a totality is uncaused – since it may well be caused by God or some other being – but rather at least that its primary features are not determined by anything else. Specifically, certain spatio-temporal features of those objects that constitute the world are not determined by anything without, for there is no reference point external to them with respect to which they could be understood properly as far as, for example, their spatio-temporal locations are concerned. God, I take it, is unconditioned in both of these senses. God is obviously not caused by anything else, so he is metaphysically independent and self-sufficient. Nor must one appeal to anything else to understand God's nature, so his nature is explanatorily independent as well.

Now given that Kant not only characterizes God as an unconditioned object, but also attaches systematic weight to this characterization, one might naturally think that this characterization immediately points to his reason for thinking that God cannot be given to us in intuition. For if no unconditioned object can be

given to us in intuition, that is, if all objects that are given to us must be conditioned, then God cannot be given to us in intuition and Kant will have given us a principled account of the hiddenness of God. Moreover, there is clear textual evidence that Kant is committed to the claim that no unconditioned object can be given to us in intuition. In his resolution to the Antinomy of Pure Reason he explicitly remarks: 'For the absolutely unconditioned is not encountered in experience at all' (A510/B538).

Unfortunately, however, Kant never provides any explicit argument for this claim in its most general form. That is, nowhere does he explain why the unconditioned could not be given to us in intuition. The mere fact that something is an object of knowledge does not analytically entail that it must be conditioned in the relevant sense. Even if it is true that objects must satisfy the conditions of the possibility of experience, it does not follow that these objects are thereby conditioned in the relevant sense because the notion of an epistemic condition that is intended in the phrase 'conditions of the possibility of experience' is distinct from the various notions of condition that Kant has in mind in calling God an unconditioned object.

Moreover, the claim is not obviously true. It seems possible, at least prima facie, that one could encounter an object that was not conditioned by anything else and that did not depend on anything else for its primary features. For in saying that an object is unconditioned one is making only a negative assertion, namely that it is not conditioned by anything else, but it could turn out, it seems, that after investigating a particular object exhaustively (or as exhaustively as is reasonable to establish knowledge) one might find no respect in which it depends on anything else, in which case the conclusion that it is unconditioned would seem warranted.[40]

That Kant does not present such support is particularly unfortunate in so far as it would represent a significant systematic advantage for him to have a general argument that would also immediately rule out the possibility that we could experience the other objects that he characterizes as unconditioned. For then Kant would have a justification that went a long way toward establishing that all of these objects of traditional metaphysics must be viewed not as knowable appearances, but rather as things in themselves that lie beyond the purview of our cognitive abilities, and he would thus have demonstrated central aspects of Transcendental Idealism.

As it is, this kind of argument to the hiddenness of God (and to Transcendental Idealism) is not possible.

B.4. God's Perfection

In his discussion of rational theology in his lectures on religion, Kant distinguishes between transcendental, natural, and moral theology and articulates different concepts of God that would be proper to each. In transcendental theology, God is represented as the *cause* of the world, in natural theology as the *author* of the world, and in moral theology as the *ruler* of the world. Kant repeatedly claims that the concept of God that is most indispensable throughout rational theology is that of transcendental theology, since its use of purely ontological predicates allows for a determinate concept of God, unlike, for example, the concept of God employed in physico-theology, which 'can never give a determinate concept of God without transcendental theology' (28: 1008). The most prominent predicates employed in transcendental theology are those of reality, with the result, as we have seen earlier, that God is to be thought of as an *ens realissimum*, or most real being, possessing no limitations in his reality (5: 100 and 8: 400n.). As a result, 'the precise concept of God is the concept of a most perfect thing' (28: 1008).

Not only is perfection an essential feature of the determinate concept underlying the rest of rational theology, but it also provides Kant with a powerful argument for the hiddenness of God. For immediately after marking the contrast between precise and imprecise concepts of God, he objects to the possibility that we might have experience commensurate with this precise concept: 'But I can never derive such a concept from experience, for the highest perfection can never be given to me in any *possible* experience' (28: 1008, my emphasis).[41] Shortly thereafter, he makes a point one could easily be familiar with from Hume, namely that our experience is, in effect, too small for such a concept:

> Our experience of the world is too limited to permit us to infer a highest reality from it. Before we could argue that the present world is the most perfect of all possible ones and prove from this that its author is the highest perfection, we would have to know the whole totality of the world, every means and every end which is reached by it. (28: 1009)

Kant's argument here might seem to be the simple empiricist point that our experience of the world happens to be too restricted

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415400001357 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in scope to allow for experience of God; since we do not know what is happening outside of a very small part of the universe, we are not justified in assuming that a perfect being must be responsible for it.

However, in both of these quotations, Kant goes beyond what we happen to experience of this world, citing *possible* experience and *possible* worlds. And in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant uses the precision of the concept of God to express the stronger argument explicitly.

> Since we can be acquainted with this world only with respect to a small part, *and can even less compare it with all possible worlds*, we can infer from its order, purposiveness, and magnitude a wise, good, powerful, and so forth author, but not his omniscience, omnibenevolence, omnipotence and so forth. One can also even grant: that one is authorized to supplement this unavoidable deficiency by means of a permitted, entirely reasonable hypothesis, namely that if wisdom, beneficence, and so forth are all displayed in all the parts that offer themselves to our closer cognition, it will be exactly the same in all the rest and that it is therefore reasonable to attribute all possible perfection to the author of the world; but these are not inferences through which we think something to ourselves based on our insight, but rather only rationales that one can attribute to us and yet still require a recommendation from elsewhere to make use of it. The concept of God therefore always remains, on an empirical path (of physics), a not precisely determined concept of the perfection of the first being, in order to view it as appropriate for the concept of a divinity (but nothing at all is to be accomplished with metaphysics, in its transcendental part). (5:139, my emphasis)

Part of what Kant is saying here is not merely that the experience that we in fact have of this world is too limited to justify the ascription of perfections to God as the cause of the world, but also that even if we were justified, as we are not, in assuming that the rest of this world is like the part of the world that we have experienced, one would still not be warranted in attributing perfection to the cause of this world.[42] For as Kant points out, to determine that this world is perfect (so as to draw the further inference from the perfection of the world to the perfection of God, which, though potentially problematic, can be granted for the sake of argument), one would have to have knowledge not only of the entirety of this world, but also of all other possible worlds such that the ascription of perfection to this world could be justified.[43] For we would have to know that no other possible world is better than this one and it

seems impossible to determine that without significant knowledge of all other possible worlds.

However, on what kind of grounds could we justify such knowledge? Straightforwardly empirical grounds seem inadequate in so far as they speak merely to how things happen to be in this world and thus do not provide any information about other possible worlds. Now, unlike some, Kant is open to the possibility of a priori knowledge, but even Kant's comparatively robust account of a priori knowledge seems insufficient in this case. For one, synthetic (or substantive) a priori claims will hold only for a limited set of possible worlds, namely those that can be considered by beings having space and time as forms of intuition. On Kant's account, space and time are not absolutely necessary features of any possible world, but rather features that are necessary only for those worlds in which we could have 'experience' in Kant's technical sense. For another, even if we could somehow have (very general) a priori knowledge of all other possible worlds, what would be required is to have knowledge of every possible world's degree of perfection (so as to make the comparison possible). If one grants that each world's degree of perfection would depend on a wide range of specific (and highly empirical) events that occur in it, then it follows that we could not have a priori knowledge of it.[44] In short, since we do not have appropriate knowledge of the relevant features of other possible worlds, we cannot know that this world is the most perfect of all possible worlds, or that God must be the perfect being who is the cause of it.[45]

It is worth remarking that Kant is implicitly criticizing the potential misuse of a characteristically Leibnizian idea. Leibniz inferred – whether rightly or wrongly, can remain undecided – that since God is perfect, the world he creates must be the best of all possible worlds.[46] Anything less would entail a lack of perfection, a defect in God's knowledge, power, or goodness. According to Leibniz, our knowledge of the perfection of the world depends entirely on our *prior* knowledge of God's perfection, and not on our knowledge that all other possible worlds are less perfect than this one. Kant is pointing out that it would be a mistake to turn the entailment relation around and attempt to use our experience of the world to establish the existence of a perfect cause of it. As long as we have no substantial access to the relevant features of other possible worlds that is independent of our knowledge of God, we have no

grounds for asserting that we can experience either a perfect world or a perfect being that would be the cause of it. So even if ours is a perfect world, created by a perfect God, our cognitive limitations – in this case our lack of sufficient knowledge of other possible worlds – would keep us from knowing it as such.

B.5. The Infinity of God

A final line of argument for the hiddenness of God is based on the conception of God as an infinite being, that is, as having the infinite attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. As we saw above in the course of his discussion of the postulate of God's existence in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant distinguishes between being very powerful, knowledgeable, and good, which are attributes that can be ascribed to finite creatures, and being omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent, which alone can be attributed to God.[47] In light of this conception of God, one can argue for the conclusion that no being possessing such attributes could be given to us in sensibility, or, to put it more precisely, we could not know that we were encountering a being that had precisely those attributes rather than lesser versions thereof.[48] In short, since God's infinite attributes extend beyond what could be given to us, one can assert that God must be hidden from us.

The central question that arises for this line of argument concerns why the infinite attributes of God could not be given to us. Rather than investigating the nature of our empirical evidence to see what it supports – a task Kant undertakes in the first *Critique*, where he ends up with a conclusion that supports this line of thought – what turns out to be crucial is seeing precisely how Kant understands God's infinite attributes. In his lectures on religion Kant attempts to determine how to ascribe only realities to God as an *ens realissimum*, and his primary concern is to make sure that none of the limitations that attach to the realities that we experience end up being attributed to God. If we remove all of the limitations from the realities we want to ascribe to God, we are then left with an understanding of God as an unlimited, or infinite, being, a being that is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.

But precisely how is the infinitude of God's attributes to be understood? Certain ways of understanding God's infinitude are, Kant thinks, unacceptable. His main target in this context is the notion of mathematical infinity. For it is, he claims, a concept that

can represent not an absolute magnitude, but rather only one that is relative to us. As he puts it: 'infinity never determines *how* great something is; for it does not determine the measure (or unit)' (28: 1017).[49] He illustrates this claim with the example of representing, or measuring, infinite space. Whether one chooses miles or diameters of the earth as one's unit, one will represent space as being larger than any number of the units chosen, and thus as infinite. At the same time, although both magnitudes are infinite, the one infinity will be greater than the other. Kant infers from this that:

> the concept of infinity expresses only a relationship to our incapacity to determine the concept of magnitude, because the magnitude in question is greater than every number I can think of, and hence gives me no determinate concept of the magnitude itself. Fundamentally, therefore, when I call an object infinite, the only advantage this gives me is that I gain an insight into my inability to express the magnitude of this object in numbers . . . but in this way I can never learn to recognize its absolute magnitude. (28: 1017)

That is, the notion of mathematical infinity represents not an intrinsic property of God – the absolute magnitude of his existence or properties – but rather a limitation of us – our inability to represent God's absolute magnitude. Unlike the argument based on God's perfection, where the problem was that our *evidence* is insufficient to amount to a proper justification, the crucial point here lies with the *concept* of God not being determinate enough to deliver the kind of content that might allow for knowledge of God. Kant explicitly draws this conclusion as follows:

> Thus we see that I cannot come a single step further in my cognition of God by applying the concept of mathematical infinity to him. For through this concept I learn only that I can never express the concept of God's greatness in numbers. But this gives me no insight into God's absolute greatness. (28: 1018)

If the mistake Kant is warning against is that of attempting to understand infinity in mathematical terms, then one could presumably avoid this mistake simply by rejecting the analogy with mathematics and employing concepts that are more appropriate. Kant explicitly endorses this idea when he notes:

> I cannot see why I ought to express an ontological concept . . . in terms of mathematical infinity. Should I not rather use a term congruent with the

> concepts of this science, instead of permitting an ambiguity by usurping an expression from another science, thus running the risk of letting an alien concept creep in as well? (28: 1018)

But then the question is: What is the appropriate concept? Kant considers the following option: 'Might we perhaps succeed in finding this measure [of God's absolute greatness] by means of the concept of *metaphysical* infinity? But what is the meaning of "metaphysical infinity"?' (28: 1018). In the course of answering these questions, Kant repeats the familiar claim that one can attribute to God only realities. The crucial issue here is how we can represent these realities properly (i.e. as expressing 'God's absolute greatness').

Kant explains that such realities can be represented in two ways, either by being given through pure reason, independently of experience, or by being encountered in the world of sense. Kant endorses this first way, but notes that it suffers from serious limitations:

> I may ascribe the first kind of reality to God without hesitation, for realities of this kind apply to things in general and determine them through pure understanding. Here no experience is involved and the realities are not even affected by sensibility. Hence if I predicate them of God I need not fear that I am confusing him with an object of sense. (28: 1020)

If we represent God as having infinite attributes, where the infinitude of his attributes is understood in terms of pure realities that are represented solely by the pure understanding (or reason), then there is no problem about ascribing these attributes to a proper concept of God. However, in that case one has conceded that the object of this concept of God cannot be given through sensibility, which, in light of Kant's requirement that objects must be given to us to be known, is simply to concede that God must be hidden from us.

What is the case, however, if we attempt to understand God's attributes by considering those predicates that could also be ascribed to objects that we experience through our own senses? Kant describes the results in this case as follows:

> What kind of predicates shall we take from experience and be able to unite with the concept of God? – Nothing but pure realities! But in the whole world there is no thing that has *pure* reality, but rather all things which can be given through experience are *partim realia*, *partim negativa* . . . Hence I must first proceed *via negativa*; that is, I must carefully separate out everything sensible inhering in my representation of this or

> that reality, and leave out everything imperfect and negative, and ascribe to God the pure reality which is left over. But this is extremely difficult, for often very little or nothing is left over after I reject the limitations; or at least I can never think of the pure positive without the sensible element which is woven into my representation of it . . . But if the negative element cannot be separated without canceling the concept at the same time, then in this case I will not be able to predicate of God the concept at all [*so werde ich im letztern Falle den Begriff gar nicht von Gott prädiciren können*]. (28: 1021)

If I consider the predicates that I attribute to typical sensible objects (including predicates expressing power, knowledge, and goodness), then these predicates will be a mixture of a reality and a negation of that reality such that the relevant object has a specific, limited degree of that kind of predicate. However, since God is an *ens realissimus* endowed with omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, no such limitations can be ascribed to him. As a result, to have any chance of representing God one must separate off the limitations that attach to the sensible predicates under consideration, in which case two outcomes are possible. (A) If one can separate the limitations from these predicates, then there are two possibilities. (1) Either nothing is left, in which case one is not in fact ascribing any content to God in ascribing the predicate to God and there would be no way for us to know that we were experiencing such a being, given that the concept would supply us with no features that we could look for in our experience. (2) Or 'very little' is left, in which case the concept contains insufficient content to represent God in a way that would allow us to distinguish experience of God from that of other beings.[50] (B) If, by contrast, the limitations cannot be fully separated from the predicate, then it is immediately clear that one cannot ascribe the predicate to God, since doing so would be to ascribe limitations to a being that exists without limitations. As a result, no knowledge of God as an *ens realissimus* is forthcoming via the 'way of negation' and the concept of God that contains the infinite attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, is not one whose object we could know.

Kant's focus on the concept of infinity and on the limitations that affect its content thus puts him in a position to develop a sophisticated and plausible argument for the hiddenness of God. While it is uncontroversial to note that God is an unlimited, or infinite, being, Kant astutely points out that the content of this concept is highly

problematic with respect to how we might experience its object. For regardless of whether one focuses on a mathematical sense of infinity or different ways of understanding it in a metaphysical sense, insight into and experience of God's absolute or infinite intrinsic magnitude remains elusive.[51]

B.6. Hume and Kant on our Cognitive Limitations

If one reflects at this point on Kant's overall goal and his strategy for attaining it by means of the arguments articulated above, one might suspect that he is following Hume's lead on this issue. Both deny that God is an object we could experience, and there are some striking analogies between several of his arguments and the well-known reflections that Hume presents on this topic in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1966) and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1977).[52] In fact, at a very general level, both thinkers hold that our cognitive abilities are so limited that the evidence we could obtain by means of them is insufficient for us to justify knowledge of the existence of God as traditionally conceived and that God, if he exists, must therefore be hidden.[53]

However, it would be a mistake to make too much of these similarities and to infer that Kant's best arguments do not go beyond Hume's considerations in any significant way. Two points of contrast are instructive in the present context. First, Kant's account of our cognitive abilities allows the argument based on God's perfection to depend on a less robust assumption about what evidence we have and to support a more persuasive argument. To this end, recall Hume's and Kant's appeals to experience when they argue that one could not acquire knowledge of God as a perfect being (in B.4.). Hume's claim was that we could not infer to God's existence on the basis of the empirical evidence actually available to us, because we have experienced only a small corner of the universe for only a very short period of time. Actual experience does not warrant, Hume thinks, an inference to an architect of the world, much less to an omnipotent creator.[54] Kant, by contrast, claimed that we could not infer God's existence even if we prescinded from these contingent limitations and assumed that our experience were much more complete than it in fact is, because we cannot in principle have the kind of experience that would be required to establish God's perfection. In short, on Kant's account, regardless of what

our actual experience happens to be, no possible experience could warrant knowledge of God's existence.

To bring out more clearly the relative strengths of these two strategies, imagine that someone claimed to have an impression of the perfection of the world (and was also inclined to infer on that basis the existence of God as its perfect cause).[55] Now Hume's first response to such a case would surely be to note that he himself lacks such an impression. However, if this were all Hume had to say he would be in a weak position, since he would have to concede that such an impression is possible in principle, given that he places no principled restrictions on what impressions we can have. As a result, Hume would be forced to appeal to the particular contents of other impressions he has in the hopes that they conflict with and thus somehow disqualify the impression of the perfection of the world in question. Although the various apparent evils in the world might seem to put Hume on somewhat stronger ground, the strength of his response is still limited, since others may well have experienced more (or different parts) of the world and may have come to see how what appear at first glance to be imperfections in the world are merely apparent. This argument thus ends up being decided by what kind of interpretation one can impose on the complex and variable impressions that we have of the world and how plausible each interpretation is, but, unlike the case of the self, there is little reason to expect widespread agreement and a high degree of certainty about the results here. In short, the complexity, contingency, and flexibility that Hume associates with our actual experiences renders him unable to articulate an especially robust response to such a claim.

Kant, by contrast, is in a position to exclude such a claim on principled grounds. For his notion of possible experience and the account of our cognitive faculties that supports it rules out that we could have an impression of the perfection of the world. For on Kant's account, whatever impressions we have, they must be of objects that are given to us, and objects can be given to us only if they exist and act on us. As a result, we can have impressions only of the actual world, not of other possible worlds, since all merely possible worlds do not stand in causal relations with us. However, if an impression of the perfection of this world entails that we also have an impression of all other possible worlds (an entailment established by the argument from perfection described above), it follows from the fact that we cannot have impressions of these

other possible worlds that we also cannot have an impression of the perfection of this world.

Now it is true that Kant's account is more complicated and robust than Hume's in so far as it allows that we can have knowledge that is not based on sensory impressions, and thus that we can have some knowledge of other possible worlds, but he also wants to insist that even so, there are strict limits to our knowledge of other possible worlds. Specifically, any object of knowledge, whether actual or not, must be an object of possible experience (e.g. must be able to be given to us through our forms of intuition). Because some possible worlds would presumably not satisfy those conditions (e.g. those that are merely metaphysically possible and not also epistemically possible for us), Kant will hold that we cannot have substantive (i.e. non-analytic) knowledge about them (which would presumably include their relative degree of perfection). While Kant goes on to make further claims about the conditions of the possibility of experience (e.g. that space and time are our forms of intuition and, in fact, nothing more than that), these more controversial claims are not required for present purposes.[56] Rather, all that is needed to establish the conclusion more firmly than Hume's argument does is that we cannot have knowledge of *all* other possible worlds, and that is both much less controversial and much less complicated than what is required by the strategy that Hume is forced to pursue, though the latter does call forth an impressive display of rhetorical skill. In sum, Kant's focus on the forms through which objects are given to us rather than on the content that we happen to receive through them allows him to see more clearly how possible rather than actual experience places limits on the empirical evidence that we could have, limits that preclude the possibility that we could have knowledge of God's existence.

The second relevant point of contrast between Kant's and Hume's accounts of our cognitive limitations concerns not the nature of the evidence that would be needed to justify knowledge of God, but rather the requirements that derive from the concepts involved in such knowledge. On Hume's account, the main limitation that pertains to what he calls ideas is that they must be derived from sense impressions. Ideas are for him merely fainter copies of original impressions and he rejects both innate ideas and any process of abstraction by means of which ideas could be formed that might be so different in kind that they could not in principle

match up with our impressions. Now according to Hume, our idea of God is not derived directly from an impression of God, but rather is formed indirectly by taking finite exemplars of certain properties (e.g. the strength of an athlete, the intelligence of a scholar), extending them as far as we can in our imagination (to what he calls omnipotence and omniscience) and then conjoining them into a single entity (a perfect, infinite being). The question then is just whether our empirical evidence or the causal reasoning based on it can validate an idea our imagination has created from sensory materials in this way. Hume presents a sustained argument that it cannot do so in the case of God, but it is crucial to note that his argument is based, as we saw, on the content of the impressions that he happens to have rather than on his account of ideas. For the limitations that attach to our idea of God, according to Hume, derive simply from our imagination and thus do not suggest that there must be a fundamental or principled mismatch between our idea of God and the relevant evidence.[57] Instead, we lack knowledge of God's existence because of the (limited) nature of the evidence that we happen to have.

Kant, by contrast, acknowledges a difference in kind between the sensory impressions by means of which empirical objects are immediately given to us, and the concepts that our understanding uses to think and cognize objects. In fact, some of the most central philosophical and systematic passages in Kant's corpus (e.g. the Transcendental Deduction and the Schematism) are devoted precisely to the task of showing the conditions under which the gap between sensory impressions and a priori concepts can be closed. The interesting point in the current context, however, is that limitations unique to our concept of God are what drive Kant's argument concerning the infinity of God (in B.5). One might think, for example, that the notion of mathematical infinity can be understood clearly and precisely, which would be advantageous to us in representing God (since these features might seem to help us to attain the determinate concept of God characteristic of transcendental theology). However, Kant shows quite effectively that this concept is not in fact in a position to capture the absolute magnitude of God, since it is based on our selection of a unit that establishes nothing more than an indeterminate relation between God's magnitude and that of other things, which means that we are representing only an arbitrary and relative rather than an absolute and intrinsic

concept of God's magnitude. Thus it is the very structure of the concept of mathematical infinity that precludes it from being used for knowledge of God's nature, rather than the evidence we might accumulate.

The concept of metaphysical infinity, to which Kant turns as the sole remaining possible concept with which to understand God's magnitude, suffers from a different set of limitations. If the properties (or realities) that a metaphysically infinite being would have to have to an unlimited degree are identified through pure reason and devoid of sensory content, then the corresponding concept of God cannot by definition be fully satisfied by any object given to us in experience.[58] In this case, the concept has been formed by means of a process that builds epistemic limits right into its content and rules of application.[59] If the properties (or realities) that such a being would have are identified through encounters with objects in the world of sense, the situation is more complicated. Given Kant's view that all instances of sensory content involve negations that are inconsistent with God's nature, they must be separated off, but the content that remains is, at best, extremely limited. In fact, the limitations are so severe that the most pressing question is whether any content remains at all or rather whether the concept is altogether devoid of content. Kant ultimately holds that the concept of God does have some meaningful content, but given the limitations in the content of our concepts, the very content of the concept of God keeps us from applying it in experience. In sum, because Kant's account of our cognitive powers allows him to articulate both a plausible distinction between concepts and sensory impressions and, as a result, limitations to the content of certain concepts, he is in a position to explain more clearly and powerfully than is Hume why our concept of God is such that finding evidence that might support it turns out to be impossible.

We can thus see how two of Kant's arguments for the hiddenness of God arise from basic features of his account of our cognitive abilities and the limitations therein. The argument based on God's perfection depends on Kant's analysis of the conditions under which objects can be given to us (or, to put it in more contemporary terms, on the limits to the kind of evidence we could have), while his argument concerning God's infinite magnitude turns on limitations that adhere to the concept of infinity. We can also see how these arguments rely on premises that are more fundamental than

Hume's, but without relying on distinctively Kantian assumptions.[60] Instead, Kant emphasizes the conditions that hold for objects to be given to us and the independent content of the concept of God for which we might try to find appropriate evidence. The contrasts between the foundational features of Hume's and Kant's accounts of our cognitive abilities thus turn out to illuminate the nature of the assumptions of Kant's arguments, showing them to be plausible in their own right even if they are often overshadowed by other more controversial claims Kant makes in conjunction with them.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that Kant presents two different kinds of arguments for the hiddenness of God, one practical, the other theoretical. The practical argument is based on the idea that if we had knowledge of God's existence, we would be unable to act in ways that God would want us to. On one version of the argument, our actions could have no moral worth; on the other, we could not act with morally significant freedom. Unfortunately, neither of these arguments is successful, since both assume, controversially, that fear of divine punishment and hope for divine reward would trump any other motives that we might have and that God could not reveal himself without also issuing threats and promises. The theoretical line of argument, by contrast, appears more promising. While two versions of this line of argument are not fully convincing, two others are much more plausible. For the evidence available to us is insufficient to support the claim that God is perfect, and our concept of God's infinite magnitude is too thin to represent God adequately or to give us content robust enough to identify God on that basis. One striking feature of both of these arguments is that they follow straightforwardly from basic features of Kant's account of our cognitive faculties and their limitations, features that differ from Hume's but without being so distinctively Kantian to be unacceptable outside the context of Kant's Critical project. As a result, Kant's Critical philosophy provides an especially helpful framework for articulating one significant account of why God must be hidden from us.[61]

Notes

[1] Notable examples of discussions on these topics include: Robert Adams, 'Moral Faith', (1995); Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (1974); and Allen Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (1970).

[2] There are many dimensions to the issue that goes under the name 'the hiddenness of God'. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser distinguish, for example, between an existential and an evidential problem in *Divine Hiddenness* (2002). Peter Van Inwagen, in 'What is the Problem of the Hiddenness of God' (2002), distinguishes between moral and epistemological problems, and restricts the moral problem to the problem of evil. As we will see below, Kant is interested in both the moral problem (though not restricted to the problem of evil) and the evidential or epistemological problem.

[3] In this paper I abstract from the complicated issue of the relation between theoretical and practical reason, as well as from Kant's acceptance of rational *Glaube* and his adherence to the so-called 'moral argument' for God's existence (with the exception of a few paragraphs in section A.2). For a provocative discussion of the 'unity of reason' see Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason* (1994), especially chapters 3 and 4.

[4] For a now classic discussion of Kant's criticism of the ontological argument, see Plantinga (1974).

[5] See, for example, Neiman (1994: 162–163), for an apparent endorsement of Kant's argument. Indeed, Neiman thinks that the argument contains 'a critique of all forms of positive theology far more devastating than the theoretical incoherence of which they were accused in the first *Critique*' (1994: 163).

[6] The range of accounts here is quite broad. At the one extreme is the belief that God remains hidden for the simple reason that he does not exist. This view has been defended by J. L. Schellenberg in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (1993). At the other extreme is either the voluntarist claim that God needs no reason to act as he does, or the view, defended by Jonathan Kvanig in 'Divine Hiddenness: What is the Problem?' (2002), that there is no problem of the hiddenness of God. There is of course a host of other possibilities between these extremes.

[7] All quotations from Kant's corpus will cite the volume and page number of the Academy edition (*Gesammelte Schriften,* ed. Königliche Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902–), Volumes 1–29). Translations from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* will be from Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Translations from Kant's lectures on metaphysics will be from Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Translations from Kant's lectures on religion will be from Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood and George di

Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). In a few instances, I have made minor modifications to these translations.

[8] Interpretation of the case of Lucifer is complicated. It is generally agreed, however, that if the account derived from Christian mythology is an accurate report, as opposed to a purely metaphorical or symbolic story, Lucifer was cast out of heaven for rebelling against God. What motivated him to rebel (pride) and what form his rebellion took are less clear.

[9] In fact, (i) seems to follow from (iii), rather than to be an assumption that entails it.

[10] While this premise may not hold for Lucifer, Kant explicitly restricts this line of argument to human beings in the phrase 'as long as human nature remains as it is'. As a result, the relevance of Kant's arguments to devils or angels will not be considered in the rest of this paper.

[11] See, for example, Kant's narrative in the *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, especially at 8: 111.

[12] Lessing's view, as expressed, e.g. in *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (1780), is of course directed at the development of reason in the species rather than in the individual, but the plausibility of his claim in the case of the species derives from features of individual members of the species. It is a separate question why reason should take over what inclination is doing satisfactorily. One possibility is that reason generates the right action necessarily, whereas inclinations get it right only contingently.

[13] Kant might not be particularly bothered by these objections, since he thinks that he has adequately defended his views on the role of inclinations in our actions and moral worth. However, the third objection to the argument from divine coercion, discussed below, would apply to this argument as well and represents a problem for Kant that is not external to his larger position.

[14] For discussion of this particular argument, see Michael Murray 'Coercion and the Hiddenness of God' (1993).

[15] I focus here exclusively on punishment and whether it amounts to coercive threat. There is a question as to whether rewards could be coercive as well, since they display a structure similar to that of threats, the primary difference being that the one traffics in negative consequences of transgressions, whereas the other involves positive consequences of obedience. Since our intuitions are less clear about rewards and whether they could be coercive, I do not consider them further here.

[16] For contemporary discussion of the notion of coercion, see Robert Nozick, 'Coercion' (1969); Gideon Yaffe, 'Indoctrination, Coercion and Freedom of Will' (2003); and Arthur Ripstein, 'Authority and Coercion' (2004).

[17] This premise would need to be made much more precise since, as stated, it is open to various counter-examples. Stating this premise such that it avoids these problems would, if at all possible, require more time and space than is warranted by current purposes.

[18] One might think that punishment should be proportioned according to the magnitude of the misdeed such that one might spend only a finite amount of time in purgatory for a minor transgression. Even so, the punishments could still be overwhelming.

[19] See Wood's *Kant's Moral Religion* (1970), for detailed reconstruction and discussion of this argument.

[20] For a helpful detailed discussion of this distinction and of the broader taxonomy of attitudes that we might have toward a proposition, such as conviction, opinion, and persuasion, see Andrew Chignell, 'Belief in Kant' (2007).

[21] One might argue that this inconsistency is not necessarily problematic. For the way in which we come to have knowledge of God's existence may still be compatible with God's threat not having what Murray calls sufficient 'epistemic imminence' (1993: 32). The idea is that people may still smoke even though they know that smoking will kill them, so the threat of death, even though known by them, does not have sufficient epistemic imminence for them. However, in addition to the purely philosophical objection that the cases are not exactly analogous, given that smokers know not that smoking will kill them, but rather only that it makes this more likely, which is unlike the case of divine punishment, the exegetical question of how to understand how Kant might attempt to avoid the inconsistency still remains. Unfortunately, this extremely important topic would require detailed discussion not possible in the context of this paper.

[22] If divine grace were contingent on one believing that God exists and has issued the relevant promises and threats, then this objection would be moot, but one would need to provide an argument for this claim about divine grace.

[23] For discussion of the difficult issue of how God's forgiveness might be understood, see John Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (1996), especially chapters 2, 9, and 10.

[24] One might claim that divine external commands take precedence over other motivations and that the presence of such an external command thus amounts to coercion. However, even if examples of external commands overpowering other (e.g. straightforwardly moral) motivations can be produced, one would have to argue that such precedence was necessarily the case for divine commands.

[25] There are naturally other alternatives that one might consider here. Perhaps, for example, self-assertion is a basic value and overwhelming threats are the severest test of this value.

[26] Kant sometimes (e.g. 28: 999–1000) draws the distinction in terms of transcendental and natural predicates. Pat Kain has rightly pointed out that Kant might try to close the gap between the ontological and psychological (or transcendental and natural) predicates such that P1 could not be split into two separate premises in this way. The most promising line to pursue here would be to bring in Kant's moral argument. As noted above, these issues cannot be discussed here.

[27] One might argue that God would have to reveal not only his existence to us, but also whatever else was necessary for our flourishing and thus his commands as part of what is necessary for our salvation. However, the general principle that God would have to reveal to us whatever is necessary for our flourishing can cut both ways. For if the divine commands were coercive and morally significant free actions are a highest value, then it would follow that God could not issue any commands (if he revealed his existence to us).

[28] In some cases, the experience in question would be directly of God. In other cases, the experience would involve inferences from features of the actual world to God's existence, while yet others depend on comparisons with possible worlds.

[29] See Eric Watkins, 'Kant and the Myth of the Given' (2008), for a discussion of some of the complexities of Kant's position.

[30] One might also argue that God could not be given in space and time on the grounds that God would then stand in reciprocal causal relations with his creation, which contrasts with the traditional conception of God according to which God is not acted on by the finite substances he creates. This argument could be supported by the argument of the Third Analogy of Experience and passages from the transcripts of Kant's metaphysics lectures (28: 42, 28: 205, and especially 29: 926). I thank Karl Ameriks for reminding me of these further dimensions of Kant's position.

[31] Leibniz expressly develops this line of argument in the third letter of his correspondence with Clarke (1989: 324). Also, one need not be committed to the *infinite* divisibility of space to support this claim. It is enough if whatever God is supposed to be is divisible even to some extent. So unless God is a sub-atomic particle, 'string', or other such smallest spatial entity, God will be divisible (even if not infinitely).

[32] Kant's argument can be reconstructed as follows:

P1	Objects of experience must be given in space or time.
P2	Anything spatial is limited and divisible.
P3	God is omnipresent and indivisible.
C1	God is not spatial (and thus cannot be given in space) (from P2 and P3).
P4	Anything temporal is limited and changeable.
P4′	Anything temporal requires continuous appearing and disappearing.
P5	God is eternal and immutable (and does not continuously appear and disappear).
C2	God is not temporal (and thus cannot be given in time) (from P4/P4′ and P5).
C3	God is not an object of experience (from C1 and C2).

[33] On the basis of this kind of consideration Descartes (1985: 211) grants that God has no modes, since modes are for him features of objects

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415400001357 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that necessarily involve change (Part I, Principle 56 of *Principles of Philosophy*).

[34] For a comprehensive account of Kant's views on causality (which includes discussion of attractive and repulsive forces and how they are specific instances of his more general model of causality), see Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (2005).

[35] Newton (in the Appendix to his *Opticks*, 1730: Query 28) and Clarke (in his correspondence with Leibniz, 1989: 322) famously argue that God is immediately present to all things and that space is, as it were, the *sensorium* of God, which suggests that God is not present in space in the same sense in which bodies are.

[36] In a passage from the lectures on religion, Kant is reported to have said: 'Of the concept of matter, after I remove everything negative and sensible inhering in it I retain nothing but the concept of an externally active power, and of the concept of spatial presence if I leave out the condition of sense (i.e. space) nothing but the pure reality of presence. I will be able to apply to God, therefore, only the real itself, power and presence' (28: 1022). So if one says that God is present in space, Kant seems to be open to understanding this claim such that God is present in space not by being extended in the way in which bodies are, but rather by being the power through which bodies exist.

[37] In fact, Kant seems to suggest just such a view in his pre-Critical period in the *Nova Dilucidatio* (1: 415) and in the *Inaugural Dissertation* (2: 396, 2: 410, and 2: 414).

[38] One might develop this line of argument for the hiddenness of God further as follows. If God were to exist in space and time, then God would be ideal, on the grounds that everything in space and time is, according to Kant, ideal. However, God is the most real of beings and is thus not ideal. Therefore, God cannot exist in space and time.

However, this argument is not, I think, particularly compelling for two reasons. First, it is not clear that being real is incompatible with being ideal. For it seems possible that God could have two 'aspects' just as human beings might, one noumenal and real while the other is phenomenal and ideal. Second, even if the first objection did not hold, this argument would be of little use outside of the context of Kant scholarship, since the assumption that space and time are merely subjective and hence idealistic forms of intuition is a distinctively Kantian claim that finds little resonance elsewhere. So while the argument might be acceptable in a certain context, it would not be appropriate in a broader setting.

[39] This notion is primitive not only in the sense that Kant leaves it undefined, but also in the sense that it is a notion that is prior even to the categories. For at least the categories of substance, causality, and mutual interaction employ it.

[40] Elsewhere (unpublished), I consider various arguments Kant develops both for any unconditioned object in general and for unconditioned, that is free and spontaneous, actions in particular.

[41] Kant's argument can be reconstructed formally as follows:

P1 God is a perfect being.
('The precise concept of God is the concept of a most perfect thing' (28: 1008).)
P2 If knowledge of the perfection of the actual world cannot be justified (by any possible experience), then knowledge that there is a perfect being, namely God, cannot be justified (by any possible experience).
P3 Knowledge of the perfection of the actual world cannot be justified (by any possible experience).
('But I can never derive such a concept from experience, for the highest perfection can never be given me in any possible experience' (28: 1008).)
C1 In so far as God is perfect, God's existence cannot be known (by any possible experience).

[42] This line of argument is not entirely distinct from the physico-theological argument Kant considers and rejects in the first *Critique*, since it does depend on an inference from the perfection of the world to the perfection of the cause of the world. While the current discussion is supposed to be distinct from the traditional theistic proofs, the physico-theological argument shades into the current considerations in a way that makes reference to that argument unavoidable.

[43] This argument presupposes, as Kant seems to grant, that perfection is at least in part, a relative concept. Otherwise, the comparison to other possible worlds that Kant makes would be irrelevant. Kant acknowledges this point implicitly in his discussion of the perfection of the world in his metaphysics lectures. See, e.g. 29: 936.

[44] I am grateful to Dana Nelkin for helping me to be much clearer about the issues raised in this section in general and this paragraph in particular.

[45] Kant's argument in support of P3 can be formulated as follows:

P1′ To know that the actual world is perfect, I would have to know that no other possible world is better.
P2′ Empirical grounds are insufficient to establish that no other possible world is better than the actual world.
P3′ A priori grounds are insufficient to establish that no other possible world is better than the actual world.
P4′ All grounds of knowledge would have to be either empirical or a priori.
C1′ Knowledge of the perfection of the actual world cannot be justified.

[46] See Robert Adams, 'Must God Create the Best?' (1972).

[47] See 5: 131.

[48] That is, one could experience a being that happened to be infinite, but one could not experience that it was an infinite being.

[49] I read Kant's claim about the infinity of space at A32 as invoking this kind of mathematical notion.

[50] Unfortunately, Kant offers surprisingly little justification for this claim.

[51] One might object that there could be ways in which one could come to experience God other than via his perfection or infinity, and thus that even if one grants the arguments reconstructed in B.4 and B.5, the conclusion that we cannot experience God does not follow. However, for this objection to be plausible, one would have to explain what other features of God we could experience that would enable us to experience God as distinct from other kinds of beings, and the challenge that the argument of B5 presents is that the paucity of the content of our concept of God could well exclude any plausible alternative to the ones considered. I thank James Messina for pointing out this objection clearly.

[52] Determining Kant's reception of Hume and its influence on his thought is not entirely straightforward, even if it is safe to conjecture that Kant must have read the first *Enquiry* by the early 1760s and the *Dialogues* shortly after its posthumous publication. While certain arguments regarding the theistic proofs in the first *Critique* sound extremely similar to lines of thought found especially in the *Dialogues*, Kant had been developing and expressing fundamental criticisms of these proofs by the early 1760s (especially in *The Only Possible Argument*).

[53] By 'cognitive abilities' I have in mind only those abilities that pertain to knowledge as such (and not belief).

[54] Of course, Hume develops further criticisms in the *Dialogues*.

[55] One can imagine further that, when questioned, this person reported that this impression includes the information that this world is better than any other, i.e. the impression is not one of merely apparent perfection.

[56] For example, Hume might reject the requirement that impressions must be of spatio-temporal objects. That is, he might grant that all of his impressions happen to be of spatio-temporal objects, but reject the claim that they must necessarily be of such objects.

[57] In other words, since, on Hume's account, we represent God's infinite magnitude by means of the imagination merely as much, much bigger than the size of anything we have experienced so far, it is not impossible that our very next impression couldn't be exactly as big as our imagination had thought God is. Now a Humean could respond by stipulating that our idea of God will be formed by having the imagination take our biggest impression and extend that impression in some direction, but that would lead to an implausible instability in our idea of God.

[58] That is, we might be able to experience an object that happened to have the properties contained in the concept of God, but we could not experience the object *as* having those properties.

[59] While Kant thus disagrees with Hume about the existence of fully a priori concepts, he agrees with Hume that rationalists wrongly attribute too much content to them.

[60] Nor do they rely on other assumptions that might be controversial. For example, one might claim that human beings' cognitive limitations are a consequence of original sin. However, any further claim about the cause of our limitations is not required as a foundation for Kant's arguments.

[61] I thank Karl Ameriks, Michael Hardimon, Kristen Irwin, Monte Johnson, Pat Kain, James Messina, Dana Nelkin, Sam Rickless, Clinton Tolley, Merold Westphal and audience members at the Society for Christian Philosophy Eastern Meeting, held at Houghton College (May 2006), for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. I owe special thanks to Graham Bird, Andrew Chignell, Pat Kain, and Mike Murray for extensive discussion and myriad helpful critical remarks on earlier versions of this paper. Two anonymous reviewers of *Kantian Review* also provided extremely helpful comments, for which I am grateful. Needless to say, in spite of their help, any errors are mine.

References

Adams, Robert (1972) 'Must God create the best?', *Philosophical Review*, 81: 317–32.

——. (1995) 'Moral faith', *Journal of Philosophy*, 92: 75–95.

Chignell, Andrew (2007) 'Belief in Kant', *Philosophical Review*, 116: 323–60.

Descartes, Rene (1985) *Principles of Philosophy*, in J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

Hare, John (1996) *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Howard-Snyder, Daniel and Paul Moser (eds) (2002) *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

Hume, David (1966) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (New York: Oxford University Press).

——. (1977) *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. J. Price (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Plantinga, Alvin (1974) *God, Freedom and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row).

Kant, Immanuel (1902–) *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königliche Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter), volumes 1–29.

——. (1996a) *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press).

——. (1996b) *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press).

——. (1997) *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (New York: Cambridge University Press).

Kvanig, Jonathan (2002) 'Divine hiddenness: What is the problem?', in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (eds), *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 149–63.
Leibniz, G. W. (1989) 'From the letters to Clarke', in G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company).
Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1780) *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (Berlin: Voß).
Murray, Michael (1993) 'Coercion and the hiddenness of God', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 30: 27–35.
Neiman, Susan (1994) *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press).
Newton, Isaac (1730) *Opticks, or Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections & Colours of Light* (London).
Nozick, Robert (1969) 'Coercion', in Sidney Morgenbesser, Patrick Suppes, and Morton White (eds), *Philosophy, Science, and Method: Essays in Honor of Ernest Nagel* (New York: St. Martin's Press), pp. 440–72.
Ripstein, Arthur (2004) 'Authority and coercion', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 32: 2–35.
Schellenberg, J. L. (1993) *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
Van Inwagen, Peter (2002) 'What is the problem of the hiddenness of God?', in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (eds), *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 24–32.
Watkins, Eric (2005) *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
——. (2008) 'Kant and the myth of the given', *Inquiry*, 51: 512–31.
Wood, Allen (1970) *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
Yaffe, Gideon (2003) 'Indoctrination, coercion and freedom of will', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67: 335–56.