Kant and religion: conflict or compromise?

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Abstract.   The standard reading of Kant presumes that 'the moral hypothesis' is a necessary and sufficient condition for understanding his philosophy of religion. This paper opens with the assumption – taken from one of Kant's last works – that philosophy and theology must always remain in conflict. Then, by way of an abductive comparison of the positions of Ronald M. Green and John Hick, I demonstrate that the moral hypothesis leads to religious compromises that contradict this assumption. To conclude, I argue that the motif of transformation is syptomatic of the underlying problem and suggest that it be replaced by the motif of transition.

I

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that Immanuel Kant's philosophy of religion has received much attention in recent years, his position on theology continues to be understood in remarkably different ways. Interpreters emphasizing the phenomenal/noumenal distinction of his first *Critique* often declare Kant to be an agnostic or, even worse, the 'all-destroyer' of metaphysics itself. Others looking mainly at 'God the postulate' of the second *Critique* understand Kant to be more of a religious moralist or deist. A third group of scholars focusing on the constructive imagination of the third *Critique* portrays Kant as a divine projectionist who found it necessary to rationalize the concept of God in order to bridge the gap between nature and freedom. A difficulty arises with each of these views, however, and with the many variations between them, when one tries to explain Kant's writings on religion relative to the theological implications of his complete system. The strengths of one view often directly contradict the strengths of the others, forcing most attempts at adjudicating among them to depend as much upon personal preference as upon actual exegetical merit. The purpose of this essay is to explore a new strategy for judging whether or not a particular way of reading Kant is in fact the best or most plausible way.

Before outlining the strategy I have in mind, perhaps it will help to identify the particular way of reading Kant that will become the subject of this essay. For heuristic reasons, our attention will be focused on the most common interpretation of Kant, often called the 'traditional' or 'conventional' interpretation (viz., the second viewpoint above).[1] Embedded in the conven-

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[1] For recent examples of these terms, see Nicholas Wolterstorff 'Is it possible and desirable for theologians to recover from Kant?', *Modern Theology*, **14** (1998), 1–18, and Stephen Palmquist 'Does Kant reduce religion to morality?', *Kant-Studien*, **83** (1992), 129–148.

tional wisdom on Kant is the belief that his practical philosophy not only provides the justification necessary for metaphysical beliefs, but also provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for every kind of metaphysics. For simplicity, we will call this 'the moral hypothesis' for Kant interpretation. According to proponents of the moral hypothesis, any perspective of reason beyond the practical is superfluous, and any empirical or revealed religion (including and perhaps most especially Christianity), whatever its historical underpinnings or conceptual framework, can be reduced in some way to the inner workings of practical reason. Ronald M. Green is one prominent philosopher who is not shy about his allegiance to the moral hypothesis. In a recent article, Green writes, 'At the heart of [my] program is the conviction that the moral judgments that we make and the array of religious beliefs that surround them arise from complex but ultimately comprehensible operations of practical reason'.[2] For the purposes of this essay, we will focus our attention on his use of the moral hypothesis.

In order to assess the explanatory power of Green's interpretation of Kant under the moral hypothesis, I will deploy two ideas – one logical and the other hermeneutical – in strategic combination. The first idea draws upon a domain of logic called abductive inference and the second enlists a new proposal for reading Kant. We will focus on the first for a moment and mention the second later as its relation to the first becomes apparent. In what follows, I will use a broadly abductive method in the sense of John R. Josephson.[3] He discusses abduction as 'a process of going from some Given to a best explanation for that (or related) given'.[4] He also fleshes out the logic of abduction and offers the following syllogism as the generic form for these sorts of inferences:

> *D* is a collection of data.
> *H* [is a hypothesis which] explains *D*.
> *No other hypothesis can explain* D *as well as* H *does*.
> Therefore, *H* is probably true.[5]

An abductive inference of this kind, according to Josephson, 'extends the detailed conception of Reason to better accommodate fallibility and uncertainty … and it moves toward restoring confidence in objectivity and progress where it has been most deeply threatened'.[6] This is exactly the kind of procedure that seems to be needed if contemporary Kant exegesis is to break the interpretive stand off and make meaningful advances in our understanding of Kant's thinking, particularly over such contentious issues as religion and theology. This essay will analyse Green's use of the moral hypothesis by adopting this abductive procedure.

[2] Ronald M. Green 'Probing the depths of practical reason: looking back over twenty-five years', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, **25** (1997), 15.
[3] John R. Josephson and Susan G. Josephson (eds.) *Abductive Inference: Computation, Philosophy, Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).   [4] *Ibid.*, 29.   [5] *Ibid.*, 5 and 14.
[6] *Ibid.*, 1.

Having already decided then that the moral hypothesis represents H, our use of the above abductive syllogism requires us further to demarcate the parameters of the data D to be considered. The ideal, of course, would be to make D represent Kant's entire literary corpus. Since, however, this designation is obviously too large for an essay of this size, we will instead focus on one aspect of his writings, call it D_1, that relatively few contemporary Kant scholars would dispute and draw upon the rest of his corpus as needed to explicate its implications. This D_1 will become the key feature of our new proposal for reading Kant. Parenthetically, I should mention that we will not focus on the third part of the abductive syllogism (viz., the other hypotheses for interpreting Kant). Instead, in order to show that the moral hypothesis is probably not accurate (or at least that its explanatory limitations suggest the existence of other more satisfactory explanatory hypotheses), we will highlight one significant result of its inability to explain D_1. Namely, Green's moral hypothesis seems to depend upon an inaccurate account of the relative significance of two ideas in Kant's writings. Instead of applying the motif of transition in the way that Kant in his critical writings appears to, Green replaces it with the idea of transformation – a motif that Kant rarely endorsed. In short, I will argue that hypotheses which recognize the importance of transition (over and against transformation) for understanding Kant's critical philosophy present more explanatory power than the moral hypothesis under similar conditions.

This brings us to the new proposal for reading Kant which will provide the principal data or D_1 in our abductive argument. Few dispute that Kant believed that philosophy and theology represent two distinct and competing disciplines, embodying two distinct and competing perspectives. This point is perhaps the most important and often overlooked feature of Kant's thought and one which I believe requires a corrective *turning over* of the way his writings are typically read. Because this notion of conflict is clarified explicitly only in Kant's final significant publication – *The Conflict of the Faculties*, and because I am here proposing to use this idea as a point of departure or 'Given' for interpreting Kant, this exegetical assumption might best be described as a kind of Copernican revolution in Kant interpretation. Although it is true that, for Kant, all theories of religion begin with philosophy, it does not follow that all in religion arises out of philosophy. Instead of understanding Kant's view of religion as something revolving around his critical philosophy, we will hereby assume that his critical philosophy revolves around certain perspectival assumptions germane to his understanding of religion.

The expressed purpose of *Conflict*, as its title suggests, is to make plain a necessary dispute. Kant explained the general nature of the dispute this way: 'there will be a conflict between the higher and lower faculties which is, first, *inevitable*, and second, *legal* as well' (7:32).[7] The specific nature of this conflict

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[7] Immanuel Kant *The Conflict of the Faculties* translated by Mary J. Gregor and Robert Anchors in Allen

is related to the presumed source of highest knowledge. 'The biblical theologian proves the existence of God on the grounds that He spoke in the Bible, which also discusses his nature … [and] must … count on a supernatural opening of his understanding by a spirit that guides to all truth' (7:24). In contradistinction, 'the philosophical faculty must be free to examine in public and to evaluate with cold reason the source and content of this alleged basis of doctrine' (7:33). Where the discipline of theology requires complete faith in God and a presumed form of God's Word, the discipline of philosophy relies upon the presumption of freedom and faith in human reason alone. In the paragraphs immediately following these clarifications, Kant further explained the rules for conflict in a way that will help us to use this notion for the purpose of abductively assessing the explanatory capability of the moral hypothesis. Two of what Kant called 'formal procedures for such a conflict' are important to mention in this regard: first, 'This conflict cannot and should not be settled by an amicable accommodation (*amicabilis compositio*), but (as a lawsuit) calls for a verdict' (7:33); and second, 'This conflict can never end, and it is the philosophy faculty that must always be prepared to keep it going' (7:33).

In what follows, Kant's explicit rules of engagement will provide us with the pivotal test for an abductive comparison of philosophy and theology under the rubric of the moral hypothesis. After detailing the most important contours of Green's interpretation of Kant, we will turn to the work of John Hick as a theological example of the moral hypothesis. Our aim will be to see what, if anything, theology, under the moral hypothesis, adds to the strictly philosophical interpretation. If it can be shown that theology under the moral hypothesis (represented by Hick) does not have a unique and competing role next to the system of philosophy under the moral hypothesis (represented by Green), then this will provide strong abductive support for our contention that the moral hypothesis should be replaced in favour of a more adequate hypothesis for interpreting Kant's complete philosophical system in general, and his philosophy of religion in particular. I will conclude by suggesting that Kant's philosophy is better read when we recognize the importance of his motif of transition, particularly as it pertains to the possibility of a third perspective of reason in the third *Critique*.

II

THE MORAL HYPOTHESIS IN GREEN'S INTERPRETATION OF KANT

In the most general sense, Ronald Green's interpretation of Kant's critical writings amounts to a self-contained and systematic philosophy of reason;[8]

W. Wood and George di Giovanni (eds.) *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Henceforth referred to as *Conflict*. All subsequent quotations from *Conflict* are from this text.

[8] Ronald M. Green *Religious Reason: The Rational and Moral Basis of Religious Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 28.

it is self-contained in the sense that almost all human experience is said to derive from reason's often intense need to be logically consistent, and systematic in the sense that every significant human trait is held to be either directly or potentially treated within the system's general framework. As with most other moral interpretations of Kant's system, this framework consists of two realms. The first realm he calls theoretical reason and designates as Kant's 'epistemology'; the second is practical reason or Kant's 'ethics'. Taken together, these two realms constitute the overarching structure of Kant's entire philosophical programme. The questions of hope and human identity, which seem to pose metaphysical dilemmas not immediately attributable to these realms, can be explained by the 'deep structure' of reason in its theoretical and practical employments.

Green focuses most of his attention on the inner workings of practical reason, and, as one might expect, this area is the most contentious aspect of his theory of religion. Although Kant focused in his critical writings on what Green calls practical reason's moral viewpoint, practical reason is necessarily composed of three interrelated 'points of view' – the moral, the prudential, and the religious. In describing Green's interpretation, we will try to maintain his most recent usage. Thus, for the two overarching parts of Kant's philosophy, we shall use the terms 'theoretical reason' and 'practical reason', and designate his three subdivisions of practical reason as either 'points of view' or 'viewpoints'. Green believes that each point of view is important for, though the latter two are only implicit in, Kant's system. In applying the moral hypothesis consistently and comprehensively to Kant's critical literary corpus, and therefore taking his writings on religion seriously, Green contends that the logic of transcendental philosophy suggests three practical points of view are all that is necessary to complete reason, that is, to bridge the gap between freedom and nature. Reason, thus, comes to consummation with the three viewpoints of practical reason.

The first point of view, or the surface structure of practical reason, is moral reasoning. In answering the question 'What ought I to do?' in any given situation, reason is naturally led to seek the ideal answer from a point of view which suppresses or even ignores our own 'special needs and desires'. This viewpoint of practical reason is what Green calls 'a direct expression of reason'. Moral reasoning orients us to knowledge of the ideal action in any situation (subject of course to the limits of one's knowledge of the facts). An ideal action is a selfless act of doing on behalf of others, not in the sense of completely ignoring the self, but in viewing oneself as just another member of the others affected by the decision. '[Moral reason] involves a perspective of radical impartiality or "omnipartiality" before the choices facing us as moral agents. It asks us to choose as though we might be any of the people affected by our conduct'.[9] Practical reason acting morally is by definition so

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[9] Ronald M. Green *Religion and Moral Reason* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.

completely impartial that the term 'impartial reason' may be used as its synonym. Green believes that the impartial/moral point of view is the only viewpoint of practical reason that legitimates the categorical imperative as a constitutive principle of practical reason.[10]

Despite the crucial role that the categorical imperative has for Kant's moral philosophy, it is not the only principle that Kant thought necessary for practical reason to meet its objective (viz., knowing what to do). Green believes that the second half of the second *Critique* shows that happiness is related to practical reason in a way that transforms its inner workings into a new point of view.

Now we learn that happiness plays an important, indeed indispensable, role, in moral reasoning. In addition to the categorical imperative, Kant tells us, practical reason has as its presupposition and requires belief in the attainability of the 'highest good', understood as the proportionate and exceptionless union of virtue and happiness. Without a constitutive role for the highest good, he says, morality would lack a complete object and moral striving itself would become empty and vain.[11]

Green contends that the implication of Kant's discussion of happiness and the highest good at this crucial juncture is that practical reason has or at least should have deeper structural levels than the moral point of view alone (which he believes is constituted without reference to happiness and the highest good). In the second stage of practical reason, just as impartial reasoning compels us to do what we ought to do in an ideal world of thought, prudential reasoning, given the reality of our individual situations in the actual world, urges us to choose according to our 'personal concerns'.

Below the surface of moral deliberation, personal happiness transforms the inner workings of practical reason and constitutes a completely different and competing point of view. Moral reasoning, when personal happiness is seriously considered below the surface of moral deliberation, becomes prudential reasoning. One might say that if moral reasoning answers the question of duty by emphasizing duty to others, prudential reasoning answers the question by emphasizing the duty that we have to ourselves. Green does not use the term, but his view of prudential reasoning might just as well be called *partial reasoning*, where partial is taken to mean 'favouring oneself' as opposed to the less desirable 'reasoning in part'. Prudential reasoning provides a viewpoint for making decisions that are partial to oneself. When reasoning prudentially, we are compelled to act according to our own special needs and desires because 'impartiality before the social array of desires can cause all or most of my desires – and the most important among them – to be suppressed'.[12] Prudential or partial reasoning puts the urgency of our own concerns to the forefront of our minds; it condones selfishness when selfishness is necessary to maintain our essential interests in the real world.

[10] Ronald M. Green *Kierkegaard and Kant : The Hidden Debt* (New York, NY : Oxford University Press, 1993), 45.   [11] *Ibid*., 50.   [12] Green *Religious Reason*, 35.

If your initial reaction to the notion of prudential reason is surprise and doubt, Green asks you to wait for his complete explication of Kant's system of practical reason. Admitting happiness into moral deliberation does not degrade virtue; it makes practical reason honest. When theoretical reason encounters the world, we learn that we not only have knowledge of things as they appear, but we also have knowledge of our own desires relative to those things. Theoretical reason in a sense transforms moral reasoning, which before might have been called the ideal practical reason of virtue, into prudential reasoning, which can now be called the real practical reason of happiness. This complete transformation sets up a conflict in practical reason. In difficult situations, impartial and partial reasoning compel us to choose diametrically opposed courses of action. If these two employments of practical reason were our only recourse, we would find ourselves in constant turmoil and would be forced in the most difficult circumstances to self-destruct. Difficult moral decisions provide so much internal tension that reason's only 'reasonable' way forward is to seek an even deeper level of practical deliberation. Here, the concept of the highest good becomes vitally important.

Employing what Kant called 'the object of practical reason',[13] Green suggests that the idea of the highest good can have a constitutive role in practical reason. All that is necessary in Green's opinion to secure such a role for the highest good are the postulates God and immortality fully clothed in culturally contingent religious beliefs and practices. They allow us to act on behalf of the highest good knowing perfectly well that it may not be achievable in this life. 'There is, in fact, no third use of reason that can adjudicate the conflict between morality and prudence. But it may be that there is another way of handling the dispute between reason's two employments, *one that involves showing that no dispute really exists*'.[14] Religious reason, constituted by the highest good and supported by religious beliefs and practices, does not adjudicate the conflict; it simply views the situation in a whole new way.

Reason employed religiously insists that the discrepancy between morality and prudence is 'only apparent, not ultimate'. Religious reason teaches us that the only rational way forward in decisions that affect our special needs and desires is to believe that moral retribution and rewards are certain. 'Just as a belief in retribution eases the apparently insuperable opposition between prudence and morality, so religious beliefs can make it rational to renew our dedication to moral effort even as we realize the difficulty of this task and the failures that loom before us'.[15] Because reason necessarily finds itself in conflict between the action of virtue and the action of happiness, only the

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[13] Immanuel Kant *Critique of Practical Reason* translated by Mary J. Gregor in Mary J. Gregor (ed.) *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). All subsequent quotations from the second *Critique* are from this text.
[14] Green *Religious Reason*, 54.   [15] Green *Religion and Moral Reason*, 20.

postulation of a moral will greater than our own and faith in this postulate can guarantee that virtue and happiness will ultimately be brought together in their proper proportion. It is an improbable choice, but when all else is eliminated it is our only hope. 'Kant's total argument', Green contends, 'drive[s] us to the realization that his own transcendent resolution, as offensive as it may be, is the one to which reason is ineluctably driven'.[16] Although it is not entirely clear how this reconciliation is effected and sustained, it may not be wide of the mark to summarize it in the following way. Religious reason allows us to embrace the internal strife caused by practical reason's other two employments: it urges us to act morally, and, in the event that special needs and desires require strictly prudential decision making, it justifies our actions through faith in postulated religious beliefs.

A practical faith in God and immortality 'opens a narrow aperture in the restraining wall of human cognition [Kant] built in the first *Critique*'.[17] Theory is breached by the needs of practical reason, which, by its inherent logic, demands belief in those ideas which guarantee the eventual fulfilment of the highest good. Because theoretical reason has already linked itself to practical reason through prudential reasoning, the way back to theory is open along the same path, which at a still deeper level is transformed into religious reasoning. At the core of Green's interpretation of Kant then is a two-way bridge connecting nature and freedom. The empirical realm of reason, by forcing us to take our personal interests and predicaments seriously, links itself to practical reason, transforming its inner workings by changing moral reasoning into prudential reasoning; and practical reason, by postulating God and immortality as moral beliefs according to strict logic applied to our internal conflicts and external cultures, links itself to theoretical reason by creating an aperture in its limits, transforming the conflict of impartial and partial reasoning into religious reasoning. One might say that on Green's view, theoretical reason is opened to subjective knowledge of God, if by subjective we mean beliefs about God created by and limited to the rational structures of the mind. In this sense then, practical reason has transformed theoretical reason by creating an aperture through which God and immortality can be 'perceived' as cultural constructions of human subjects.

Before we move on to John Hick, we might make a preliminary critique of Green's overall interpretative project in the following way. The strength of Green's account lies in fact that it systematizes a number of the most important concepts in Kant's practical philosophy in a simple and straightforward manner. In so doing, however, Green is forced to downplay important questions that reason has 'set before itself' in the first *Critique*, particularly the question 'What may I hope?' The question of hope never

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[16] Green *Religious Reason*, 68–69.   [17] Green *The Hidden Debt*, 57.

surfaces in Green's account outside a purely practical context. Hope is entirely based upon a moral faith in God and immortality as postulated by oneself in a given cultural linguistic environment. Green's hope is a humanistic hope (an inside-out hope). Kant's notion of hope, however, is at the very least a *cosmic hope* rooted in feeling (an outside-in hope). Though this can be substantiated by several passages in the third *Critique* and in other passages throughout his writings, one need look no further than Kant's practical philosophy to find it.

In a section entitled 'Fragment of a moral catechism' in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6:480–482),[18] Kant concludes his description of a classroom dialogue between a teacher and his student with the following question (asked by the teacher):

Has reason, in fact, any grounds of its own for assuming the existence of such a power, which apportions happiness in accordance with a human being's merit or guilt, a power ordering the whole of nature and governing the world with supreme wisdom? that is, any grounds for believing in God? (6:482).

The pupil, who invariably answers the teacher's leading questions correctly (after all, this is part of a *catechism*), says:

Yes. For we see in the works of nature, which we can judge, a wisdom so widespread and profound that we can explain it to ourselves only by the inexpressively great art of a creator of the world. And with regard to the moral order, which is the highest adornment of the world, we have reason to expect a no less wise regime, such that if we do not make ourselves *unworthy of happiness*, by violating our duty, we can also hope to *share* in happiness (6:482).

The key words of course are 'judge', 'art', and 'hope'. Kant's answer to the question of hope is found not in the practical realm of reason, but in a more *poetic* employment of reason. We will return to this topic in section four. For now, we can simply say that we have reason to hope, from a philosophical point of view, because beauty and purpose in nature are felt. This feeling of wonder confirms, even if it does not prove, our belief in God's wise moral judgement (and in this way assures the highest good), provided we have not been crushed by the empirical realities of the world and not allowed our inclinations to be the ground of our action to the best of our abilities.

III

HICK'S THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THE MORAL HYPOTHESIS

The fact that Hick assumes a version of the moral hypothesis for interpreting Kant's philosophy is confirmed by his book *An Interpretation of Religion*. 'God was not for [Kant] a reality encountered in religious experience but an object

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[18] Immanuel Kant *Metaphysics of Morals* translated by Mary J. Gregor in Gregor (ed.) *Practical Philosophy*, 593–595. All subsequent quotations from the *Metaphysics of Morals* are from this text.

postulated by reason on the basis of its own practical functioning in moral agency'.[19] Though he describes Kant as an enlightening philosopher and his system as essentially true, he also sees a problem that is directly attributable to the moral hypothesis: Kant's philosophical programme is hopelessly reductionistic with regard to religion. In order to correct the problem, he suggests a theological reproof of Kant in the form of a philosophical amendment of his position.[20]

Before we take a look at how Hick actually amends Kant's system, it is important to understand how he contextualizes his position relative to the moral hypothesis of Green. Like Green, Hick understands Kant's moral philosophy as selflessness. He writes that for Kant 'the goodwill, instead of making practical decisions from the standpoint of a particular individual whose interests will inevitably conflict with those of others, makes them from the universal standpoint of impartial rationality'.[21] Unlike Green, however, he does not believe that Kant suggested or desired a prudential exposition of practical reason. Hick believes that moral prudence is the very opposite of 'Reality-centredness'. Ethics, being founded upon an impartial or selfless morality, 'derives from God, not in the sense that it is divinely commanded but in the sense that the personal realm, of which it is a function is God's creation'.[22] Hick's assumption is that God as the creator of all guarantees that practical reason exists and is operative in every one. Where Green believes that to act rightly is to act in accordance with both virtue and happiness on the basis of postulated religious beliefs and practices, Hick believes that 'to act rightly is to act rationally, on unrestrictedly valid principle, rather than on the basis of one's own personal desires and preferences'.[23]

As it turns out, however, this difference between Green and Hick is only superficial. Hick knows perfectly well that few actions are done for the sake of duty alone. Our observations of human experience around the world reveal this well. This situation does not leave us without hope, however, because our observations also reveal that many people are at various stages of moral maturity and that the key features of their personal development are most often related to some variety of religious belief and experience. For Hick, this is decisive evidence that Kant's epistemology needs to be amended. '[F]or Kant God is postulated, not experienced. In partial agreement but also partial disagreement with him, I want to say that the Real *an sich* is postulated by us as a pre-supposition, not of the moral life, but of religious

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[19] John Hick *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1989), 242.

[20] In response to an earlier draft of this paper, Hick explained that he is not trying to exegete Kant, but 'merely raiding him for one enormously important idea, and then consciously using that in a way that Kant would not have approved of'. Be this as it may, it still clear that Hick's thought is broadly Kantian (see below) and very near the traditional interpretation (except, of course, for its enormous theological exception).   [21] Hick *An Interpretation of Religion*, 39.   [22] *Ibid*., 98.   [23] *Ibid*.

experience and the religious life'.[24] In order to escape the religious reductionism in Kant, Hick contends that we have to amend the theoretical philosophy. Hick does this by explicitly equating immediate experience and religious experience, with one condition: 'the categories … of religious experience are not universal and invariable but are on the contrary culture-relative'.[25]

To this point, we might be tempted to commend Hick's theological response to Kant's alleged religious moralism. However, such commendation would be premature. Hick's religious epistemology, upon critical inspection, betrays a deep structure of its own that is remarkably similar to that of Green's interpretation of Kant. It seems to me that Hick's view of religion requires theoretical reason to have two distinct points of view. The first point of view is theoretical reason based on synthetic a priori principles without appeal to experience. We might call this the Kantian part of his proposal or the ideal/internal use of empirical reason. The second point of view is theoretical reason based upon our limited epistemic positions at any given moment in life. This might be called the Hickian rejoinder to Kant or the real/external use of empirical reason.

According to Kant's understanding of critical realism, the main difference between the world as it appears to us and the world *an sich* is the a priori spatial-temporal order of the mind. Hick believes that true critical realism requires us to take one step beyond Kant, to what Hick calls a *critical religious realism*: 'For it arises out of elementary reflection upon our experience. We quickly realize that the same thing appears in either slightly or considerably different ways to people owing both to varying spatial locations in relation to it and to differences in their sensory and mental equipment and interpretive habits'.[26] Besides the a priori limits of theoretical reason in its ideal employment, humans have further epistemic limits which constitute our actual employment of theoretical reason.

One might say, although Hick has not put it quite in this way, critical religious realism appeals to a *partial* point of view in theoretical reason. This time the word partial actually means 'reasoning in part' rather than 'favouring oneself', as it did in Green's account of practical reason. Each person's limited epistemic viewpoint or partial point of view is necessarily something less than the ideal, fully employed, theoretical reason. This difference suggests that partial experiencing of the Real is to be expected; but more than that, because our different cultural contexts and personal histories (which are factors beyond the influence of reason) are actually constitutive of the experience itself, we have access only to an individualized *appearance* of the Real. Hick would not want to say, as Kant did with regard to things-in-themselves, that we must think that God as-He-appears is the same God as-He-is-in-himself. Hick rejects any theology which attempts to

[24] *Ibid.*, 243.   [25] *Ibid.*, 244.   [26] *Ibid.*, 242.

say that we are made in God's image and therefore have access (either potentially or actually) to a personal or direct relationship with God.

How can we escape the religious solipsism inherent in this position? The situation requires only religio-moral discernment. By taking into account the claims of others with regard to religious experience, we could conceivably derive a full picture of God as He appears to all humanity. Only this kind of holistic vision approximates the complete appearance of God which is possible from the ideal human point of view. Theoretical reason in Hick's critical religious realism has its own conflict. That is, we have the ideal or trans-cultural capacity to know the Real as it appears fully, but we only know the appearance of the Real insofar as partial reasoning allows. This gap between the ideal and the actual in our theoretical experience of God forces reason (to avoid frustration) to create an aperture in the restraining wall of its practical employment. In order to know that our own experiences and the experiences of others are genuine manifestations of the Real, Hick believes we need to apply a moral test. Because 'religious experiencing-as more commonly occurs in the awareness of situational rather than object-meaning', the moral life becomes an object of experience 'mediating either the external claim of God or the internal requirements of Dharma'.[27] Thus, we must assume that something like a cause and effect relationship exists between genuine religious experience and the moral life that it creates.[28]

Hick links theory to practice in a way analogous to Green, but contrary to Kant's explicit and critically defended assertions. Kant argued that it is impossible to be sure that one is observing truly moral action because the actual motives are always hidden. Only God can read hearts and distribute justice in a way that avoids the pitfalls inherent in human experience. Hick's amendment of Kant's theoretical philosophy forces him to substantiate his religious theory with what Kant considered to be a dubious connection to practical reason. His new understanding begets a partial point of view that leaves reason in insoluble conflict. The only way forward is a religious theory founded upon a suspect moral procedure. Perhaps, as Hick believes, it is possible to judge accurately the content of another's character, but such a judgement is not critical reasoning in the Kantian sense. It is prudential-like reasoning brought on by the uncritical presumption that we can know the Real's appearance in a purely empirical way.

To this point, we have suggested that the moral hypothesis, which assumes that Kant's philosophy is a two-tiered system of theory and practice and that Kant's view of religion is confined to the practical realm, has two general procedures for trying to construct a coherent world view. The philosophical

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[27] John Hick *Disputed Questions* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1993), 22.
[28] Hick uses a moral test to argue the case that Christianity is probably not unique. John Hick *The Rainbow of Faiths* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 16. Even 'salvation', according to Hick, can be observed as 'an actual change in human beings' (*ibid.*, 17).

procedure, represented in the work of Ronald Green, assumes that God, if God exists, is radically unknowable, and contends that practical reasoning, under cultural and situational constraints, determines the religious beliefs and practices observed world-wide. The theological procedure, represented in the work of John Hick, assumes that God (the Real) is knowable, but only in appearance. It points to a philosophy of religion that links theory to practice according to the phenomena of religious experience and a moral test.

The most important similarity between Green's interpretation and Hick's reinterpretation of Kant's critical philosophy is that they both perform a kind of hypercritical *transformation*. Green employs 'an aperture' in Kant's theoretical philosophy to argue for a transformation of the moral point of view; namely, when understood in light of theoretical considerations, the moral point of view transforms into the prudential point of view. Only a further transformation made possible by practical faith allows reason to overcome the paralysing internal conflicts between impartiality and prudence. The mind projects culturally contextualized religious themes and submits to belief in them to resolve the conflict. Hick's theological proposal turns on a transformation of the ideal theoretical perspective into an independent and partial point of view. The discrepancy between the ideal and actual appearance of God (which leads him to propose an aperture in Kant's practical philosophy) gives rise to his philosophy of religion. Where Green privileges knowledge of our own desires, Hick privileges knowledge about God's appearances and human responses to that knowledge.

To the extent that Green and Hick are representative of the philosophical and theological responses to Kant's system under the moral hypothesis, they have failed in their requirement to be in conflict. They appear not to be in conflict, but rather participating in a religious compromise. Although many of the details are different, the fundamental similarities between Hick's proposal and Green's interpretation are striking. The equivocation of the distinction between philosophy and theology that has been uncovered from our abductive comparison has been quite revealing. More will have to be said, particularly on the constructive side of interpreting Kant's system, if the argument against the moral hypothesis is to be completely persuasive, however. To conclude, I would like to show how this exegetical task might be undertaken by highlighting the promise of one motif in Kant's philosophy which has emerged from our abductive comparison. It should be noted that the following discussion presents only one of several motifs that must be kept in mind to achieve a balanced and unified reading of Kant's complete system. The motif in question, as suggested in my opening comments, is that of *transition*. Transition can be found in all three of Kant's *Critiques* and is the most important motif in Kant's writings regarding the possibility of a third perspective of reason. A cumulative case for the significance of transition for

Kant's entire philosophical programme can be made by comparing his use of this theme with its rival, transformation, in each of the *Critiques*. I will outline one way in which this case might proceed by organizing my concluding comments briefly around each of these texts.

IV

TRANSITION INTO WHOLENESS

In the first *Critique*, Kant made two points of note concerning transformation and transition: firstly, the motif of transition is to be favoured over certain kinds of transformation, and secondly, the motif of transition will be useful for the ultimate completion of the transcendental philosophy. In discussing some of the positive aspects of Plato's philosophy in the Transcendental Dialectic, a practical application of transformation, similar to one which Green's interpretation espouses, is the target of Kant's indignation:

> Whoever would derive the concepts of virtue from experience and make (as many have actually done) what at best can only serve as an example of an imperfect kind of exposition, into a pattern from which to derive knowledge, would make of virtue something which changes according to time and circumstance, an ambiguous monstrosity not admitting of the formation of any rule (A315, B371).[29]

Notice how Kant's tone is stern and personal. His main point is that giving a determinative role to experience (or, worse yet, the personal concerns which arise because of experience) in practical deliberation turns virtue into something it cannot be. This transformative procedure is the very opposite of what Kant took to be correct about Plato's theory, that is, his method of moving from the original idea of virtue to judgements about moral worth and not the other way round. Mierklejohn's 1887 translation is less emotive on this point than Smith's and perhaps even more revealing. Instead of using a term like 'monstrosity' to translate '*Unding*', Mierklejohn chose the word 'nonentity'.[30] For Kant, a conception of virtue transformed under the conditions of experience becomes literally a nonentity. Despite what Green's interpretation would suggest, transforming moral reasoning into prudential reasoning is not a matter of simply transforming virtue into something like qualified self-interest (which would seem to exemplify the essence of Smith's translation anyway). On the contrary, the above passage suggests that Kant believed our understanding of self-interest, given the varying conditions of life which contribute to it, is critically unstable and incapable of attaining any useable form.

[29] Immanuel Kant *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan Press, 1929). Unless otherwise specified, all subsequent quotations of the *Critique of Pure Reason* are from this text.
[30] Immanuel Kant *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by J. M. D. Mierklejohn (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887), 222. Mierklejohn also uses the word 'transform' instead of 'make of' to translate the sense of '*machen*'. Here, Smith's translation is the more literal.

Within the context of the first *Critique*, however, we are getting somewhat ahead of ourselves. Kant at that time was not fully aware of where the motif of transition would eventually take him, and we have to follow the development of his thought carefully to avoid reducing it simply to the sum of its parts. Kant's negative view of moral transformation creates enough room in his system for the positive affirmation of transition. Though the details are not specifically worked out in this text, Kant did go as far as suggesting that the motif of transition would allow the critical philosopher to navigate beyond the realm of empirical reason into the 'wide and stormy ocean' of metaphysics itself (A235, B294–295). The possibility of this role for transition is first brought to light in the chapter entitled 'Transcendental Doctrine of Judgement'. In writing of perception, Kant noted, 'Now, from empirical consciousness to pure consciousness a gradual transition [*Veränderung*] is possible, the real in the former completely vanishing and a merely formal a priori consciousness of the manifold in time and space remaining' (A166, B208). Though this suggestive remark was meant to provide only one part of numerous smaller arguments for categorical thinking, it anticipates further developments in Kant's thinking and his later more extensive use of transition (*Übergang*) in explicating his critical philosophy. This process would take some time to mature and manifest itself in his writing.

Kant is sure enough of the merits of transition to bring up the idea later and in increasingly important contexts. One of these contexts is a section immediately following the one in which Kant discussed transformation (quoted above). While noting the limitations that theoretical reason imposes upon the critical philosopher, Kant asserted that the motif of transition can play an important role in seeing the ideas of freedom, immortality, and God as potential avenues for reason's self-consistent extension.

[The] concepts of reason may perhaps make possible a transition [*Übergang*] from the concepts of nature to the practical concepts, and in that way may give support to the moral ideas themselves, bringing them into connection with the speculative knowledge of reason. As to all this, we must await explanation in the sequel (A329, B386).[31]

The importance of transition for moving from the theoretical employment of reason to the practical employment is later confirmed in Kant's famous book *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Written between the first and second *Critiques*, Kant describes the purpose of this short work as 'nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*' (4:392).[32] Without going into detail, it is enough to notice that Kant divided the book

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[31] Kant referred to freedom, immortality, and God as 'unavoidable problems set by pure reason' in the Introduction to the first *Critique* (A3, B7).
[32] Immanuel Kant *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* translated by Mary J. Gregor in Gregor (ed.) *Practical Philosophy*. Henceforth referred to as *Groundwork*. All subsequent quotations from the *Groundwork* are from this text.

into three sections which all bear the word 'transition' in their titles. In fact, Kant made it clear that the book as a whole was to serve as a transitional phase for a 'Critique of Pure Practical Reason' and a prolegomena to his proper *Metaphysics of Morals*. According to Kant, all this would be done without severing 'the unity of practical [reason] with speculative reason... which must be distinguished merely in its application' (4:391).

Groundwork, understood as a preparatory and transitional phase in Kant's writings, thus leads us directly to the second *Critique*. This movement is not, as we have already noted, performed in any way by transforming reason, only by the promise of moving to a new perspective. This explanation of transition is most closely related to the exact definition of the German word *Übergang*, meaning literally 'to walk over', as to another perspective. *Übergang* connotes movement 'over' or 'across', whereas a word like *Umformung*, meaning 'transformation', connotes a *turning* 'over' or 'around'. Only by moving to a different point of view – one with its own rule – can reason hope to resolve the problem of freedom. As would be expected, the motif of transition surfaces at key junctures in the second *Critique*. In that work, Kant made it clear that it is not only desirable to go beyond his first *Critique* (of theoretical reason) in order to make a critique of practical reason, but also possible to do so:

… because reason is considered in transition to quite a different use of those concepts from what it made of them *there*. Such a transition makes it necessary to compare the old use with the new, in order to distinguish well the new path from the previous one and at the same time draw attention to their connection (5:7).

Kant later provided a synopsis of the details for this transition after his table on freedom in the Analytic of Practical Reason. He began by highlighting an analogous connection between theory and practice: 'One quickly sees that in this table freedom is regarded as a kind of causality – which, however, is not subject to empirical grounds of determination – with respect to actions possible through it as appearances in the sensible world' (5:67). The passage goes on to assert that freedom, considered under the motif of transition, can be understood as a 'causality outside the sensible world' because it is presented to practical reasoning in association with the moral law (5:67). The reciprocal relationship between freedom and the moral law, as Henry Allison has shown, constitutes the optimal perspective from which to conduct moral reflection.[33]

Putting aside all the conceptual debates surrounding this proposal, it will be useful for the purely exegetical aims of this essay to juxtapose this positive portrayal of transition with the resolutely negative portrayal of transformation that Kant reaffirms in the second *Critique*. One such passage associates transformation with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of the ancient

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[33] See Henry Allison *Idealism and Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 114–18.

Greek schools. Interestingly, we find it near the beginning of the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, the part of the second *Critique* which Green consistently names in support of his interpretation:

One must regret that the acuteness of these men (whom one must, nevertheless admire for having in such early times already tried all conceivable paths of philosophic conquest) was unfortunately applied in searching out identity between extremely heterogeneous concepts, that of happiness and that of virtue. But it was in keeping with the dialectical spirit of their times, which sometimes misleads subtle minds even now, to suppress essential and irreconcilable differences in principle by trying to change them … and this usually occurs in cases where the unification of heterogeneous grounds lies so deep or so high, or would require so complete a transformation of the doctrines assumed in the rest of the philosophic system, that they are afraid to penetrate into the real difference and prefer to treat it as a diversity merely in formulae (5:111–112).

The identity of 'the real difference' between the concepts of happiness and virtue to which Kant alluded in this passage is open to some debate, but one thing seems clear: whatever it is, it should not be discerned by transformation. Empirical considerations of happiness are primarily a matter for theoretical reasoning and moral considerations of virtue belong to practical reasoning. This is not to say that there is no relationship between them, but only that a critical explanation of such a relationship should resist all forms of transformative synthesis. As mentioned earlier, Kant called the idea of the highest good 'the object' of practical reason, but, in the context of second *Critique*, its significance is not fully explored.

This brings us to the culminating phase of Kant's critical philosophy – *The Critique of Judgement* – and to the brink of an intriguing further possibility – a third perspective of reason. The evidence so far considered suggests that the real difference between happiness and virtue only becomes a problem when theoretical and practical reason are considered together (which they must finally be) as the whole system of transcendental philosophy. When this occurs, 'there is a great gulf fixed, so that it is not possible to pass from the former to the latter' (176).[34] Kant's critical philosophy, considered as a two-tiered system of theory and practice, is unable to cope with the gap between nature and freedom. There must, therefore, be a perspective of reason which unites theory and practice under a priori principles. Had Kant not had recourse to the motif of transition, he might well have had no choice but to revert to the idea of transformation in order to manufacture such principles, as Green's interpretation suggests. The topic of transformation, however, does not come up in the third *Critique*. Instead, the problem of unity takes centre stage and its subsequent resolution draws heavily on the motif of transition.

[34] Immanuel Kant *The Critique of Judgement* translated by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952); see also (195). All subsequent quotations from *The Critique of Judgement* are from this text.

Kant set the stage for this climactic third feature of his philosophy with a series of suspenseful questions in the 'Preface':

But now comes *judgement*, which in the order of cognitive faculties forms a middle term between understanding and reason. Has *it* got independent *a priori* principles? If so, are they constitutive or merely regulative, thus indicating no special realm? And do they give a rule *a priori* to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, as the middle term between the faculties of cognition and desire, just as understanding prescribes laws *a priori* for the former and reason for the latter? (168).

In the face of the apparent immensity of the gap between understanding and reason, Kant set the agenda for resolving these questions under the rubric of judgement. Although a thorough account of his subsequent answers to them is beyond the scope of this essay, we can point to two passages in the 'Introduction' to the third *Critique* in which Kant provided a qualified answer to these questions (which he unpacks later in the text). In the passage where the problem of unity first surfaces, for example, Kant concluded with this firm conviction:

There must, therefore, be a ground of the *unity* of the supersensible that lies at the basis of nature, with what the concept of freedom contains in a practical way, and although the concept of this ground neither theoretically nor practically attains to knowledge of it, and so has no peculiar realm of its own, still renders possible the transition from the mode of thought according to the principles of the one to that according to the principles of the other (176).

A later passage, discussing the same topic, confirms and expands this conclusion:

Now between the faculties of knowledge and desire stands the feeling of pleasure, just as judgement is intermediate between understanding and reason. Hence we may, provisionally at least, assume that judgement likewise contains an *a priori* principle of its own, and that … it will affect a transition from the faculty of pure knowledge … to that of the concept of freedom, just as in its logical employment it makes possible the transition from understanding to reason (178–179).

Comparing these passages with Kant's prefatory questions in the overall context of the third *Critique*, which itself is divided into aesthetical and teleological parts, Kant's solution involves a ground of unity that we can feel as beauty and to which we can attribute a purpose. This unity allows for a smooth transition between theory and practice, and is dependent upon a judicial employment of reason. Kant also assumed that such an employment was possible and set out to discover what can be known of the a priori conditions for its possibility.

Now, two questions confront us as we return to the question of theology and look forward to Kant's writings on religion. What was the final form of Kant's judicial employment of reason? How did it impact on the way he understood theology? As for the first, given the task of the third *Critique* as understood above, it is understandable to find room for debate over whether

judicial reason is primarily dependent upon aesthetics or teleology (reflection).[35] It is important to discern the subtle distinction in the relationship of aesthetic and teleological judgement, however, if we are to present an adequate account of the third *Critique* and Kant's theological posture as a whole. Aesthetic judgements serve to unite freedom and nature through feeling; while the role of teleological judgement is to reflect upon the nature of the purposiveness inherent in such feeling. If the problem of unity is the principle concern of the third *Critique*, as I have suggested, then aesthetic judgement would have to be considered the most important feature of judicial reasoning. Subsequent German philosophy, inasmuch as it took up aesthetic judgement as the defining feature of the third *Critique*, confirms this reading. This is not to say that teleological judgement is without an important role in the third *Critique*;[36] it must finally answer the question of purpose, which arises out of aesthetic judgement, with a creatively constructed, humanly oriented *possibility*. This seems to be what Kant meant in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement when we he wrote, 'As we never meet such an end outside ourselves, we naturally look for it in ourselves' (301). With this in mind, what I have been calling 'judicial reason' or 'the judicial employment of reason', which is based upon the feeling of beauty and the poetic possibility of the highest good, should not be equated with the practical perspective of reason, but must become practically a perspective of its own. Reason employed judiciously is thus best described as *poetic reason* or *the poetic perspective* of reason.

If this understanding of the relationship between aesthetic and teleological judgement is more or less correct, it is not difficult to understand why the idea of the highest good becomes, in Kant's way of thinking, the finest human effort to express the underlying purposiveness that unifies nature and freedom into a coherent world view. The highest good, as a poetic possibility, does not constitute a realm; instead, it 'supplements' reason's judicial perspective in its role as the facilitator of smooth transitions between theory and practice.[37] This poetic perspective brings us to the close of Kant's critical trilogy and to the threshold of a fuller understanding of Kant's position on theology. Conceived as a tri-perspectival system, Kant's philosophy singles out the concept of the highest good as the highest reflective principle of judgement, and the point of departure for any philosophical account of theology. This understanding of Kant's philosophical theology is not a radical departure from his earlier posture. We encounter a similar idea, for

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[35] Adina Davidovich, for example, argues broadly for the primacy of the latter. Adina Davidovich *Religion as a Province of Meaning: The Kantian Foundations of Modern Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 51–122. Paul Guyer, on the other hand, argues for the former. Paul Guyer *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 50–51.

[36] Davidovich understands, and on this we agree, that 'To be able to recognize spatio-temporal events as moral acts, we need to be able to contemplate nature in terms of final causes'. Davidovich *Province of Meaning*, 89.   [37] Kant *The Critique of Judgement*, (453).

instance, in his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (delivered around 1783–84), where he explicitly asked 'But what are we to call the kind of theology in which God is thought of as the *summum bonum*, as the highest moral good?' (28:1002).[38] His answer at that time was 'moral theology' because 'I do not think of God as the supreme principle in the realm of nature but rather the supreme principle in the realm *of ends*' (28:1002). In this same context, Kant also called a moral theology based upon the Word of God '*theological morality*'. 'Such a theological morality', Kant wrote, 'has no principle, or if it does have one, this is nothing but the fact that the will of God has been revealed and discovered' (28:1002).

In the final paragraph of the third *Critique*, Kant developed his position a bit further, referring to it as 'an ethical theology'. This is an obvious advancement over his earlier term 'moral theology' in that it highlights *aims* rather than *norms* without losing its emphasis on goodness. Now, if we supposed that an ethical theology, which relies importantly upon the poetic perspective of reason for its constitution, is the most developed form of philosophical theology in Kant's thinking, then it becomes much easier to understand his demand for conflict between philosophy and theology. Philosophy, in seeking a unified purpose in nature and morality from the perspective of reason alone, finds the poetic concept of the highest good, and theology, in seeking to fulfil its role as the conveyer of God's Word, finds all purpose emanating from the God Most High.[39] This seems to be why, in the context of his discussion of ethical theology at the end of the third *Critique*, Kant juxtaposed the various dimensions of philosophical theology with what the philosopher would presume to be their counterparts in revealed theology. 'An ethical theology is therefore quite possible. … But a theological ethics – on the part of pure reason – is impossible … . In the same way a theological physics would be a monstrosity [for pure reason], … whereas a physical, or properly speaking, physico-teleological, theology can at least serve as a propaedeutic to theology proper' (485). Kant's philosophical description of theology looks very much like two sides in a dispute.

The hope of the philosopher rests in the harmony we feel in nature and the poetic possibility that the ends of nature and the ends of freedom are united under the ideas of God and the highest good. The hope of the theologian rests in a vision of ultimate reality afforded by God's Word interpreted under the guidance of God's Spirit. This poetic understanding of the third *Critique* explains why ethical theology and revealed theology would necessarily be at odds – they provide a conflict of hopes from two distinct perspectives. More needs to be said if the abductive argument against the moral hypothesis is to be completely successful. If this sketch of transition is correct (and the

[38] Immanuel Kant *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* translated by Allen W. Wood in Wood and di Giovanni (eds.) *Religion and Rational Theology*. The subsequent quotations are also from this text.
[39] See Ge. 14:18 and Mk. 5:7.

resulting possibility of a third critical perspective upheld), however, it promises to be an important motif for understanding Kant's critical corpus as a unified whole and a useful tool for adjudicating the many renderings of Kant's writings on religion and theology. Under the motif of transition, for example, it would be correct to say that Green's interpretation of Kant under the moral hypothesis is a good example of *reduced reason*. Reason, instead of achieving its full potential by a transition to the poetic perspective, becomes mired in its practical realm. Furthermore, by returning to theoretical reason and transforming it, Hick's system of theology regresses away from both moral and poetic reason. Instead of having reduced reason, he has *reversed reason*. Given Green's repose and Hick's retreat, a strange peace emerges between philosophy and theology. Our conclusion must surely be, if this analysis is accurate, that the moral hypothesis as conventional wisdom should no longer be uncritically embraced.[40]