

## Faith without hope is dead: Moral arguments and the theological virtues

RORY LAWRENCE PHILLIPS

*Department of Philosophy, University College London, Gower Street, WC1E 6BT, UK*

*rory.phillips@ucl.ac.uk*

**Abstract:** It is well-known that Kant defends a conception of God and the final end of our moral striving, called the highest good. In this paper, I outline Kant's argument for why we ought to have faith in God and hope for the highest good, and argue that the Kantian argument can be extended in such a way as to show the unity of the theological virtues. This feature of the Kantian account can then have ramifications in further questions regarding the relationship of faith and moral action.

Out of the three theological virtues, hope is the one often overlooked.<sup>1</sup> Much contemporary philosophy of religion is concerned with the claims of faith, and various controversies about the nature of faith. Love (or charity) is dealt with by moral philosophy and philosophy of the emotions. Hope, on the other hand, is the odd one out.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I want to use a Kantian position in philosophy of religion to argue that faith essentially or ultimately requires hope.<sup>3</sup> I take this to be in line with Biblical views on the matter (though I will not directly argue from the Biblical sources), insofar as the theological virtues go together or fit into a unity.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, for example, the letter of James (2:14-17) (which I paraphrase in the title) claims that true faith and love (manifested as good works) must go together, as do the Johannine letters (e.g. 1 John 2:3-5). I will claim that hope is a Janus-faced attitude, which is at once theoretical and practical, and thus forms the bridge between faith and love.

This essay then has two main aims. The first is to argue that a virtue of Kantian moral arguments for the existence of God is that they give directions for a good account of the theological virtues and their unity. The second claim I want to make is that a virtue of this facet of the Kantian arguments is that it shows how to make sense of hope as both a theoretical and a practical attitude. In particular, this essay is not an attempt to give a new interpretation of Kant's own views. There are many discussions of the Kant's argument for God and highest good and its role in Kant, and what kind of attitudes Kant thinks are involved – but many these interpretative issues can be set aside for the purposes of this paper, as I only intend to outline a Kantian position on the question of the theological virtues.<sup>5</sup> This essay is in 3 parts. In the first, I give an outline of the Kantian position that I intend to take. In the second, I show how this position can be used to give hope its proper place, with reference to the Kantian position outlined in section 1, but also with reference to Pieper's classic *On Hope*.<sup>6</sup> In the third, I anticipate and respond to some potential objections.

### The Kantian position

The Kantian framework within which I shall be working mainly involves Kant's moral argument(s) for the existence of God.<sup>7</sup> This argument-cluster is designed to begin from the fact of morality or of our moral obligation and move to the necessity of positing God to account for this fact, or some derivative fact. It is important to note that this Kantian argument is not simply a moral argument that states:

- A) Moral values/obligations/facts exist
- B) If moral values/obligations/facts exist then God exists
- C) Therefore God exists

This is a valid argument, but the inference is too quick to pass muster for Kant, partly because he denies that the mere existence of moral values or obligations would be sufficient to imply God's existence, and partly because it makes a knowledge-claim that has been shown to be, in Kantian jargon 'a dialectical use of reason' – an inference which goes beyond knowledge and into the realm of faith.<sup>8</sup> So we are going to have to move more slowly from morality to God, and also frame the claim so as not to violate the bounds of knowledge Kant thinks he has shown with the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the system of transcendental idealism. The arguments thus share a form of the following: Firstly there is an assertion of some rational commitments regarding morality or the rationality of morality. Secondly, these rational commitments are

seen to involve or entail some further commitment. This further commitment is however, problematic in some way (which will become clear when I outline the specific argument), and then God is the necessary solution, insofar as God is found to make rationally consistent the demands or commitments we antecedently have. I note here that it is a virtue of these arguments that they show that the relationship of God and morality is a more complicated one than the simple argument above suggests.<sup>9</sup>

### Kant's 2<sup>nd</sup> Critique argument

The argument is designed to show that, in order to consistently affirm our moral obligation, we must postulate the existence of God, as well as the actuality of immortality, though it is just the existence of God I focus on for now. In any case, the arguments would be essentially the same, substituting "God" for "immortality" throughout. The only difference would be in the role the postulates would play in explaining why we need to postulate them. The argument's first premise is going to be that moral obligations or moral facts<sup>10</sup> exist. This Kant thinks he has already shown. Briefly, his thought on this (as of 1788 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Critique*) is that we are confronted with what he calls the Fact of Reason (1996a, 5:30). This fact is the individual's consciousness of his own moral ability, especially in the guise of something like ought-implies-can. Kant's example is of a person who, when told that he needs to bear false witness against a neighbour or suffer death, knows that he could certainly refuse and face death with the knowledge that he did his duty. So, Kant concludes, we intuitively feel the binding power of morality, and then infer that possess at least the freedom required for this binding power to be actual. This is then developed until we reach the postulates.

The postulates section spells out what Kant thinks about the ultimate goal of morality. Kant of course thinks that particular actions ought to be performed or refrained from on the basis of their maxims – the subjective principle of action – , or the inherent worth of the actions themselves (for example whether they use rational agency as a mere means). But Kant also sees that we might reasonably enquire about the moral project as such, even once we agree that moral actions are to be done for their own sake. This question of the moral project is what guides Kant to think of the highest good.<sup>11</sup> The highest good is the perfect unity of both happiness and morality, and for Kant is spelled out with the idea that one's happiness is proportioned to one's virtue.<sup>12</sup> It is our highest rational end combined with our highest natural end. There is, naturally, some disagreement in Kant scholarship about how to interpret the highest good, but I will leave this aside for now, as we can just take a rough conception for the purposes of this paper.

One further point needs to be discussed. This is the famous 'primacy of practical reason'. It plays a role in motivating these arguments. Kant argues that if practical reason has 'of itself original a priori principles with which certain theoretical positions are inseparably connected' then we might well conclude in favour of practical reason. (1996a, 5:120) So, given that morality, and the fact of reason – the sheer confrontation between myself and the knowledge of my own obligation – shows that reason is 'of itself...practical' then we are entitled to conclude that practical reason has a certain primacy, that is, that practical reason can legitimately extend us to believing things that no theoretical reasoning could show to be legitimate. The caveat is of course that this is only allowed in cases where theoretical and practical reason have the same object (such as in the case of God) and where the union of these two faculties of reason (which are in the end 'one and the same reason' (*ibid*, 5:121)) is not contingent 'but based a priori on reason itself and therefore *necessary*' (*ibid* 5:121). In other words, we can only invoke practical reason and its primacy over theoretical reason once we are entitled to conclude that the object for which we are invoking this primacy is not a contingent or a discretionary one, but one necessary to the rationality of a universal moral project. This then entitles Kant to move on to thinking about the postulates of God and immortality as demanded by rational consistency in the moral project.<sup>13</sup>

The highest good, then, is an end of our rational activity of the moral project. But, Kant reasons, in trying to bring about this highest good, as we are by engaging in the moral project, we are caught in a bind. It appears that we are trying to bring something about that we know that we have no ability to do so. So either we give up morality (which we cannot, because the Fact of Reason impresses itself upon us), or we accept that there exists a being which could in some way bring about the highest good. Of course, such a being would be God (*ibid* 5:125). So, Kant concludes, we are rationally committed to faith in God, by virtue of

the demands of practical reason, even if, as he also thinks, we have no ground on merely theoretical reason to judge one way or the other on the question of the existence of God. A similar argument is given for immortality, but I shall not go into that here. We can summarise the argument slightly more formally as follows:

- A) We are rationally committed to morality
- B) Morality, or the Moral Project, aims at a certain state of the world, called the Highest Good, in which virtue and happiness are proportioned to one another, or there is a maximal amount of goodness and a maximal amount of happiness
- C) So in order to accept morality with its commitments (which we are rationally committed to), we must accept that we should aim at the Highest Good.<sup>14</sup>
- D) But the Highest Good is out of our reach, so there is a rational tension here.
- E) The rational tension can only be solved by jettisoning Morality, or by invoking some further being who can bring the Highest Good about
- F) We cannot jettison morality, so we must be rationally committed to believing in a being who can bring the Highest Good about
- G) This being is God

It is important to note that this argument, being centred around rational commitment, is not directed at proving that God exists. That would be too much. If sound, it shows instead that we are committed to God's existence, given the prior commitments we have to morality and what morality entails. We therefore have to believe in God's existence, as it is the only way to reconcile our rational commitments to one another. This is why I use the phraseology of 'rational tension' – our commitments pull in different directions, unless we accept the conclusion that we are committed to having faith in God.<sup>15</sup> This is the result partly of Kant's strictures concerning knowledge of transcendent things – Kant just cannot have it that theoretical reason alone can show the existence of a being transcendent and non-empirical.

Summary so far

In the remainder of this essay, I will outline the special role that hope plays in Kant's argument. I will argue that it is a virtue of this style of arguing that it shows how the theological virtues are in a unity, or at least these arguments lay the groundwork for a unified theory of the theological virtues. I will not directly argue that the theological virtues imply one another, so that to have any of them one must possess all of them, but my conclusion is more modest – that the Kantian style of arguing can be developed to give an account of the theological virtues and their unity, from the perspective of the agent, and I will outline how this can be so on this view. We should note however that the arguments always leave it open that from purely theoretical reason, one seems entitled to reject morality along with the postulates. This is a possible way to answer the arguments, but ultimately I shall not discuss it, as it is a radical solution that involves jettisoning a great deal.

The role of hope

Now we have an outline of the position, we can see how hope is involved. I shall give a brief outline of the main features of hope as an attitude, before turning to hope and the Kantian argument. We do well, however, to distinguish here between mundane or worldly hopes and fundamental hope. I am concerned primarily with the latter, which shares some features with the former, but is somewhat different in scope (this distinction is clearly outlined by Pieper (1969, 21ff)).

Hope is distinct from mere wanting or wishing. We can wish for things we know to be incredibly unlikely, such as winning the lottery. Similarly, we can want to win the lottery. But hoping to win the lottery, absent any particular evidence which makes one more than usually confident, seems like too strong an attitude to take. In other words, hoping seems to involve something like a reasonable belief that the event or state hoped-for will come about, or there should at least be some evidence that such a state or event will come about.<sup>16</sup> Hoping, unlike wishing, entails belief in possibility. One may wish for things that are possible, but one could also wish for something impossible, it seems. One might wish that things on a recent date had gone differently, or that one had got the job, or even that one had never been born. These wishes, being

about the past, seem impossible (as long as we grant that changing the past is impossible). However, it seems fishy to say ‘I hope that I had never been born’. The only sense one can make of this is as a claim about the future – that one hopes that, for example, it will turn out that one’s entire life had been some kind of radical illusion. But even in this remote possibility, it would not be expressed as ‘I hope that I had never been born’, but rather ‘I hope that it will turn out that I had never been born’. So hopes have a number of features. One feature is that they require some belief in the logical possibility of the hoped-for. A second, which builds on the first, is that the agent must have a rational belief in the real possibility of the hoped-for. This is in line with recent interpretations of Kant here such as Chignell (2013b).<sup>17</sup>

Many, but not all, hopes are more specifically characterised by a rational belief that this possibility may be realised *by one’s own action or effort*. This does not have to characterise hope, because we can, for example, hope that our friend wins the race.<sup>18</sup> An important additional feature is that hope may license certain behaviour that might be irrational without this hope.<sup>19</sup> It is this feature that I want to focus on in connection with the Kantian arguments.

We have seen that one way of viewing Kant’s argument is that we are rationally committed to certain other projects, including the bringing about of the highest good, by virtue of our commitment to morality. But morality itself does not give us the means by which to bring the highest good about. It is in a sense powerless to produce that. The highest good requires that God will produce a state of virtue and happiness. But to believe in God and God’s ability here requires some kind of faith. Once we have that kind of faith, our rational commitments begin to be unified again. On the one hand, we have a rational commitment to morality, and all that it entails, including the highest good. On the other, we are committed (partly by morality itself) to an honest evaluation of ourselves and our place in the world. These two together result in the inescapable conclusion that we are rationally committed to bringing about a state of affairs that is really impossible for us to bring about.

Now this tension is resolved by God. Again, it is crucial to remember that for Kant, purely theoretical reason alone could not tell us that we should postulate God in this sense, because purely theoretical reason can maintain that we could just give up our moral conception of ourselves. But given that practical reason is unable to abide by that, we are driven to the God-option.<sup>20</sup> Now we have faith, we can see where hope comes in. We have a belief both that the object of hope (which will be the highest good) is possible, and a belief that it will actually come about. But this belief is uncertain. There is some connection between the highest good and our moral actions, which remain under our control. What I want to suggest here is that moral action in a broad sense is licensed by hope. That is to say that, for any individual moral action, there are reasons which we can give for and against such an action being carried out. If we are Kantians, then we will regard a moral duty as being overriding, and so it remains true that, for example *I just ought to return the book*. These individual moral actions do not require hope as a theological virtue. But when we sit back and reflect on the question of why we might perform any moral actions whatsoever, here is where hope is important. Because the whole edifice of morality is bound up with the highest good (as a consequence) and the highest good requires God, we require there to be some rational license, as it were, for actions. This rational license is given by the justified hope in God’s bringing about the highest good.

I am not claiming that hope is a motive, or motivating reason (though it may be). It is not that I think that actions have to be done with hope or motivated by hope. Instead, hope gives us a kind of internal warrant to perform actions we would not otherwise be rationally entitled to perform. This is because hope removes a kind of internal conflict of reason, similar to the way faith in God removed the internal conflict of our rational commitments.

We are indeed committed to morality. But when it comes to the highest good, we are confronted with a problem. The question that gives rise to the problem is whether we have faith in the highest good. Now this question might seem to have an obvious answer – yes – but things are not so simple. This is the problem. If we claim to have faith in the same way as we do have faith in the existence of God, this has two unfortunate consequences. The first consequence is that we are overly dogmatic – that is, we make claims to the existence of something which is not-yet, something we wholly lack access to, something beyond us in time.<sup>21</sup>

This would be an overly dogmatic attitude to take to it, because it is not just a ‘taking-to-be-true attitude regarding something for which there cannot be empirical evidence (or for which empirical evidence is silent)

claim, as faith in God is.<sup>22</sup> With the highest good, or other such objects, it would be a taking-to-be-true regarding something which has no existence yet. But it is not the transcendent nature of the claim – that these things are beyond us – which is necessarily problematic. It is the combination of the transcendence element of the claim and the inherent future-directedness of the attitude toward the highest good that generates the worry over dogmatism. The second undesirable consequence is related. This is that in claiming such faith for the highest good, we would be claiming something like an inevitability for the highest good. This naturally raises all sorts of worries about free will and determinism, which could be avoided with thinking of the highest good and the attitude we should take to it in a different way.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly to my worry here, Pieper raises the twin dangers, as he sees it, either side of hope. On the one hand, we might fall into despair. On the other hand, we might become presumptive (2012, 113). Presumption, which is the kind of attitude I would designate by a kind of misplaced faith, is a ‘perverse anticipation of the fulfilment of hope’ (*ibid*, 113). In other words, this attitude rejects the arduous character of the hoped-for object, by either claiming that a) it is already present or b) that its coming-about is certain.<sup>24</sup> Presumption then actually destroys hope, because it turns it into certainty (either of the present or the future), and this certainty has consequences for moral thought and action. If we are presumptive, we engage in either what Hare calls “puffing up” the human capacity to do good, or reducing the moral demand.<sup>25</sup> That is, either we take the route of saying that we actually have a much greater ability to fill the ‘moral gap’ between our action and our duty, or we claim that the moral demands are not actually all that demanding. Neither of these options are acceptable on the Kantian model.

Despair is the condition of taking the current state of the world as bad (because of moral evil, say) and then assuming that nothing could ever change, that attempts at individual or collective moral renewal are ‘vanity, vanity, all is vanity’. Pieper tells us that despair is ‘self-contradictory, self-divisive. In despair man actually denies his own desire, which is as indestructible as himself’ (*ibid*, 116). In other words, the hope in the final achievement of the good is so inextricably linked to the moral nature of humanity that taking away the hope through despair ends up denying the moral nature – but then we are irrevocably split. Hope is therefore akin to a necessary condition on our selfhood remaining intact. We have therefore seen that conceiving of the highest good as an object of faith (in a narrow sense) is not the right attitude to take, and that we should instead take the attitude of hope, in order to avoid presumption or despair.

So we should reject that kind of thinking in terms of faith in the highest good, and take a different path. Hope fills the role, because it does not require us to be overly dogmatic, nor does it involve thinking of the hoped-for object as inevitable (indeed, one might think that hoping for something which is an inevitability is evidence of confusion).<sup>26</sup>

So hope is the right attitude to take toward the highest good. This is because of its peculiar Janus-faced character.<sup>27</sup> Hope is in some sense similar to faith, insofar as it relies on a belief in the real possibility of the hoped-for object. But it is also in some sense similar to charity or love, insofar as it is an attitude concerned with the practical aspects of living, namely, that it can play a role in a system of commitments which licenses moral behaviour. Hope is at once a theoretical and a practical attitude, which bridges the gap between faith and love. Another way of putting this same point is to say that hope has a cognitive element – belief in some present possibility – but also a conative element – turning towards the future. This account can thus incorporate Chignell’s (2013a, 205) point that hope is clearly weaker than and different from belief but has been often used to interpret talk of “faith” in religious circles. This is because faith and hope form a unity (along with love) such that it is artificial to separate them out.<sup>28</sup>

I will now discuss how my Kantian account can show that hope forms a bridge between faith and love, and why this is a virtue of my account. Without this bridge, we are left in a puzzle of how to move from faith to love. That is, we can raise the following question: How does faith generate good works? I will argue that the Kantian arguments supply one good account of this generation, which also shows the unity of the theological virtues.<sup>29</sup>

The bridge of hope is shown by the arguments because from the perspective of the agent, we can see that the concern for morality hinges on it being a rational project. Because morality implies other commitments, we need to accept them, or reject morality, on pain of rational incoherence or disunity.<sup>30</sup> After the conclusion of the argument, the agent is in a position where they have accepted morality, and its extra commitments, and so is rationally coherent again. However, it is important to note that the acceptance of

God is logically posterior to the acceptance of the highest good as an end incumbent upon us (because the highest good requires God).

In the order of discovery, for the agent, the theological virtues go from love (in its guise of morality), through hope (for the highest good), to faith (in God).<sup>31</sup> Because the highest good plays such a vital role in the arguments, for the agent, they are well-placed to see the connection between their faith in God, their hope, and their moral actions. It is not that individual moral actions are only licensed by hope, or by the rational structure of which hope is a part. It is that the project of morality itself is rationally licensed by this structure.<sup>32</sup>

The question of how faith generates works, is then only raised if we have the simple argument in mind, or an overly simple view of the relationship between morality and God. This is because for someone who accepts the simple argument outlined in section 1 – that moral facts/values/properties exist and if they exist then God exists – there is a puzzle about how their faith does anything more. In principle the agent who accepts this argument at T1 could have performed all the moral actions they do at T2, at the pre-acceptance stage of T0. In other words, their faith adds nothing over and above adding to their stock of (putatively) true beliefs. For the Kantian agent, however, things are different. Their moral commitments are bound tightly together with their faith, but their faith by itself could not make any difference – the faith requires the hope in the fulfilment of the project of morality, and the faith and hope together enjoin the agent to perform acts of love, that is, moral actions, and might in the end provide rational support for doing those actions.<sup>33</sup>

So, an agent who has love and hope but no faith is disunified because they are willing to perform moral actions and have an idea of the purpose of the moral project, but are caught in the tension of having to believe that but also not believing that there is a being or agent that could bring about such a thing. They would then resolve this tension either by accepting faith, or by puffing up their own (and other humans') capacities or bargaining down what the moral law requires. The agent who has love and faith but no hope is willing to perform moral actions and believes that there is a being which could bring about a highest good, but lacks a unity insofar as they have no way of accounting for why their moral actions are important for the project of morality, in a broad sense. The agent who has faith and hope but no love believes that there is a being who can bring about a highest good, and hopes for the coming of this highest good, but fails to themselves contribute, and so fall into something similar to the presumptive attitude; for example, they might fatalistically think that because God is all-forgiving then it doesn't matter what they do, so love, or moral action, is pointless.<sup>34</sup>

It is important that the hope is of a peculiar character. It cannot be that the agent has the hope that they shall bring about the highest good – as if a single agent within a single human lifetime could do so – but that their actions are in some way connected to the highest good. From Kant, we find a model of this. This model is that we seem to find the view that earthly actions count insofar as they form, at least partly, the metric by which our place in the highest good (as a maximally happy and maximally virtuous state) is determined.

To see this, we can turn again to the Pieper, especially the discussion of despair. Despair is the negation of hope insofar as it considers the hoped-for impossible to achieve. In my view, this would mean that the despairer might still perform individual moral actions, and recognise moral authority, but when it comes to thinking about the project of morality as such, they would think that it is unachievable. This is a tension in reason, because the despairing agent is practically engaging in a project that they conceive to be unfulfillable.<sup>35</sup> This person has faith and love, but not hope. What is added by hope is a rational coherence in the attitudes of the agent. The agent who hopes is then led to conceive of morality as a fundamentally worthwhile project, despite any and all evidence to the contrary, e.g. no matter how much moral evil the world actually contains.

## Objections and Responses

I shall now frame and respond to some objections which one might have. One objection might be that hope involves optimism, which can be misleading, or unwarranted. This gets something right – hope and optimism are connected in some sense, as I shall outline – but the kind of optimism that is objectionable

here is not warranted by hope. In this section I will not be talking about optimism as a psychological condition or trait, as it has been discussed by some (such as Benatar 2006). I think it is clear that the kind of theological hope I have been talking about does not warrant what has become known in psychological and philosophical literature as ‘Pollyannaism’, that is, an unwarranted and basic attitude that things will just turn out well.<sup>36</sup> Another way of putting this is to say that optimism which would be unwarranted is when the assurance of the hoped-for is taken as bedrock, perhaps in something like the way I outlined above, when it is taken as an object of faith rather than hope.<sup>37</sup> That would be problematic, for the reasons I gave above. Another kind of optimism which is commonly thought to be problematic is the optimism inherent in Leibnizian theodicy. I shall not here be arguing against this theodicy. It seems to me that there are at least some construals of Leibniz according to which his views fall foul of the Kantian restrictions I want to put in place against faith in the not-yet. There could be other readings of Leibniz, however, which do not overstep this particular boundary. So if this objection presents a worry that my position either a) leads to Pollyannaism or b) licenses a kind of ‘best of all possible’ view, then that worry should be assuaged. My view only amounts to a ‘best of all possible’ insofar as the highest good is, by definition, the optimal arrangement of happiness and virtue. But there might be some other worry, according to which my view is troublesome because history shows us that moral progress is at best shaky, and there has been very little of it.<sup>38</sup> What about this worry?

The objector here rightly claims that hope and optimism are connected. The agent that hopes for the highest good or some analogue of it cannot help but also be an optimist, because things would get better if the hoped-for object were to become actual.<sup>39</sup> But the hopeful optimist is not, on my view, committed to thinking that the highest good can come about by their own action. Indeed, they are committed to explicitly recognising that it cannot. Thus the hopeful optimist, who also has faith and love, need not be in any way misled or naïve about the depth and reality of evil in both historical and contemporary societies - Hare, (2005, 214) and Palmquist (2009, 22) are particularly forceful here. They also, by refusing to infer from the extent of existing evil to pessimism, gird themselves against motivational problems. There is then no need to choose between being morally motivated and seeing the world aright.<sup>40</sup> I take it that this thought is expressed by Jeffrey when they say that theological hope ‘produces patience in waiting for God to bring his kingdom to earth and salvation to individuals in his own timing and ways...hope is a mean between the extreme of anxious striving, on the one hand, and despairing paralysis, on the other’ (2017, 205). This mean is shown by the Kantian reasoning. On the Kantian view I am endorsing here, we should not think that there is any tight relationship between our ability to bring about moral ends and the highest good – because it is part of the reasoning regarding the argument for God that we explicitly recognise that our ability cannot ever match up (1996, 5:119).

Another optimism-related objection is that the highest good is not a coherent object of hope, because there is no such thing as an optimal arrangement of virtue and happiness. If, for example, there were 10 million people in the heavenly state of the highest good, surely it would be better if there were 20 million, or even 10 million and one. Surely a maximally virtuous and maximally happy person is always going to be an addition to the goodness of the highest good. I think we are warranted in rejecting the assumption behind this objection. Hope as an attitude does not have to spell out the details of the hoped-for in order to be warranted. It might have to fulfil other conditions, such as being based on evidence or rational commitments, but that the hopeful agent be able to give an account of the details of the hoped-for does not seem like a genuine condition on the rationality of hope. At least, in this particular case under discussion, these problems would surely be regarded as finally solvable by God, being omniscient.

A second cluster of objections might be a ‘moral hazard’ argument similar to that given by Jay (2014). Jay argues that, for Kant, having a doxastic attitude that God existed would itself be problematic. It is not merely that we cannot ringfence our motivational capacities from our expectations, but that we cannot separate it from our attitudes either. Jay argues that the problem with thinking that the propositional attitude towards ‘God exists’ is doxastic is that it brings with it a bunch of further theses. Among these will be something like ‘God will punish the wicked’. So, when we take the attitude of faith toward those claims, something happens to us. It is not that we lose our freedom to choose, but that we are ‘overwhelmingly inclined to *choose badly* when presented with the prospect of incurring terrible consequences’.<sup>41</sup> The worry is then that having knowledge of God will impinge on our capacities to choose well. Jay envisions this

happening by, perhaps, not taking the adequate time in rational reflection and moral deliberation, and thereby either choosing an action which is not in accord with duty, or choosing an action in accord with duty for the wrong reasons (e.g. because one is emotionally driven rather than coolly reflective). Even if some of us can be knowledgeable about these heavenly rewards or hellish punishments and still choose for the good, the fact that many would be unable to do so is enough for Kant, on Jay's account, to think that knowledge of these matters is overall a bad thing (Jay, (2014) 227). So, Jay concludes, we should take a non-doxastic attitude to God's existence, that is, we should, if we are attracted to Kantian views, be fictionalists about God.

This argument assumes that we take the same kind of attitudes to each of the different propositions in the complex of propositions that Jay invokes to get his argument started. But this assumption is unwarranted. We might believe that God will punish the wicked, and that we are not worthy of salvation, but we can justifiably hope that God will save us through grace, or forgive us, as attested by Scripture. More specifically, we can develop a response to this worry from materials derived from Luther. Luther argues that the importance of the Gospel is that it sets us free from the law. What this means is that the law condemns us of sin, but the Gospel reveals grace and forgiveness, such that the problem that might lead us to endorse Jay's argument does not get going. The problem only gets going if we are convinced that having anything stronger than a non-doxastic attitude regarding God will mean that our motivation is determined badly. But on the Kantian view, the worry dissipates once we realise that our duty can be made manifest to us by practical reason (especially in the Fact of Reason). We end up knowing that we just ought to perform or not perform certain actions. With a firm grasp on the highest good, then, and our place in it, perhaps informed by revelation, we might then believe that even if we choose badly, so long as certain conditions are met (e.g. repentance) then this will not doom us to the prospect of hell, and therefore we will not be inclined to choose badly at all.<sup>42</sup>

I have pursued a reading which means that the Kantian argument requires more than the minimal attitudes.<sup>43</sup> Kant has in mind a committed practical attitude, which is supposed to inform one's life and moral orientation, which would be difficult to square with a fictionalist take on religious belief. Kant requires a theoretical belief in the real possibility of God and the highest good, as full theoretical belief would be both presumptuous and beyond the bounds of knowledge, which translates in the practical sphere to a commitment to an improvement in one's moral character, amongst other things.

## Conclusion

By way of a conclusion, I will summarise what I have done in this paper. I first outlined what I take to be Kant's moral argument for God's existence. In this respect, I emphasised the key step in these arguments of the rational commitment to some kind of highest good. I then discussed hope, and why hope is in some ways the key theological virtue, because it bridges the gap between faith, the cognitive virtue, and love, the volitional virtue. This gives good grounds for thinking that the theological virtues are in a unity. I then argued that a virtue of the Kantian accounts was that it gave us a good account of why this unity holds, because of the fact that they place hope in such a central place. I then responded to some objections that one might have to this kind of approach, namely a) that it is too optimistic in a bad sense b) that it is subject to a kind of moral hazard argument.

Hope is then a central plank in the make-up of the agent in the Kantian view I have presented. In addition, because of its relationship to faith and love we can see the wisdom in Pieper's statement that for the hoper, 'to accept the vanity of his hopes is an unthinkable idea' (1969, 19). Hoping is not distinct from acting, and acting is enacting faith. We can therefore conclude that the Kantian arguments can give a good account of the unity of the theological virtues, as well as explaining the role of hope, and giving it its proper place as the simultaneously theoretical and practical mediator between faith and love.

## References:

- AQUINAS, ST THOMAS (1947) *Summa Theologiae* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, Benziger Brothers)
- BLÖSSER, CLAUDIA & STAHL, TITUS 'Fundamental Hope and Practical Identity' *Philosophical Papers* **46**:345-371
- BENATAR, DAVID (2006) *Better Never to Have Been* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)
- BODEN, MARGARET A. (1966) 'Optimism' *Philosophy* **41**:291-303
- CHIGNELL, ANDREW (2013a) 'Prolegomena to any future Non-Doxastic Religion' *Religious Studies* **49**:195-207
- (2013b) 'Rational Hope Moral Order, and the Revolution of the Will' in Eric Watkins (ed.) *Divine Order, Human Order, and the Order of Nature* (Oxford, Oxford University Press) 197-218
- (2014) 'Rational Hope, Possibility, and Divine Action' in Gordon E. Michalson (ed.) *Kant's Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) 98-117
- DALFERTH, INGOLF (2013) 'Rational Hope, Possibility, and Divine Action' in Gordon E. Michalson (ed.) *Kant's Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) 58-79
- DAVIS, STEPHEN T. (1993) *Risen Indeed* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B Eerdmans)
- DIETZ, ALEX (2016) 'What We Together Ought to Do' *Ethics* **126**:955-982
- EAGLETON, TERRY (2015) *Hope Without Optimism* (New Haven CT, Yale University Press)
- ELLIOT, DAVID (2017) *Hope and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)
- ENOCH, DAVID (2007) 'Agency Schmagency: Why Normativity Won't Come From What is Constitutive of Action' *The Philosophical Review* **115**:169-198
- FERREIRA, M. JAMIE (2014) 'Hope, Virtue, and the Postulate of God: A reappraisal of Kant's pure practical rational belief' *Religious Studies* **50**: 3-26
- FUGATE, COURTNEY 'The Highest Good and Kant's Proof(s) of God's Existence' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* **31**:137-158
- GARDNER, SEBASTIAN (2006), 'The Primacy of Practical Reason' in Graham Bird (ed.) *A Companion to Kant* (Indianapolis, IN, Blackwell) 259-274
- GAVA, GABRIELE (2019) 'Kant and Crusius on Belief and Practical Justification' *Kantian Review* **24**:53-75
- GUYER, PAUL (2005a) 'From Nature to Morality: Kant's New Argument in the "Critique of Teleological Judgement"' in Paul Guyer *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (Oxford, Oxford University Press) 314-342

(2005b) 'The Unity of Nature and Freedom: Kant's Conception of the System of Philosophy' in Paul Guyer *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (Oxford, Oxford University Press) 277-313

HARE, JOHN (1996) *The Moral Gap* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)

(2005) 'Kant on the Rational Instability of Atheism' in Andrew Dole & Andrew Chignell (eds) *God and the Ethics of Belief: New Essays in Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) 202-218

INSOLE, CHRISTOPHER (2016) *The Intolerable God* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans)

HAYWARD, MAX KHAN (2018) 'Immoral Realism' *Philosophical Studies* **176**:897-914

JAY, CHRISTOPHER (2014) 'The Kantian Moral Hazard Argument for Religious Fictionalism' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* **75**:207-232

JEFFREY, ANNE (2017) Jeffrey 'Does Hope Morally Vindicate Faith?' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* **81**:193-211

KANT, IMMANUEL (1992[1781/1787]) *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Paul Guyer & Allen Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

(1996a) *Practical Philosophy* trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

(2000[1790]) *Critique of the Power of Judgement* trans. Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

(1996b) *Religion and Rational Theology* trans. George di Giovanni & Allen Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

KENNY, ANTHONY (1963) *Action, Emotion, and Will* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul)

KLEINGELD, PAULINE (2016) 'Kant on "Good", the Good, and the Duty to Promote the Highest Good' in Thomas Höwing (ed.) *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy* (Berlin, De Gruyter) 33-49

KORSGAARD, CHRISTINE (1996a) *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

(1996b) *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

LUTHER, MARTIN (1966[1520]) *Treatise on Good Works* trans. W. A. Lambert & James Atkinson in *Luther's Works: Vol. 44: The Christian in Society I* ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia, Fortress Press)

(1958[1535]) *Commentary on Galatians* Middleton trans., ed. P. S. Watson (London, James Clarke & Co)

MICHALSON JR, GORDON E. (1999) *Kant and the Problem of God* (Oxford, Blackwell)

PAYTAS, TYLER (2017) 'God's Awful Majesty Before Our Eyes: Kant's Moral Justification for Divine Hiddenness' *Kantian Review* **22**:133-157

- PETERS, CURTIS H. (1993) *Kant's Philosophy of Hope* (New York, NY, Peter Lang)
- PIEPER, JOSEF (2012[1934]) 'On Hope' in *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco, CA, Ignatius Press)
- (1969[1967]) *Hope and History* trans. Richard & Clara Winston (London, Burns & Oates)
- SCHOPENHAUER, ARTHUR (1974) *Parerga and Paralipomena Vol. II* trans. E. J. F. Payne (Oxford, Clarendon)
- SCHRADER, MICHAEL & LEVINE, MICHAEL P. 'Hope: The Janus-Faced Virtue (With Feathers)' *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* **11** DOI: 10.24204/EJPR.V11I3.2935
- SILVERSTEIN, MATTHEW (2015) 'The Schmagency Question' *Philosophical Studies* **172**:1127-1142
- WHEATLEY, J. M. O. (1958) 'Wishing and Hoping' *Analysis* **18**:121-131
- WOOD, ALLEN W. (2008) *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

---

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements: I thank Sebastian Gardner, Rob Simpson, and three anonymous referees, for helpful feedback on previous drafts.

<sup>2</sup> Though there has been recent work done in this area, notably Elliot (2017), who argues for the centrality of hope, primarily from the perspective of virtue ethics. When citing Kant's work I do so using standard conventions of A/B numbers for *Critique of Pure Reason* and Akademie pagination for other works.

<sup>3</sup> The centrality of hope to Kant has been previously noted, for example by Peters (1993). It is clearly Kant's view that faith and hope go together, as is made clear in the Canon (A800/B828ff), but here I intend to spell out how this line can be defended and extended.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey (2017, 202) notes that both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic strands of the Christian tradition hold a reciprocity thesis about the theological virtues – that to have one of them, the agent must have them all.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Guyer (2005a, 2005b), Hare (2005) Palmquist (2009), Chignell (2013b, 2014), Ferreira (2014), Fugate (2014), Kleingeld (2016), Gava (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Whilst I think that Pieper's discussion of hope can be meaningfully discussed separately from his Thomist, and more generally, Catholic commitments, there is of course a question of how the very different approaches to God and virtues in Kant and Aquinas could be brought into fruitful discussion. One major difference will of course be in the different accounts of the virtues, and to what extent the virtues are dependent on human or divine action. Having noted that, I bracket that discussion for another time.

<sup>7</sup> I use the bracketed "s" as whilst the spirit of the argument remains fairly constant, the letter of the argument changes with different presentations. The first presentation is in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method of the first *Critique* (specifically the "Canon of Pure Reason"). Then comes the version in the second *Critique*, which is usually taken as the canonical statement, and then there is the third *Critique*, which has a slightly different version, revised to take into account the results of that work. For ease of reference, I call this cluster "the moral argument" or "the Kantian argument".

<sup>8</sup> We do well here to recall Kant's famous claim that he found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith (Bxxx).

<sup>9</sup> One might worry, as Hayward (2018) does, that conditionalizing our moral beliefs on the existence of God or some other controversial entity is itself immoral, or at least encourages immoral ways of thinking. I will not attempt to answer this challenge here, but note that at least on a Kantian view, because the movement is supposed to be internal to reason or reason's demands, it does not seem to me to be as damaging as it might otherwise be.

<sup>10</sup> I use this term with caution, as I do not here need to take a stance on the question in Kant scholarship over whether Kant is a constructivist or a realist with respect to morality. For the constructivist view, Korsgaard's (1996a) and (1996b) are staple texts. For the realist reading, see for example Wood (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Kant (1996a 5:109 and 5:119), for example. I will use this phrasing throughout, partly for textual fidelity, but partly because Kant seems to think that the Kingdom of God could possibly come about through sheer human effort. He says that we could say 'with reasons [*Gründe*] that the Kingdom of God [*das Reich Gottes*] has come to us' if the religion of reason were to become enshrined within a state (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* 6:122). Though it must be said this is not conclusive. It could be that the religion of reason just could not be

---

instituted by the state and the moral community formed by human effort alone. For example, in other places Kant seems to signal the necessity of God, for example in *The End of All Things* (8:332).

<sup>12</sup> Kant (1996a) 5:110. Exactly how this proportioning is to take place, and whether there is a distinctly *moral* happiness, or whether the happiness is derived from the satisfaction of our worldly desires, is not a question I take a stance on here. See Kleingeld (2016:38ff) for discussion of this.

<sup>13</sup> For an excellent outline of the primacy of practical reason so far as Kant is concerned, see Gardner (2005).

<sup>14</sup> This is because for any activity that we are engaged in, if that activity has a constitutive end, then we cannot meaningfully engage in that activity without sharing that end (at least as long as we are involved in the activity). Morality has a constitutive end – the highest good – and so whilst we are engaged in the moral project, we commit ourselves thereby to aiming at its end. Most other human activities are not like this – because they have multiple ends. But it would still be very strange, at the very least, for someone to say that they are engaging in the sporting activity but not for the sake of health, fitness, friendship, happiness, or anything else. The point I am making here is similar to the point that Silverstein (2015) makes against Enoch’s (2006) famous ‘schmagency’ objection to constitutivism about agency.

<sup>15</sup> Therefore my point is very similar to the one that John Hare (2005) makes with his argument that the atheist is subject to ‘rational instability’. It also tracks what Kant means when he argues that a virtuous atheist like Spinoza will not be able to maintain their set of attitudes over time, and will either end up in the position of the immoralist who rejects morality, or the rational theist who accepts faith in God (2000 5:451-3)

<sup>16</sup> Thus Wheatley: “To hope, regarding the future, is in part to expect but not to be sure. And if a person is *hopeless* what he lacks is not desire but an expectation that his desire will be met’ (1958, 127). See also Boden (1966, 294).

<sup>17</sup> This means my account is close to that provided by Chignell (2013b, 2014), as for Chignell faith and hope are different kinds of attitude but they do naturally come as a package – the faith that is present is less demanding than full-blown doxastic assent to dogmatic religious propositions (see esp. 2013b 198, 209). There is also similarity between my account and that of Blöser and Stahl (2017), who convincingly argue that there is a kind of hope which is bound up with our practical identities. Indeed, one might be able to make the argument that I am making here in terms of commitments transposed into terms of fundamental practical identities. Blöser and Stahl are surely correct to say that the positive effects of the agent’s hope can only justify the relevant activities if hope is already rational. In my account, this means that the faith in God is only rational once we have seen that the hope for the highest good is already itself rational (made so by our non-negotiable commitment to morality). This again shows how the theological virtues interlink.

<sup>18</sup> Pieper argues that the formal nature of hope is ‘attainability, futurity, and arduousness’. By ‘formal nature’ I take Pieper to be claiming that the attitude of hope is only ever apt whenever these characteristics are present in the hoped-for object. If this is right, it is similar to what Kenny would later designate as the ‘formal object’ of hope (Kenny, (1963), 189), so just as ‘the dangerous’ is the formal object of fear, ‘the attainable, future, yet arduous’ would be the formal object of hope. However, Pieper’s conception of the formal object of hope is controversial, and so I won’t push this here, and leave it for another time, as my account here only requires that the object of hope be really possible and have the ‘licensing’ feature that I will now go on to discuss.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey (2017, 208-9). See also in this connection Guyer (2005b, 246).

<sup>20</sup> This again is part of the ‘primacy of practical reason’ central to the Kantian tradition.

<sup>21</sup> Ferreira (2014, 15) argues that if we believed in God we would have to view the highest good as inevitable. But this seems to me to underrate 1) the persistence of radical evil, and 2) the inscrutability of God’s purposes and action as a non-negotiable agent involved in the realisation of the highest good.

<sup>22</sup> Whilst people have argued that there is empirical evidence for say, miracles (most notably Jesus’ resurrection) – e.g. Davis (1993), I take this to be in principle separable from the question of whether there is empirical evidence for God. There is also a footnote in Kant’s *Religion* (6:153-4) in which Kant says that ‘*assertoric* faith’ is required in the highest good. But this cannot mean that we have faith that the highest good *exists now*. Rather, we have faith that it will be, which is hope – as there is no claim to necessity that it “must” be, only that we are required by practical reason to have faith that it will be. To my mind, this locution is equivalent to hope.

<sup>23</sup> This is also a virtue of Ferreira’s (2014) account, according to which the theoretical belief in the real possibility of the God is equivalent to the practical ‘belief’ (which is really a hope) that God exists. Ferreira says ‘the only *required* rational belief is either the theoretical belief in the “real possibility” of God or, *equivalently*, the “practical belief” in the “existence” of God.’ (2014, 20) I would distinguish myself from Ferreira by saying that Ferreira, like Dalferth (2013) seems to think that we should hope that God exists, but I would argue that we should have faith that God exists which is closely bound to a hope that God brings about the highest good. My view is a close cousin of Ferreira’s and Dalferth’s, because given the unity of the theological virtues hoping that God exists and hoping that God does that which only God can do and somehow must do are surely closely related.

<sup>24</sup> For Pieper, the problem of presumption is tightly bound together with the fact that it represents a rejection of the finite nature of humanity, which he calls the *status viatoris* – always being ‘on the way’ and never finished. Presumption claims either that we currently are finished or that finishing is inevitable. Again, whilst Pieper thinks that all objects of hope are ‘arduous’ (because that characterises the formal object of hope), I do not need to accept this claim here – though surely the highest good is arduous, even if not all objects of hope are.

<sup>25</sup> Hare (1996), chs.4 and 6 deal with puffing up our capacities and reducing the demands, respectively.

---

<sup>26</sup> One might worry that the phrasing of the Apostles' Creed is evidence that the tradition is against me on this, as it says 'I believe in...the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting'. It is sufficient to point out, I think, that the Nicene Creed has 'hope' (or a cognate phrase) in the same place – 'I look to the resurrection and the life of the world to come'. It is consistent with both these phraseologies that 'belief' in the Apostles' Creed is used in a more practical sense, akin to 'believing in' someone. Here, of course, it wouldn't be 'believing in' the resurrection in this exact sense, but trusting in God to bring it about.

<sup>27</sup> This is different from Schrader and Levine's (2019) sense of hope as Janus-faced.

<sup>28</sup> Much as it would be artificial to separate out God's nature and what God has done (God as creator and God as redeemer).

<sup>29</sup> Of course, there has been much discussion of how faith generates or entails good works in the history of theology and philosophy. For just one example, see Luther, who seems at different times to give the view that a) we are necessarily led to perform good works because of our gratitude to God (1953[1535], 138) b) we are freed from our paralysing worries of conscience and so can perform the good works that we were previously worrying about (1953[1535], 41-2).. Luther, of course, was an indirect influence on Kant (through Pietism), though it is unclear to me how much first-hand knowledge Kant had of Luther's texts. Insole (2015, 14) records that the dominant influence on Kant appears to be 'a theological rationalism informed by medieval piety, with strands of influence from Plato and Aristotle that would hardly have found favour with Luther himself.'

<sup>30</sup> Technically there are three options, (the third being to bargain down what the commitments require) as stated above in section 1, but I leave this out for simplicity's sake.

<sup>31</sup> This nicely mirrors the order in the text of 1 Corinthians 13 of faith, hope, love. For a differing view, on which the active development takes place in order from faith through hope to love, see Pieper (2012, 103). I take it that this is following Aquinas, for whom faith resides in the 'speculative intellect' (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q4, Art 2, reply 3) and must come first, because God as the 'object of heavenly bliss' cannot be known apart from faith (*ST* II-II, q4, Art 7, reply 1).

<sup>32</sup> Of course, one might reject God and the whole structure and therefore claim oneself free of morality as well. But the demands of morality (as issuing from rational nature) would still be upon one, and one would still therefore find themselves in rational disunity.

<sup>33</sup> Kant himself spoke of (at least some) moral actions as love – he called this practical love, as opposed to pathological love (in the *Groundwork* (1996a, 4:399), the second *Critique*: (1996a, 5:83), and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1996a, 6:448-52).

<sup>34</sup> For Dietz (2016) and others (see references therein) it is only rational to do group actions if there is a reason to think that others will do their part. This thought is out of place for Kant, as I read them, because for individual moral actions there is still always (sufficient) reason to do my duty. At the level of the highest good, which could be thought of as a kind of group action, we have already acknowledged that we cannot do it ourselves, and in a sense we confront it alone, because our place in the highest good will be determined by our moral life (both now and in the future life that is postulated).

<sup>35</sup> Pieper would seem to agree with what I say here, insofar as he links despair to *acedia*, or sloth, and says that a despairing or slothful agent might well still be a diligent and productive person in their practical life. (2012, 118-9).

<sup>36</sup> For a particularly damning account of the dangers and extent of Pollyannaism, see again Benatar (2006).

<sup>37</sup> Another form of optimism which is unwarranted would be 'as a rule of mental hygiene' to use Boden's (1966, 292) excellent phrase.

<sup>38</sup> Such a person might be Benatar, again, or indeed anyone of the Schopenhaurian mind. For a classic Schopenhauer text, see 'Additional Remarks on the Doctrine of the Suffering of the World' in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1974).

<sup>39</sup> It seems possible that there would be more 'mundane' hopes (as opposed to fundamental hope) for which one could hope for them and be a pessimist about them. This is discussed at length in Eagleton (2015).

<sup>40</sup> Pieper's answer makes reference to the complex of virtue that needs to go with hope, mainly magnanimity and humility. This could also be an effective response, though requires more premises than my response here, because it requires more claims about how hope is not only in a unity with faith and love, but also with magnanimity and humility, virtues which may in turn require other virtues.

<sup>41</sup> Jay (2014, 219). I think Kant's view is also that knowledge of God would make us lose morally significant freedom. The answer to the divine hiddenness problem, on Kant's account, is that if we knew that God existed in a normal way (with a doxastic attitude) then 'God's awful majesty would be forever before our eyes' and we would be unable to freely choose without coercion. For discussion, see Paytas (2017).

<sup>42</sup> Another interesting possible response to Jay is Fugate's (2014) argument that by putting happiness largely on the side of the highest good, we are actually freed to conduct ourselves morally in this earthly existence. My response here is different, but not incompatible with Fugate.

<sup>43</sup> It must be said, however, that there are philosophers who argue in favour of what we might call the 'minimal attitudes' approach. Most notably, Michalson (1999) has long held the view that Kant is closer to 19<sup>th</sup> century atheism than to the Protestantism that, e.g. Hare thinks Kant is near to. I see Michalson's work as developing Kant's rich texts in ways different to mine.