

KANT ON RATIONAL FAITH AND HOPE

by

Michael Yuen

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of

the Australian National University

January 2022

© Copyright by Michael Yuen 2020

All Rights Reserved

Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own original work.

Michael Yuen

1 January 2022

Acknowledgements

I am fortunate to have had a wonderful philosopher as a dissertation supervisor, Fiona Jenkins. Without her assistance and dedication, I would have never completed this project. Fiona's challenges, probing questions, comments, and insights have prompted me to reflect deeply, and from new perspectives, about many of the problems discussed in this dissertation. She guided me through the dissertation process with an acute sense of when to push a graduate student and when to allow freedom. I am forever in Fiona's debt.

I am also grateful to Bronwyn Finnigan, Andrew Chignell, Knox Peden, and Philip Pettit for serving on my committee. Bronwyn is the model of a generous, perceptive, and open-minded interlocutor. Many of the arguments in what follows owe their origins to her insights and searching feedback. Bronwyn provided extensive comments on multiple drafts of this dissertation, was a source of encouragement while writing, and gave me the opportunity to teach an advanced course on Kant's ethics with her. For these things and more, I am grateful to Bronwyn. I owe a debt of gratitude to Andrew for his charitable, sharp, and thought-provoking comments. He gave me the opportunity to undertake research with him at Princeton University where many of the ideas in this dissertation found their final form. Andrew's approach to the history of philosophy, namely, to make available today and (where possible) compelling various philosophical positions of the past in a way that speaks to philosophers and non-philosophers, has shaped my own approach. His work on Kant has inspired many of the arguments found in the following pages. I am especially appreciative of his assistance in securing permission for me to stay at Princeton at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and thus preventing me from needing to endure consecutive quarantine periods. I am thankful to Knox for his feedback and encouragement especially in the early stages of my dissertation. He was instrumental in building a bridge between my Master's

research and the research project in this dissertation. I am also grateful to Philip for his patience and comments. He has had an important influence on my approach to philosophy, not least through his effortless combination of the best aspects of the analytic tradition, the continental tradition, and the history of philosophy.

I have been fortunate to receive Australian Higher Degree Research and ANU Covid-19 scholarships. My research at Princeton University was made possible by a John Passmore Scholarship and a Vice Chancellor's Travel Grant.

Finally, I could not have completed this dissertation without the support of my family and life partner, Cui Jaiyi. My parents Rosalina and Terry Yuen have taught me about perseverance and commitment. My siblings have provided me sanctuaries in New York and Melbourne to write various parts of this dissertation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Jaiyi has been by my side throughout the whole dissertation process. Without her patience, trust, and love, this dissertation would not have been possible.

Abstract

This study concerns Kant's account of the nature and norms of Belief (or faith - *Glaube*) and hope (*Hoffnung*). It aims to better understand the *non-moral* aspects of this account by drawing on his analysis of propositional attitudes. I argue that Kantian Belief is constitutive of, and thus necessary for, pursuing ideal moral *and* non-moral ends, while hope is psychologically necessary for maintaining our resolve in these pursuits, for most of us, most of the time. My interpretation extracts a plausible non-metaphysical example of doctrinal (or theoretical) Belief from Kant's writings, explains the general principles that underwrite the necessity of Belief and hope for pursuing certain ends, and explains the relationship between Belief and hope. Appreciating the non-moral aspects of Kantian Belief and hope involves embracing a theory of Kant's practical attitudes larger in scope than commentators have traditionally allowed. The result, however, is a rational account of our propositional attitudes, which more accurately captures the full range of our experience as ambitious, end-directed agents.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
A Note on References and Abbreviations	vii
Epithet	ix
Introduction	1
Part I	9
Chapter 1 — Kant's Doctrinal Belief	9
Introduction	9
1.0 The Problem: Kant's Lack of Plausible Examples of Doctrinal Belief	11
2.0 Existing Responses	21
3.0 Knowledge, Opinion, Belief, and Doctrinal Belief: An Overview	24
Conclusion	47
Chapter 2 — A Test Case for Doctrinal Belief	49
Introduction	49
1.0 Future Life and the Philosophical Historian	51
2.0 Doctrinal Belief and the Idea of a Universal History	57
3.0 Four Implications	65
Conclusion	77
Chapter 3 — Secular Faith: Question and Desiderata	78
Introduction	78
1.0 Setting the Stage	79
2.0 Faith's Critics	88
3.0 Ruling Out Options	96

Conclusion	102
Chapter 4 — Social Belief and Secular Faith	104
Introduction	104
1.0 Belief and Hope	106
2.0 Kantian Moral Belief	108
3.0 Kantian Doctrinal Belief and Social Belief	111
4.0 The Necessity of Belief and The Attainability Principle	114
5.0 Objections to the Attainability Principle	122
6.0 Responding to Faith’s Critics	136
Conclusion	142
Chapter 5 — Kantian Rational Hope and Secular Faith	144
Introduction	144
1.0 Kant on Hope	145
2.0 Kantian Hope’s Rational Conditions	150
3.0 The Dual and Distinct Thesis	166
4.0 Responding to Faith’s Critics	170
5.0 Implications	175
Conclusion	178
Part II	181
Chapter 6 — The Necessity of Kantian Ideas: An Interpretive Problem	181
Introduction	183
1.0 An Overview of the Positive Use of Speculative Ideas	191
2.0 Why Are Ideas Necessary: Four Interpretive Approaches	203
3.0 A Proposal: Our Most General Thoughts	214
Chapter 7 — Kant on Cognition, Kant on Reason: The Necessity of Ideas	215
Introduction	215
1.0 Reason Produces Cognitions	219

2.0 Narrow and Broad Cognition	224
3.0 Kant’s Account of Reason and Rational Cognition	234
4.0 Putting the Pieces Together: The Necessity of Ideas	249
5.0 Objections	250
6.0 Implications	254
Conclusion	258
Chapter 8 — Why Seek Systematicity?	259
Introduction	259
1.0 Setup: Systematicity and Reason’s Logical Maxim	264
2.0 Logical Maxim (partial)	272
3.0 Logical Maxim (full)	281
4.0 An Over-Demandingness Worry	289
Conclusion	296
Concluding Remarks	298
References	301

A Note on References and Abbreviations

References to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* follow the customary practice of citing the pagination of the 1781 (A) edition and the 1787 (B) edition (i.e., A820/B847).

References to Kant's works other than the *Critique of Pure Reason* give the volume and page number in the Academy Edition and an abbreviations of their titles. I use the following abbreviations for Kant's works:

A/B	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
AK	<i>Kants gesammelte Schriften</i>
Blom-L	<i>The Blomberg Logic</i>
CJ	<i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i>
CPvR	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
Dohna	<i>Dohna–Wundlacken Logic</i>
FS	<i>The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures</i>
G	<i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
I	<i>Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim</i>
JL	<i>The Jäsche Logic</i>
MM	<i>The Metaphysics of Morals</i>
OPA	<i>The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God</i>

O	<i>What It Means to Orient Oneself in Thinking</i>
PP	<i>Toward Perpetual Peace</i>
Progress	<i>What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?</i>
Rel	<i>Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason</i>
TP	<i>Theory and Practice</i>
Vien-L	<i>The Vienna Logic</i>

Historical works by authors other than Kant are referred to using the original date of publication, with the date of the edition cited listed in the bibliography.

Epithet

All-destroying Kant [*der Alleszermalmende Kant*]. —Moses Mendelssohn

[P]recisely in these latter cognitions, which go beyond the world of the senses, where experience can give neither guidance nor correction, lie the investigations of our reason that we hold to be far more preeminent in their importance and sublime in their final aim than everything that the understanding can learn in the field of appearances, in which we would rather venture everything, even at the risk of erring, than give up such important investigations because of any sort of reservation or from contempt and indifference. — Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (A3/B7)

Introduction

0.1 Why Kant on Faith and Hope Today

An account of the nature and norms of Belief (or faith - *Glaube*) and hope (*Hoffnung*)¹ is central to Immanuel Kant's epistemology. The aim of this study is to better understand the *non-moral* aspects of this account. Kant famously thinks that we lack sufficient evidential justification for knowledge of the existence of supersensible things, such as God. He also thinks, however, that we should not resign ourselves to indifference towards such metaphysical questions.² Instead, Kant argues that we possess sufficient practical justification for a rational Belief (*Vernunftglaube*) in God's existence because Belief is necessary for our practical ends.

In this study, I argue that Kantian Belief is constitutive of, and thus necessary for, pursuing ideal moral *and* non-moral ends, while hope is psychologically necessary for maintaining our resolve in these pursuits (for most of us, most of the time). I do so by drawing on Kant's account of propositional attitudes to provide an interpretation of Kantian Belief and hope that is sensitive to internal textual constraints and conceptual coherence and is responsive to ongoing debates in contemporary epistemology about the nature and norms of faith and hope.

¹ Following Chignell (2007a), I translate *Glaube* as capitalized 'Belief'. See Chapter 1 for discussion of this point. In this study, I treat Kantian Belief and Kantian hope as distinct attitudes. See Chapters 4 and 5.

² See, for instance, Ax.

A central challenge for any account of Kantian Belief and hope is explaining why Belief and hope are necessary for pursuing specific ends. There is a long tradition that recognises the practical necessity of Kantian Belief for ‘moral’ ends, which is familiar (if still controversial) terrain: morality requires that we pursue the highest good (*summum bonum*) as an end—that ideal state where happiness and morality are proportionate.³ While we lack knowledge of this ideal state, Belief in God is *necessary* for practical moral purposes because the highest good is possible only under the condition that there is a God willing and able to bring it about. Without Belief in God’s existence, Kant argues, we cannot rationally pursue the highest good as a moral end.

Recently, limiting the practical necessity of Belief to moral ends has been subject to re-evaluation. Andrew Chignell (2007a) and Nicholas Stang (2016) have highlighted that Kant allows that our pursuit of theoretical ends can justify doctrinal (or theoretical) Beliefs (*doctrinale Glaube*).⁴ On their so-called liberal reading of Kantian Belief, Kant allows for moral and theoretical ends to justify Belief. Thus, on this view, there is something genuinely philosophically interesting about Kant’s account of the necessity of Belief that lies in *general* principles that can be applied, and Kant does apply, to non-moral contexts. Recent work has

³ Wood (1970; 1978) stands at the fountainhead of contemporary discussion of Kantian moral Belief. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Wood’s (2020) updated and revised account. Here is a mere selection of those who have since contributed to this tradition: Beiser (1987, Ch. 2 and 4; 2006); Hoffe (1994); Hare (1996); Neiman (1994, Ch. 4); Pasternack (2011); Chance and Pasternack (2018); Guyer (2000, Ch. 10); Fugate (2014); Insole (2020; 2019); Bryne (2007); Chignell (2007a; forthcoming (a)); Insole (2019); Firestone and Jacob (2008); Denis (2005); Reath (1988); Korsgaard (1996); O’Neill (1997).

⁴ This re-evaluation is accompanied by a new appreciation of the *Canon of Pure Reason* and in it Kant’s analysis of different modes of assent or ‘taking-to-be-true’ (*Fürwahrhalten*). See Stevenson (2003); Chignell (2007a; 2007b; forthcoming (a)); Gava (2019); Höwing (2016); Pasternack (2011; 2014); Watkins and Willaschek (2007a; 2007b); Insole (2013 136-171).

begun to incorporate Chignell and Stang's insights to explain Kant's endorsements of metaphysical arguments on the grounds that they produce legitimate doctrinal Beliefs but not knowledge.⁵

Despite the growing interest in the non-moral aspects of Kantian Belief, much about non-moral Kantian Belief is still unclear. (1) It remains to be seen whether we can provide a compelling, non-metaphysical example of an agent's doctrinal Belief. If metaphysicians are the only agents who hold doctrinal Beliefs, then Kant's account of doctrinal Belief only explains the necessary attitudes of a limited range of agents. By contrast, Kant thinks that his insights into Belief (and hope) are accessible to everyone and capture universal human concerns.⁶ (2) If, for Kant, general principles underwrite the necessity of Belief in moral and theoretical contexts, then it is unclear why the scope of ends should be limited to those contexts alone and cannot extend to social, political, or aesthetic ends (although Kant does not expressly claim the latter). (3) It is unclear how Kant's account of non-moral Belief relates to his account of hope. If Belief and hope are both necessary in moral contexts, as Kant claims, then, presumably, they are also necessary in non-moral contexts.⁷

In this study, I argue that we can extract a plausible non-metaphysical example of doctrinal Belief from Kant's writings, that the principles underwriting the necessity of Belief and hope for pursuing certain ends generalise to social ends, and that Belief and hope are

⁵ See Chignell (2007a); Stang (2016); Pickering (2016); McLear (2020); Proops (2021).

⁶ See, for instance, Bxxxiii.

⁷ Recently, several studies have investigated Kantian hope as distinct from Belief. See Chignell (2014; forthcoming (b)); Wood (2020, esp. Part 2); Insole (2008); Zuckert (2018); Blöser (2020); Cureton (2018). In Chapter 5, I treat Kantian hope as a propositional attitude. See Zuckert (2018) for a non-propositional account of Kantian hope.

distinct propositional attitudes but both necessary for pursuing certain goals. However, there remains a danger in studying Kant's non-moral Belief and hope in isolation from his similar claim that we *must* use ideas (i.e. supersensible concepts), like God, in empirical investigations.⁸ We might confuse his claims about mental states (i.e. the propositional attitudes Belief and hope) with claims about mental content (i.e. supersensible concepts, like God). So Part I focuses on Belief and hope, whereas Part II focuses on the necessary use of ideas in empirical investigations. I argue that ideas are our most general concepts, in our most general thoughts, in a given domain, and this explains why they are necessary for empirical investigation: they are necessary for systematic thought.

What emerges is a defence of Kantian Belief and hope that recognises their non-moral aspects, which broadens our understanding of his epistemology in three main areas. First, for Kant scholars, this recognition suggests a reassessment of regulative 'as if' readings of Kant on ideas in theoretical inquiry. These readings interpret Kant as saying we are justified in acting 'as if' ideas exist, even if we lack knowledge that they do. Doctrinal Belief is a mental state, not an act; thus, Kant's position on doctrinal Belief cannot be understood as acting 'as if' something were true. Second, for contemporary epistemologists, recognising the non-moral features of Kantian Belief and hope enables us to see his position as a rich and viable view capable of contributing to contemporary debates about faith and hope—without committing to his moral philosophy. Third, recognising the non-moral features of Kantian Belief and hope will help political theorists grasp how such attitudes may play an important, even necessary role in our social and political lives, while acknowledging their limitations.⁹ If I read Kant

⁸ See, for instance, A644/B672; A671/B699; A677/B705; A681/B709.

⁹ I acknowledge that many philosophers view Kantian Belief and hope as part of a one-sided narrative of Enlightenment progress that is misguided at best, and sexist and xenophobic at

correctly, we can and should Believe and hope in the pursuit of our most important social and political goals.

Appreciating the non-moral aspects of Kantian Belief and hope involves embracing a theory of Kant's practical attitudes larger in scope than commentators have traditionally allowed. The result, however, is a rational account of our propositional attitudes, which more accurately captures the full range of our experience as ambitious, end-directed agents.

0.2 Summary of Chapters

In **Part I**, consisting of chapters 1 - 5, I advance and defend an interpretation of Kant's account of propositional attitudes and particularly of Belief and hope. **Chapter 1**, *Kant's Doctrinal Belief*, introduces Kant on propositional attitudes and Doctrinal Belief (or equivalently) Theoretical Faith. According to the standard reading of Kantian Belief: Kant denies knowledge of ideas (like God, freedom, and immortality) and allows moral ends alone to practically justify Moral Belief in them. This chapter provides textual evidence for *liberalism* about Kantian Belief: the view that Kant allows for moral *and* theoretical ends to justify Belief. Moreover, I argue that the liberal reading faces a problem: Kant's official examples of doctrinal Belief are unconvincing. Without convincing examples, his proposal is incomplete at best and insupportable at worst.

In **Chapter 2**, *A Test Case for Doctrinal Belief*, I defend Kant's notion of doctrinal Belief by extracting a plausible example of it from his writings. I argue that, according to Kant, a philosopher-historian who pursues a complete human history necessarily assents to the idea

worst. However, we can only identify what is problematic about Kant's views if we better comprehend them. See Mensch (2017); Allais (2016); Kleingeld (2007; 2019); Mills (2017, 91-112); Lloyd (2009) on Kant's sexist and xenophobic views.

that human rationality will develop fully in the distant future. I contrast my reading with those commentators who think a philosopher-historian makes a regulative ‘as if’ assumption. I show that these readings cannot distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uses of such assumptions.

In **Chapter 3**, *Secular Faith*, I argue for five desiderata for an account of secular faith. I do this to motivate my Kantian account of secular faith in the following chapter. I show that we want an account of secular faith as an attitude that (1) is necessary for pursuing our far-distant goals; (2) does not produce overconfidence towards those goals; (3) does not demotivate us; (4) is truly secular; (5) is sensitive to key evidentialist principles. I defend these desiderata by engaging with a range of contemporary advocates and critics of faith. I go on to suggest how four recent proposed accounts of secular faith fail to meet these desiderata—faith as ‘leaping’, faith as unjustifiable, faith as non-propositional, and faith according to a decision-theoretic model.

Traditionally, commentators have run together Kantian Belief and hope. By contrast, in **Chapters 4 and 5**, I argue for the *Dual and Distinct Thesis*: Kantian Belief and hope are distinctive but both necessary attitudes for pursuing our far-distant goals; Belief is constitutive of, and thus necessary for, pursuing those ends, and hope is psychologically necessary for pursuing those ends. I also show that Kantian Belief and hope satisfy the desiderata on secular faith defended in the previous chapter. In **Chapter 4**, *Social Belief and Secular Faith*, I argue that Belief’s necessity rests on the Attainability Principle—that (roughly) one can rationally will an end only if one thinks of that end as attainable. In **Chapter 5**, *Kantian Rational Hope and Secular Faith*, I show how hope is psychologically necessary (for most of us, most of the time) to maintain our resolve in pursuit of far-distant ends.

In **Part II**, consisting of chapters 6 - 8, I defend Kant's claim that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation. **Chapter 6**, *The Necessity of Kantian Ideas*, takes up Kant's claim that the *a priori* concepts of God, the soul, and an infinite-world, are *necessary* for empirical investigation, and not *optional* heuristics that we might use in empirical investigation (A644/B672). This leads to an interpretive problem: if ideas, like God, the soul, and an infinite-world, are *a priori* concepts, why are they necessary for empirical investigation? In this chapter, I motivate my reading of the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation. To do so, I present and reject four prominent readings of that necessity.

In **Chapter 7**, *Kant on Cognition, Kant on Reason*, I present and defend *mentalism* about the necessity of Kantian ideas for empirical investigation. Mentalism is the view that ideas are our most general concepts, in our most general thoughts, in a given domain, and this explains why they are necessary for empirical investigation. I argue that on Kant's conception of the mind, ideas play an indispensable generalising function. They are our most general concepts in our most general thoughts—what Kant calls 'cognitions of reason.' I show that 'cognitions of reason' are a parallel to 'cognitions of the understanding'. The basic idea I put forth is that 'cognitions of reason' are the products of ideas generalising over empirical concepts, whereas 'cognitions of the understanding' are the products of concepts generalising over intuitions.

Chapter 8, *Why Seek Systematicity?*, asks the question why must we systematise? Kant defines systematicity as the mental act of connecting up concepts in a hierarchical order of generality until the most general, and he thinks that systematicity is something we are rationally required to do. The 'dynamics of reason' reading holds a plausible answer to our question: reason's nature involves seeking unified explanation by systematising concepts, and we must do this because this is the only way we can be self-consistent reasoners. That reading turns on a key Kantian distinction between systematicity as an abstract principle (i.e., the logical maxim) and an illusionary knowledge claim about the world (i.e., the transcendental

Introduction

principle). Commentators rarely defend the logical maxim, however. I show that it is a rational requirement based on the following principle: to set our own ends, we need to be in a position to logically connect our knowledge that p to other propositions. In turn, putting ourselves in such a position requires systematising our concepts.

Part I

Chapter 1 — Kant's Doctrinal Belief

Introduction

This chapter introduces Kant's account of propositional attitudes and doctrinal Belief (or equivalently) theoretical faith, by highlighting doctrinal Belief's rational conditions.

According to the standard reading of Kantian Belief: Kant denies knowledge of ideas (like God, freedom, and immortality) and allows moral ends alone to practically justify moral Belief in them. This chapter provides the textual evidence for liberalism about Kantian Belief: the view that Kant allows for moral and theoretical ends to justify Belief. Moreover, I show that liberalism faces a problem: Kant's official examples of doctrinal Belief are unconvincing. Without convincing examples, his proposal is at best incomplete and at worst insupportable.

My aim in this chapter is to motivate my example of doctrinal Belief, the assent of a philosopher-historian, who in pursuing a complete human history necessarily assents to the idea that human rationality will fully develop in a distant future. The chapter proceeds in three stages. In Section 1, I argue that Kant's official examples of Doctrinal Belief are implausible. Section 2 shows the limits of existing responses to these examples. In Section 3, I provide an overview of Kant's account of propositional attitudes and their justificatory models: opinion, knowledge, and Belief, and Belief's three species: moral, pragmatic, and doctrinal. I argue that an example of an agent with doctrinal Belief must meet three rational conditions, namely

the Contingent Ends, Hypothetical Necessary Means, and Lack of Objectively Sufficient Grounds conditions.¹

Before beginning the work of the present chapter, it will be helpful to make some remarks about translation. In an effort to be precise but transparent in regular language, I will translate ‘*Zweck*’ interchangeably as ‘end’ and ‘goal’. I will also translate ‘*wollen*’ interchangeably as ‘willing’ and ‘pursuing’ although we might more precisely, but awkwardly, say one promotes [*befördern*] an end by willing [*wollen*] it. Some important topics are fruitfully tackled with Kant’s technical terms. In these cases, I will revert to the Kantian language of ‘willing an end’.

It also bears remarking that I translate a central term in this study, namely ‘*Glaube*’, as capitalised ‘Belief’.² Commentators and translators sometimes have used ‘faith’ and sometimes ‘belief’ to refer to Kant’s term *Glaube*.³ Using a single term, however, for *Glaube* better preserves the symmetry between the *B Preface* and the *Canon of Pure Reason*⁴ where Kant uses the same term to refer to the same attitude. ‘Belief’ also better captures the Kantian notion of *Glaube* than ‘faith’ because ‘faith’ expresses an attitude without religious overtones. Moreover, with the capitalisation of Belief, I aim to distinguish Kantian Belief from contemporary discussions of belief. Kant does not have a direct equivalent of our contemporary notion of belief, and it is misleading to suggest so. I admit capitalising Belief

¹ In broad strokes, I endorse existing accounts in Chignell (2007a) and Stang (2016).

² In this translation, I follow Chignell (2007a). See also Wood (2020); Gava (2019); Stang (2016); Pickering (2016); Pasternack (2011); Insole (2016); Höwing (2016).

³ Compare, for instance, the Guyer-Wood edition for the *Critique of Pure Reason* at Bxxx and A820/B848.

⁴ Hereafter, simply *Canon*.

introduces some linguistic awkwardness. However, other translation options are less appealing—K-belief, K-faith, faith_k , or belief/faith.⁵ I will reserve ‘faith’ for contemporary discussions under that term.

1.0 The Problem: Kant’s Lack of Plausible Examples of Doctrinal Belief

1.1 Kantian Belief

One of the most frequently quoted lines from the *Critique of Pure Reason* is Kant’s B Preface claim that he “had to deny knowledge [of ideas, like God, freedom, and immortality] in order to make room for Belief [or faith: *Glaube*]” (Bxxx). According to Kant, knowledge, Belief (and opinion) are modes of assent. Assent is “taking something to be true” (A820/B848). For him, ideas are concepts that “go beyond the possibility of experience” (A320/B337); that is, they are non-empirical. Kant thinks that we, in principle, lack sufficient evidential justification for assents to propositions involving ideas to count as knowledge because they are concepts that lack connection to possible experience. These propositions are thus in principle empirically undecided. By contrast, he claims that Belief is a ‘holding-to-be-true that is enough for action’ (JL 9:68n), “theoretical[ly] insufficient” (A823/B851) (i.e., is not a candidate for knowledge), and practically justified as a necessary means to an end (A823/B851)

Presuming we can make sense of Kant’s denial of knowledge of ideas, we can consider a scope question: what is the scope of the ends that can justify Kantian Belief? Kant thinks his

⁵ For instance, see Pasternack (2017) for the ‘belief/faith’ translation, and see O’Neill for whom *Glaube*’s “obvious translation would be belief or faith” (280).

account of Belief represents a major intellectual breakthrough that resolves centuries-old philosophical disagreements. We should no longer demand unachievable theoretical knowledge of the existence of God or remain indifferent to such metaphysical questions. Instead, lacking such knowledge, Kant claims that Belief in God is necessary for our practical ends. The B Preface, however, leaves that claim curiously unspecified: we are left wondering what kinds of ends justify assents to propositions involving ideas.

1.1 Denialism, Moralism, and Liberalism about Belief

There are three responses to the scope question. The first response is, what I call, *denialism* about Kantian Belief. It holds that Kant strictly denies access to ideas and things-in-themselves, and thus denialism rejects that there is any legitimate scope for practical ends to justify Belief in Kant's philosophy. On this view, any talk of justified assent to propositions referring to ideas and things-in-themselves is misleading or a contradiction within the Kantian framework.⁶ Once historically dominant, in recent decades denialism has come to be seen as unable to do justice to the tension in the B Preface between our *unjustified* knowledge of ideas and our *justified* Beliefs about them.⁷

The second response is what I call *moralism* about Kantian Belief, and is the contemporary standard reading. It holds that Kant denies knowledge of ideas and allows moral ends alone to practically justify Belief in ideas. Paul Guyer is representative of this

⁶ See Strawson, for whom Kant's arguments about Belief are "entirely foreign to Kant's thinking" (1966, 241). Denialism has deep historical roots. A canonical example is Jocabi's objection to Kant's denial of knowledge of the thing in itself, captured in his famous line: "Without the presupposition [of the thing in itself] I was unable to enter into [Kant's] system, but with it I was unable to stay within it" (1787, 223). See also Heine (1835).

⁷ The rejection of denialism is in large part to Wood (1970; 1978).

reading. He claims that the existence of God, freedom, and immortality are “necessary presuppositions [for] moral conduct” (2006, 34), and that “[B]elief or faith ... has no theoretical basis at all” (233). Given the implausibility of denialism, the standard reading is uncontroversial insofar as it claims that Kant allows for moral ends to practically justify Belief. Kant claims that, although we lack knowledge of ideas, we must assent to “the existence of God and a future life [of the soul]” (A828/B856) as a necessary means to the end of pursuing our vocation as moral agents.⁸ The standard reading has until recently enjoyed almost universal coverage in scholarly discussions of Kantian Belief.⁹

The third response is, what I and others call, *liberalism* about Kantian Belief, namely, Kant allows for moral *and* theoretical (or doctrinal) Beliefs.¹⁰ Without denying the importance of moral Belief in Kant’s overall picture, Chignell (2007a) has shown that the standard reading of Kantian Belief might seriously downplay epistemological resources in Kant’s work to explain how our assents to propositions which refer to ideas may be justified beyond the moral sphere.¹¹

A central plank of the liberalism proposal is that our assents, according to Kant, are justified only if we lack the justificatory grounds required for knowledge (empirical evidence

⁸ See also A810–811/B838–839; CPvR 5:127–129; CJ 5:442–447; JL 9:69n.

⁹ See Korsgaard, for whom only Kantian Belief is moral Belief (1996, 27-31), and Rawls, who slides between “reasonable faith” and “practical [moral] faith” (2000, 306-11). See also Beiser (1987); Gardner (1999); Hoffe (1994); Hare (1996); Fugate (2015); Bryne (2007); O’Neill (1997); Rescher (2000); Neiman (1994, Ch 4). See Pasternack (2011) for an explicit defence of moralism.

¹⁰ Commentators sometimes call denialism and moralism about Belief the labels ‘hardline’ and ‘moderate’ interpretations. For example, see Chignell (2007a, 359). I opt for more descriptive labels.

¹¹ See also Stang (2016).

and rational arguments), and firm assent is a necessary means to contingent ends—namely, those which we are not rationally required to pursue and are thus dependent on our individual circumstances (Chignell 2007a) as opposed to the *necessary* ends of Kantian morality. On this reading, for Kant, “there are theoretical considerations on which we can base firm rational assent that such things [as a world-author, an ultimate ground and *ens realissimum*] exist” (359) i.e., the concepts of God, grounds for everything, and a being containing all positive predicates, which go beyond possible experience and thus lack intuitional content, and hence empirical reference. On this interpretation, these considerations are the ends metaphysicians, cosmologists, and theologians set for themselves; its advocates emphasise that, in several passages where Kant chastises metaphysicians, he says “enough remains left to you to speak the language, *justified* by the sharpest reason, of a firm Belief, even though you must surrender that of knowledge” (A744-5/B772-3; my italics).¹² So, according to the liberal reading, Kant chastises metaphysicians not merely because they assent to their conclusions, but because they assent in the mode of knowledge and not doctrinal Belief. What is liberal about this reading is that, according to it, Kant allows for some theoretical undertakings to justify our assents to propositions referring to ideas beyond moral contexts—i.e., inquiries about the world.

At first pass, for Kant, a *doctrinal Belief* is an assent that enjoys practical justification only if that assent is necessary to pursue inquiry into the world, but does not count as knowledge. (I return to the details of doctrinal Belief in Section 2.)

For its supporters, the liberal proposal helps make sense of Kant’s metaphysical sounding remarks about ideas and things in themselves, while simultaneously denying knowledge of

¹² See Chignell (2007a, 359).

them: he is speaking of assents justified in the mode of doctrinal Belief. By contrast, opponents to the proposal emphasise Kant's claim that doctrinal Belief is an "unstable" (A827/B856) notion¹³ and that it is missing from Kant's discussion of Belief in the *Critique of Judgment* (CJ 5:461-73).¹⁴ These considerations lead opponents of liberalism to claim that Kant either eventually abandons the notion of doctrinal Belief¹⁵ or that doctrinal Belief is equivalent to regulative 'as if' statements—statements that guide our research endeavours but do not refer to the world.¹⁶

There is strong textual support for liberalism. In the *Canon*, Kant says that there is a theoretical "analogue of practical judgments" called "doctrinal Belief" (*doctrinale Glaube*) (A825/B853), which "concerns the direction that an idea gives me and the subjective influence on advancement of my actions of reason" (A827/B855).¹⁷ In the B preface of the *Critique*, he speaks of a "Belief in a wise and great author of the world" (Bxxxiii) (i.e., a God) that is not grounded in a moral argument. In the *Transcendental Doctrine of Method*, Kant

¹³ See, for instance, Stevenson, for whom doctrinal Belief is a "mongrel" notion combining what Kant wants to sharply distinguish, namely propositions within the limits, and beyond the limits, of possible experience (Stevenson 2003, 95).

¹⁴ Admittedly, some passages seem to strongly count against the liberal reading: "the principles of pure reason have objective reality in their practical use, that is, in the moral use" (A808/B838). But if this and similar passage suggest that Kant reduces reason to the moral use of reason, there is not much left to reason as such.

¹⁵ For example, Pasternack claims that a doctrinal Belief in God is "explicitly rejected in the Third Critique" (Pasternack 2011, 412).

¹⁶ For example, Insole claims that "Kant calls both pragmatic and doctrinal beliefs 'regulative ideas' or 'concepts of reason' where we need make no commitment to there being any sort of 'object' corresponding to our beliefs, but where we employ such beliefs as 'heuristic fictions'" (2016, 48; see also 2013, 158-9). As far as I know, Kant does *not* call pragmatic and doctrinal beliefs 'regulative ideas' either in the passage Insole quotes (A771/B799)—or anywhere else.

¹⁷ See also O 8:138-9; CPvR 5:135; 5:480; CJ 5:447; MM 6:354.

claims that in speculative disputes we “can always accept (*annehmen*) these propositions, which are quite in harmony with the speculative interest of our reason in its empirical use” as long as we are certain “someone will [not] someday proof the opposite” (A742/B770).¹⁸

Like other liberal readers, I think moral Belief does not exhaust Kantian Belief, that our ends as theoretical inquirers can in some contexts practically justify assent to propositions involving ideas, and that the theoretical aspects of Belief are a much-underappreciated part of Kantian epistemology.

1.3 Kant’s Official Examples

Despite the strong textual support for liberalism about Belief, the liberal reading faces a problem: Kant’s official examples of doctrinal Belief are unconvincing. Without convincing examples, his proposal is at best incomplete and at worst insupportable. Even from the brief sketch above, we can see that Kant’s examples are implausible. Consider the following examples.

Inhabitants of other planets: Kant says that whether there are inhabitants on other planets is not empirically verifiable,¹⁹ and is thus a “strong belief” (A825/B853) and not a working hypothesis. Yet, astrobiologists take this proposition as a working hypothesis to find evidence for or against it. Moreover, we can in principle empirically verify whether there are inhabitants on other planets—by (say) going to them. Thus, even if in Kant’s time human

¹⁸ See also B425; CPvR 5:135; O 8:138-9.

¹⁹ Kant says that the proposition cannot be “settle[d] by any sort of experience” (A825/B853).

travel to other planets was unimaginable, the proposition is (and was) in principle empirically verifiable.

God as world author: Kant claims that the existence of God as “wise author of the world” (A826/B854) is an article of doctrinal Belief because “I know of no other condition for this unity that could serve me as a clue for the investigation of nature except insofar as I presuppose that highest intelligence has arranged everything in accordance with the wisest ends” (A826/B854). Kant’s basic claim is that to investigate the complexity of biological nature, a necessary presupposition is that God intentionally ordered it. Kant is not claiming that nature *is* minded (i.e., possesses God’s intentional order). Instead, he is claiming that a necessary condition of biological research is our assent that nature is minded because it helps us organise our observations. Yet, Kant is hardly convincing. Few (if any) contemporary biologists would claim that a necessary condition of investigating nature is assenting that God intentionally ordered nature.²⁰ The theory of evolution by natural selection supersedes Kant’s theory of biology because it provides an empirical hypothesis about how nature developed its complexity. It explains the natural processes responsible for the complex organisations observable in plants and animals without appealing to intentional design, and is supported by a wealth of empirical evidence. Thus, contemporary biologists (or philosophers of biology) have no need to assent to a version of minded nature—Godly or otherwise.²¹

²⁰ Many contemporary and historical philosophers have attempted to rehabilitate Kant on this point. For instance, see Zuckert (2007); Ginsborg (2014); Quarfood (2006). My strategy differs, as I provide a different example.

²¹ Kantians might respond that, in the *Third Critique*, Kant argues that the recognition that living beings are purposive wholes necessarily implies that we conceive of them as aim-directed beings (i.e., teleologically). It is not clear that this is a satisfactory response. Contemporary biology (and philosophy of biology) is dominated by empirically-verifiable, mechanistic explanations, and not purposive talk. For instance, Godfrey-Smith characterises the current state of play: “One of the most historically influential and

Future Life: Kant says that “in respect of the magnificent equipment of human nature and the shortness of life which is so ill suited to it, there is likewise to be found sufficient grounds for a doctrinal belief in the future life of the human soul” (A827/B855). Clearly, Kant thinks that the existence of a future life of the human soul is an example of doctrinal Belief. But, in the *Canon*, this is *all* that Kant says about the example—without mentioning contingent ends or why firm assent is a necessary means to it. Thus, the *Canon* provides little textual evidence to specify the example of future life in any convincing detail.

So Kant fails to supply convincing examples of doctrinal Belief in the *Canon*. But Kant’s failure does not *ipso facto* render his position untenable. It only suggests that Kant fails to marshal compelling examples. Where Kant fails, I think we can do better.

1.4 Motivations

In this chapter, I present and defend Kant’s account of doctrinal Belief and propositional attitudes in general. In the next chapter, I argue that, while Kant’s official examples of doctrinal Belief (assents to propositions about God, immortality, and extra-terrestrial life) are flawed, his account is philosophically tenable within his epistemological framework and that it is amenable to other instances. I argue that a philosopher-historian—whose activities

psychologically powerful ways of thinking about living things is in terms of their purposes and functions. Modern biology, with its combination of a mechanistic, bottom-up treatment of biological processes and an evolutionary account of how living things come to be, has an uneasy relationship with that way of thinking” (2014, 2). See Nagel for a philosophical account of functions or purposes. He claims that a function or purpose statement “simply asserts a necessary... condition” (1961, 405). On this view, the statement ‘the heart has the function or purpose of pumping blood through the circulatory system’ is equivalent to the statement organisms in which circulation occurs pump blood only if they have a heart.’ Thus, in general, we can state ‘the function or purpose of system X is to do Y’ in the form ‘Y only if X’, and hence without thinking in purposive terms.

Kant depicts in the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*—serves as an illustrative and legitimate example of doctrinal Belief.

Articulating and defending Kantian doctrinal Belief is interesting for several reasons. First, it directly relates to central exegetical puzzles about how to interpret Kant's position on what we can legitimately think, know, or Believe about ideas and things in themselves that lack connection to possible experience. Supplying a plausible example of doctrinal Belief would lend support to the liberal reading of Kantian Belief

Second, providing a doctrinal Belief example represents an argument in favour of Kant's position because his argument is an *argument from examples*. Kant argues that the three examples of inhabitants on other planets, a world-author, and a future life provide evidence of agents who ought to hold doctrinal Beliefs.²² To be convincing, arguments from examples must (at least) provide convincing examples! Since Kant fails at this task, providing an example is an *argument for*—and *not merely illustrative of*—Kantian doctrinal Belief.²³

²² That Kant's argument for doctrinal Belief is an *argument from examples* is demonstrable by his presentation. Kant says that “even though we might not be able to undertake anything in relation to an object, and taking something to be true is therefore merely theoretical, *in many cases we can still conceive and imagine an undertaking* for which we would suppose ourselves to have sufficient [subjective] grounds ... [T]hus there is in merely theoretical judgments an analogue of practical judgments, where taking them to be true is aptly described by the word Belief, and which we can call doctrinal Beliefs” (A825/B853; my italics). Immediately following, he provides three examples: doctrinal Belief about inhabitants of other worlds (A825/B853), God (A826/B854) and the future life of the human soul (A827/B855).

²³ A number of commentators have identified stepwise arguments in the *Critique of Pure Reason* whose conclusions are doctrinal Beliefs (see Stang (2016); Chignell (forthcoming (a), Ch. 10); Proops (2021)). Those commentators aim to demonstrate that such arguments are valid and their premises are sound. By contrast, my focus is on Kant's argument defending that we legitimately hold doctrinal Beliefs. However, a possible worry about my claim that, in the *Canon*, Kant provides an argument from examples is that the *Canon* provides a brief gloss of earlier discussions of his stepwise arguments. This impression is misleading. Consider someone who denies *structured-propositionalism* the view that the

Third, the philosophical issues at play regarding doctrinal Belief exist in present discussions of political agency. For example, much of Martin Hägglund's (2019) recent presentation of *secular faith* echoes Kant's account of doctrinal Belief—yet in a political register. He characterises secular faith as a commitment to the unknown that is essential to the sense of who we are. In my view, a central upshot of recent debates about doctrinal Belief is a fresh engagement with key Kantian terms like 'knowledge' and 'Belief'. By better understanding Kant's own views, we can simultaneously clarify the merits of such discussions of political agency. (I return to the political dimensions of Belief in Chapter 4).

Fourth, if defensible, doctrinal Belief is a viable alternative to the decision-theory framework of analysing rational faith that is popular today. I have in mind, Lara Buchak's (2012) account of rational faith—i.e., a willingness to act on a proposition without first looking for further evidence for or against that proposition.²⁴ In Buchak's framework, one assesses the rationality of a subject's faith through credences (how likely they think a proposition is true given their evidence), utility (how valuable the consequences of the proposition being true are for them), and risk (the degree to which they care about the potential payoff or cost of being wrong). It seems to me that a drawback of Buchak's

objects of thoughts (like desires and contemporary beliefs) are propositions because they consider propositions to be mysterious and out of place in the natural world. It is question-begging to reply that certain valid arguments with sound premises result in conclusions that warrant a justified belief as a propositional attitude. Similarly, if Kant's argument that we legitimately hold doctrinal Beliefs rests on his stepwise arguments that conclude in doctrinal Belief, then his argument appears weak. On the assumption that he was aware of such a glaring question-begging move, it is plausible to assume that Kant wanted to keep separate two issues: the stepwise arguments whose conclusions we are rational to assent to in the mode of doctrinal Belief and an argument for the claim that we legitimately hold doctrinal Beliefs.

²⁴ I expand on my criticisms of Buchak's view in Chapter 3 in Section 3 "Ruling Out Options".

framework is that it reduces faith (or what Kant calls Belief) to an action (refraining from looking for further evidence) and a justified belief, whereas I present faith as a distinctive mental state. Moreover, her account has difficulty accounting for instances in which evidence is not in the offing or is systematically ambiguous. Demonstrating that doctrinal Belief is a plausible way of going beyond evidence represents one step in showing that it is a viable alternative to the decision-theoretic framework.

2.0 Existing Responses

Commentators typically propose three responses to Kant's examples of doctrinal Belief. To motivate my reading, I explain the limits of these responses in addressing his lack of convincing examples.

2.1 Things in Themselves

Some commentators portray Kant's metaphysical claims about things-in-themselves as examples of doctrinal Belief. Chignell explains that a God who intentionally creates nature (i.e., a world author), a ground of everything (i.e., an ultimate ground), and a being containing all positive predicates (i.e., an *ens realissimum*) are things-in-themselves that lack possible connections to experience. He then claims that 'Kant says that there are theoretical considerations on which we can base firm rational assent that such things exist' (2007, 359). Similarly, Mark Pickering claims that an example of doctrinal Belief is "our acceptance of the existence of things in themselves" (2016, 614). These interpretations are promising because they seem to make sense of Kant's claims about the existence of things in themselves, while doing justice to his claim that we cannot have knowledge of them. The justification for

assents to the existence of things in themselves is not evidential but practical, justified in light of our theoretical—understood here as metaphysical—goals.²⁵

Although I am sympathetic to Chignell's and Pickering's readings, Kant's metaphysical claims about things-in-themselves are deeply controversial. A more convincing account of doctrinal Belief would first support Kant's account with plausible examples and then generalise to metaphysics. Chignell does acknowledge that Kant's biological example is "not perhaps the strongest philosophical example" (2007, 347) but does not provide an alternative non-metaphysical example. Moreover, there are 'Kantian' motivations to first support Kant's account with plausible examples that do not concern metaphysical goals. In the B Preface, Kant explicitly claims that his account of non-moral Belief in a wise and great author of the world touches on "universal human concerns" and are "accessible to the great multitude" (Bxxxiii). If metaphysicians are the only agents who hold doctrinal Beliefs, then his account of doctrinal Belief is relevant to a very limited range of agents—contra Kant's claim.

2.2 Parsimony

It is tempting to supplement Kant's examples of doctrinal Belief with examples of regulative principles. For Kant, regulative principles frame scientific research and provide 'guidance' (A671/B699) for empirical investigations, but they are not themselves part of our knowledge claims. Chignell suggests parsimony—the principle that the world has a simple organisation—as one such regulative principle that "fit[s] the profile of [doctrinal] Belief" (2007, 351). He explains that scientists and historians assent to the principle of parsimony

²⁵ For similar strategies, see Stang (2016, 286), for whom assent that an absolutely necessary being exists is required in a doctrinal Belief, and McLearn (2020, 82-3) for whom an article of doctrinal Belief is that our intellectual acts are transcendently free. See also Proops (2021, 175-189 and 418-421).

because “it is a necessary condition of attaining their rational goals” (352). Chignell seems to have something to the following effect in mind: a ball rolling down a plank might potentially travel along infinitely many logically possible paths, many of which are unobservable. It is logically possible that the laws of nature are such that the ball zips off to outer space and back in a way that we do not notice. As these possible paths are so numerous, a scientist aiming to explain the ball’s path must firmly assent to the proposition that its path is simple (that it does not zip off to outer space between observations). Otherwise, they may be overwhelmed by an infinite number of potential paths, and therefore, presumably, fail to achieve their explanatory ends. For Chignell, the principle of parsimony is thus a plausible candidate for doctrinal Belief. However, a scientist’s assent to the principle of parsimony is not a clear-cut example of doctrinal Belief. It is difficult to parse the differences between thinking economically and conceiving of a ball’s path as simple. Kant explicitly denies that parsimony is an economical way of thinking: parsimony “is not merely a principle of the economy of reason” (A650/B678). Thus, we still lack a plausible (and clear-cut) example of doctrinal Belief.

2.3 Kant Walks Back His Examples

According to the deflationary reading of doctrinal Belief, Kant walks back his account of doctrinal Belief and examples thereof in his later works. For instance, Lawrence Pasternack argues that “[n]one of [Kant’s] examples [of doctrinal Belief] survive” into his mature position, in which “Kant rejects all non-moral forms of assertoric assent to God and to the afterlife” (2011, 301). On this reading, Kant puts forward doctrinal Belief in the *Canon* but then narrows the use of Belief to moral Belief in God and immortality. The ‘inhabitants of other planets’ example speaks strongly in favour of the deflationary reading. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant says that we can in principle “determine by means of experience whether [inhabitants of other planets] exist or not” (CJ 5:467). Kant seems here to retract his previous

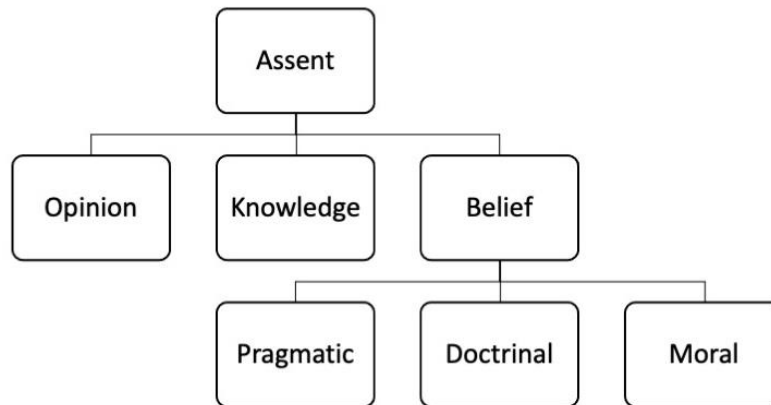
view that inhabitants of other planets lack connection to possible experience and so could be an example of doctrinal Belief. He retreats to the more plausible position that ‘inhabitants of other planets’ could be a hypothesis for (say) astrobiologists.

However, retracting one example of doctrinal Belief does not entail retracting the whole thesis. Although Pasternack might be correct that Kant narrows his position in later works, that alone does not damage the plausibility of Kant’s position in the *Canon*.²⁶ It therefore relieves neither Kant, nor us, of the need to provide plausible examples.

3.0 Knowledge, Opinion, Belief, and Doctrinal Belief: An Overview

It is almost a tautology that to construct an example of someone who legitimately holds an attitude we need an account of that attitude. So, in this section, I present my reading of the propositional attitude of doctrinal Belief, in which we are justified in assenting to propositions referring to ideas on broadly practical grounds. I present three rational conditions that an example of an agent with doctrinal Belief must meet, namely the Contingent Ends, Hypothetical Necessary Means, and Lack of Objectively Sufficient Grounds Conditions. However, approaching these conditions requires some background. For Kant, assent is our most fundamental propositional attitude, of which opinion, Belief, and knowledge are modes. Moreover, on Kant’s analysis, Belief can be pragmatic, doctrinal, and moral. So I begin with assent and work towards doctrinal Belief. As a visual aid, we can represent Kant’s analysis with the below graph.

²⁶ I am doubtful of the view that Kant narrows his position in latter works. A telling passage comes from the *Metaphysics of Moral*, published 1797: “An [speculative] assumption is adopted from a theoretical point of view in order merely to explain a certain phenomenon ... An assumption is adopted from a practical point of view in order to achieve a certain end, which may be either *pragmatic* .. or a *moral* end” (MM 6:354).



3.1 Assent

In the *Canon*, Kant introduces assent and its three basic modes: knowing (*Wissen*), opining (*Meinen*), and Believing (*Glauben*). For Kant, assent is “taking something to be true” (*Fürwahrhalten*) (A820/B848) in the sense of ‘accepting’ or ‘holding’ a proposition to be true. He thinks that assent is the most fundamental mental state that a subject can hold towards a proposition and can be involuntary (JL 9:73) or voluntary (JL 9:67).²⁷ So Kantian assent is a very broad notion. In contemporary terms, we would call each mode of assent a propositional attitude—judging, believing, doubting or desiring that a proposition is true. Like these propositional attitudes, we can analyse what makes a subject justified in assenting to a proposition and thus evaluate the justificatory status of their propositional attitudes (justified

²⁷ Kant says, the “will cannot struggle against a convincing proof” (JL 9:73). Thus, confronted with a convincing mathematical proof, we cannot choose not to assent to its truth. But also, he says, Belief is a “*free holding-to-be-true*” (JL 9:67; original italics) in which the will has “influence immediately on assent (JL 9:73; 9:70). For this reason, I read Kant’s talk of ‘holding something to be true’ in Belief as similar to what some contemporary epistemologists call *acceptance* (for example, see Bolinger (2020) and Tebben (2016) rather than contemporary usages of *belief*, which is typically understood as non-voluntary. For Kant, it is important that some assents are voluntary because he wants to argue that our rational assent in moral contexts that God exists cannot be compelled or obligatory (CPvR 5:144; 5:145–6) and thus must be a free assent.

assenting that p). (Note that Kant's notion of assent is broader than many contemporary usages since it is voluntary and non-voluntary, but that is a story for another day.)²⁸

Suppose I take it as true that there is a ship in the harbour. I might do so because a reliable friend told me so, or because previously there was always a ship in the harbour and I reason that today is no different, or because I wish there to be a ship in the harbour, and so on. So I might take something to be true for different reasons—what Kant calls grounds.

Something like this observation serves as the basis for Kant's task in the *Canon*: analysing rational justified assent in terms of the nature and adequacy of the objective and subjective grounds of holding something to be true. He claims that an assent may “rest on objective grounds ... [and] requires subjective causes in the mind of him who judges” (A820/B848), both of which can be either sufficient or insufficient (A822/B850). Here, the notion of a ground is epistemic: a ground confers rational justification upon an assent.²⁹ Unlike Søren Kierkegaard, Kant rejects the irrationalist tradition summed up in Tertullian's dictum ‘I believe because it is absurd’. After 800-odd pages, Kant finally seems ready to

²⁸ Contemporary epistemologists use ‘assent’ and ‘acceptance’ in ways that differ from Kantian assent. For examples, Jackson claims that “[a]cceptance ... is an action rather than a state” (2021). Since Kantian assent is a mental state, it is not acceptance in Jackson's sense. Moreover, for Kant, assent is not a ‘free-floating’ propositional attitude in that it must manifest in various modes (the most basic of which are knowledge, opinion, and Belief). Instead, it is something that all other propositional attitude share.

²⁹ Here, we should not confuse the epistemic notion of a ground with others that Kant uses. Sometimes, Kant speaks of grounds in a logical sense, in terms of a major premise (A322/B378). Sometimes, he speaks of things in themselves grounding appearances, which suggests a causal or metaphysical sense of ‘grounds’ (A537/B565). Some commentators read Kant's grounds as metaphysical grounding, in which a ground non-causally accounts for the existence of something (Willaschek 2018). In the *Canon*, Kant's notion of grounds is what confers justification on an assent.

explain the key terms in his B preface's oft-quoted denial of 'knowledge' to make room for 'Belief' (Bxxx).

Kant begins his analysis of assent by distinguishing between persuasion and conviction. For him, *persuasion* is an assent with “only private validity ... [that] cannot be communicated” (A820/B848). We cannot communicate persuasion because its grounds are “held to be objective” but in fact are “only in the particular constitution of the subject” (A820/B848). Today, what Kant calls persuasion, we might call wishful thinking—taking something as objectively true because one wishes that it is true.³⁰ Communicability relates to other reasoners. Kant's point is not that we are incapable of communicating these assent or grounds of assent. Clearly, we can write down, speak or otherwise communicate many of our wishful thoughts and why we wish them. Rather, in persuasion, an assent cannot be communicated in the sense that other reasoners would not assent were they in the same position. By contrast, Kant says, in conviction, our grounds are communicable—and if they were communicated, we would find them “valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true ... regardless of the difference among the subjects” (A820-1/B848-9).³¹ So convictions involve grounds which all reasoners would likewise assent to if they were in the same position—i.e., intersubjectively communicable in principle.

³⁰ There is room for interpretive debate here. In the Bloomberg lecture, Kant is reported as characterising persuasion differently: as a “holding-to-be-true on account of the illusion of cognition,” in which the illusion consists in “one accept[ing] any degree of truth ... without investigating whether the grounds of the opposite have a greater degree of truth or not” (Blom-L 24:143-4). Here, Kant's point seems to be that assent to a proposition on the basis of strong probabilistic evidence is not enough to render that assent rational; one must also consider the probabilistic evidence against the proposition. Thank you to Huaping Lu-Adler for pointing this out.

³¹ In the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant puts it like this: “[r]ational Belief ... can be convincingly communicated to everyone” (Rel 6:102).

Having made this distinction, Kant addresses his main topic—three species of conviction: opining, believing, and knowing.³²

Taking something to be true, or the subjective validity of judgment, has the following three stages in relation to conviction (which at the same time is valid objectively): having an opinion, believing, and knowing. Having an *opinion* is taking something to be true *with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient*. If taking something to be true is *only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called believing*. Finally, when taking something to be true is *both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing*. Subjective sufficiency is called conviction (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty (for everyone). I will not pause for the exposition of such readily grasped concepts.

(A822/B850; my italics)

We will pause where Kant does not! Schematically put, assents with intersubjectively communicable grounds are:

³² For those interested in the history of Kant's three threefold distinction, note the following. Kant inherits and innovates the threefold distinction of opinion, belief, and knowledge from his predecessors. The rationalists before him took this threefold distinction to concern degrees of epistemic justification. For them, opinion concerns probabilistic justification; belief concerns testimonial justification; and knowledge concerns justification by reasoning. We can have different justifications for the same judgment: one might judge that *p* based only on probabilistic evidence, based on testimony or based on inferential reasoning—corresponding to the original threefold distinction. Kant's innovation is in identifying Belief with a broadly practical justification. Moreover, testimonial justification does not disappear altogether, rather Kant associates with historical Belief (Vien-L 24:895-6; JL 9:68; 9:73n). Gava (2019) provides a detailed study of Kant's source for his notion of practical justified Belief, and argues that Kant's immediate source was Crusius.

Knowledge: Assents with objectively and subjectively sufficient grounds.

Opinion: Assents with objectively and subjectively insufficient grounds.

Belief: Assents with objectively insufficient and subjectively sufficient grounds.

3.2 Knowledge

According to Kant, our assents count as knowledge just in case their grounds are objectively and subjectively sufficient: “when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing” (A822/B850).

Kant says that objectively sufficient grounds “lie in the constitution of the object” (A821/B849) of the proposition in question. So grounds are in the object or objects. Here, Kant construes ‘objects’ broadly. He claims these grounds involve evidence in the form of “my own experience”, testimony, mathematical proofs and inferential reasoning (JL 9:70-1) and that they allow us to “distinguish probability” (JL 9:81). Since objects (like a dog) cannot obtain to some probability but only states of affairs (like Rover being a dog), we should read objects as states of affairs.

Kant speaks of objective grounds of assent lying in objects, objects thus guarantee intersubjective communicability as they are common to all rational agents (the same evidence, experience, proof, etc). However, the Kantian object is not one entirely independent of human cognition. This is because a central doctrine of Kant’s critical philosophy is the thought that our knowledge of things is constrained by the conditions under which we cognise appearances. Thus, the object in question does not concern things in themselves, apart from how things appear to us in time and space and the conditions of our cognitive uptake of these appearances through intuitions and concepts.

Kant says, “[w]ith probability ... the ground of the holding-to-be-true is objectively valid” (JL 9:82). So, for him, an objective ground of assent is *sufficient* if it renders the relevant proposition sufficiently probably true. There is debate about what level of probability counts as sufficiency for Kant³³ and whether propositional knowledge is incompatible with the possibility of being wrong (i.e., whether Kant is a fallibilist or infallibilist concerning knowledge).³⁴ Despite these issues, we can provide an example of what counts as objectively

³³ Sometimes, Kant posits that for a proposition to be sufficiently probable we must “cogniz[e] more grounds for the thing than there possibly are for maintaining the opposite of the thing” (Blom-L 24:194), suggesting that sufficiency requires a probability of more than 0.5. Yet, he also seems sceptical that that we can assign precise numbers to probabilities outside of mathematical and logical contexts—because the “weights are not stamped” (JL 9:82). Chignell suggests that sufficiency involves a “moderate-to-high degree” (2007a, 326) of probability that the proposition is true—and remains vague about where this line might be. Sometimes, Kant says that “[t]o know something ... is nothing other than to cognize it with certainty” (Blom-L 24:242) and that “what I know ... I hold to be *apodictically certain*, i.e. to be universally and objectively necessary (holding for all), even granted that the object to which this certain assent relates should be a merely empirical truth” (JL 9:66; my italics). Stevenson interprets Kant as saying that sufficiency requires apodictic certainty (2003). But this bar is very high: if the standard of empirical knowledge is necessary certainty (no exceptions), few propositions about the world we experience would count as knowledge. To address this problem, Pasternack claims that certainty—and hence sufficiency—“var[ies] with the subject matter under inquiry” (2014, 61). He discusses the difference between physics, chemistry, psychology, and philosophy: “since Chemistry is not amenable to the sort of mathematization or systematization found in Physics, so its standards for certainty are limited to the empirical” (2014, 61). But it seems hardly true that Physics is a more mathematisable and systematisable discipline than Chemistry. Even if this position is plausible, it says nothing about what counts as the standard for certain claims of knowledge in an everyday inquiry into (say) tables and chairs. Nor does it account for many passages in which Kant gives a single standard for sufficiency—*apodictic* certainty. For the purposes of this chapter, it is not important for me to take a position on the matter. However, I think that, although the textual evidence is ambiguous, the best way we can charitably make sense of Kant’s position is to agree with Chignell that sufficiency involves a “moderate-to-high degree” of probability and to remain vague about drawing a line because this reading apportions the objective grounds of knowledge to the probability of evidence.

³⁴ I do not pursue the further question of whether Kant is fallibilist about knowledge, as it is not central to my discussion here. For a typical infallibilist reading, see Willascheck and Watkins (2020). For fallibilist readings, see Gava (2015) and Chignell (forthcoming (a) Ch. 2).

sufficient grounds of assent for Kant. Suppose I have probabilistic evidence for thinking that Johanna has finished writing her latest book (her publisher told me so, they have not lied about such matters, and I read a very nearly complete forthcoming (a) a few weeks ago). Since this evidence makes it highly probable that Johanna has finished writing her latest book, I have (on Kant's account) objectively sufficient grounds for assent in the mode of knowledge.³⁵

Kant thinks that subjective grounds lie in the “mind of him who judges” (A820 B848), that they involve a “particular subject” (JL 9:66), and presumably, that subjective sufficiency here tracks the probability of objective sufficiency. There is room for disagreement regarding whether, for Kant, a subject must be aware of the objective grounds or merely potentially able to cite them upon reflection.³⁶ However, Kant's general point is that merely possessing

³⁵ Gettier-style worries here are appropriate. Although I might be correct in assenting that p, my objective grounds of assent that p may not be the correct grounds. It is altogether possible that Johanna's publisher was in fact lying, but unbeknownst to her publisher, Johanna had finished her latest book anyways. And, it is altogether possible that Johanna had in fact completely rewritten an identical version of her latest book after losing the manuscript I read. Thus, while I have objectively sufficient grounds that rendered the proposition very probably true and the proposition is indeed true, my assent did not go through the correct grounds. In truth, Kant does not seem to consider Gettier style cases like this. And, this should not be surprising considering he is writing in 1781 and 1787, whereas Gettier raises this famous problem in 1963. See Chignell (forthcoming (a), Ch. 3) for further discussion.

³⁶ The details of Kant's picture here are not entirely clear. He sometimes suggests that subjective sufficiency requires awareness of our objective grounds: “knowing is an objective holding-to-be-true, with *consciousness*” (Vien-L 24:852; my italics). This suggestion is very strong. Typically, we do not think we must be actively aware of the grounds for why we hold a proposition to be true. For example, it is exceedingly demanding say that knowing how to get to the shops requires that I am actively aware of all the steps required. According to this reading, subjective sufficient is satisfied by a subject being aware of the ground and base her judgment on that ground. See Stang (2016, 284n) for this stronger reading. Instead, one might think it is enough that I can cite the step required to get to the shops upon reflection. Sometimes, Kant suggests that subjective sufficient grounds consist the requirement—that, “one is in a position” (Blom-L 24:87–8) to cite the objective grounds. See Chignell (2007a, 329) for this weaker reading. In my

objectively sufficient grounds is not enough for an agent's assent to count as knowledge, and instead knowledge also requires awareness, or potential awareness of, the grounds on which the agent judges. In broad terms, this seems plausible. Typically, if a subject is unaware, or unaware even upon reflection or when challenged, of their reasons for holding that *p*, we do not think they know that *p*.

3.3 Opinion

For Kant, opinion is assent “with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient” (A823/B851). So opinions are assents in which we lack objective grounds that render a proposition sufficiently probably true, and are aware, or potentially aware, that we are not assenting on objective grounds. Kant says that opinions are “provisional judg[ments]” (JL 9:66), that upon further reflection and investigation may transform into knowledge. He claims that “[i]n opining I always take a step toward knowledge. For there is an insufficient ground, to which complements still must be added in order to make it perfect” (Vein-L 24:850). So, for Kant, assents lacking objectively and subjectively sufficient grounds are not themselves problematic, but are important to knowledge formation. Thus, an opinion is a working hypothesis that we posit to find evidence for or against it.

view, there is little textual evidence to draw on here. However, charity of interpretation recommends the weaker reading. Although, admittedly, Kant's position might be that knowledge is exceptionally demanding. Either way, while the details are vague, I think Kant's basic point is clear enough: merely possessing the objectively sufficient grounds is not enough for an agent's assent to count as knowledge. Knowledge also requires that the agent must be, or potentially be, conscious of those grounds.

3.4 Belief (and Doxastic Universalisability)

Kantian Belief is an assent with objectively *insufficient* but subjectively *sufficient* grounds (A823/B851; JL 9:69). So our assents count as Belief only if they lack the objectively sufficient grounds necessary for knowledge. For Kant, Belief is justified on subjective grounds in virtue of a “practical relation” (A823/B851) because it is a “holding-to-be-true that is enough for action” (JL 9:68n). This practical relation is a justificatory means-ends relation. Suppose I set for myself the end of going to the city; a necessary means to pursuing that end is catching a train (or some other form of transport). The relation between my end and means is practical because catching a train allows me to pursue my end. Since it is necessary to pursue my end of going to the city, my catching the train is a practically-justified action.³⁷

With Belief, Kant conceives of it as a practically-justified assent in much the same way as actions can be means to ends:³⁸ assent can be a means to obtaining an end, and the relation between ends and means can serve as justificatory grounds for holding that assent. Kant calls these grounds subjectively sufficient in a practical relation. Kant goes on to claim that Belief

³⁷ It is important to note that Kantian Belief is unlike typical contemporary uses of (uncapitalised) belief in at least three important respects. First, Kant maintains that Belief is “a free holding to be true” (i.e., it is voluntary) (JL 9:67; 9:73; 9:70), whereas contemporary epistemologists hold that belief is not under the control of the subject; second, Belief is necessarily a conscious holding-to-be-true (A822/B850), whereas contemporary epistemologists typically think we hold many background beliefs without being conscious of them; third, Kantian Belief cannot be epistemically justified—and hence be a candidate for knowledge (A822/B850), whereas many contemporary epistemological debates concern how our beliefs are epistemically justified and can qualify as knowledge.

³⁸ That these assents are subjectively justified on practical grounds does not imply that they are less-justified assents than those justified on objectively sufficient grounds (i.e., knowledge). Kant explicitly says that “rational Belief ... is not inferior in degree to knowing” (O 8:141) Instead, for him, Belief is a “completely different” (O 8:142) kind of assent—i.e., one that is practically justified—from knowledge.

comes in three modes (moral, pragmatic, and doctrinal). Yet, primarily, each is a justified assent because they allows us to achieve an end.

Kant's account of subjectively sufficient grounds seems to differ between knowledge and belief. In knowledge, they consist in being or potentially being aware of one's objectively sufficient grounds; in Belief, they consist in a practical justification. So there is debate about how to reconcile the two kinds of grounds. In my view, Kant plays fast and loose with his terminology using subjective sufficiency in two different but overlapping ways. With knowledge, subjective sufficiency is an epistemic notion, and thus a condition on knowledge concerning the awareness, or potential awareness, of one's objectively sufficient grounds. With Belief, subjective sufficiency is a practical notion, and thus a condition of action concerning the conditions of obtaining an end. These two usages overlap because they share two high-level features: (1) they are not objective grounds and (2) they are subjective in the sense of internal to a subject's mind (A820/B848). Thus, I think we should read Kant's usage of 'subjectively sufficient grounds' as denoting a class of grounds that shares these two features.³⁹

³⁹ Chignell (2007a) simply distinguishes the two kinds of subjectively sufficient grounds—epistemic and practical. But this reading has the disadvantage of introducing a distinction where there is none. Pasternack considers the subjective grounds of Belief to be psychological—as the “stability of one's commitment” (2014, 43). But since Kant is talking about justificatory grounds for assent, it is not clear that Kant's account of a practical justified assent is psychological. Höwing (2016) takes subjective grounds in both cases to refer to a rational requirement to assent that p. But this has the disadvantage that nowhere in the section *Opining, Believing, Knowing* does Kant speak of a rational requirement to assent. Indeed, Kant explicitly speaks of Belief as an assent we are not obliged to make (CPvR 5:144; 5145-6). My basic proposal is similar to Chignell's (2007a) in that it distinguishes between epistemic and practical subjectively sufficient grounds, but it also explains why Kant fails to distinguish the two clearly. By seeking to clarify Kant's account of subjective grounds in more detail, we risk presenting it in an artificial light.

Epistemic Universalisability. Before continuing, I want to emphasise and clarify that Kant's subjective grounds are in principle intersubjectively communicable. For Kant, Belief is a species of conviction, and the grounds of assent for all convictions are in principle intersubjectively communicable. Thus, Belief's subjective grounds are intersubjectively communicable. But how might we judge whether or not a subjective ground is intersubjectively communicable?

In *What It Means to Orient Oneself in Thinking*,⁴⁰ Kant seems to address this question directly, writing, “[a]ccept what appears to you most worthy of Belief [*glaubwürdigsten*] after careful and sincere examination, whether of facts or rational grounds” (O 8:146).⁴¹ In a footnote, he continues, saying:

To make use of one's own reason means no more than to ask oneself, *when one is supposed to assume [annehmen] something*, whether one could find it feasible to make the ground or the rule one which one assumes [*annimmt*] [the rule] into a universal principle for one's use of reason. This *test is one that everyone can apply to himself; and with this examination he will see superstition and enthusiasm disappear*, even if he falls far short of having the information to refute them on objective grounds. (O 8:146n; my italics)

⁴⁰ Hereafter, simply *Orient*.

⁴¹ Similarly, in the *Canon*, Kant speaks of determining intersubjectively communicable grounds through an “experiment that one makes on the understanding of others” (A821/B849). So, for Kant, we distinguish between intersubjectively and non-intersubjectively communicable grounds by asking ourselves whether others in the same position would assent to the same proposition on those grounds.

As several commentators note, Kant claims that making use of one's reason involves asking whether one's own principles could be universal principles, and this echoes his *moral universalisability* principle. That is, the maxims of our actions are morally permissible only if those maxims are universalisable (Cohen 2014, 322; O'Neill 1989, 26). Or, as Kant puts it, "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (G 4:402). On standard readings, Kant's moral universalisability principle is a test: only maxims for our action that can be made universal without generating contradictions are morally permissible.⁴² Since the above passage echoes Kant's moral universalisability principle, Alix Cohen reads the above passage as an *epistemic universalisability* test as an ethics of belief (in the contemporary justified true belief sense): only maxims for forming beliefs that can be made universal without generating contradictions are epistemically permissible (Cohen 2014, 324).⁴³ For her, the maxim "ignore evidence when I wish something to be true" fails the test because it generates an epistemic contradiction: as a participant in an epistemic community, I rely on others' beliefs; I cannot do this if I am not sure whether evidence or desire grounds their beliefs (Cohen 2014, 323-4).

Cohen's reading goes in the right direction, but diverges significantly from the text. I think the test should read:

⁴² The exact nature of the contradiction the universalisability test generates is deeply controversial. However, my argument does not rely on any particular formulation of the contradiction. For further discussion, see Korsgaard (1996, 78-102); Wood (1999, 40-2); Kleingeld (2017).

⁴³ If there is a received reading of the above passages in the *Orient*, it is O'Neill's who equates it with Kant's categorical imperative (1989, 59). For a dissenting view, see Hadisi (n.d.), who reads this passage as a prescription to "universalize the ground of one's judgment *simpliciter*" be they theoretical, practical or formal.

Doxastic Universalisability Test: in matters of Belief, our assents are justified only if upon reflection we would find that others would think that assenting to the relevant proposition is a necessary means to a proposed end.

I offer three remarks in support of this reading. First, Cohen is correct that Kant proposes a universalisability test: using our reason involves asking ourselves whether universalising our grounds is feasible (O 8:146n). However, in the passages quoted above, Kant claims the test concerns “[a]ccept[ing] what appears to [us] most worthy of Belief [*glaubwürdigsten*]” (O 8:146), “when one is supposed to assume [*annehmen*] something” (O 8:146n), and where one lacks “objective grounds” (O 8:146n) for refuting a claim. So Kant here speaks about Belief. Thus, as I read him, talk of examining ‘facts’ refers to ruling out that one possesses objectively sufficient grounds of assent to a relevant proposition, and examining ‘rational grounds;’ concerns considering our subjective grounds of assent. Thus, the above passage supports reading the doxastic universalisability test as one of the subjective grounds for our Beliefs—in the Kantian sense of practically justified assent—and not in terms of justified true belief.

Second, as Cohen would admit, Kant never speaks of generating an epistemic contradiction (2014, 332-3). Rather, Kant speaks of reflecting—i.e., *asking oneself* whether everyone would also think that the grounds of one’s assent are a means to the proposed end. Moreover, I think we should read the test as narrowly referring to *others with our contextually dependent ends* and not broadly as *everyone simpliciter*. This is because (as we will see) Kant maintains that assents in the mode of pragmatic and doctrinal Belief involve contextually dependent ends and not universally held ends of morality. So I suggest we read ‘universal’ in

the above passage as holding for all reasoners that have set themselves the same end.⁴⁴ So the test concerns self-reflection about what a community of other reasoners might think is a necessary means to a proposed end.

Third, for Kant, Belief is subjectively justified—not objectively. On Cohen’s test, if we find that our Beliefs did not contain contradictions, we would have objective grounds for Belief. So Cohen’s reading proves too much: it provides objective justificatory grounds for Belief. It seems to me that, for Kant, no pragmatic or doctrinal Belief assent can ever enjoys conclusively practical justification: Belief is *revisable* at least in non-moral cases.⁴⁵ For Kant, moral Belief is an assent with “moral certainty” (A829/B857) and thus unrevisable, but “[t]heoretical [i.e doctrinal] belief is alterable to be sure ... For I can advance to better insight, and find something contrary [to it] in nature, and then my holding-to-be-true comes to an end” (Vien-L 24:852). So doxastic universalisability provides a test for intersubjective communicability, but cannot produce certainty in non-moral cases. Let us now move to moral, pragmatic, and doctrinal Belief.

3.5 Moral Belief

For Kant, in moral Belief, our assents enjoy practical justification only if they are means to a necessary end—particularly, the ends that morality rationally requires all reasoners to take

⁴⁴ There is a notorious problem with universality tests: the more we specify an individual’s context, the less universal it looks; the more we make an individual’s context universal, the less it seem to apply to that individual. In light of this problem, I think we should remain vague about what counts as universal. After all, Kant calls the test a “touchstone” (I 8:146) and not a cut and dry test.

⁴⁵ What I call revisable Kleingeld calls tentative and fallibilist (2008, 526). I use the label revisable because, in the moral case, it seems we have maximal—and thus unrevisable—certainty in God’s existence, but can still be fallibilist about knowledge of God’s existence.

up:⁴⁶ in moral issues, it is “absolutely necessary that something must happen, namely that I fulfil the moral law in all points” (A828/B856). Such ends are “inescapably fixed” (A828/B856) in the sense that as moral rational agents, we are rationally required to pursue them. For Kant, one such inescapably fixed end is seeking the highest good—a world in which “happiness [exists] in proportion with ... morality” (A814/B843). Kant claims that a necessary means to this end is assenting that “there [is] a God” (A828/B856) who has an inclination and capacity to bring about a world in which virtue is proportionate to happiness, in order for us to seek the highest good in this world. Because of this practical means-end relation, Kant claims that we “will inexorably Believe in the existence of God” (A828/B856).

On Kant’s picture, our assent to God’s existence lacks objectively sufficient grounds (and thus cannot count knowledge) because such a claim involves “wander[ing] about beyond the boundaries of all experience” (A828/B856). As Kant glibly puts it: “no one will be able to boast that he knows that there is a God ... for if he knows that, then he is precisely the man I have long sought” (A828/B856).

However, for Kant, with moral Belief, our assents enjoy subjective sufficiency only if they are necessary for seeking moral ends. Kant calls this his moral proof of God, not because it proves God’s existence, but because it proves the necessity of our assent to God’s existence. Interpretive complexities surround Kant’s so-called moral proof of God, especially the necessity at issue.⁴⁷ However, despite these complexities, his moral proof is a clear-enough

⁴⁶ Note that the fact that we are all rationally required to pursue an end (here, the moral law) does not entail that we all actually do pursue that end. Instead, it only entails that we all have a rational normative requirement to pursue that end, and thus a rational normative requirement to form moral Beliefs (CPvR 5:143; JL 9:86n).

⁴⁷ The literature on Kant’s moral proof and the highest good is vast. Since these are not the focus of this chapter, I will not take them up here. However, I will point to a series of classical worries. First, Kant stipulates a just-deserts principle: that we should seek a world

example of a moral Belief, and is plausible (at least within a Kantian framework). Indeed, central to Kant's moral philosophy is that the assent that 'there is a God' is a necessary means to seeking our moral ends.

3.6 Pragmatic Belief

Like all modes of Belief, in pragmatic Belief, our assents lack objectively sufficient grounds but are justified in virtue of a practical relation. What separates pragmatic from moral Belief, is that our assent to a relevant proposition is a hypothetically necessary condition of obtaining "contingent ends" (A823/B851). Such ends are contingent, because who must set them and how one pursues them are context-dependent. This is because, unlike moral Belief, rationality does not require everyone to take up these ends, and a wide range of means may be rational for obtaining those ends (depending on the circumstances). The means are hypothetically necessary because they are necessary only "once an end is proposed" (A824/B852). So hypothetically necessary means go hand-in-hand with contingent ends. For example, if I set mastering Ancient Greek as my end, you are not rationally required to set it as your end, and there might be many rational ways to realise this end (memorising flash cards, taking an

where happiness and morality are proportional such that people's happiness is proportionate to their moral goodness; and then he argues that we must assent that God guarantees it. But many critics wonder why morally good people deserve proportional happiness—and if they are proportional, why not think that evolutionary pressures or multiple gods or state institutions guarantee their proportionality? Second, Kant presents different reasons for why we must assent in the mode of moral Belief to a God-guaranteed just-deserves principle: because the highest good provides "promises and threats" (A812/B840), because this assent is conceptually consistent and because it provides psychological assistance in a demoralising world. It is unclear which of these is his final point of view. For more detail, see Chignell (forthcoming (a) Ch. 10) and Wood (2020, Ch. 2). Third, given Kant's insistence that morality is done from a sense of duty, regardless of whether we realise the goals of our moral actions or whether it brings about human happiness, one must reconcile the happiness component of the highest good with Kant's doctrine of duty.

online course, learning individually, reading, singing declensions, etc). These means only become necessary once I have set the end for myself, and hence depend on my circumstances (prior learning, ability, etc).

Kant claims that, in cases of pragmatic Belief, a hypothetically necessary condition of pursuing a contingent end is assenting that *p*; that means-ends relation provides a subject's assent with subjectively sufficient grounds—even though this assent lacks objective sufficiency.

Concerning pragmatic Belief, Kant cites an example of a doctor who must act urgently to save a patient's life without knowing the illness. A practical relation justifies the doctor's firm assent: it is a hypothetically necessary means to save the patient. Kant says, "he does not know the illness. He looks to the symptoms, and judges, because he does not know any better, that it is consumption. His Belief is contingent even in his own judgment; someone else might perhaps do better" (A824/B852). For Kant, the doctor's end—saving the patient—is contingent because it is dependent on his circumstances as opposed to a general requirement of rational morality. His means are contingent because others might do better, for example, if they had access to better equipment, more training or more time. Moreover, presumably, the symptoms provide the doctor with some probabilistic evidence (e.g., visually, he rules out external blood), but not sufficient probability to satisfy objective sufficiency.

In many real-life evidentially-ambitious circumstances, a doctor's assent that *p* might primarily enjoy justification in an exploratory epistemic mode—to (say) gather evidence (assenting that *p* to know *q*) or rule out options (assenting that *p* to ruling out that *q*) or entertain a working hypothesis (entertaining that *p*)—on the way to gaining knowledge of a

patient's illness.⁴⁸ In contrast to Kant's position, in such circumstances a doctor's assent is justified because it helps us know something—in virtue of increasing our probabilistic evidence. However, I think we are supposed to imagine situations requiring *urgent* action, in which such avenues are unavailable or exhausted (perhaps because of lack of time or equipment).⁴⁹ We are supposed to imagine a patient who is on death's door (so to speak) and will die without further action.⁵⁰ In such urgent situations, Kant claims that if a doctor's firm assent is required to save a patient's life, it can be justified, and epistemic universalisability constrains justified assent. Recall that Belief's grounds are intersubjective, and thus the doctor

⁴⁸ One might even think doctors have an obligation to assent in this way.

⁴⁹ We might hesitate to accept Kant's doctor example for two reasons. First, the doctor seemingly acts on a hypothesis. Presumably, the doctor has evidence for or against the hypothesis 'the patient has consumption'; gains more evidence after administering and observing the effect of a treatment; and adjusts her confidence in that hypothesis as she goes. Second, where evidence is not available, one might think a doctor should not rush into action—or at least act with minimal confidence—and act to gather evidence. However, I think these concerns miss the urgency of the situation Kant describes. In a proto-Jamesian way, Kant's suggestion is that sometimes we find ourselves in pressing circumstances in which firm assent is a condition of achieving our ends. The doctor might gain evidence through her actions that would satisfy objective sufficiency; but the patient, in all likelihood, will be dead by then. So the key point is that, in pragmatic Belief, our assents enjoy practical justification in urgent contexts. Here, I agree with Chignell that "[i]f there are no pressing circumstances that call for firmness, then the rational thing to do is to hold the proposition as an Opinion [i.e., a hypothesis], or to withhold assent altogether" (2007a, 340). Admittedly, Kant describes cases of pragmatic Belief involving assents in businesses deals (JL 9:67-8n) with corn merchants assenting that "the harvest will turn out badly" (AK 20:298), which seems less pressing. But we might well imagine that such decisions are time pressing because, say, a large loan is about to expire.

⁵⁰ I take the urgency Kant describes in this example as proto-Jamesian. James asks us to consider an alpine hiker whose only way off a mountain is jumping over a crevasse, the success of which he has no evidence for, having never had a similar experience. If the hiker believes he can make the jump, he is more likely to succeed because he will jump confidently. If the hiker thinks he should only proportion his beliefs to evidence, he is less likely to succeed because he will hesitate. For James, the lesson is clear. In this and similar cases, one is justified "to believe what one desires; for the belief is one of the indispensable preliminary conditions of the realisation of its object. There are then cases where faith creates its own verification" (1896, 529). The Jamesian point is that one's firm belief without evidence in one's success can bring it about.

must subject their assent to the doxastic universalisability test and ask themselves whether their colleagues would think that the assent was required to save the patient. So Kant is not writing a blank cheque. Instead, with pragmatic Belief, he recommends to us a contextually-sensitive account of agency embedded within social standards and individual reflection.⁵¹

I suspect most people will think that Kant's doctor should assent to do what is most likely to save the patient *however low the probability is* or withhold assent altogether under some version of a 'do no harm' principle. But the doctor example shows that Kant thinks we have contingently justified Beliefs: in some circumstance, lacking probabilistic sufficient evidence, our assent that p enjoys practical justification as a necessary means to a contingent end.

3.7 Doctrinal Belief

Kant says that doctrinal Beliefs involve “taking something to be true ... merely theoretical[ly]” (A825/B853) analogous to pragmatic Belief.⁵² Kantian doctrinal Belief resembles pragmatic Belief but involves firm assent to propositions referring to concepts lacking empirical reference—i.e., ideas. Kant claims that in doctrinal Belief, we cannot “undertake anything in relation to an object” (A825/B853), and its propositions cannot be

⁵¹ Complexities abound here concerning meta-ethics, medical ethics, and ethics of belief. So we would need to flesh out Kant's proposal. Since this chapter's focus is doctrinal Belief, I will leave aside that discussion.

⁵² In several other passages, Kant explicitly says theoretical (as opposed to practical) uses of reason can justify assents to propositions referring to ideas: “[w]ithout assuming an intelligent author ... there yet remains sufficient [subjective] grounds for *assuming* such a case in reason's need to presuppose something intelligible in order to explain this given appearance” (O 8:138-9; original italics). He also says: “[t]here was therefore no extension of the cognition of *given supersensible objects*, but there was nevertheless an extension of theoretical reason and its cognition with respect to the supersensible in general, inasmuch as theoretical reason was forced to grant that *there are such objects*” (CPvR 5:135; original italics).

“settled by any sort of experience” (A825/B853)—hence rules out a meaningful assignment of probabilities because we cannot verify them.⁵³ So, with doctrinal Belief, our assents to propositions that go beyond experience can enjoy a theoretical means-ends justification.⁵⁴

Kant’s central example is the following:

[W]e must concede that the thesis of the existence of God belongs to doctrinal belief. For although with regard to theoretical knowledge of the world I have nothing at my command that necessarily presupposes this thought as the condition of my explanations of the appearances of the world, but am rather obliged to make use of my reason as if everything were mere nature, purposive unity is still so important a condition of the application of the reason to nature that I cannot pass it by, especially since experience liberally supplies examples of it. But I know of no other condition for this unity that could

⁵³ Here, I diverge from Chignell’s canonical reading of doctrinal Belief. Chignell suggests that probabilistic evidence plays a role in doctrinal Belief—albeit a weak one. He claims that a subject’s available objective grounds, if any, render the proposition at least as likely as any relevant alternative to it (though not likely enough to count as Conviction) (2007a, 350). In contrast, as I read Kant, the propositions involved in doctrinal Belief are the kinds to which *we cannot meaningful assign probabilities*. Thus, any empirical evidence (like a hint from nature) or rational argument (like Kant’s *ens realissimum* argument) for them does not indicate whether they are more or less likely to be true with any significant probability—the kind that might satisfy Kant’s objective sufficient probability condition on knowledge. I take this to be Kant’s point about betting with regards to Belief. He says that pragmatic Belief comes in degrees such that “betting” (A824/B853) is an indicator of the confidence of someone’s assent: “Often someone pronounces his propositions with such confident inflexible defiance that he seems to have entirely laid aside all concern for error. A bet disconcerts him. Sometimes he reveals that he is persuaded enough for one ducat and not for ten” (A824/B852). In contrast, in doctrinal Belief, Kant says “I might bet everything that I have on it” (A825/B853). As I read Kant, the point here is that betting is meaningless in these circumstances, and this is because assigning probabilities to the propositions involved in doctrinal Belief is meaningless without any way of checking their veracity. On this reading, there might be grounds—like Kant’s argument for the existence of an *ens realissimum*—that look like objective grounds but to which we cannot meaningful apply probabilities since we cannot verify these probabilities in experience.

⁵⁴ My reading is indebted to Stang’s (2016, Ch. 9) and Chignell’s (2007a) readings.

serve me as a clue for the investigation of nature except insofar as I presuppose that highest intelligence has arranged everything in accordance with the wisest ends.

Consequently, the presupposition of a wise author of the world is a condition of an aim which is, to be sure, contingent but yet not inconsiderable, namely that of having a guide for the investigation of nature. (A826/B854)

Here, Kant claims that we cannot have theoretical knowledge that ‘there is a wise author of nature’ conceived of as God. This is not surprising, considering that a central aim of the *Transcendental Dialectic* is showing that rational proofs of God’s existence fail, and that we cannot experience God. Thus, our assent that ‘there is a wise author of nature’ is not justified on objectively sufficient grounds. Likewise, Kant claims that we are not justified in assenting to God’s existence as a hypothesis (or equivalently as an opinion) because we would make ourselves “liable for more of a concept of the constitution of a world-cause and of another world than I can boast of” (A827/B855). The point here is that hypothesising that ‘there is a wise author of nature’ implies we can gather evidence for or against the hypothesis. Moreover, in doctrinal Belief, we must be aware that our assent that *p* lacks, and can never have, objectively sufficient grounds, since Kant thinks we must be aware (or potentially aware) of our subjective and objective grounds for our assents to be justified.

Instead, according to Kant, in the biological context, certain assents are justified as a means to an end. Suppose a biologist sets out the end of finding richer, deeper, and more unified explanations of nature. To pursue this end, Kant says that she must presuppose that ‘there is a wise author of nature’. The thought is that natural organisms confront her with a bewildering complexity such that two species seem entirely unrelated—say, a wombat and a snake. But experience tells her that nature is purposive: experience “liberally supplies examples of [purposive unity]” (A826/B854). Kant suggests that, if the biologist aims to

explain a wombat and a snake in terms of a more general kind, she must posit that a wise author creates a unified world—such that, in that world, a wombat and a snake are related and thus do not contradict the examples of purposiveness that experience provides.⁵⁵ Moreover, in light of the doxastic universalisability test, her assent is justified only if, upon reflection, she would think that fellow biologists would also assent on the same grounds.⁵⁶

A key similarity between pragmatic and doctrinal Belief is that both involve “contingent ends” (A823/B851). The biologist’s assent that ‘there is a God’ is contextually appropriate to her end of providing “explanations of the appearances of the world” (A826/B854) that display a purposive unity. Like pragmatic Belief, rationality does not require us to take up the biologist’s end. And, were the biologist to re-train as a mathematician, rationality would not require her to set as her end seeking the pursuit of richer, deeper, and more unified explanations of the natural world.

The contingent ends’ condition on doctrinal Belief differs from pragmatic Belief in two important ways, however. First, the ends in doctrinal Belief involve theorising and not action

⁵⁵ Note that Kant seems to reply to so-called ladder-kicking objections that worry that the step of positing a God that guarantees purposiveness is not necessary when we can directly posit that nature is purposive. His response is that it should not matter whether we posit that “‘God has wisely willed it so’ or ‘Nature has wisely so ordered it’” (A699/B727).

⁵⁶ Kant’s language echoes that of the *Appendix*’s the second part, where he claims that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation and that this involves the presupposition that everything is the result of the “wise intentions of a world-author” (A687/B715). I argued in Chapter 7 that the necessity claim concerning ideas in the *Appendix* is broadly-speaking semantic: rational cognition requires givenness and generality conditions to be met; empirical concepts satisfy givenness and ideas satisfy generality; without ideas, reason would fail to produce cognition. However, notice that in the *Canon*, Kant pursues a different, *practical-epistemic*, line of argument: if we set ourselves certain contingent ends, our assents to propositions concerning ideas are justified because they are necessary for bringing about those ends. As I have been arguing, the major burden of such an argument is showing that there really are examples of contingent ends that require assent.

(as is the case with the doctor). So the end is *theoretical*: “in order merely to explain a certain phenomenon” (MM 6:354; A825/B853). Second, such theoretical ends are *collective* in a way that the doctor’s individual ends are not: they involve the ends of whole disciplines such as science, metaphysics or biology. However, they are not universal ends in the way that morality’s ends are necessary for all rational agents. In the doctor example, assent is justified in light of an *individual’s* end—saving a patient—which is not shared with others.⁵⁷ Kant’s biology examples suggests that the ends involved in doctrinal Belief are *collective* ends—although not universal ones, i.e., the ends that morality sets for us. This is because the biologist presumably acts within a community of researchers that share her goal. But, as we saw, Kant’s biologist example is weak because it involves assenting that God intentionally ordered nature.

Conclusion

In sum: Kant’s account of doctrinal Belief provides a justificatory profile that any example of an agent who legitimately holds that attitude must satisfy. In the mode of doctrinal Belief, our assents to propositions referring to ideas are rationally justified just in case:

- (1) **Contingent Ends Condition:** a subject sets a contingent theoretical end shared with others.

⁵⁷ Of course, a nurse could share in the end of saving the patient’s life. So by shared end, I mean the goals of a large enterprise. I am not sure how we should draw a line between individual and shared ends. But my distinction reflects Kant’s examples. For Kant’s other examples of pragmatic Belief involve individuals with goals: corn merchants, generals, and businessmen. See (Dohna 24:750; JL 9:68n; Progress 20:298), whereas in doctrinal Belief he refers to biologists (A826/B854).

(2) **Hypothetical Necessary Means Condition:** firmly assenting to a relevant proposition is a hypothetically necessary condition of pursuing that end, and upon reflection we would find that others would think assent to the relevant proposition was a necessary means to the end.

(3) **Lack of Objectively Sufficient Grounds Condition:** the subject is aware, or potentially aware, that they lack objectively sufficient grounds for that assent.

Our question, to which we return to in the next chapter, is: can we find an example of such a rationally justified assent?

Chapter 2 — A Test Case for Doctrinal

Belief

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented my account of doctrinal Belief and its rational conditions. We saw that Kant's official examples in the *Canon* of doctrinal Belief are not compelling, and that one such example was the existence of a future life:

[I]n respect of the magnificent equipment of human nature and the shortness of life which is so ill suited to it, there is likewise to be found sufficient grounds for a doctrinal belief in the future life of the human soul. (A827/B855)

The basic thought is clear enough: we are born with natural capacities which must all reach full development; our natural lives are too short to fully develop them; therefore, there exists a future life of the human soul in which these capacities can be realised. Let us call this a life-too-short argument. Kant wants to argue that this conclusion is justified only as an article of doctrinal Belief.

Kant himself notoriously dismisses the need to give examples and illustrations of philosophy. He claims that they are necessary only for a 'popular' readership (i.e., well-educated middle and upper class elites), and that 'real experts' might even find examples and illustrations counter-productive. Kant says that, although "[e]xamples and illustrations always appear necessary to me, and hence appeared in the proper place in my first draft, ... I found it inadvisable to swell it further with examples and illustrations" (Axviii).

However, the problem with the example of a future life—as an example of doctrinal Belief—is not that Kant does not give one, but that Kant’s remarks about it are so comically brief. (In the *Canon*, the above three lines are all Kant says on the matter!) The reader is left unclear as to what contingent end is at issue, why a firm assent is required to attain it, and thus how it satisfies the conditions of doctrinal Belief.¹

My suggestion here is that we can defend Kant's account of doctrinal Belief by extracting a plausible example of it from Kant’s the *Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*.² Section 1 lays out the textual case for reading Kant’s epistemological comments about doctrinal Belief into the *Idea*. In Section 2, I argue that, according to Kant, a philosopher-historian who pursues a complete human history necessarily assents to the idea that human rationality will develop fully in the distant future—or a future life. I will argue that rational assent to a future life fits the justificatory profile for doctrinal Belief. It fits because assent to a future life is a necessary hypothetical means to the end of making sense of all historical events. The latter is, for Kant, the goal of philosopher-historians. Section 3 presents four central upshots of Kant’s account of doctrinal Belief thus defended. I contrast my reading with those commentators who think a philosopher-historian makes a regulative ‘as if’

¹ Chignell provides the example of John’s effort to master modal logic at age 75. This a contingent end that John sets for himself (arising out of his philosophical vocation), but he is aware that his natural life is probably not long enough to reach it. Chignell claims that if John did not assent to a future life, “the pursuit of such expertise, in the face of imminent extinction, would involve John in a sort of performative contradiction and not be fully rational” (Chignell forthcoming (a), Ch. 9). It strikes me that this way of thinking about future life is a hybrid of pragmatic and doctrinal Belief. The end set is pragmatic as opposed to theoretical, in the sense of setting the end of gaining proficiently at a skill (modal logic); however, the proposition refers to an idea—the future life of the soul—and thus the example is partially doctrinal. The possibility of such hybrid assents is intriguing and shows that Kant’s taxonomy is not exhaustive.

² Hereafter, simply *Idea*.

assumption. I show that these readings cannot distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uses of such assumptions.

1.0 Future Life and the Philosophical Historian

1.1 Epistemology and the Idea of a Universal History

In the *Idea*, Kant observes that the historical actions of individuals appear “confused and irregular” (I 8:17) and that individuals rarely act in “accordance with an agreed upon plan” (I 8:17). He suggests that, while at a micro-level the weather shows little regularity, if we consider the weather as a whole, we see that it sustains the growth of plants and the flow of rivers. Likewise, Kant claims that our only chance of providing a deep and unified account of all human events in history lies in considering them “in the large” (I 8:17)—i.e., as a whole.

Kant proposes that, to make unified sense of history’s entirety, we posit an end towards which human history is progressing. This end is the “idea of the human being” (I 8:19), a state of affairs in which our rational capacities are fully developed: “[the] human species is represented in the remote distance [future] as working itself upward toward the conditioning which all germs nature has placed in it can be fully developed” (I 8:30). When viewed this way, Kant thinks we will recognise that humanity as a whole is slowly, non-linearly progressing towards the fullest development of its rational capacities.

In the *Idea*, Kant makes the following argument: humanity’s rational capacities will reach full development in the future in the “idea of a human being” (I 8:19) (*second proposition*). We develop our rational capacities through human competitiveness (*fourth proposition*).³

³ Kant claims that human beings’ competitiveness—*unsociable sociability*—drives the development of history. According to Kant, we are social creatures insofar as we have a propensity to live together for the “development of [our] natural predispositions” (I 8:21),

Civil society—one with “the greatest freedom” (I 8:22)—is a necessary condition of our full development because it is necessary for human competitiveness (*fifth proposition*). A cosmopolitan state—a “federation of nations” (I 8:24) guaranteeing peace between nations—is a condition of civil society (*seventh proposition*). Therefore, a necessary condition of the full development of humanity’s rational capacities is a cosmopolitan state (*eighth proposition*).

The lion’s share of scholarship focuses on political aspects of this argument.⁴ By contrast, my interest is epistemological: how Kant justifies the *second proposition* in light of the *ninth proposition* concerning the possibility of writing a “philosophical history” (I 8:31).

The *second proposition* states that the “idea of a human being” (I 8:19) represents the fullest development of our rational capacities.

In the human being (as the only rational creature on earth), those predispositions whose goal is the use of his reason were to develop completely only in the species, but not in the individual ... And this [future] point *in time* must be, at least in the idea of the human being. (I 8:18-9; my italics)

but we are unsocial creatures insofar as we also have a “great propensity to *individualize* (isolate)” (I 8:21; original italics) ourselves in order to pursue our own way—manifest in ambition, tyranny, and greed in obtaining for ourselves a higher rank amongst other whom we “cannot *stand*, but also cannot *leave alone*” (I 8:21; original italics).

⁴ There is a growing body of work on Kant’s history of philosophy. See, for instance, Rorty and Schmidt (eds.) (2009), Brunkhorst (2020), Zuckert (2021), and Sweet (2013). However, there is little discussion of the epistemology that underwrites it in terms of assent.

Let's call this:

Future Life: there is a future state of affairs beyond our natural lives in which humanity's rational capacities come to perfect fruition.⁵

Since Kant holds that perfect rationality will only completely develop in the species and not the individual, 'our' refers not to any individual but humanity collectively in a presumably infinite future. Moreover, such a future collective humanity is *in time*. So Kant is talking about fully embodied, spatiotemporally located humans—and not some version of ourselves in an afterlife.⁶

And, the *ninth proposition* states that writing a universal history must be possible:

A philosophical attempt toward our universal world history according to a plan of nature that aims at the perfect civil union of the human species, must be regarded as *possible* and even furthering this aim of nature. (I 8:29; my italics)

For Kant, a philosopher-historian's goal is to write a philosophical universal world history, which amounts to a unified explanation of *all* history's events. So it would provide a deeper, richer, and more unified account of history than we currently possess, and ultimately would make visible how we are progressing towards a civil society and a cosmopolitan state—both of which are preconditions of the full development of our rational capacities. The

⁵ In a moment, I will provide textual evidence for calling this 'future life'.

⁶ By 'Future Life,' I aim to pick out a future point in time when humanity's perfection obtains, and distinguish that concept from a post-mortem existence such as Kant describes in relation to the highest good: "the existence and personality of the same rational being continuing endlessly (which is called the immortality of the soul)" (CPvR 5:122).

task of writing a philosophical history is not proving history's aim-directedness, but rather making visible regularities in seemingly unrelated events of all of history. A philosopher-historian's goal is not empirical, but a priori, because it extends beyond empirical evidence. In claiming that attempting a philosophical history is 'possible', Kant presumably means it is feasible—as in not bound to fail. It is trivial to claim that such an attempt is logically possible (contradiction-free) and physically possible (possible according to the laws of nature).⁷ By analogy, suppose I set out to summit a 6,000-metre mountain. When we say that attempting the summit is possible, we are typically suggesting that we lack evidence that I will necessarily fail—already assuming the logical and physical possibility of attempting the summit.

Kant goes on to restate future life: “[t]he human species is represented in the remote distance as finally working itself upward towards the condition in which all the germs nature has placed in it can be fully developed and its vocation here on earth can be fulfilled” (I 8:30). And, he claims,

[i]f, nevertheless, *one may assume* [*annehmen*] that nature does not proceed without a plan ..., then this idea could become useful ... this idea should still serve us as a guiding thread for the exhibiting of an otherwise planless aggregate of human actions, at least in the large, as a system. (I 8:29; my italics)

⁷ On this point, see Bittner (2009, 231).

So, for Kant, attempting a history of all of history's events is feasible only if we *assume* the idea of a Future Life.⁸ The question relevant to this study is under what justificatory model 'may one assume' Future Life.⁹

1.2 Textual Evidence: Vienna Logic, Canon, and the Idea of a Universal History

I claim that assuming a Future Life in the *Idea* is an example of doctrinal Belief. Textual support for this claim comes from the *Canon*, *Vienna Logic*, and the *Idea*. We have already seen Kant's life-too-short argument in the *Canon*. Now, consider what Kant says about the *second proposition* in the *Idea*:

⁸ On this point, see Kleingeld (2008, 525) and Zuckert (2021).

⁹ There are different views on how Kant's assumption of a future life is rationally justified. Kleingeld, for example, sees Kant's assumption that history proceeds towards the full development of human rationality as justified, insofar as it helps us see history with a "narrative coherence" (2008, 528)—which she, in turn, thinks it follows from the claim in the *Appendix* that reason's striving for systematic unity of knowledge justifies our use of ideas (Kleingeld 1999, 175). The assumption is, thus, neither provable a priori or a posteriori. In contrast, Wood sees Kant's assumption as justified in terms of reflective judgment—a capacity to find appropriate universal concepts for given particulars—in contrast to determining judgment, which applies the concepts we have to particulars (1999, 216). He, in turn, thinks follows from the claim in the *Critique of Judgment* that we are not entitled to ascribe purposiveness to nature, but only to use it to "increase the intelligibility of nature" (1999, 218), and only if we consider the concept of purposiveness solely in the mind of the inquirer. On this reading, aim-directedness is a general theory and not exclusively a biological one. So, at the general level, it is immune to biological counterexamples. In my view, these two proposals make important contributions to understanding Kant's strategy in the *Idea*. If Kant's justificatory model implies a posteriori and a priori knowledge of history, he would commit a dogmatic error. If Kant's justificatory model requires his biology to be correct, it is difficult to see how anyone could take it seriously in the post-Darwinian era. These two proposals demonstrate that the assumption of aim-directedness is useful arranging empirical facts into a coherent whole. However, I think we can clarify these models further by articulating who the assumption is useful for—i.e., whoever has set themselves the end of bringing order to the seemingly chaotic actions of individuals.

[E]very human being would have to live exceedingly long in order to learn how he is to make a complete use of all his natural predispositions; or if nature has only set the term of his life as short (as has actually happened), then nature perhaps needs an immense series of generations, each of which transmits its enlightenment to the next, in order finally to propel its germs in our species to that stage of development which is completely suited to its aim. (I 8:19)

These remarks are nearly identical to those we saw in the *Canon*. Moreover, consider Kant's reported remarks in the *Vienna Logic*:

[T]here is belief, again, namely, that since everything in nature is in accordance with ends ... [we] cannot with reason trace the first seeds of life to their final development. For life is too short, and in old age reason does not have its proper strength, either. *There must be another place, then, where human reason can attain its proper development.* Thus runs the belief ... In the case of belief we judge assertorically, i.e., we declare ourselves for the truth, although it is only sufficient subjectively for us. (Vien-L 24:851; my italics)

This passage restates the life-too-short argument but explicitly in terms of Belief. In the *Idea*, Kant does not dwell on the epistemic status of the assumption of a future state of affairs beyond our natural lives in which our capacities come to fruition. Given these passages' similarities, it seems probable to me that when Kant turns to his life-too-short argument in the *Idea* he imports epistemic considerations expressed in the *Canon* and *Vienna Logic*. So it is

plausible to read the assumption of the idea of a human being's full complete development as a mode of doctrinal Belief.¹⁰

2.0 Doctrinal Belief and the Idea of a Universal History

2.1 The Philosopher-Historian and Doctrinal Belief's Three Conditions

Let's turn to consider how a philosopher-historian's assumption of a Future Life satisfies the three conditions of doctrinal Belief in the *Idea*.

Contingent Ends Condition. Kant claims that despite the seeming irregularity of history, the philosopher-historian's task is to "discover within it [all events of history] a regular course" (I 8:17) as a whole and thus "discover an *aim of nature* in this nonsensical course of things human" (I 8:18; original italics). The philosopher-historian's task differs from an empirical historian's in that the former concerns the "idea of a world history" (I 8:30)—i.e., all human actions—whereas the latter does not. The philosopher-historian's task, Kant thinks, will be informed by empirical histories, for one must be "well versed in history" (I 8:30); however, the philosopher-historian attempts history from "another standpoint" (I 8:30).

So doctrinal Belief's contingent ends condition is satisfied: the end philosopher-historians set themselves is bringing order to all human actions in history—i.e., writing a universal history. That is, philosopher-historians set themselves the task of seeking deeper, richer, and more unified explanations of the seemingly nonsensical course of human actions. Moreover,

¹⁰ This reading is similar to Proops (2021) but the details differ. The goal in question, according to Proops, is the "contingent goal of inquiring into nature" (185). Proops claims that we have a doctrinal belief that nothing in nature is without a purpose, and that "it functions as a premise in the argument supporting my doctrinal [B]elief in the afterlife" (182). However, I am unclear how, on Proops account, an assent to future life (what he calls afterlife) is necessary for inquiry into nature.

rationality does not require that we all take up this end, and we can see that it is a contingent end. A biologist, mathematician or empirical historian is not rationally required to seek such explanations of all historical events. Lastly, the philosopher-historian's contingent end is collective, because (on Kant's telling) other philosopher-historians presumably share it.

Hypothetical Necessary Means Condition. The philosopher-historian's assent is a necessary means condition of pursuing the end of writing a universal history in the following way for Kant: the philosopher-historian's assent to a Future Life enjoys a practical justification because it is required for pursuing that end by making visible a unifying structure for seemingly unrelated events.

We can see Kant's point by considering a jigsaw puzzle. Suppose I encounter two seemingly unrelated jigsaw puzzle pieces. If I want to relate them to each other, I must assent that they are part of one jigsaw puzzle, and hence form part of a coherent whole, because otherwise, I have no hope of finding a relation between the two. Similarly, suppose I come across two seemingly unrelated historical facts. If I have any hope of finding a relation between the two, I must assent that they are part of the same historical arc, and hence part of a coherent unified history. This is because, at first, I cannot connect these two events. However, I will continue to look for a more fundamental understanding of both events in terms of how they fit into the narrative arc of our rational capacities reaching full development in the distant future. I do so because, under this assumption, the development of our rational capacities does not progress in a purposeless manner, and thus rules out that two historical facts are entirely unrelated. A key difference between the jigsaw and the historical arc is that with the jigsaw, we can possess objective grounds for our assent (i.e., the successful completion of the jigsaw puzzle provides evidence), but with history we cannot have objectively sufficient grounds for assenting, because the proposition in question refers to an idea. In this way, assenting to a

Future Life is a necessary means to a theoretical end—possessing a richer, deeper, and more unified explanation of historical events.¹¹

Kant is wrong that a firm assent to Future Life is the *only* means of writing an entire world history, and the history of philosophy demonstrates this.¹² Many philosophers have proposed and defended other accounts of aim-directed universal histories. Consider Rawls' claim that we are progressing slowly towards more democratic cultures and institutions through confrontation, deliberation, and discussion (1993, 77-88). Or, take Honneth's claim that through the gradual expansion of mutual recognition, communication, and social interaction, we can reach a society whose members are sympathetic to each other and "support the realization of each other's justified needs" (2017, 24). Or, consider Marx's claim that we are progressing towards a social-economic order in which we are no longer alienated from ourselves—"the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man" (1844, 102). However, these examples support, rather than undermine, the broader Kantian point. Assenting that aspects of humanity will in the distant future reach perfection is a necessary means to writing a universal history, because it allows us to relate seemingly unrelated events.

One might worry that we will one day possess a complete and true book of biological evolution, human psychology or sociology providing a unified account of human history, and that this would undermine Kant's claim that assent to a Future Life is a necessary means to writing a universal history because in this case, empirical science would provide us objective

¹¹ Here, I modify Stang's reading of Kant's example of doctrinal Belief in biology (2016, 286).

¹² For a similar line of discussion see Kleingeld (1999).

grounds for assent—and hence knowledge.¹³ Yet, since this history will be an empirical account, we have no a priori reason to think such a project will succeed.¹⁴ So, until we actually possess such a book, the possibility of possessing it does not undermine Kant’s claim here: assent to a proposition involving an idea is a necessary means to recounting a philosophical history.

Lack of Objectively Sufficient Grounds Condition. Kant is sceptical that we can have knowledge of our existence after death, and hence the lack of objectively sufficient grounds condition is satisfied with Future Life. He holds the eminently reasonable position that “it is impossible ... to know a posteriori the continued existence of [the human] soul after death” (Vien-L 24:851). Similarly, but less explicitly in the *Idea*, Kant—on the future state in which our rational capacities reach their full extent—writes, “we are too short-sighted to see through to the secret mechanism of this arrangement” (I 8:29). To me, this is an eminently reasonable position because it is an analytic truth that, as finite beings, we have no experience of life after death.

But, perhaps, the conclusion of a rational argument would count as objectively sufficient grounds for assenting to a Future Life. As I noted in the discussion of knowledge, a central tenet of Kant’s critical philosophy is that the conditions under which we cognise appearances constrain our knowledge. I said that when Kant speaks of objectively sufficient grounds as being located in objects (A821/B849), the object at issue is one that appears to us in time and

¹³ Note that Kant considers biological and sociological explanations but rules them out as incomplete. Kant argues that the philosopher-historian cannot use our animal nature or rational plans as a guide to history because humans neither act solely “instinctively, like animals ... [nor as] rational citizen[s] of the world ... [with] an agreed upon plan” (I 8:18).

¹⁴ For a similar view, see Wood (1999, 225) and Kleingeld (2008, 528).

space and through the conditions of our cognitive uptake of this appearance—and not a thing in itself. So the conclusion of a rational argument cannot be objective grounds for assent, unless we can show it connects to the way things in themselves appear to us in space and time (and our cognition of them through intuitions and concepts). With Future Life, this is impossible since we cannot have experience of life after death. Therefore, the conclusion of a rational argument cannot count as objectively sufficient grounds of assent.¹⁵

One might worry that Kant's life-too-short argument provides an argument for Future Life, and that this contradicts what I have said about rational arguments by providing objective grounds. We saw that in the *Canon*, *Vienna Logic*, and *Idea*, Kant argues that (P1) we are born with natural capacities that must all reach full development, and (P2) life is too short for these capacities to fully develop, and thus (C) there is a future life in which our natural capacities reach full development.

In the *Idea*, Kant claims that it “actually happens” (I 8:19) that life is too short—a plausible-enough position. Assumedly, one lifetime is insufficient to fully develop all of one's capacities as (say) a concert pianist and professional chef and academic mathematician. If the life-too-short argument provides an argument for Future Life, the key is establishing the teleological claim that our natural capacity must reach full development, which Kant calls an “analytical observation” (I 8:19). Here, I think we should be sceptical of Kant's claim that he can establish this analytically. It is unclear how the concept of a ‘natural predisposition’ contains ‘its future full development’; at best, it contains ‘the potential of its future full

¹⁵ Here, I diverge from Chignell (2007a), who takes such arguments to provide objectively insufficient grounds. I take objectively insufficient to mean ‘lacking objective grounds’, because experience and a priori argument cannot produce the correct kinds of grounds that count as objective grounds.

development'. But then, Kant's argument appears very weak, because there is no principled reason to think that any capacity would reach its full potential in the future. So, if the life-too-short argument provides an argument for Future Life, it seems weak indeed.

Nonetheless, according to my reading, the core of Kant's teleological claim is that we are practically justified in holding it as true. He says that "if we depart from that [teleological principle of nature], then we no longer have lawful nature ... and a desolate chance takes the place of the guideline of reason" (I 8:18). The central Kantian point here is that natural phenomena will appear chaotic if we do not *assume* that some rule governs them. This, Kant thinks, would have dire consequences for the possibility of explaining natural phenomena because they will seem too fragmentary for us to grasp. Likewise, departing from this assumption will have dire consequences for writing a philosophical history, because historical events will seem too fragmentary for us to grasp, thus rendering impossible our pursuit of the theoretical goal of providing a richer, deeper, and more unified account of history's entirety. So the life-too-short argument is an exercise in showing how one practically justified assent builds on another, and not an argument providing objective grounds for assenting to Future Life.

2.2 Evaluation: Why Take Up the End of Writing a Universal History?

But what should we think of Kant's position that, for a philosopher-historian, assenting to Future Life is a necessary means to writing a universal history? I have discussed the hypothetical necessary means and lack of objectively sufficient conditions above. So I wish to address what I consider to be a serious concern about the contingent ends condition: that we have little reason to set ourselves the end of writing a universal history. Most historians today would typically avoid universal histories and carefully limit their studies. So, at best, Kant's position is at odds with contemporary historical practice; at worst, it reinforces a narrative of

historical progress that has left out persons of different ethnicities, religions, and genders.¹⁶ So it is difficult to see why anyone but a Kantian historian has reason to take up the end of writing a universal history.

Kant seems to anticipate this objection: “It is, to be sure, a strange and apparently an absurd stroke, to want to write a [universal] history” (I 8:29). He provides four reasons. *First*, it can explain the “confused play of human things” (I 8:30). This amounts to saying that we want to write a universal history because it will explain all human historical actions, and thus begs the question against the objector.

Second, he claims that a universal history can help in the “art of political soothsaying about future changes in states” (I 8:30)—i.e., help political actors predict the future. However, because Kant is very derogatory about politicians predicting the future, here he is not offering a serious reason.¹⁷

Third, Kant suggests that a motivation for writing universal philosophical history is to open up “a consoling prospect into the future” (I 8:30). That is, writing such a history is a rational end because possessing it would provide us with psychological aid in our attempts at progress: that despite history’s seeming incoherency and our “folly, childish vanity, often also ... childish malice and the rage to destruction” (I 8:18), humanity is working towards both the state of its full development and the conditions of its full development (a cosmopolitan state). So, above and beyond the disgust and despair in the world, possessing a universal history

¹⁶ Kant’s own views here are well-known. He holds that men are naturally superior to women and that white races are naturally superior to other races—all while defending moral equality, universal human dignity and a cosmopolitan state for all. See Mensch (2017); Allais (2016); Kleingeld (2007; 2019); Mills (2017, 91-112); Lloyd (2009).

¹⁷ See *The Contest of the Faculties*, Section 2.

gives us “hope” (*hoffen*) (I 8:30) that we can achieve such a state in the distant future. Notice that this motivation does not directly furnish the grounds of subjective assent to Future Life. So it does not directly impact our grounds of assent in the mode of doctrinal Belief. Instead, it is a reason to strive for a particular end, and on the face of it a plausible one: in times of despair, we can find solace in the thought that history is slowly and non-linearly progressing towards the full development of our rational capacities.

Kant's claim, in the *Idea*, that hope can console us against forms of despair fits into a larger pattern of associating rational hope with its psychological benefits (see Rel 6:5; 6:76). We might wonder what is hope, and how can it be rational? I want to flag these issues and return to them in Chapter 5 “Kantian Rational Hope and Secular Faith”. But, reading ‘consolation’ as a psychological category, we can assume that, for Kant, hope can be psychologically beneficial to agents in pursuing their ends, adding that at the publication of the *Idea*, in 1784, he had yet to commit to an account of rational hope, which he did in 1793 with the publication of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

Fourth, Kant argues that a “small motive” for attempting a philosophical history is that it can direct the “desire for honour of the heads of state as well as their servants” (I 8:31). So writing a universal history will motivate politicians otherwise unmotivated by Kant’s argument for the establishment of a cosmopolitan state to work towards such a state. They will do so out of a desire for “glorious remembrance” (I 8:31). Remember, this is Kant’s political and not moral philosophy. Whatever motivates a leader to aim to establish a cosmopolitan state is fair game, regardless of the subject’s intentions. Again, this is a believable-enough reason for taking up writing a universal history. If a leader thinks history will kindly remember their actions in bringing about a cosmopolitan state, they are more likely to work towards it.

The details of these reasons need to be fleshed out. However, I hope to have shown that we have non-trivial reasons for setting ourselves the end of writing a universal history. When things are going poorly for persons committed to striving for some good cause (for Kant a cosmopolitan state), possessing a universal history can provide psychological assistance that things are headed in the right direction. Persons not committed to striving for this cause may be motivated by explanations of how history will remember them if they help.

In sum: Kant's description of Future Life in the *Canon* as an example of doctrinal Belief is comically short. However, there are resources in the *Idea* and *Vienna Logic* to render it a plausible example of doctrinal Belief. We cannot have knowledge of Future Life. However, a necessary means to the end of providing an account of humanity's history as a whole is assenting that there is a future in which some aspects of humanity reach full development. Those who set themselves such ends are philosopher-historians.

3.0 Four Implications

I have argued that Kant's analysis of doctrinal Belief is supportable by at least one example—that of a philosopher-historian. Providing this example has an obvious implication: it remedies Kant's lack of convincing examples of doctrinal Belief—which (I argued) is not only a deficit of presentation but also of substance, since Kant argues by examples. Yet, more implications arise from the Kantian notion of doctrinal Belief than one might initially think. I will highlight four.

3.1 Liberalism about Kant Belief Defended

One implication concerns how the philosopher-historian example supports the so-called liberal reading of Kantian Belief. Recall that defenders of that reading claim that theoretical ends can ground justified assents about things in themselves and ideas—particularly the

existence of a God who intentionally creates nature (i.e., world author), a ground of everything (i.e., ultimate ground), and a being containing all positive predicates (i.e., *ens realissimum*). For example, Chignell claims that “the rational theologian’s end is to seek complete and systematic theories, and so *in the context of speculative theory-construction* he or she can rationally form the Theoretical [i.e., doctrinal] Belief that an *ens realissimum* exists” (2007, 354). Yet, this example and others like it—such as a rational cosmologist or a metaphysician looking for an ultimate ground—appeal to metaphysical undertakings in Kant. This is because he views rational theology as concerning God’s existence, and rational cosmology as concerning the world as the sum-total of all appearances (all spatially-temporally located objects and events). Both, however, lack connection to intuitional experience and hence cannot be objects of possible experience. Thus, these examples are metaphysically-loaded from the start.

In contrast, writing a history is not a metaphysical undertaking, and thus the example of the philosopher-historian establishes Kantian doctrinal Belief as a defensible position independent of our metaphysical undertakings. Therefore, this example supports the liberal reading of Kantian by providing reasons to think that Kant is correct that we have a justified propositional attitude called doctrinal Belief independent of metaphysical undertakings.

3.2 Justified Speculation and Assent as Constitutive of Pursuing an End

The next implication closely follows. Having defended Kant’s account of doctrinal Belief, we can articulate plausible epistemic features of a Kantian model of justified speculation in terms of propositional attitudes. If we take speculation as a general class of positive propositional attitudes to propositions referring to concepts whose objects we cannot meet in experience (ideas in Kant’s terminology), examples of speculation would be believing, hoping, knowing,

imagining, having faith that (say) God exists. Now, I submit that not only is doctrinal Belief a defensible position, it is also a genuinely Kantian account of justified speculation with the now-familiar following three features: (1) Contingent Ends, (2) Hypothetical Necessity Means, and (3) Lack of Objectively Sufficient Grounds Conditions.

I take doctrinal Belief to be a *genuinely* Kantian account of justified speculation in two rational respects. First, clearly, doctrinal Belief is not an ‘anything goes’ account of speculation. It is not enthusiasm or “an overstepping of the bounds of human reason undertaken on principle” (CPvR 5:85). In his moral philosophy, Kant thinks that, without rational principles, the enthusiasm of novelists and sentimental educators (those who take emotion as a primary source of knowledge) amounts to heroism, and that without rational principles philosophers do not make progress (CPvR 5:86). Similarly, a genuinely Kantian speculative pursuit would be rationally constrained by the conditions of doctrinal Belief.

Second, justified speculation is *rationally normative* for the Kantian. To grasp this point, we need to look again at Kant’s claim that, in doctrinal Belief, our assents are justified only if a firm assent that p is a hypothetically necessary condition of pursuing an end. The ‘hypothetically necessary condition’, I think, is best understood in terms of Kant’s discussion of a hypothetical imperative in his moral philosophy. In the *Groundwork*, he says that it is an “analytic” (G 4:417) proposition that

whoever wills the end, so far as reason has decisive influence on his action, wills also the indispensably necessary means to it that lie in his power. For in willing an object as my effect, my causality as an acting cause, i.e. the use of means, is already thought, and the imperative derives the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of willing this end. (G 4:417)

So, with a hypothetical imperative, to set an end is to have a rational normative commitment to performing some action or actions to obtain that end. For example, to set the end of learning a difficult language is to have a normative rational commitment to taking certain necessary steps like studying and practicing that language. The rational normative commitment here is hypothetical, because it concerns an end that is rational only for particular agents in particular circumstances. One is not required to set the end of learning said language; and, having set that end, I might decide or simply fail to study and practice—or refrain from other actions necessary for obtaining that goal. This is what makes the imperative normative.

Kant's claim that a hypothetical imperative is analytic does not mean that anyone who sets themselves a particular end will automatically perform the actions required to obtain it (because it still lies within the power of the will to refrain from such actions).¹⁸ Nor does it suggest that the means analytically entail the end. Rather, Kant claims that a normative commitment is analytically contained in the setting of an end, such that if I fail to engage in actions that are necessary to obtaining my end, I am not acting according to rational norms constitutive of pursuing that end. Therefore, reason lacks a “decisive influence” (G 4:417) on my actions.

Similarly, if I fail to firmly assent in the mode of doctrinal Belief—and firm assent is a hypothetically necessary means to an end—then I am not acting according to rational norms

¹⁸ The literature on hypothetical imperatives is vast. Fortunately, a detailed picture is not necessary for my account. My reading emphasises that hypothetical imperatives are binding only for those who have an end. This is not the place to defend this reading. For a similar account to mine, see Wood (1999, 61-4). According to an alternative reading, hypothetical imperatives are disjunctives. As Hill classically writes, a hypothetical imperative instructs everyone to “[t]ake the necessary means or else give up the end” (1989, 436).

constitutive of pursuing that end. Therefore, by assessing a relevant means-ends relation, a Kantian locates where speculation is rationally required. There are reasons to worry about the plausibility of Kant's rational normative claim that Belief is constitutive of pursuing their end. If one can demonstrate that it is reasonable in certain circumstances to pursue a relevant end without assenting to the relevant proposition (say, because success would be so immensely good), then this raises further questions about the plausibility of Kant's claim. I put that issue aside for the moment and return to it in Chapter 4 (in Sections 4 and 5 "The Necessity of Belief and The Attainability Principle" and "Objections to the Attainability Principle"). For the moment, I want to emphasise that Kant suggests that our ends rational constrains our attitudes towards those ends. If a philosopher-historian fails to speculate—in the form of a doctrinal Belief, then their thoughts are irrational with respect to their ends. The reason is that they are violating rational norms constitutive of pursuing their end. It is a further empirical matter whether people in situations similar to those of a philosopher-historian *do in fact* assent to a relevant proposition in the mode of doctrinal Belief.

3.3 Distinguishing Between Legitimate and Illegitimate Uses of Regulative Ideas

I have claimed that a case of doctrinal Belief is a philosopher-historian's assumption that humanity will reach its fullest potential in the distant future. This helps us to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate uses of regulative ideas—by providing a test for assessing a relevant means-end relation.

In the *Appendix*, Kant claims that, metaphysically speaking, a regulative idea (like other ideas) are concepts without "any corresponding object" (A671/B699) in experience. He also claims that, epistemically speaking, we are justified in using the former as "guidance" (A671/B699) in empirical investigations (in the sense of framing our research projects), but

not as part of our knowledge claims. Similarly, in the *Idea*, Kant introduces the philosopher-historian's assumption as a "guiding thread" (I 8:17) and a "guideline for such a [universal] history" (I 8:18). On the strength of the resonance of the guidance claims in the *Appendix* and the *Idea*, some commentators read the philosopher-historian's assumption as a regulative 'as if' idea. For example, Pauline Kleingeld claims that the philosopher-historian's assumption is "epistemically weak" (2008, 526) and is a justified proceeding "as if" (524) history has an order.¹⁹ On this reading, the philosopher-historian's assumption is epistemically weak since we cannot have knowledge of it, but we are justified in proceeding as if it were true because we have "a rational interest in systematicity" (*Ibid.*, 526). In turn, for Kleingeld, the assumption is tentative and fallibilist. It is tentative because our justified use of this assumption corresponds to how helpful it is in framing our research in terms of a rational demand for seeking systematicity—i.e., seeking a unified explanation further and further. Thus, the proof of this justification must be "shown in practice" (*Ibid.*, 527) to the degree that it helps us achieve deeper, richer, and more unified explanations of history. Moreover, the assumption is also fallibilist, because it does not amount to a conclusive doctrine regarding the "truth" of the direction of history, and because Kant allows for "the possibility that someone else will come up with a better proposal" (*Ibid.*, 526-527).

To my mind, Kleingeld is correct about regulative ideas and fallibilism invoked in the assumption,²⁰ but not about 'as if' justification. For Kant, our regulative use of ideas is justified in our search for systematicity as long as we do not expect that they correspond to

¹⁹ For a similar view, see Zuckert (2021).

²⁰ See Chapter 1, Section 3, for textual support of this reading, where I called this fallibilism *revisable*.

objects—which would be the constitutive use of ideas.²¹ Moreover, a fallibilist reading of the relevant assumption can help us explain why today there is general agreement that biological research does not require the assumption of a God-like world author—i.e., evolution by natural selection is a better proposal. However, I suspect that an analysis of Kant’s account of an ‘as if’ regulative use of ideas lacks enough fine-grained detail to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate cases of the regulative use of ideas.

As an example of a *legitimate* case, I have in mind the philosopher-historian’s assumption of Future Life. As an example of an *illegitimate* case, I have in mind Kant’s claim that a necessary condition of biological research is our assent that a world author (i.e., God) intentionally organises nature, because it helps us explain seemingly unrelated species (say a wombat and a snake) in terms of a more general kind. As I have argued earlier, to our contemporary ears, it is an illegitimate case because few (if any) contemporary biologists would claim that a necessary condition of investigating nature is assenting that God intentionally orders nature—even if Kant disagreed.²²

²¹ It is another issue why we are justified in seeking systematicity. I address that issue in Chapter 8.

²² The notion of ‘as if’ is very broad in Kant. We might interpret ‘as if’ involves a propositional attitude and thus an assent (as I have been assuming for the sake of argument). In the Appendix, Kant says that, in the context of biology, we “must assume [*annehmen*] a unique wise and all-powerful world author” (A697/B725) insofar as we “regard all the connection of things in the world of sense **as if** they had their grounds in this being of reason [i.e., God]” (A681/B709, original emphasis). Alternatively, we might interpret that ‘as if’ is an action: we act as if something were true while withholding positive assent. For instance, we investigate nature as if it were intentionally organised without forming a positive assent to the relevant proposition. While the latter is the standard interpretation of Kant’s philosophy of biology, it is not clear that it is coherent to ‘act as if’ p is true while withholding positive assent that p. Suppose that a scientist acts as if the proposition (p) that ‘the world is intentionally ordered’ is true, but they do not form an assent about p. Now suppose we ask the scientist to reflect and report their attitude towards p, and they have no positive attitude towards p. In this case, however, their thoughts about p do not justify their action (acting as if p were true). For further details, see

So how can we distinguish between these two cases? It is a non-starter to distinguish these cases on a rational demand for systematicity. I accept that, for Kant, we have a rational demand to seek systematicity, and that this *may* justify our assumptions of relevant propositions by helping us to arrive at a systematic conception of the world. But, in the biology case, we can see that this proves too much. This is because an individual biologist can claim that they are justified in assuming God intentionally organises nature because it is a necessary condition of *their* biological research, since it helps them systematise their observations, in *their* case. An individual biologist would only need to show that in practice such an assumption does indeed help them systematise. Therefore, if one agrees that the biology case is an illegitimate case of the regulative use of ideas, the latter cannot be all that justifies such assumptions.

Recall that in doctrinal Belief, our assents are justified only if a hypothetically necessary condition of pursuing an end is firmly assenting to a proposition referring to an idea. Also, recall that this means-end relationship is subject to the doxastic universalisability test. That is, we ask ourselves whether others would—were they in our position—think that a firm assent to a certain proposition is a necessary means to a proposed end.

If we apply the doxastic universalisability test to the biological research case, we see that—at least today—the assumption that God intentionally orders nature fails. I might privately hold that firm assent to God’s existence is a necessary condition of pursuing an account of purposive nature. But if I ask myself whether others would agree, I will concede that they would not, given even a rudimentary grasp of today’s biology.

my discussion of the Despairing Activist Objection in Chapter 4, Section 5 “Objections to the Attainability Principle”.

In contrast, if we apply the doxastic universalisability test to writing an entire world history, we see that the assumption that humanity's rational capacities will one day reach full realisation stands a better chance of passing. One might dispute whether the goal of writing such an entire world history is worthwhile, or whether Kant is correct that firm assent that our rational capacities will one day find full development is the only means to writing a unified account of an entire world history. However, I submit that many people (but not all) would think that to write a history of *all* human events requires us to maintain that some aspects of humanity will one day reach perfection because doing so is implicitly necessary for such a task.²³ Moreover, if in the future, biological evolution, human psychology, or sociology provides us the basis for an empirical account of an entire world history, a philosopher-historian's assumption in human perfectibility would fail the doxastic universalisability test. So a philosophical-historian's assumption is—as with the biology case—fallibilist.

Thus, an analysis of the two cases in terms of doctrinal Belief delivers us the desired result two and a half centuries after Kant. The biologist's assumption regarding God is illegitimate; and the philosopher-historian's assumption in human perfectibility is legitimate; and, both are fallibilist.

3.4 Problematic Versus Assertoric Judgments

The last implication is that my reading helps us reply to a worry that what passes as doctrinal Belief assent merely rebrands a more familiar notion (at least to Kantian scholarship)—namely, the regulative use of reason's *problematic judgments*. On my reading, we should not

²³ While I have stated the assent of philosopher-historians in positive terms, on my account, they might assent to a more bleak proposition: for instance, that all of humanity is doomed, will reach a state of total disaster, or will culminate in complete extinction.

reduce doctrinal Belief to problematic judgments, and the philosopher-historian's assumption of human perfectibility allows us to see why.

In the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant reportedly claims that: “Opining is problematic judging, believing is assertoric judging, and knowing is apodeictic judging” (JL 9:66). He goes on to say that:

The problematic ones [i.e., judgments] are accompanied with the consciousness of the *mere possibility of the judging*, the assertoric ones with the consciousness of its *actuality*, the apodeictic ones, finally, with the consciousness of its *necessity*. (JL 9:109-10; my italics; see also A74/B100-1)

So, according to Kant, we can analyse judgments in terms of modality—possibility, actuality and necessity (JL 9:108). For Kant, an analysis of the modality of judgments is done in “abstract[ion] from all content of a judgment” (A70 B95) and “contributes nothing to the content of the judgment” (A74/B99–100). That is, an analysis of the modality of judgments does not analyse propositional content. Thus, for Kant, at issue is not what contemporary epistemologists might analyse under epistemic modality—the different justifications for different modal statements such as ‘all dolphins are necessarily, possibly or actually animals’. Instead, the modality in question concerns the propositional attitude we take to a proposition.²⁴ Kant's claim is that problematic judgments involve a subject's mental state of

²⁴ On my reading, the passage at (JL 9:109-10) counts as robust evidence that Kant's central concern with the modality of judgments is propositional attitudes. For an alternative view, see Leech (2010), who claims that the propositional attitudes reading cannot do justice to Kant's claim that the modality of judgments is separate from the content of the relevant proposition. Leech argues that one needs to consider a proposition's content to entertain the possibility of a proposition. On this point, Leech is correct. So here, I have to bite the bullet: On my reading, considerations of a proposition's content do play a role in Kant's

consciously entertaining the possibility that a proposition is true, assertoric judgments involve consciously holding it to be actually true, and apodeictic judgments involve being conscious that a proposition is necessary true—that it has the “dignity of necessity” (JL 9:109).²⁵

Now consider Kant’s description of apodeictic and problematic judgments in the *Appendix*:

Either the universal is in itself certain and given, and only judgment is required for subsuming, and the particular is necessarily determined through it. This I call the ‘apodictic’ use of reason. Or the universal is assumed only problematically, and it is a mere idea, the particular being certain while the universal of the rule for this consequent is still a problem; then several particular cases ... are tested by the rule, to see if they flow from it. (A646/B674)

In other words, in apodeictic judgments, a universal necessarily contains a particular. An example of this is an analytic judgment. The universal claim ‘all shapes with three straight sides are triangles’ analytically necessarily entails that ‘this particular shape with three straight sides is a triangle’. I am conscious of the necessity of the particular claim because it is

modality of judgments—contra Kant’s claim. However, we can soften the tension between my reading and Kant’s claim by stating that he is attempting to draw our attention to propositional attitudes and not a proposition’s content, even if its content finds its way in through the back door. For a similar reading, see Matthey (1986).

²⁵ Kant also airs some metaphysical modal considerations, saying that problematic judgment “expresses logical possibility” (A75 B101), that “[t]he assertoric proposition speaks of logical actuality or truth ... [that it] is already bound to the understanding according to laws” (A75-6/B101), and that “[t]he apodictic proposition [is] determined through these laws of the understanding itself ... and ... expresses logical necessity” (A76/B101). This opens the intriguing possibility of linking Kant’s modal metaphysics to his modality of judgment. I will not pursue this here. A rigorous analysis would demand a chapter of its own.

analytically entailed. Contrastingly, in problematic judgments, one assumes a universal rule and tests it against various particular cases, but the universal rule remains a problematic judgment because we cannot be sure we have encountered all cases. For example, one might assume that ‘all mammals do not have bills’ and test this amongst particular cases of mammals. Suppose that one finds that dolphins, cats and wolves lack bills. For Kant, the universal claims ‘all mammals do not have bills’ remains only a problematic judgment because we have not encountered all mammals. Of course, we know platypuses are mammals with bills. So there exists a counter-example to the universal rule. However, until the discovery of the platypus, particular cases confirmed the universal rule—but only problematically.

Yet, it is difficult to explain the assumption of future human perfectibility in terms of the above framing of problematic judgments. If we interpret the assumption of human perfectibility as a problematic judgment, we should expect philosopher-historians to test particular cases (i.e., events) against a universal rule—assumedly ‘all events in history progress towards human perfectibility’. But if the philosopher-historian did this, they would find countless counter-examples. As Kant concedes, history often appears “woven together out of folly, childish vanity ... childish malice and the rage to destruction” (I 8:18)—that is, progressing in the opposite direction of human perfectibility. So, rather than particular events confirming the universal rule, many particular historical events serve as counter-examples.²⁶

²⁶ Kant’s position here is that, in the long run, counter-examples cannot undermine the assumption because, over a long-enough time span, it is possible that they are part of a slow, non-linear progression towards human perfectibility. But my point is that Kant’s position on problematic judgments is tightly linked to finding particulars that confirm a universal rule, and that this is not the case in the assumption of human perfectibility in the *Idea*.

In contrast, if we read Kant in the *Idea* as claiming the assumption of future human perfectibility as an article of doctrinal Belief, we have a justificatory model for why we are justified in making such an assumption: we are holding something to be *actually* true as a necessary condition of pursuing the end of writing an entire world history. Again, this is how Kant presents the philosopher-historian's assumption in the *Idea*: their task of writing an entire world history is possible only under the assumption of future human perfectibility.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us return to Kant's oft-quoted claim that he "had to deny knowledge [of God, freedom, and immortality] in order to make room for Belief" (Bxxx). On the one hand, Belief could refer solely to moral Belief. In this case, the Kantian position on assenting to propositions involving ideas is that *only* our moral considerations justify such speculative assents, and this leads readers back to the standard view: reading Belief as moral Belief. On the other hand, Belief could refer to doctrinal Belief as well. In this case, for the Kantian, our theoretical considerations can justify assents to propositions involving ideas, thus recommending the liberal reading of Belief to the reader. This chapter's argument was not intended to exclude the possibility that, in the final analysis, the views Kant expresses in the *Canon* are not his mature ones. Although I do not think this is the case, it is difficult to settle this issue nearly 250 years on from the *Critique of Pure Reason's* publication. Instead, I have argued that a Kantian can hold coherently that our assent to propositions involving ideas is justified in light of our shared theoretical and contingent ends. I hope to have shown that doctrinal Belief is a rich notion that we can express without referring to Kant's flawed examples in the *Canon*. If all that is reasonable is contained in the moral sphere, Susan Neiman once asked rhetorically, then "what is reasonable about practical reason save its

name” (1994, 44)? The answer is nothing. It seems to me that this also applies to Kantian Belief or faith.

Chapter 3 — Secular Faith: Question and Desiderata

Introduction

Before beginning this chapter, it will be helpful to review my main claims thus far and sketch the course of my argument over the upcoming three chapters. The view that I have been resisting is this: only our moral ends can justify Kantian Belief. I called this view moralism about Kantian Belief. By contrast, I argued for liberalism about Kantian Belief: our moral and theoretical goals can justify our Beliefs.

In the next three chapters, I aim to push liberalism further than commentators typically have been willing to go. Whilst Chignell (2007a) and Stang (2016) have stressed that theoretical ends can justify our Beliefs, I will argue that there is room in Kant for an account of how social ends can justify our Beliefs. In turn, I will argue that this account is a compelling explanation of the rationality of secular faith—a non-evidentially justified, but rational, attitude directed at the way this-world is or will be. What emerges is an account of Kantian Belief justified in relation to social ends that is not dependent on Kantian morality. Such an account has the advantage, over moralism about Kantian Belief, that it renders available to us Kant’s epistemological resources without requiring commitments to his morality: no commitments to a categorical imperative, a highest good, or perfect and imperfect duties. I submit that those commitments are a high bar for anyone interested in Kant’s positive views on the nature and norms of propositional attitudes like Belief.

The work of Chapter 3 is to motivate independently an account of secular faith. As we will see, secular faith is an attitude that people invoke in their social and political lives in ways that seem rational. If they do, we want an account of what that attitude is and what, if anything, rationalises our holding it. I will step back from Kant's analysis of propositional attitudes, and ask the general questions: what is secular faith, and how may an account of it be constrained? I argue that any philosophically plausible account of secular faith must meet five desiderata. I go on to argue how four recent proposals fail to meet these desiderata—faith as leaping, faith as unjustifiable, faith as non-propositional, and faith according to a decision-theoretic model.

In Chapter 4, I will argue that Kantian doctrinal (or theoretical) Belief, and not moral Belief, is a plausible model for analysing secular faith's rationality because, in certain contexts, Belief is necessary for us to pursue social ends.

In Chapter 5, I present and defend my account of a related Kantian propositional attitude, namely, rational hope. Along the way, I defend (what I call) the *Dual and Distinct Thesis*: Kantian Belief and hope are distinctive but both necessary attitudes for pursuing our far-distant goals—Belief is constitutive of, and thus necessary for, pursuing those goals; hope is psychologically necessary (for most of us, most of the time) to maintain our resolve in pursuit of far-distant ends. I will argue that the Dual and Distinct Thesis does justice to key features of Kant's texts and to the way the attitudes of Belief and hope feature in our secular lives. (As spelt out in Chapter 1, I use the terms 'ends' and 'goals' interchangeably in this study.)

1.0 Setting the Stage

1.1 The Question

Sometimes people speak of faith that humanity can achieve something or faith in humans. For example, in Joe Biden’s presidential victory speech he spoke of a “hope, joy, and renewed faith in tomorrow to bring a better day.”¹ George Yancy thanks readers of his opinion piece ‘Dear White America’ for “let[ting] go, ... of the proverbial mast of the ship and tak[ing] a leap of faith, to listen to a voice different from your own.”² Novelist, Bi Shumin, writes of COVID-19, that she has “faith that humanity can win this battle again.”³

It strikes me that when people speak in the above ways, they invoke a rational *secular faith*. It is *rational* in the sense that people invoke a candidate for a justifiable attitude (i.e., they are not calling for a fanatical stance). It is *secular* in the sense that it is a stance towards this-worldly objects (like the American people or humans on earth), not other-worldly ones (like an afterlife). And, it is *faith* in the sense that it goes beyond evidence (presumably, Biden is not claiming he has an evidentially justified true belief that tomorrow will be better).

When philosophers turn their attention to secular faith, they divide broadly into two camps—critics and advocates.

For faith’s critics, faith cannot or should not play a role in our secular lives. Some critics deny that faith can ever be rational. For instance, Richard Dawkins claims that faith is an attitude unsupported by evidence and thus irrational (2006, 199). Other critics view faith as a demotivating attitude: if I have faith that history is progressing towards justice, then I am

¹ The Washington Post. Joe Biden’s victory speech. November 7, 2020.

² The New York Times. Dear White America. December 12, 2015.

³ Global Times, March 19, 2020.

unlikely to view my actions as contributing a significant difference to progress and thus not act. (More on faith's critics soon. See Section 1.)

For faith's advocates, faith can be an important attitude in our secular lives. For instance, John Dewey (1934) articulates a religious-like, life-defining faith that we can work together imaginatively and cooperatively to create a better society without appeal to supernatural beings.⁴ Hannah Arendt describes "faith and hope" (1958, 247) as the appropriate attitudes to adopt towards our capacity to reflect upon and enact our values—beyond biological and technological "ever-recurring cycle[s]" (*Ibid.*, 246). She thought examples of such cycles are capitalism and mindless bureaucracy.

When faith's advocates discuss its rational status, a typical move considers its rational *permissibility*: one *may* have faith that p.⁵ For instance, according to John Bishop (2007), we are *epistemically entitled* (but not required) to have faith that p only if: we are aware that we lack sufficient evidence to support both p and not-p, we give p full weight in our practical reasoning, and do so while believing that p is true. Further, we may be *morally entitled* (but not required) to have faith that p, only if further moral conditions are met—for example, one has the right kind of moral motivations for one's belief that p.

1.2 Hägglund's Necessity Claim

⁴ Dewey (1934, 45).

⁵ Neither Dewey or Arendt consider in depth faith's possible rational basis. Plausibly, providing rational constraints on faith is not the primary goal of their work.

Recently, in the advocates camp, Hägglund has argued that “secular faith is necessary a condition” (2019, 73) of striving to maintain and achieve our life-defining projects—what he calls a spiritual cause.⁶

Hägglund does so on broadly existential grounds. He thinks a spiritual cause is something for which we lead our lives in this world. On this view, a spiritual cause makes normative demands on us because it enables us to see what is meaningful to us. For example, in a loving relationship, I might live my life (in part) to sustain that relationship. This, in turn, places normative demands on me in terms of what I ought to do—for example, compromising between my partner’s wishes (say, to go to dinner) and my own (say, to read a book). Moreover, the relationship itself depends on our collective actions to sustain it. On this view, secular faith is necessary because neither a divine being nor my life experience can guarantee the relationship’s longevity in so far as it involves two people working together. Thus, according to Hägglund, in secular faith, we commit ourselves to each other in this-world to causes that are greater than ourselves, the success of which depends on others.

For Hägglund, typical examples of spiritual causes include marriage, raising a child, artistic vocations, and vocations in general. Importantly, for our discussion, they also include social causes like emancipation from poverty and the abolition of slavery in this world. He tells us that:

in striving to achieve or to sustain the [emancipation from poverty in this life], it will always be necessary to make the double movement of secular faith. We must

⁶ For a similar proposal, see Royce 1908. Hägglund seems blissful unaware of the many fellow travellers on the same path.

acknowledge the utter fragility of what holds our lives together—our institutions, our shared labour, our love, our mourning—and yet keep faith with what offers no final guarantee. (Hägglund 2019, 377)

So (again), on Hägglund’s view, secular faith is necessary for engaging in spiritual causes—here, social causes.

There is more to say about Hägglund’s account.⁷ However, I think Hägglund’s is broadly correct: actual, this-worldly emancipation from poverty is a state of affairs that will only exist if we strive to create and maintain it. Simply waiting for God to make good on my goal of eliminating poverty, without myself doing anything, is probably a bad strategy.⁸

1.3 Far-Distant Goals

⁷ For instance, it is unclear that interpersonal causes (like marriage) and social causes (like the elimination of poverty) are equivalent: the later seems vastly more complex than the former given the number of people involved. Moreover, Hägglund wants to vigorously differentiate secular from religious faith. He thinks secular faith’s objects are ‘this worldly’ and finite. In contrast, he claims that religious faith’s objects are ultimately an eternal other-worldly and the “serv[ice] [of] God or attain[ment of] salvation” (2019, 9). On Hägglund’s telling, religious faith impedes our striving for spiritual causes because those with religious faith live their lives for something in an afterlife, and ultimately acknowledge normative demands from God or defer to divine assistance in bringing about their goals. I think few religious people will recognise the above characterisation of religious faith. For example, Hägglund ignores socially engaged religious movements like the 19th Century Social Gospel movement within Protestantism. Its proponents thought that Jesus’ Second Coming would occur only if humanity rid itself, *through its own actions*, of social evils like economic and racial inequality, child labour, poverty, schooling, war, and environmental degradation. See Schilbrack (2019), and Biernot and Lombaard (2020) for criticisms of Hägglund’s account of religious faith. I will set aside Hägglund’s account of religious faith to consider his necessity claim.

⁸ Our striving need not rule out an ‘all-and’ approach—according to which we do *all* that is our powers to promote the elimination of poverty *and* have faith that God will help us out or that the world is amenable to our actions.

Where Hägglund speaks of ‘spiritual causes’, I will speak of *far-distant totalising goals* (or far-distant goals for short), and distinguish them from them *non-totalising goals*. By totalising goals, I mean any goal that involves totalities—for example, eliminating poverty for all people, and not only for some people. Since the achievement of such a goal (presumably) lies far off in the future, I call them far-distant goals. In contrast, by non-totalising goals, I mean a goal involving one or some people but not all. So maintaining a happy marriage is a non-totalising goal, and probably a medium-term one at that.

The scope of ‘all’, that I have in mind, is *everyone, always, and everywhere*: all embodied people, from the present into infinite future time, and wherever there are people in this world. My model for this scope is Kant’s *ethical community*: an as-yet-unseen society on earth solely arranged according to moral considerations that is “enduring and ever expanding” encompasses the “entire human race ... in its full scope” (Rel 6:94). Kant is explicit that an ethical community can “exist in the midst of a political community” and be constituted by its members “on earth” (Rel 6:94)—that is, made up of human beings in a community living under public laws in this world. So the scope of ‘all’ is limited to embodied and spatiotemporally located people in this world—for both Kant and me. In contrast, the scope does not include people in a non-spatiotemporal world (an afterlife, for example)—since it concerns a society on earth. Moreover, the scope stretches from the present into infinite future time—or in Kant’s terms is ‘enduring’ and ‘ever expanding’—in the sense that it encompasses infinitely many generations of people.

I think we legitimately hold many far-distant goals—beyond Kantian ethics. Suppose someone sets abolishing poverty as their goal. To me, it seems disingenuous if they set abolishing poverty *only for this weekend* or *only in their town* as their ultimate goal. When we aim to abolish poverty, we take the ultimate goal to be abolishing poverty for *everyone, always, and everywhere*, at least in the long term—even if localised limited goals are part of

our initial steps. Likewise, I take it that the faith professed in Biden’s remarks involve a faith that everyone’s indefinite future will be better—and not only his political allies’ in the coming year. Other such goals might include: a society capable of reversing climate change, staving off ecological collapse, abolishing all form of slavery, poverty or undue exploitation, a socialist workers’ paradise, world peace or a society arranged according to principles of justices and freedom, or according to the principle each according to their own need and ability.⁹

There are reasons to think there is an important differences between far-distant (totalising) goals and non-totalising goals. First, in principle, we cannot establish whether or not we have achieved a totalising goal—for example, a state of affairs in which poverty is eliminated for everyone, forever, and everywhere. This is because the next individual born might suffer from poverty. In contrast, we can check whether the two people in a marriage are happy (or at least in self-reports). In this sense, evidence for totalising goals is systematically ambiguous: in principle, we cannot possess evidence that renders the state of affairs described in p more or less likely to a significant degree.¹⁰

Second, you might not see progression relative to a totalising goal in your lifetime. For instance, while during one’s lifetime, you might see progression relative to achieving a happy marriage, you may not see progress towards achieving an enduring elimination of poverty for

⁹ While these ends are political, my conception of social ends is wide enough to include aesthetic ends: the contingent ends of communities pursuing artistic projects, new forms of expression, and aesthetic ways of living together.

¹⁰ See Bishop (2007, 71). As one might expect, conceiving faith in terms of systematically ambiguous propositions—as it applies to God—has a long heritage. Take Pascal for example: “There is enough light for those who desire only to see ... and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition’ (1670, 57). Or take James: there are propositions that “cannot by [their] nature be decided on intellectual grounds” (1896, 464).

everyone, forever, and everywhere. In the latter case, this is because the scope of the goal encompasses infinitely many successive generations and thus by definition involves one generation maintaining or building on the successes of past generations lest poverty return. Thus, totalising goals involve inter-generational effort, where intra-generational progress may be very limited, non-existent or not obvious. In contrast, non-totalising goals need not require inter-generational effort.

Before continuing, it might be helpful to distinguish the value of approximating one's goal and its full attainment. When we propose social and political models that we know we can never fully attain, it might seem that there is still something valuable in trying to approximate them. In the next chapter, we will see the example of trying to write a completely error-free book. One might think that there is value in trying to approximate such a goal, even though one knows that achieving it is impossible (presumably) because we are flawed humans. The value of approximating the goal, so the story goes, is that the book will improve insofar as one works toward error-free perfection.

I, like David Estlund, think that the value of approximating goals cannot be assumed. Here is an example, adapted from him (2020, 274), that I will return to in the next chapter. If one's goal is giving a patient three doses of an anaesthetic, one should not assume that approximating that goal by giving the patient two doses is better than giving them one, or none. Given that the patient might not fall asleep, two doses might be useless. The anaesthetic example suggests that we are unwarranted to assume the value of approximating ends without further argument. I agree, and will provide additional argument.

1.4 Motivations and Plan

What interests me most about Hägglund’s account is his necessity claim: faith is necessary for pursuing far-distant goals (what he calls spiritual causes).¹¹ Why?

First, Hägglund’s necessity claim captures a pre-theoretically plausible thought: one must have faith to pursue some difficult goals. Such a thought is expressed, when we say (in English) that ‘someone *must* have faith that they will overcome their addiction.’ Here saying one ‘*may* have faith’ sounds odd. If Hägglund’s necessity claim captures a pre-theoretically plausible thought, then there is value in seeing in which way (or ways) it is defensible.

Second, if we can make sense of the necessity of faith in certain contexts, we will get rationality for free. Suppose that I want to get lunch, and I know that leaving the house is necessary to get lunch (my fridge is empty), practical reasoning tells us that leaving the house is rational. The same can be said of attitudes. If I want to pursue a far-distant goal and my having faith that p is necessary to pursue that goal, my having faith that p is rational. Of course, the sticky point is establishing in what sense (if any) having faith that p is necessary to pursue certain goals.

If we (or those around us) invoke rational secular faith in our political and social lives, we might want to know what that propositional attitude is and how we might be rational in holding it. I think Kant offers us resources to progress on understanding nature and norms of secular faith, and its necessity in certain contexts. He claims that we can *rationally Believe*, or rationally have faith (*Glaube*), that a God exists willing and able to bring about the highest

¹¹ For a similar necessity claim, see Badiou: faith “[is] necessary in order to invent a humanity worthy of the name” (2009, 59). He describes faith as an ongoing commitment to an ‘event’—an unforeseeable rupture in the course of history. For Badiou, ‘events’ come in an assortment of flavours from Jesus’ resurrection, to the spartan revolt, Schoenberg’s atonal composition, the French revolution and the Paris 1968 student uprising.

good—a state where happiness and virtue are proportionate (A828/B856). He also claims that we may *rationaly hope* for an *ethical community*, which (as we saw) is an as-yet-not-seen society arranged solely along moral consideration. In doing so, he articulates two rationally held attitudes towards propositions referring to far-distant goals.

Faith's critics claim that secular faith cannot, or should not, play a productive role in pursuing our far-distant goals. It is question-begging, I think, to stipulate a definition of faith derived from one perspective or tradition and use it to disqualify others.¹² So, in Section 2, I show that some worries of faith's critics are well-motivated.¹³ In Section 3, I argue that these worries give us reason to reject prominent construals of faith. I do this to motivate my Kantian account of secular faith in the following chapter.

2.0 Faith's Critics

2.1 Certainty Worry

Some philosophers warn that faith is an inappropriate attitude in our social lives because it may produce a sense of certainty, or overconfidence, that we can achieve our goals. We might think faith involves a certainty in our goals that enables us to behave in ways unjustified by evidence or venture into the unknown. In this case, the certainty that faith provides us makes

¹² Rettler (2018) points out that, while most people agree about paradigm cases of knowledge (we know that $1 + 1 = 2$, we know that a triangle has three sides), there is little agreement about paradigm cases of faith. He plots a fourfold division of cases: religious faith (faith in God), non-religious faith (faith in a football team or a spouse), important faith (faith in God, or a spouse), and mundane faith (faith in a football team). He suggest that we should remain pluralist about faith and give analysis of different faiths. Derrida, in a different tradition, made a similar point that there is not *one* religion but *many* different religious traditions (and thus presumably *many* religious faiths) (2002, 44-5). I remain pluralist about faith throughout.

¹³ For a similar account of hope's critics see Huber (2021).

us resilient to the risk and disappointment inherent to pursuing our goals and might lead us to overlook doubts that our goals are the correct ones. So, for example, Cornel West chastises Marxists for their “reluctance to admit [a] dimension of risk and uncertainty [into their] Marxist faith” (1993, 231) that history is “going somewhere” (222).¹⁴

West’s worry, I think, is deeply plausible. It implies that if faith is to be productive in our pursuit of an as-yet-not-seen social order, (1) we can and should debate our far-distant goals—be that bringing about a workers’ paradise or eliminating poverty. It also implies (2) that such faith should be sensitive to the messy and uncertain process of bringing about change. So a model of faith that adequately responds to this worry will *not* provide us with certainty.¹⁵

2.2 Demotivating Worry

Others worry that faith demotivates us because it makes us less likely to act to bring about our goals. Suppose that one has faith that the arc of history is somehow inevitably bending toward justice. Jennifer Mensch complains that this attitude allows well-meaning people to remain

¹⁴ Here, I understand 'certainty' as *psychological* certainty, which is a property of an agent's attitudes (especially belief): an agent is psychologically certain of their belief that p only if they are convinced of its truth to the highest degree. Other common notions of certainty are *epistemic* and *moral*. They are properties of attitudes themselves, but not agents. A belief is epistemically certain when it attains the highest possible epistemic status—(roughly) that facts are such that the belief could not be false. A belief is morally certain when it attains the highest possible moral status—one absolutely ought to do (or refrain from doing) some act.

¹⁵ Buchak suggests that certainty is phenomenological incompatible with faith: “anyone who is acting on faith typically feels like she is taking a risk of some sort. The act A that you are performing on faith (that X) is supposed to be better than some alternative if X holds and worse than that alternative if X does not hold. But if one is certain that X is the case, then doing A is not a risk at all!” (2012, 232). I will remain agnostic about her suggestion here. Plausibly, one’s maximum certainty in God’s existence is what enables one to engage in some risky pursuits.

passive—especially those “who enjoy every short-term advantage by maintaining the status quo” (2017, 9). This is because if history is inevitably progressing, our actions would be superfluous, and thus we can “avoid the kind of hard work required for the achievement of a real peace and justice” (*Ibid.*, 9).

The demotivation worry that Mensch articulates gets something right. If our faith that p undermines our resolve to act, then faith is detrimental to achieving our far-distant goals.

2.3 Religious Vestiges Worry

Others worry that faith is a religious attitude that cannot shake off the vestiges of its religious origins, so *secular* faith is an incoherent notion. David Newheiser claims that it is “impossible and unnecessary to exclude religion from secular politics” because “political commitments are formally indistinguishable from religious faith insofar as both are directed toward the unforeseeable future” (2019, 14). On this telling, either as a conceptual truth¹⁶ or as a historical fact,¹⁷ a strict separation between religion and secular politics is not possible or has never occurred. Newheiser claims that central notions of contemporary secular politics like

¹⁶ For an example of the conceptual version of this worry, see Pippin: “[t]o my ears, devotion, and faith are terms that belong in a religious context, and can’t be dissociated from it by appending the adjective ‘secular’ to it” (2019). The thought is that religion is a set of social practices for addressing our uncertain future in terms of pain, suffering, loss, and death; and faith is an attitude directed at such uncertain futures. Thus, speaking of secular faith is merely to speak of religion’s social practices in a supposedly secular setting.

¹⁷ For an example of the historical fact version of this worry, see Nietzsche: “with the aid of a religion that indulged and flattered the loftiest herd desires, things have reached the point where this [herd] morality is increasingly apparent in even political and social institutions: the democratic movement is the heir to Christianity” (1886 §202). See also Schmitt: “all significant concepts in the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts ... the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts” (1922).

tolerance, globalisation, forgiveness, and hospitality are best understood as religious (especially Christian) notions.¹⁸ This worry gets its force because religious violence seems especially cruel. As Mark Lilla puts it, “[a]nimals fight only to eat or reproduce; men fight to get to heaven” (2007, 85). Thus, on this view, if we recognise the religious nature of our supposedly ‘secular’ contemporary politics, we can explain why contemporary political violence is so cruel. So, not only is secular faith incoherent, it obscures the particularly cruel nature of supposedly secular political violence, which is always religious.

Again, I think the above worry gets something right. I doubt that secular faith and religious faith are conceptually entailed and thus are indistinguishable—as Newheiser claims. Moreover, I think that secular movements use religion to attract support from communities: the secular in religious garb, not religion in secular garb. However, at times, individuals appeal to religious faith to support violent acts—think of the attack on the French publication *Charlie Hebdo* relating to satirical pictures of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. It seems to me that this is not the kind of faith to promote in our secular lives.

2.4 Evidentialism Worry

Some thinkers claim that faith is always an irrational belief because it is belief without evidence. Take Dawkins: faith is “blind trust, in the absence of evidence” (2006, 199). Similarly, Daniel Dennett claims that faith understood as a belief that God exists is such a “prodigiously ambiguous” (2006, 312) proposition that it is immune to proof or disproof

¹⁸ See Newheiser (2019, 117); Schmitt (1922) Derrida (2002, 59-60); Kahn (2011). The thought here is not merely that many political concepts have religious origins. As Kahn points out, this is about as interesting as “learning that English words have their origin in old Norse” (Kahn 2011, 3). Advocates of the religious vestige's worry are keen to point out that our political concepts continue to operate in religious modes and thus understanding contemporary politics requires drawing on religious modes of analysis.

through evidence. Thus, he argues, there are no rational theistic beliefs and suggests that people merely profess to believe in God, without actually believing—otherwise, one would “cut the rope” (*Ibid.*, 227) believing God would save them. He also connects irrational faith with a failure to gather evidence. Emphatically, he writes: “Do more research” (*Ibid.*, 311). On the Dawkins-Dennett view, faith is an evidentially unsupported belief, and therefore irrational.¹⁹

I suspect few persons of religious faith will recognise the Dawkins-Dennett conception of faith as merely a belief that *p*.²⁰ In the philosophy of religion, there is significant debate regarding whether faith that *p* entails belief that *p*.²¹ On one common view “faith requires less evidence and-or is consistent with a lower credence than belief” (Jackson 2021). A reason to think faith is less evidentially demanding is that our beliefs can be maximally certain (say a belief that a triangle has three sides), whereas it is odd to say I have faith that *p* when one has a maximally certain belief. So we might suspect that the Dawkins-Dennett conception of faith (that it just is a belief) is impoverished.

However, the Dawkins-Dennett conception of faith points to an important issue: faith seems to violate key evidentialist principles. Evidentialism is the view that we ought to only hold beliefs on the evidence relevant to the proposition in question. William Clifford

¹⁹ See also Leiter, for whom “religious belief in the post-Enlightenment era involves culpable failures of epistemic warrant” (2012, 82).

²⁰ For example, the Dawkins-Dennett conception reduces faith to a belief that *p*, and thus to propositional faith. Yet many religious people might have faith in God. Their faith is, then, a relational faith—an attitude they hold towards an object or state of affairs without a proposition.

²¹ On faith that *p* does not entail belief that *p*, see Howard-Snyder (2013). On faith that *p* entails belief that *p*, see Mugg (2016). See Rettler (2018) and Buchak (2017) for excellent summaries of what faith might be.

famously captures this condition in the principle: “[i]t is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” (1877, 77). Evidentialism may also involve another condition, as David Hume writes: a “wise [person] ... proportions [their] belief to the evidence” (1748, 10.4). Taken together, evidentialism is the view that we ought only to base our beliefs on the evidence relevant to the truth of the proposition at issue and do so proportionally to available evidence.

Strict evidentialism is the view that it is always wrong, for everyone, in all contexts to form beliefs without sufficient evidence and proportion one’s belief to the evidence in one’s possession. Today, many people find strict evidentialism an untenable philosophical position. One reason is that pragmatic concerns might affect what counts as a justified belief. One might think that justifiably believing that the noodles contain no nuts, *when I have a nut allergy*, requires more evidence than normal.²² Another is that strict evidentialism suffers from a regress problem: it is unclear how we can have sufficient evidence for the belief that we have sufficient evidence for our beliefs.

Yet, some version of evidentialism remains prevalent amongst philosophers, and for good reason. Even if we think that we are sometimes permitted to believe without sufficient evidence, we want to be able to explain when it is wrong to believe without sufficient evidence.²³ Suppose a pilot lacks sufficient evidence that their plane is safe to fly—they have

²² There is much room for debate here. One might think that, in the nut allergy case, justified belief does not require more evidence; however, because the stakes are high, a subject's justified belief is not sufficient to warrant action. On this view, there are epistemic norms of believing and pragmatic norms of acting. The latter does not affect the former. Typically, we are more concerned with pragmatic norms as opposed to epistemic norms—(say) not dying from a nut allergy than believing in justified ways. So, when the two are in conflict, we follow (and ought to follow) pragmatic norms when we act.

²³ As a demonstration of how widespread evidentialism is take Levinas, the phenomenologist who wants to argue that ethical truths stem from our subjective encounters with other’s

not inspected the outside of the plane, spoken with the technical crew or checked their instruments. In this case, the pilot seems wrong to believe, and hence wrong to act on the belief, that the plane is safe to fly because their evidentially unsupported belief might harm others.²⁴ Or, suppose that you are committed to achieving gender equality in the workplace. It seems that you should hold beliefs proportionate to the evidence you possess. You should not disregard evidence that sexual discrimination, gendered roles, and gendered pay-gaps are persistent features of many workplaces. In these cases, it seems relatively straight-forward that one should base beliefs on the relevant evidence and do so proportionally.

So a convincing account of secular rational faith directed towards far-distant goals must account for at least some version of evidentialism.

In sum, a philosophically plausible account of secular faith must account for at least four worries:

pain and suffering, which place overwhelming demands on us—and our subjective experiences of an incapability to meet these demands. He too rhetorically asks: “is not philosophy itself after all defined as an endeavour to live a life beginning in evidence, opposing the opinion of one’s fellow-men [sic], the illusions and caprice of one’s own subjectivity?” (1961, 24). Or, take the philosopher-mystic Simone Weil, who also ascribes to a form of evidentialism in rejecting religious attitudes that blind us to reality: we must leave aside the “beliefs which fill up voids and sweete[n] what is bitter [in the world]. The belief in the immortality. The belief in the unity of sin ... The belief in the providential ordering of events—in short the ‘consolation[s]’ which are ordinarily sought in religion” (1947, 13).

²⁴ Basu (2019) argues that, without action, some beliefs can wrong others. The thought goes: in believing that you are a waiter (say) as opposed to a fellow conference participant, I can wrong you by ‘fail[ing] to see you’ as you—in a similar way as failing to see you as a person (as opposed to a thing) fails to acknowledge my obligations to you.

Certainty worry: Faith that p results in a harmful certainty that our goals are the correct goals.

Demotivation worry: Faith that p undermines our willingness to act to bring about the state of affairs described in p .

Religious vestiges worry: Faith is a religious attitude that we cannot be separate from religious contexts, so secular faith is an incoherent notion.

Evidentialist worry: Faith violates the principle that we ought to form beliefs (in the contemporary sense) based only on relevant evidence.

We can state faith's critics' worries as desiderata on a philosophically plausible account of secular faith. With the addition of the desideratum that secular faith is necessary for pursuing our far-distant goals, we have five desiderata.

Rational secular faith's five desiderata

A philosophically plausible account of secular faith should explain how the attitude of secular faith:

- (1) is necessary for pursuing our far-distant goals,
- (2) does not produce overconfidence in those goals,
- (3) does not demotivate us,
- (4) is truly secular, and

(5) is sensitive to key evidentialist principles (such as we ought to form beliefs based only on relevant evidence).

3.0 Ruling Out Options

In this section, I discuss and dismiss prominent construals of faith in our social and political lives from diverse traditions (broadly analytic, pragmatic, and continental).

3.1 Faith as Leaping

Hägglund’s central project is descriptive, not normative. He claims that secular faith is “*a leap ... into the unknown*” (2019, 136) in advance of experience and knowledge. He understands this leap as a passionate commitment to a goal whose outcome is “uncertain” (*Ibid.*, 130). On this view, such leaps of faith are necessary because in our this-worldly, life-defining projects, we “devote [our]self to someone whose fate exceeds [our] control” (*Ibid.*, 136). Hägglund provides the example of becoming a parent. He claims that someone cannot know if they will become a good parent and—if they do—they cannot know what it will be like until they are already in the situation. Thus, Hägglund claims, to become a parent, one must “engage in a passionate commitment to their child without knowledge of how their child will turn out or how they will be as a parent” (*Ibid.*, 136).

Knowing that *p* is an extremely high epistemic bar for *acting* on *p*. Suppose I am going to leave the house today with a sun hat. I do not know that it will be sunny. I have not seen the reports of experts (the meteorologists), and I have not looked outside (I was in a rush). But I have mild to middling confidence that it will be sunny today because it is September, and in September where I live, it is more often than not sunny. So I take my hat.

Presuming we can make sense of why Hägglund thinks lacking knowledge we must engage in a leap of faith, we may ask the following question: what are the normative constraints on a leap of faith? Without normative constraints, on Hägglund proposal, *any* leap of faith is permissible. He is right that our lives are full of goals with uncertain outcomes, but not all might involve *rational* faith. For example, before taking-off, a pilot might lack certainty that they can land their plane (all sorts of weather events might intervene). But they should not make a leap of faith and fly their plane without seeking out relevant evidence. This suggests that there is an evidentialist constraint on faith. Yet, Hägglund's does not provide one.²⁵

3.2 Unjustifiable Hope & Faith

As faith might be instantiated in many contexts (in and outside religious), one might think it unnecessary to give a precise account of faith and its possible justifications. Richard Rorty speaks of unjustified hope and faith in this way. He claims that faith and hope (along with

²⁵ Here, I only engage with Hägglund's characterisation of faith as a leap to show that more needs to be said on the matter. His view might be interesting in its own right. His two main concerns are (1) describing the ways religious faith might rob us of responsibility to each other in this-life because (he thinks) it is an attitude essentially directed at an after-life; and (2) describing a non-religious faith as a 'leap of faith'—i.e., a venture essential involves uncertainty and active risk. But if what a leap of faith means here is believing beyond evidence in the face of uncertainty, then a decision theorist might object in the following way. If my evidence for or against a proposition renders me uncertain, I can rationally assign a degree of confidence to my belief that p proportionate to the probabilistic evidence in my possession. If I have no evidence, I can assign probability 0.5. In calculating my expected utility from a range of options, I take this probability into account. There is no room for believing beyond evidence (i.e., leaps of faith), the decision theorist claims, because even in the most evidential impoverished circumstance I can assign probabilities. My point is not that this line of objection is correct. To me, it seems incoherent to assign probabilities where the relevant proposition *in principle* cannot be settled by evidence or rational argument. But the decision theorist's objection shows that much more needs to be said about 'leaps of faith'. For a more sophisticated and more plausible account of 'leaps of faith', see Bishop (2002).

love) have a “fuzzy overlap” (1999, 161). He speaks of the hope that “the future may be better than the past in this [newly described] respect” (*Ibid.*, 52), that we can construct “a utopian democratic society” (*Ibid.*, 68), and the “hopes that our great-grandchildren will live in a world without nuclear warheads” (Rorty 2002 149). Yet, for Rorty, the issue of justifying hope does not arise because hope is “unjustifiable” (Rorty 2005, 40). Instead, his concern is distinguishing “unjustif[iable] hope” from “unjustifiable gratitude” (*Ibid.*, 40). In the former, we “simply hope for a better human future” (*Ibid.*, 40)—simply in the sense of not-compounded with divine assistance. In the latter, we are grateful that a divine being will help us “transcends our present condition” (*Ibid.*, 40) and thus conceive changes as dependent on divine assistance. Likewise, presumably, faith too is unjustifiable, on Rorty’s account—since, for him, faith and hope have a fuzzy overlap.

Yet, given the criticisms of faith aired above, I am doubtful that an unjustified attitude model can informatively respond to faith’s critics or explain in which contexts it is a necessary attitude to adopt.

3.3 Non-Propositional Faith

Philosophers tend to distinguish propositional from non-propositional faith. Propositional faith is faith that *p*, where *p* is a proposition like ‘Australia is a dry country’ or ‘spiders are dangerous’. Non-propositional faith is a mental state directed at objects but not in virtue of relating to propositions about those objects. For example, I might like Australia or hate spiders. My liking or hating is directed at Australia or spiders and not propositions about them.

Simon Critchley uses the term ‘proclamation’ to describe a non-propositional kind of explicitly political faith. For him, faith as proclamation is the “experience of making an oath” or “pledge” to a demand that infinitely exceeds our powers to realise in “situation[s] of crisis

where a decisive intervention is called for” (2012, 162-3). He has in mind, situations where governments legitimatise authoritarian treatment of their citizens by claiming that humans are essentially defective and thus require corrective measures. What such citizens need, on Critchley’s account, is to make a proclamation of, or oath to, “a sinless union” (108) of ‘Christlike’ humans living in a community with others. He claims we experience this oath as an infinite demand to live up to such a sinless union—although we know that “we are all too human” (7) to realise such a community.²⁶

Given that sin is a religious notion, talk of a faith in ‘a sinless union’ is most probably shot through with religious vestiges.²⁷ So Critchley’s proposal will not satisfy the advocates of the religious vestiges worry. Moreover, proclaiming ‘a sinless union’ seems to avoid questions of how to make this version of faith compatible with our overwhelming evidence that humans are capable (for example) of large scale ethnic, racial, and religious cleansing. So the evidentialism worry goes unaddressed as well.

3.4 Risk and Rationality

²⁶ I am not convinced Critchley’s non-propositional faith does not collapse into propositional faith (i.e., faith that ‘there exists a sinless union of humans’), but I accept it for the sake of argument. Perhaps what Critchley means is that, in faith, an affective state or states is more fundamental than propositional attitudes. Kvanvig, similarly, characterises faith as an affective orientation: “an orientation of a person toward a longer-term goal ... prompted by affections of various sorts and involving complex mental states that are fundamentally affective even if they involve cognitive dimensions as well” (2013, 111).

²⁷ Admittedly, Critchley’s account is more nuanced and complex than I have room to present here. Indeed, his project is an attempt to ‘thread the needle’ between religious and secular faith. Critchley claims to “refuse such an either-or-option [between secularism and theism]” (2012, 8). Here, I only consider Critchley’s account of faith schematically to provide an account of the range of options of faith in our social lives.

The last view that I canvas and reject is Buchak's (2012). In her recent and popular account, faith that p requires making a commitment to take a risk on that proposition being true, refraining from gathering further evidence for it and maintaining one's commitment in the face of counterevidence.

It may help to consider one of Buchak's examples:

a man simply stumbles across an envelope which he knows contains evidence that will either vindicate his wife's constancy or suggest that she has been cheating. He seems to display a lack of faith in her constancy if he opens it and to display faith in her constancy if he does not. And this seems true even if the evidence has been acquired in a scrupulous way: we might imagine the wife herself presents the envelope to the man, as a test of his faith. (Buchak 2012, 233)

On Buchak's view, faith requires "not looking for further evidence even if one knows that the evidence is *readily available*" (2012, 233; original italics) and is rational when the costs of looking for evidence outweighs the benefits of refraining. For Buchak, the costs might be *interpersonal* costs. In the above example, if the man does not open the envelope, he is rational to do so if the benefit of (say) remaining in a loving relationship outweighs the cost of opening the envelope. Here we might imagine that his wife sees opening the envelope as a betrayal that would lead to a breakdown in their relationship. Alternatively, the costs might be *postponement* costs. Buchak suggests that, for example, if one does not have faith in a friend to keep a secret and that friend is only available to hear that secret today, then one might lose that option forever. The cost of postponing having faith that p (expressed as stopping to look for evidence) might be higher than the value of telling your friend your secret. On Buchak's view, in this case, agents are rational to have faith that p (*Ibid.*, 242).

I am sympathetic to Buchak's account. It is plausible that we are rationally justified in the ways she describes, and that those agents who insist on gathering all the available evidence before deciding to act might miss out on opportunities that would greatly benefit them. If I gather all the available evidence that a potential friend will keep a secret, for instance, I may miss out on partaking in a loving friendship.

Yet, let me raise two worries with Buchak's account. First, one might think that faith is connected typically with deeply evidentially ambiguous propositions. Take the proposition 'God exists'. If our total available evidence is *ambiguous*, the evidence leaves open whether or not God's existence is more likely or not to a significantly high degree.²⁸ If our total available evidence is *deeply* ambiguous, it is ambiguous because the kind of evidence that bears on that proposition is not readily available to us. (Presumably booming voices from heaven or Christ's second coming would be conclusive evidence for God's existence). By contrast, in the above husband case, the man's faith that his wife is cheating or not is a proposition that he has evidence for—in the form of the contents of the envelope. Moreover, having faith that 'a friend will keep a secret' is a proposition for which we can have garden variety evidence for. I might ask their friends and colleagues whether they have kept secrets in the past. In the secret-keeping-friend case, Buchak seems correct that we might be rationally permitted to refrain from looking for further evidence. And yet, if one accepts that 'God exists' is a deeply ambiguous proposition, looking for evidence for God's existence would be irrational in the first place: a kind of category mistake, like looking for the laws of physics under the bed. This is because there is no readily available evidence that might bear on the relevant proposition.

²⁸ See Bishop (2007) for more details of this view.

Second, I want to air an old line of objection against the kind of cost-benefit analysis that Buchak gives. Along this line, Voltaire thought Pascalian wagers miss the point—wagers for God’s existence that weigh the benefit of eternal bliss against the cost of being wrong.²⁹ The basic thought is that self-interested reasons are not the appropriate reasons to appeal to in the above examples. In the friend-secret-keeping case, on Buchak’s view, this point is striking. I agree that a friend might be upset if I do not refrain from looking for additional evidence that they are trustworthy in keeping a secret and that I might lose the opportunity to tell them a secret. However, they will be equally—or more—upset if I tell them the reason I stopped looking is that I want to partake in a loving friendship or did not want to miss out on an opportunity. They will be upset (I submit) because my reason is a self-interested one: I have faith that my friend will keep a secret because it advantages me.

Here, I provisionally suggest that, while we might be rationally justified in stopping to look for evidence in the way Buchak describes, it is not faith—at least in the sense that I use the term to denote an attitude whose object is deeply evidentially ambiguous and whose rationality does not depend on self-interested reasons. In the end, the core issue might be definitional (one philosopher’s ‘faith’ might be another’s ‘shaith’—or ‘trust’ for that matter). So the worries I air above require further discussion, which goes beyond the scope of this study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the desiderata for a philosophically plausible account of secular faith. Two important points emerged. First, such an account should explain how the attitude

²⁹ Of Pascal’s wager, Voltaire writes: “This article seems besides a little indecent and puerile; the idea of gaming, of loss and gain, little suits the gravity of the subject” (1734, letter 25).

of secular faith (1) is necessary for pursuing our far-distant goals as some of faith's advocates claim. But, in response to faith's critics' well-founded worries, it should explain how secular faith is an attitude that (2) does not produce overconfidence in those goals, (3) does not demotivate us, (4) is truly secular, and (5) is sensitive to key evidentialist principles (such as we ought to form beliefs based only on relevant evidence). That is, there are five desiderata on secular faith. Second, several recent accounts fail to meet these desiderata—faith as leaping, faith as unjustifiable, faith as non-propositional, and faith according to a decision-theoretic model. In the next chapter, we will turn to Kant's account of Belief and how it might satisfy these desiderata.

Chapter 4 — Social Belief and Secular

Faith

Introduction

The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out. —James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal*

In the previous chapter, we saw that rational secular faith is a propositional attitude that people invoke in their political and social lives. As a candidate for such an attitude, I offered the example of Joe Biden’s invocation of a renewed faith that tomorrow will bring a better day. The above epigraph, drawn from James Baldwin, is another example of rational secular faith. Baldwin’s phrase ‘the moment we break faith with one another’ seems to invoke a rational attitude (a candidate for a justifiable attitude), a secular attitude (a stance directed towards other humans), and a faith attitude (a stance that goes beyond the evidence of the rising sea and fading light).¹

¹ Strictly speaking, Baldwin expresses an allegiant faith, namely, faith exemplified by ‘keeping faith’ with someone or ‘fidelity’ to some cause. Talk of allegiant faith is commonplace in English, with Baldwin’s words one example. Conceptually, however, allegiant faith is reducible to propositional faith (faith that p), relational faith (faith in something), faith as venturing (faith as a doxastic or non-doxastic commitment), or some combination thereof. For instance, we can understand ‘keeping faith with one another’ as faith that a proposition about each other is true, a love-like faith in each other, a commitment to each other, or some combination thereof. My aim is not to police ordinary language, and I do not know what Baldwin was thinking. My claim is that if we presume that Baldwin expresses a propositional faith, then as a propositional attitude it is a

If we (or those around us) invoke rational secular faith in our political and social lives, we might want to know what that propositional attitude is and how we might be rational in holding it. However, we also saw that a philosophically plausible account of secular faith should satisfy five desiderata. The account should explain how the attitude of secular faith (1) is necessary for pursuing our far-distant goals, (2) does not produce overconfidence in those goals, (3) does not demotivate us, (4) is truly secular, and (5) is sensitive to key evidentialist principles (such as we ought to form beliefs based only on relevant evidence). We are therefore asking how we can make sense of the thought that secular faith is a necessary attitude for pursuing our far-distant goals while at the same time accommodating the worries expressed by faith's critics.

In this chapter, I propose a Kantian account of what I call social Belief by drawing an analogy with doctrinal Belief (or faith, *Glaube*). This account allows us to explain the necessity of faith and answer faith's critics (Section 3). I will explain that the necessity of an agent's Belief when pursuing far-distant goals rests on the Attainability Principle—that (roughly) one can rationally will an end only if one thinks of that end as attainable partly through one's actions (Section 4). I will reply to six key objections to Kant's position thus interpreted (Section 5) before explaining how my interpretation of Kantian Belief might respond to criticisms of secular faith (Section 6). To set the stage, I will begin with Kant's remarks in the *Canon* on Belief (and hope). I will then show why Kant's moral Belief is not a good candidate for rational secular faith (Sections 1 and 2). However, an account of Kantian Belief will emerge that is textually sensitive, contemporarily plausible, and can make sense of

candidate for rational secular faith. See Audi (2008) on the reducibility of allegiant faith to other modes of faith.

situations such as those evoked by Baldwin and Biden. In doing so, I will push liberalism further than commentators typically have been willing to go. Chignell (2007a) and Stang (2016) have stressed that theoretical ends can justify our Beliefs. By contrast, I will argue that there is room in Kant for an account of how social ends can justify our Beliefs.

1.0 Belief and Hope

Kant claims in the *Canon* that the interests of reason are united in three questions. He is talking about propositions which refer to ideas (i.e., totalising concepts with no empirical referent).

1. What can I know?
2. What ought I to do?
3. For what may I hope? (A805/B833)²

The first question is theoretical, and thus concerns *what is* the case. For Kant, we have no substantive knowledge of ideas. The second question is “practical” (A805/B833) and thus concerns what *we ought to* do. For Kant, we ought to act in accordance with the universal moral law. The third question concerns an “inference that **something is ... because something ought to happen**” (A806/B834; original emphasis). It thus unites theoretical and moral inquiry by asking the following: if I do what I *ought* to do, then what may I hope *is* the case? In asking what I may hope, “the practical leads like a clue to a reply to the theoretical question and, in its highest form, the speculative question” (A805/B833). In other words, the

² See also (JL 9:25).

question concerning hope leads to positive conceptions of God and the immortal soul: it is thus of paramount importance.

Whereas Kant thinks hope is of paramount importance, traditional interpretations tend to conflate hope and moral Belief. They perhaps do so because Kant raises the question “what may I hope?” in the *Canon* before rushing headlong into a discussion of moral Belief that a God exists who is willing and able to bring about the highest good—that ideal state in which happiness and virtue are proportionate (A828/B856). Here are two representative examples of the conflation.³ First, Peter Strawson:

From behind [the curtain of sense,] reality, as it were, speaks: giving us, not information, but commands—the moral imperative; and, with that, something else: a (kind of) hope and even faith [i.e., Belief]. (Strawson 2000, 251)⁴

Second, Onora O’Neill:

If Kant had offered only an argument from ignorance and the limits of human knowledge, his claim to show that we have reason to adopt any form of faith [i.e., Belief] or hope, let alone specific faiths or hopes, would be quite unsatisfactory ... [Kant] construes the basics of faith as a form of hope. (O’Neill 1996, 282-3)⁵

³ For further examples see Gardner (1999, 315-8); Firestone (2009); Flikschuh (2009); Nieman (1994, 156-164); Goldman (2012).

⁴ Note that (*pace* Strawson) Kant explicitly denies that Belief is a command: “a Belief that is commanded is an absurdity” (CPvR 5:114).

⁵ Kant himself contributes to the confusion: he often uses ‘hope’ in a non-technical manner. For example, he writes that “it would be absurd for humans even to make such an attempt or to hope [*hoffen*] that there may yet arise a Newton” (CJ 5:400) who could comprehend

It is regrettable that commentators have traditionally failed to distinguish between Kantian Belief and hope.⁶ Kantian Belief and hope are in fact distinct attitudes, as we will see in this and the following chapter. Although the focus of this chapter is Kantian Belief, it sits within a larger defence of what I call the *Dual and Distinct Thesis*: Belief and hope are distinct, but both are necessary, propositional attitudes for pursuing our far-distant ends. Belief is constitutive of willing those ends, and hence necessary for them; hope is psychologically necessary (for most of us, most of the time) to maintain our resolve in pursuing those ends.

2.0 Kantian Moral Belief

In all three *Critiques*, Kant claims that Belief is a rationally justified propositional attitude to hold towards propositions that refer to ideas. He maintains that ideas are concepts which have no possible empirical referents and are thus evidentially ambiguous. However, our assents (literally, “taking something to be true” (*Fürwahrhalten*) (A820/B848) to such propositions can enjoy practical justification.⁷ As Kant affirms, Belief is a “holding-to-be-true that is enough for action” (JL 9:68n). Regarding *moral* Belief, he claims that (for example) our assent to the proposition that there exists a God who is willing and able to bring about the highest good—a world in which morality and happiness are proportional—is justified in

biological organisms according to natural laws. Furthermore, he frequently does not deem it necessary to distinguish hope from Belief. For instance, in the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant moves from claiming that “hope for a future life ... [is] the assumption of our continuance [after death]” (CJ 5:460) to claiming that “the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, are matters of Belief” (CJ 5:469) without any indication that hope and Belief are distinct attitudes.

⁶ Recent literature emphasises a distinction between Kantian Belief and hope. See Wood (2020, Ch. 2); Chignell (forthcoming (b); 2014); Huber (2021).

⁷ For a discussion of assent, see Chapter 2.

virtue of the fact that willing such a world is a necessary means to fulfilling our *necessary ends*.

Allen Wood has recently attempted to translate moral Belief into non-moral contexts. He writes that “Kantian practical faith need not be framed in terms of loyalty to the highest good,” but in terms of any “lost cause that gives meaning to our lives” (Wood 2020, 36). By loyalty, Wood means devotion to something “larger than [one’s] self” (*Ibid.*, 35); by lost cause, he means “any cause that cannot be fulfilled within the lifetime of the loyal community or any of its members” (*Ibid.*, 36). For Wood, moral Belief is necessary for loyalty to lost causes because it is stable: “moral Belief ... is a disposition to assent for practical purposes that can be constant and pervasive for a human being ... [whereas] Kant considers doctrinal belief ‘unstable’” (*Ibid.*, 57).⁸

Wood here recalls Kant’s famous (or infamous) ‘moral proof’ for the existence of God and an immortal soul. Kant claims that our assents to propositions that such entities exist do not enjoy evidential justification but do enjoy practical justification. They are practically justified because they are a necessary means to fulfilling our moral vocation: that is, seeking to fulfil the moral law at all points. We should think of ‘proof’ quite loosely here. Kant’s moral proofs are not supposed to demonstrate an “objectively valid proof ... or prove to the doubter” (CJ 5:450-1n) that God, the immortal soul, and the afterlife exist. They are rather supposed to show that we are rationally justified in assenting to propositions that refer to an idea.

⁸ See also Chignell (2007a, 156-164), who also emphasises moral Belief’s stability.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that Kant's proof is cogent. In the mode of moral Belief, a subject's assent to propositions that refer to ideas are rationally justified just in case:⁹

(1) **Necessary Ends Condition:** the subject sets necessary ends: i.e., the ends which rational morality sets for us.

(2) **Hypothetical Necessary Means Condition:** firmly assenting to a relevant proposition is a hypothetically necessary condition of pursuing that end, and upon reflection we would find that others would think assent to the relevant proposition was a necessary means to the end.

(3) **Lack of Objectively Sufficient Grounds Condition:** the subject is aware, or potentially aware, that they lack objectively sufficient grounds for that assent.

Unlike Wood, I think that Kantian moral Belief translates poorly into non-moral contexts. Recall the *certainty worry*: faith that p results in a harmful certainty that our goals are the correct goals. First, part of the certainty worry is that faith leaves no room for debating which goals we should pursue. In contrast, Kantian moral Belief is an attitude we hold as a necessary means to a *necessary* end that all reasoners must take up, that of rational morality (i.e., the moral law). Kant's claim here is not that we all *do* pursue that end, but that we all have a rational *requirement* to pursue that end. We thus have a rational requirement to form moral Beliefs (CPvR 5:143; JL 9:86n). For Kant, however, we cannot debate which ends to set for

⁹ My reading of moral Belief is indebted to Chignell (2007a; forthcoming (a), Ch. 10) and Wood (2020).

ourselves regarding moral issues: rationality demands that it is “absolutely necessary that ... [we] fulfil the moral law in all points” (A828/B856).

Second, another aspect of the certainty worry is that faith might be too certain and thus unsuitable for the typically messy and uncertain process of bringing about change. This aspect of the worry implies that we are searching for a revisable attitude. In contrast, Kant claims that “nothing can make these [moral] Beliefs unstable,” that they are “moral certainty” and that we are “in little danger of ever surrendering” them (A828-9/B856-7). Moral Beliefs are stable, certain and cannot be abandoned because they are necessary for our moral vocation. Thus, if our attitude towards our moral Beliefs were to become unstable or uncertain, or were we to abandon them, we would relinquish our moral vocation (A828/B856).

Moral Belief is thus too stable to assuage faith’s critics because it is not revisable. Let us see if we can do better with what Kant calls doctrinal Belief.

3.0 Kantian Doctrinal Belief and Social Belief

Moral Belief occupies the lion’s share of discussion on Kantian Belief. This was true in Kant’s time and is true in our own. Moral Beliefs are assents that are necessary means to our shared *necessary ends*: i.e., the ends of moral rationality. However, in *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explicitly discusses *doctrinal* Beliefs: assents that are necessary means to our shared *contingent* non-moral and theoretical ends.

It strikes me that theoretical ends do not exhaust the category of shared contingent ends. Social ends appear to be another prominent example of shared contingent ends: our striving for various and better ways of living together. If this is correct, there is space in Kant for social Beliefs: assents that are necessary means to our shared *contingent social* ends.

Here I mean ‘contingent’ ends in the sense that Kant’s rational morality—*as stated*—does not require that all rational beings take the ends up. There may exist plausible Kantian arguments that all rational beings must take up a particular far-distant end (perhaps the reversal of climate change or a socialist state), and that these ends are thus morally necessary ends. Hermann Cohen (1904/1907), for instance, argues that the Humanity Formulation of the categorical imperative (to treat persons “always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (G 4:429)) entails a necessary obligation never to exploit people’s labour. He thus argues on Kantian grounds that we have a necessary obligation to attempt to bring about a democratic socialist state wherein workers’ collectives own the means of production. The workers would thereby not be exploited. I will remain neutral here regarding the plausibility of such arguments.¹⁰

Kant never discusses how contingent social ends might justify assents. However, I think we can provide an account of how they might do so by analogy with doctrinal Belief. Recall that *in the mode of doctrinal Belief*, a subject’s assent to propositions referring to ideas are rationally justified just in case:¹¹

(1) **Contingent Ends Condition:** the subject sets a contingent *theoretical end* that is shared with others.

¹⁰ The central reason I remain neutral is because Kantian arguments concerning negative duties (the actions and ends that are morally impermissible or wrong) are often thought to be more compelling than his arguments concerning positive duties (the actions and ends that we must take up). A Kantian argument that aims to prove that a particular far-distant end is a necessary moral end will thus involve contestable Kantian arguments and the arguments that Kantians find the least compelling. See Allison (1993) for an account of our positive Kantian duties.

¹¹ See Chapter 2.

(2) **Hypothetical Necessity Means Condition:** firmly assenting to a relevant proposition is a hypothetically necessary condition of pursuing that end, and upon reflection we would find that others would also think that assent to the relevant proposition was a necessary means to the end.

(3) **Lack of Objectively Sufficient Grounds Condition:** the subject is aware, or potentially aware, that they lack objectively sufficient grounds for that assent.

Analogously, *in the mode of social Belief*, we might claim that our assents to propositions referring to ideas are rationally justified just in case (2), (3), and

(1)* **Contingent Ends Condition:** a subject sets a contingent *social end* that is shared with others.

The ends I that have in mind here are our far-distant ends: ends that involve everyone, everywhere, and always, and which typically cannot be achieved in our lifetime. These might include a society capable of establishing an enduring world peace, staving off ecological collapse, abolishing all forms of slavery, or a workers' paradise.¹²

By a 'shared end', I refer to the goals of a large collective enterprise, as opposed to the goals of individuals that Kant associates with pragmatic Belief—individual such as doctors (A824/B852), corn merchants (Dohna 24:750), and businessmen (Progress 20:298).

According to Kant, doctrinal Belief is necessary for us to pursue our theoretical ends of

¹² See Chapter 3. It is useful to note again that, while I will focus on political ends, my conception of social ends is wide enough to include aesthetic ends: the contingent ends of communities pursuing artistic projects, new forms of expression, and aesthetic ways of living together.

systematic inquiry in various fields: ends such as a unified account of biology (A826/B854) or a unified explanation of all historical events (I 8:29).¹³ It is unclear how we should draw the line between individual and shared ends. Individual doctors presumably share their goals with nurses, hospital administrators, and other doctors. However, many everyday concepts exhibit vagueness in a way that does not prohibit us using them ('shortness' and 'tallness', for instance). Similarly, we should allow for vagueness in distinguishing between individual and shared ends. Even if we cannot draw a sharp distinction between individual and shared ends, the basic idea behind the latter is that they are ends collectively taken up by us in large-scale enterprises.

4.0 The Necessity of Belief and The Attainability Principle

Suppose that you think we sometimes legitimately set contingent collective large-scale ends for ourselves and that we are aware, or potentially aware, that we lack sufficient objective grounds (i.e., evidence) to assent to the proposition that we can achieve those ends. In other words, you think that (1)* and (3) are met. If an analogy between doctrinal and social Belief holds, then a rational constraint on social Belief is (2) that a subject's firm assent to a relevant proposition is a hypothetically necessary condition of pursuing that end. However, we may ask the following question: in what sense, if any, is this assent a necessary means to pursuing our far-distant end?

¹³ In Chapters 1 and 2, I argued that despite the poor examples of doctrinal Belief that Kant provides, there is at least one plausible example: a philosopher-historian, who in pursuing a complete human history necessarily assents to the idea that human rationality will fully develop in a distant future.

4.1 The Attainability Principle

In the *Groundwork*, Kant claims that it is “analytic” that “whoever wills the end, ... wills also the indispensably necessary means to it ... For in willing an object ... the use of means, is already thought” (G 4:417). As I explained in Chapter 2, Kant’s claim is that a normative commitment is analytically contained in the setting of an end: if I fail to engage in actions that are necessary to obtaining my end, I am not acting according to rational norms constitutive of pursuing that end.

Commentators often read Kant’s claim that Belief is necessary for us to pursue our far-distant ends (especially the highest good) as underwritten by a general principle of willing—much as the above passage suggests. This reading is most famously put forward by Wood (2020, 46).¹⁴ The general principle of willing is as follows:

¹⁴ Guyer reads the necessity of Belief as a matter of entirely psychological motivation. For him, Beliefs have “no recommendation except that they are effective in motivating creatures like us to act in the way and toward the end that reason demands,” and “the entire doctrine of the postulates of pure practical reason is stated within the limits of human psychology” (2000, 367). Thus, according to Guyer, Belief is necessary for human sensibility and not human reason. On this reading, Belief that the highest good is possible gives us affective incentive to do what we already rationally know we ought to. Guyer’s reading is deeply misleading. Admittedly, in the First Critique, Kant eludes to affective motivation and incentive as playing a role in Belief: “Everyone also regards the moral laws as commands, which, however, they could not be if they did not connect appropriate consequences with their rule a priori, and thus carry with them promises and threats” (A811/B839, original emphasis), and “[t]hus without a God and a world that is not now visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realisation” (A812/B840). By the Second Critique, however, Kant is clear: the rational incentive of duty alone should be sufficient incentive for us to follow the moral law despite the fact that it is not for us (imperfect humans). Guyer cites CPvR 5:145 in support of his reading. There, I find no mention of affective motivation or incentive.

The Attainability Principle: one can rationally will an end only if one thinks the world is such that the end is possible to attain and only if one thinks of oneself as contributing (in part) to its attainment.¹⁵

The Attainability Principle concerns the norms constitutive of willing. For Kant, in willing an end, I commit myself to a rational norm because such a commitment is constitutive of willing something. Willing an end is committing to *intend to bring the end about* and to do so partly *through one's actions*. Moreover, this rational norm constrains my thoughts (i.e., my propositional attitudes) about my actions and ends: one cannot rationally commit to intend to bring something about that one thinks is impossible to achieve through one's intends. In this sense, the Attainability Principle is constitutive of willing an end.

Kantians often hold that a principle can be constitutive of an action. In the case of walking, for instance, the principle of putting one foot in front of another is constitutive of the action of walking. The principle does not externally constrain my walking, however, and nor does it mean that I cannot coherently rebel against the principle. I can rebel against a constitutive principle of walking (by twirling around, for instance) but then I am not trying to walk. Instead, the principle constrains my walking in the sense that if I am trying to walk, then I must put one foot in front of another because that is an internal rule of walking. Similarly, the Attainability Principle is constitutive of willing an end.

¹⁵ See CPvR 5:113-114, 5:119; CJ 5:451n; 5:472. Language for this principle varies in the literature. Willaschek (2016) refers to a version of this principle as 'the realisability principle'. Fugate (2014) uses the language of 'practical consistency in our willing', whereas Wood (1978; 2020) and Longworth (2017) use the language of 'attainment'.

It is admittedly natural to think of means-ends relations as causal. For instance, my turning the stove on (means) causes the pan to heat up (ends). Means-ends relations can also be constitutive, however. We can understand this better with an example. Suppose I want to attend a workshop on Kantian epistemology. My registering for the workshop (means) is a constitutive precondition of my attending the workshop (ends). My registration does not cause my attendance, however, whereas my going to the venue (or zooming in) might. Of course, I might attend the workshop without registering, but in that case I will have violated a constitutive norm—the norm of registering for workshops. On the constitutive account of means-ends relations, when I set myself the end of attending the workshop, I rationally commit myself to registering for it.

Similarly, when I will an end, I commit myself to rational norms of willing. For instance, if I know that I have lost a race, it seems irrational for me to think I can win it. Of course, I can still think I can win the race; I can even keep trying to win. In doing so, however, I am violating a rational norm that is constitutive of willing my end: it is rational to think I can win only if I think it is possible for me to win. To explain this point more clearly, we can express it in terms of a violation of the Attainability Principle. Let us consider the principle's three core features.

Willing. The principle's first feature is a Kantian distinction between wishing and willing the attainment of an end (willing an end, for short). The principle is therefore general in the sense that it is a principle of willing *any* end. When I *wish* an end, I find it desirable but I do not intend to bring it about, and I do not think of myself as contributing to the actuality of the end. Few would dispute that we wish for many ends in this sense. For instance, I might *wish* for the cessation of a war; I find this event desirable and would be happy upon hearing the news that the war has ended. However, I do not participate in steps to bring about its end. Kant would term my attitude to the war's cessation as “deedless wishes” (Rel 6:201) or the

cult practice of “mere wishing” (Rel 6:51; see also G 4:394). By contrast, in willing an end, I *do* intend to bring the end about, and I *do* see myself as contributing to its actuality. In *willing* the war’s cessation, I intend to take steps to stop it (by protesting and advocating for its end in my community, for instance). In willing my end (the cessation of the war), I thus commit myself to a rational norm: to intend to bring the end about, and to do so partly through my actions.

Thought. The Attainability Principle’s second feature is that the wishing-willing distinction rationally constrains an agent’s thoughts. My willing an end is rational only if I hold certain attitudes toward that end and the contribution that I am making to it. If I thought the end was impossible to attain or that my actions did not contribute to it, I would be irrationally committing myself to a course of action. By contrast, I can rationally commit myself to intending to bring about an end through my actions only if I think the end is possible to attain, and possible to attain partly through my actions. For instance, I would be irrational if I committed myself to a course of action to bring about the end of a war, and I thought either that its continuation was inevitable or that my course of action could not contribute to its cessation. I would be irrational because my attitudes would not support my actions. Similarly, suppose I set myself the end of winning a race. I can rationally intend to win a race only if I think it is possible for me to do so. If I find out that someone has already won the race, it would be irrational for me to continue to try to win the race. It would be irrational because I think that it is impossible for me to win and that my actions (continuing to compete) cannot contribute to my winning. These examples suggest that in willing an end, an agent is rationally constrained to think that their end is attainable and attainable partly through their actions.

Contribution. The principle’s third feature is that a rational agent need only think that the conditions of the world are such that it is possible to attain their end if they try their best. In

this sense, they need only think of themselves as contributing *in part* to the attainment of their end. As Kant holds, “earnest will[ing]” consists in promoting our end “as far as lies in our power to do” and not “in the immediate causes of success” (CJ 5:451).¹⁶ It would be the height of irrationality (and perhaps hubris) to think of myself as the sole cause of my ends. My winning a race depends on my efforts, but it also depends on aspects beyond my control (such as the willingness to act of my teammates, support crew, and other competitors, as well as environmental conditions). Rationally willing an end thus involves thinking that one is contributing in part to that end and thinking the world is amenable to those contributions.

4.2 The Attainability Principle and Belief

We are now in a position to see how the Attainability Principle underwrites the necessity of Belief in willing far-distant ends. Where evidence that we can attain our end is weak or unavailable, Belief is constitutive of our willing such an end: otherwise we would merely be *wishing* for the end. On Kant’s account, for instance, we must *will* our moral ends. He claims that morality demands we set the highest good as our end (a world in which happiness and morality are proportional). If we *must* will the highest good, however, then we *must think* it is possible to attain and think of ourselves as *contributing* (in part) to its attainment. Moreover, the distribution of happiness according to moral worth is attainable only if the world is amenable to our efforts to change it. Given that we have no evidence for such a state of affairs, when we pursue the highest good (as we ought), it is rational and necessary to Believe

¹⁶ See also CPvR 5:119; 5:142; Rel 6:101.

that the highest good is attainable and attainable partly through our actions. Otherwise, we violate the Attainability Principle.¹⁷

Given that the Attainability Principle is general (i.e., not restricted to moral ends), it should also hold for our far-distant social ends. We can make this point clear by reflecting on the following example:

Peace Activist: A peace activist pursues the end of an enduring world peace, understood as lasting peace into the indefinite future. They assent to the proposition that we will inhabit such a world and that their actions contribute to bringing about that world.

Suppose that our peace activist has strong independent reasons to pursue an enduring world peace. In this sense, they have strong reasons to *will* their end, even if it is not an end that everyone must will. However, given the complexity of the end and given that it involves all humans into the indefinite future, they have no evidential grounds to assent to the proposition that their end is attainable and attainable (partly) through their actions. They must nevertheless Believe in the attainability of their end if they are to will their end, on pain of violating the Attainability Principle.

Further, suppose that our peace activist undertakes all the actions necessary to bring about enduring world peace but does not (or would not) assent to the proposition that enduring world peace will come about partly through their actions. I suspect that it is too strong to claim that they ought to believe (in the contemporary sense) that we will inhabit such a world: they have little or no evidence for that belief. However, I also suspect that it is too weak to

¹⁷ For similar discussions see Wood (2020); Longworth (2017); Chignell (2007a).

say that our peace activist *acts as if* we will inhabit such a world. It is too weak because we want to say that our peace activist's actions are more than *pretending* that the relevant proposition is true. The Kantian analysis of the case says that the activist who does not Believe is wishing and not willing their end, or that they hold irrational attitudes towards their ends.

It is worth stressing that, although most of the literature on the Attainability Principle focuses on Kant's theistic claim that our pursuit of the highest good justifies a Belief in God's existence, an account of the epistemic resources of Kantian Belief has a wider application than that theistic claim. This wider application is demonstrated by the example of the peace activist. I will therefore abstract away from Kant's theistic claim when discussing objections to the principle.

Another reason to abstract away from the theistic claim is that it is probably false. Kant uses the Attainability Principle to claim that we must assent to the proposition that the highest good is attainable in part through our actions. In a further step, Kant claims that God is the *only adequate explanation* of the conditions under which we can achieve the highest good, such that we must assent to God's existence.¹⁸ However, it is unclear why other explanations of these conditions are not adequate or even better. Examples that come readily to mind include history's progress, social institutions, biological forces, karma, or an office of

¹⁸ For instance, “[the highest good] must be assumed to be possible ... [T]he *sole conditions* of its possibility [the highest good] that are conceivable for us, ... are the existence of god and the immorality of the soul” (CJ 5:469; my italics). See also CPvR 5:124–125; O 8:141.

multiple gods. Moreover, the Attainability Principle only requires an explanation sufficient to realise the highest good, not an all-powerful, morally-good being like God.¹⁹

For these two reasons, in what follows, I will focus on objections to the Attainability Principle in abstraction of the highest good and Kant's theistic claim.

5.0 Objections to the Attainability Principle

Six key objections have been raised about Kant's position as stated in terms of the Attainability Principle. They concern: (1) lack of moral necessity, (2) modality, (3) approximation, (4) ought-implies-can, (5) wishful thinking, and (6) rational action from despair. The best way to defend the Attainability Principle is to address these objections, which I shall now do.

5.1 The Lack of Moral Necessity Objection

The Attainability Principle says that one can rationally will an end only if one thinks the world is such that the end is possible to attain and if one thinks of oneself as contributing (in part) to its attainment. An objector might argue that the Attainability Principle does not do justice to Kant's aim in describing the necessity of Belief, as he wants to show that Belief is somehow *morally* necessary. Readers of Kant who object along these lines cite a passage in the *Second Critique* in which Kant explicitly claims that Belief in God is "morally necessary"

¹⁹ On this point see Chignell (forthcoming (a), Ch. 10); Wood (2020, Ch. 2); Ameriks (2012, 255-6).

(CPvR 5:125). By contrast, the Attainability Principle shows only that Belief is necessary for an agent to maintain consistent thought.²⁰

In Chapters 1 and 2, I argued that there is nothing especially moral about Kantian Belief, and that theoretical ends can justify Belief. Shortly after the above quoted passage, Kant insists that Belief is necessary for “the way in which we are to think” (CPvR 5:145) of our ends. Similarly, he writes in the *Third Critique* that Belief is necessary if our “thinking is to be consistent” (CJ 5:451n). Passages like these suggest that Kant is committed to the Attainability Principle as a general principle about setting ends, *pace* those who think that the necessity of Belief is uniquely moral. In light of this commitment, Kant’s language of ‘moral necessity’ regarding Belief appears to be somewhat careless.

5.2 The Modality Objection

The modality objection states that the Attainability Principle only warrants a Belief that our far-distant ends are *not impossible* to attain through our actions, and that this is inconsistent with Kant’s claim that we Believe that our far-distant ends are *possible* to attain through our actions. This supposed inconsistency arises because the principle implies only that we are irrational to pursue an end (winning a race) that we know is *impossible* to attain through our actions (because we know that someone has already won the race).²¹

I fail to see the force of the modality objection. Assuming classical modal logic, it is valid to infer from the claim that ‘something is not impossible’ that ‘something is possible’. For example, it is valid to infer from the claim that it is (physically) not impossible for me walk

²⁰ See Fugate (2014); Hare (1996); Beck (1960).

²¹ See Denis (2005, 43) and Fugate (2014, 155n).

up the stairs that it is (physically) possible for me walk up the stairs. Likewise, it is valid to infer from the claim that it is (logically) not impossible for Bigfoot to exist that it is (logically) possible for Bigfoot to exist. Classical modal logic holds that:

(1) *p* is *possible* if it is not necessarily false (regardless of whether it is in fact true or false)

(2) *p* is *impossible* if it is necessarily false.

Now consider the negation of (2), (2)*:

(2)* *p* is *not impossible* if it is *not* necessarily false.

The modality objection is not deeply worrying because the definition of possibility (1) just is the negation of impossibility (2)*. It is furthermore a non-starter for our objector to deny that (1) and (2)* are equivalent by claiming (for instance) that it is physically not impossible for me to leave my house tonight, yet I know that it is necessarily false that I do so because I never leave the house at night. In this case, they would be conflating physical and epistemic necessity. Strictly speaking, the Attainability Principle may support only the Belief that *p* is *not impossible*. However, it is valid to infer from this the Belief that *p* is *possible*.

5.3 The Approximation Objection

According to the approximation objection, we are rational to will the *approximation* of our ends (far-distant or otherwise) and not their perfection, given that we are flawed human beings. In doing so, we can rationally pursue our ends knowing or believing (in the contemporary sense) that they are never attainable but only that we can approach them asymptotically. Kantian Belief is therefore not necessary for pursuing the approximation of

our far-distant ends. All that is necessary is a belief (in the contemporary sense) that we can approach our goals asymptotically accompanied by a belief regarding the value of doing so.

Kant's critics point to situations in which it is valuable to approximate a goal that is known to be unattainable.²² Peter Byrne (2007) provides one such situation.²³ Suppose that your goal is the production of a perfectly error-free book, but you know that you cannot achieve that goal given the fallible nature of human intelligence. According to Byrne, "[t]he value of the goal lies in the fact that there is always something [you] can do in the light of it that improves the book, even while the perfect book always lies beyond possible attainment" (96). As long as you are committed to approximating your goal, Byrne claims, there are always things that you can do to improve, without possessing a belief, Belief, or knowledge that you can attain the goal.²⁴

I have two remarks to make in response. First, the proponents of the approximation objection claim that there is 'value' in approximating a goal; in doing so, they assume that it

²² Kant himself is the source of this objection. He claims that in scientific inquiry, "reason can follow [principles of completeness] only asymptotically, as it were, i.e. merely approaching, without ever reaching them, yet [these principles] nonetheless possess, as synthetic propositions a priori, objective, but indeterminate validity, and serve as a rule of possible experience, and can even be used, in the treatment of the same, with good success, as heuristic principles" (A663/B691; see also AK 8:335; AK 6:354). I am not aware that Kant makes any attempt to demonstrate the value of approximation. In passages like these he therefore merely assumes that approximating a goal is valuable.

²³ See also Adams (1979), for whom the approximation objection is fatal to Kant's Attainability Principle.

²⁴ See Marina (2000) for a reading that emphasises Kant's commitment to our asymptotic approach to the highest good. Indeed, Kant sometimes makes suggestions along these lines. For instance, in the 1794 essay 'The End of All Things,' Kant writes that our moral lives in this world consist in "constant progression and approach to the highest good (marked out for [us] as a goal)" (AK 8:335).

is *always* true that more of something is better than less. That remains to be shown, however.²⁵

Suppose you are about to undergo surgery, and you require three doses of anaesthetic. However, the hospital is running low on anaesthetic medicine. An anaesthesiologist would be mistaken to assume that giving you two doses would be better than giving you one or no doses. In the absence of three doses, two doses might be useless (they might not put you to sleep) or dangerous (you might wake up mid-surgery).

The above example shows that we cannot assume that more of something is *always* better than less of it, relative to a goal. Two doses might be better than one or none, if the missing dose or doses turn up. However, the approximation objection relies on the goal never being attainable, and thus on the assumption that there is intrinsic value in approximating a goal. Its proponents need to show why this assumption is compelling in the relevant cases.

Consider another example: Kant's highest good. Let us grant for the sake of argument that the value of happiness proportionate to virtue in the world increases in continuous fashion, contrary to the anaesthetic example. There is a second problem for the approximation objection. In terms of the highest good, we can imagine situations where more happiness proportional to virtue does not necessarily result in a better world. Consider two situations:

²⁵ See Estlund (2020, 271-303), who (quite aptly) calls this assumption the Fallacy of Approximation. I adapt one of his cases below (272).

(1) a world with a high amount of happiness proportional to virtue but where that proportionality is concentrated in groups based on non-moral features such as gender, race, wealth or social class, and

(2) a world with a medium amount of happiness proportional to virtue but where that proportionality is distributed evenly amongst its inhabitants.

If you think that (1) is *not* necessarily better than (2), then you think approximating the highest good is *not* necessarily better than not approximating it, even if its value is continuous. However, the approximation objection assumes that (1) is always better than (2). Again, its proponents must show why this assumption is compelling in the relevant cases.²⁶

Second, the approximation objection conflates the end with the conditions necessary for that end. The Kantian thought is that the relevant proposition is not merely that our ends are possible to attain, but that *the world is such that* our ends are possible to attain (partly) through our actions, whether they be goals of perfection or approximation; and that there are instances in which we lack sufficient evidence to justify an assent to the relevant proposition on evidential grounds. The Kantian way of putting this is that the ‘conditions of our end will obtain’ such that we can contribute to our ends. In the case of the writer, we do not directly assent to the proposition that an error-free book is possible to obtain. Instead, we assent to the proposition that certain conditions will obtain: for example, that there exists an

²⁶ Here, I consider only examples of approximation involving a single value. Second-best objections (according to which approximating an ideal might be disastrous if approximating it involves missing a key ingredient) are therefore irrelevant. For instance, if complete justice requires equality, fairness, and the abolition of slavery, a just society with slavery is an approximation of complete justice which looks particularly abhorrent. However, I think the second-best objection is an independent reason not to pursue approximate ideals, not an objection against pursuing ideals *simpliciter*.

editor who is willing and able to help us write an error-free book. Even if I am guided by the asymptotic goal of writing an error-free book, I still need to hold that certain conditions will obtain to approach that end. Even if there is value in approximating my end, there is no conflict between our setting the *approximation* of our end, and the Belief that the conditions necessary for for me to contribute to that approximation will obtain.²⁷

6.4 The Ought-Implies-Can Objection

According to the ought-implies-can objection, if a state of affairs lies outside our capacity to attain, we need do only what we are capable of doing. Belief is therefore not necessary to pursue our far-distant goals because any reasonable normative theory can only require us to try our best; we need not concern ourselves with the rest.

Lewis White Beck captures this objection:

[S]uppose that I do all within my power... to promote the highest good, what am I to do? Simply act out of respect for the law, which I already knew. I can do absolutely nothing else toward apportioning happiness in accordance with desert—that is the task of the moral governor of the universe, not of a laborer in the vineyard. (Beck 1960, 244–245)

²⁷ See Willaschek (2016, 235-7) for a similar point. However, he thinks that the point licenses us to act ‘as if’ our goal is realisable because (according to him) acting ‘as if’ something could be realised simply means taking the appropriate steps to approximate a goal as far as possible. However, Willaschek seems to assume that approximating a goal is always valuable, which as I have shown is not true.

In terms of the highest good, the objector claims that if ought-implies-can holds, it is unclear why we ought to will the highest good as opposed to willing our own virtue (as best we can) while hoping for or desiring happiness.²⁸

Wood suggests in response that if we leave ‘the rest’ to God (as Beck would have it), we are “refusing to regard the highest good as [our] end at all” (2020, 49). The highest good would then be God’s end and not ours.

I agree with Wood. Consider the case of the peace activist ‘pursuing’ an enduring world peace. Suppose they do all that is in their power to bringing that end about in the sense of pursuing ‘present’ peace, yet they leave ‘enduring’ peace to God or history. In this sense, they do not believe that enduring world peace is possible to attain through their actions. Indeed, when asked, they may not be in a position to form assent to a proposition about the attainability of enduring world peace. Such an activist puts enduring world peace in the hands of God or history’s progress. They therefore take the ‘enduring’ aspect of world peace to be God’s or history’s end and not their own. Here we see Kant’s distinction between willing and wishing. The peace activist *wills* present peace and *wishes* for enduring world peace.

5.5 The Wishful Thinking Objection

A philosophical defence of any practically justified attitude must respond to the charge of wishful thinking. According to this objection, the claim that the Attainability Principle

²⁸ See Chignell (forthcoming (a), Ch. 10) on this point. Chignell claims that Kant fails to explain in the *Second Critique* why we ought to will virtue proportionate to happiness as opposed to what is under our control: i.e., our own virtue. At least one passage of the *Second Critique* suggests that Kant is aware of this problem: happiness proportionate to virtue “cannot be attained at all in this world ... and is therefore made solely an object of hope” (CPvR 5:129).

warrants a Belief is “wishful thinking dressed up as argument”, as Byrne (2007, 88) puts it. Kant himself was aware of this objection. He notes Thomas Wizenmann’s example of someone in love with an idea of beauty that is a “chimera of his own brain” and who assents to the proposition that the object of this idea of beauty “really exists somewhere” (CPvR 5:144n).

Kant’s responds to the wishful thinking charge by appealing to his moral universalism. According to Kant, the only end that can justify a moral Belief is the pursuit of the highest good to the “utmost of our capacity” (CPvR 5:144), which is a universally held end of all rational beings. This is the case because such an end is given to us rationally by the moral law that “necessarily binds every rational being”; Belief, Kant claims, is thus not justified if it is based merely on “inclination” (CPvR 5:144).

When we abstract away from the details of Kant’s moral universalism, we see a point that at least tempers the wishful thinking objection. Kant is suggesting that rational Belief requires us to possess independent reasons to will our ends in the first place. Without such independent reasons, we would end up in what Adams calls a “vicious practical circle” (1979): I reason *from* my Belief that an end is attainable through my actions *to* the claim that this gives me partial reasons to pursue that end (because I see it as attainable) *back to* the claim that my end gives me practical reasons to Believe.²⁹ In all three *Critiques*, Kant emphasises that moral ends are “quite independent of these suppositions” (CPvR 5:142) (i.e., our Beliefs) about the attainment of the relevant ends.³⁰ We may not subscribe to Kant’s moral universalism, but the

²⁹ Adams’ own version of the vicious practical circle concerns the psychological sustenance of Belief.

³⁰ See also A828/B856; CPvR: 5:143; CJ 5:450.

general point stands: Beliefs are justified only once we have independent reasons to pursue an end. If wishful thinking involves the above vicious practical circle, then Kant's position is explicitly anti-wishful thinking.

5.6 The Despairing Activist Objection

Consider an anti-war activist seeking enduring world peace; consider also proposition *p* (that such a world is attainable in part through their actions). A decision theorist might claim that on the standard decision theory model agents ought to choose actions that maximise expected value, given their credences and their utility function. The activist can therefore be very pessimistic that they will succeed at their goal, and thus have a belief (in the contemporary sense) that *p* with a very low credence. However, as success would be so immensely good, it is rational for them to pursue the goal anyway. Belief is not therefore necessary for the activist to rationally will their end. Let us call the decision theorist's complaint the 'despairing activist objection'.³¹

In the *Third Critique*, Kant considers an example much like the despairing activist: a righteous non-Believer facing despair whom Kant assigns the moniker 'Spinoza'. Kant imagines Spinoza to be motivated purely by Kantian principles but surrounded with deceit, violence, and envy, and who sees morally good people subject to "poverty, illnesses, and untimely death" (CJ 5:452). Kant continues:

It [the world] will always remain so until one wide grave engulfs them [the righteous and unrighteous] all together (whether honest or dishonest, here it makes no difference) and

³¹ Versions of this objection are frequently put to me by decision theorists and Kantians alike.

hurls them, the very ones who were capable of Believing that they were the final purpose of all creation, back into the abyss of the purposeless chaos of matter from which they were drawn. – The end, therefore, which this well-intentioned person had and should have ... he would certainly have to give up as impossible; or, *if he would remain attached to the appeal of his moral inner vocation* and not weaken the respect ... then he must assume the existence of a moral author of the world, i.e., of God. (CJ 5:452; my italics)

In my view, the most compelling Kantian response to cases like the despairing activist and the righteous Spinoza is that these agents are *not willing* but *wishing* their ends, because the Attainability Principle still holds for these agents.³² As Kant says, his so-called moral proof of God:

³² Trullinger and Chignell offer interesting interpretations of this passage, which I do not pursue here. According to Trullinger, Kant is pointing to a “decision to be true to one’s vocation, and therefore, true to oneself” (2013, 376). On this reading, faced with despair and the choice to continue to pursue his end, Spinoza realises that he is committed to more than he thinks: he is committed to the Belief that the world is amenable to his actions. Chignell (forthcoming (a), Ch 10; forthcoming (b), following Adams, sees Spinoza’s Belief as underwritten by the moral-psychological advantage that it offers him. Spinoza must do what he ought to do regardless of consequences and his psychology (because Kantian moral obligations hold irrespective of consequences and our actual psychologies). However, he will *despair* that his efforts will make a difference to bringing about their end in the face of an awareness of the unjust systems of which he is a part and an awareness of his impotence to change those systems. Moreover, that despair will result in a waning of *moral resolve*. There is thus a significant moral advantage to Believing in God’s existence: it is psychologically necessary (for all but the most stoic agents) to maintain respect for morality and moral resolve. In my view, interpretive differences about this passage cannot be settled on purely textual grounds. The Spinoza passage, and Kant’s moral proof within which it is situated, is rich and complex. It is sufficient for my purposes that Kant still holds the Attainability Principle in the *Third Critique*.

[Is] not meant to prove to the doubter that there is a God; rather, it is meant to prove that *if his moral thinking is to be consistent*, he must include the assumption of this proposition among the maxims of his practical reason. (CJ 5:451n)³³

Kant wants to show that Spinoza is an inconsistent thinker in doubting God’s existence. The inconsistency, he claims later, is that “reason cannot command the pursuit of an end which is known to be nothing but a phantom of the mind” (CJ 5:472). Once again, Kant is insisting on the Attainability Principle: one can rationally will an end only if one thinks the world is such that it is possible to attain and thinks of oneself as contributing (in part) to its attainment.

Thus, the Kantian response to cases like the despairing activist is not that the activist is irrationally willing their end. It is that they are *not willing* their end; they are *wishing* their end, precisely because they do not see themselves as contributing to the realisation of their end. They do not see themselves as contributing to their end because they do not see their end as one that is realisable.³⁴

³³ Thus, unlike Chignell (forthcoming (a), Ch. 10; forthcoming (b)), I do not see Kant’s moral proof as changing dramatically between the *Second* and *Third Critiques*. According to Chignell, the former relies on the Attainability Principle and the latter relies on empirical premises concerning our tendencies to hope and despair. Given the above-quoted passage, at best, hope and despair find a renewed fresh analysis in the *Third Critique’s* moral proof, *alongside* the basic argument from the *Second Critique*. See Chapter 5.

³⁴ This is why Willaschek (2016) is misleading when he represents the Attainability Principle as a principle of trying, dependent on *not* believing *p* is impossible—as opposed to a principle of willing. According to him, an agent is rational in trying to realise some end only if they (rationally) do *not* believe it to be impossible that their actions could causally contribute to realising their end and that a set of causal conditions that are jointly sufficient to realise their end (of which their actions is a part) obtains. He claims, along decision theoretic lines, that “[w]hether or not it is rational to *try* to do something even though success is highly unlikely will mainly depend (a) on the importance of the end pursued and (b) on the costs involved in *trying*. As long as success is

Having established a Kantian response to despairing activist cases, we can ask how plausible it is. Kant is *not* a decision theorist. First, for the decision theorist, an agent's pursuit of an end can be rational given a sufficiently high expected value of achieving it. A decision theorist can accept the Attainability Principle and claim that it is satisfied by a low credence. On this view, the anti-war activist has a low credence that enduring world peace is attainable in part through their actions, and the pursuit of their end is rational given the immense good of achieving it. By contrast, Kant thinks that the moral worth, or value, of our actions lies in our intentions and not in the value of their success or expected success. For the Kantian, the payoffs of acting are irrelevant to the rationality of one's actions. Second, for the decision theorist, a gambling analysis underwrites the rationality of the anti-war activist's actions. In trying their best to achieve enduring world peace, the anti-war activist gambles on the goodness of success. Even though the odds of success are extremely low and thus warrant a low credence about success, the anti-war activist is rational to act given that enduring world peace is so immensely valuable. On the Kantian picture, such a gamble is not a genuine form of willing: one tries one's best with a low expectation that one's best will contribute to one's end but merely wishes that it will. On the first point, the decision theorist will claim that our intentions are irrelevant given that at issue the attitude that is rational for us to hold towards our ends (i.e., a low credence or Belief). On the second point, the decision theorist will claim

not absolutely impossible, it seems that trying can always be rational if the stakes are high enough" (2016, 239; my italics). Willaschek is correct that, for instance, on a hot day, I can rationally try to get a cold drink from the fridge if I do not believe that it is impossible. Kant's point, however, is that I have not (at least implicitly) formed an attitude about how my actions contribute to the attainment of my end because I have not (at least implicitly) considered the conditions necessary (say the fridge being on) that must hold for my actions to contribute to obtaining my end. By failing to consider these necessary conditions, I fail to will my end—in effect, fail to take a stand on that end *as my end*. The rationality of willing an end does not, for Kant, concern the costs of trying to bring it about.

that they are analysing ‘gambling-as-willing’ and Kantians a mysterious ‘Kantian-willing’. So, both points are clearly contestable Kantian positions, and ones which the decision theorist is unlikely to accept.

Let me offer a principled remark in favour of the Kantian response: it in fact does not recommend irrationality in a way that a decision theoretic analysis of the relevant case might.

The decision theorist might claim that the despairing activist believes that p with credence 0.2, but the value of p 's success is immensely high. They are therefore rational if they *act as if* they have a credence 0.7. Let us grant for the sake of argument that such a scenario is psychologically plausible. Now suppose we ask the activist to reflect and report the strength of their belief. The activist may report a belief with a ‘faith-adjusted’ credence 0.7, and thus the strength of their belief rationally supports their actions. However, in this case, they are not believing proportionately to the evidence they possess. This evidence warranted only a credence 0.2 and was the original reason they despaired.

Alternatively, the activist may report a ‘non-faith-adjusted’ credence 0.2; the strength of their belief is therefore rational because it is proportionate to the evidence they possess. However, in this case, the strength of their belief does not justify their action (acting as if p were true to the degree 0.7). They are acting as if their belief rationally supports their actions, which it does not. On both counts the activist is irrational. They are irrational in thinking either that the strength of their belief supports their actions or that their evidence supports the strength of their belief.³⁵

³⁵ See Buchak (2012) for a discussion of this point and a more nuanced understanding of faith as an action in terms of refraining from looking at evidence.

By contrast, the Kantian response to situations like that of the despairing activist does not recommend irrationality; it instead recommends that the activist stop wishing their end and start willing it.

6.0 Responding to Faith's Critics

I have argued that Kantian Belief is necessary for willing our far-distant goals because in willing an end, we commit ourselves to a rational norm. We do so because such a commitment is constitutive of willing something: willing an end involves *intending to bring that end about* and to do so partly *through one's actions*. I argued that this commitment is constrained by the Attainability Principle: one can rationally will an end only if one thinks the end is possible to attain and sees oneself as contributing (in part) to its attainment. Thus, where evidence that we can attain our end is weak or unavailable, Belief is constitutive of one's willing such an end. Otherwise, one would merely be *wishing* an end. (More precisely, the Attainability Principle that underwrites the Belief is constitutive of willing an end.) Moreover, I showed in the last section that readers should not be troubled by the leading objections to Kant's position thus interpreted.

However, I also argued in Chapter 3 that any philosophically plausible account of secular faith must respond to the well-motivated worries expressed by faith's critics. In what follows, I will therefore focus on how doctrinal Belief might assuage faith's critics. I will assume that what I say about doctrinal Belief is applicable to a Kant-inspired social Belief, as they both involve contingent ends.

Recall the *demotivation worry*: faith that *p* undermines our willingness to act to bring about the state of affairs described in *p*. In doctrinal Belief, however, assent that *p* is a hypothetically necessary means of pursuing an end. Having doctrinal Belief thus does not

make one less likely to act because assenting to the relevant proposition is constitutive of pursuing an end.

Recall the *certainty worry*: faith that p results in a harmful certainty that our goals are the correct goals. We are instead looking for a model of faith that (1) allows us room to debate what we should pursue as our distant future goals and (2) is sensitive to the messy and uncertain process of bringing about change.

In response to (1), doctrinal Belief and social Belief involve contextually dependent ends and not universally held ends of morality. They thus allow room for debate about which ends to pursue. The biologist's assent to the proposition that 'there is a God' is contextually appropriate to their end of pursuing a richer, deeper and more unified explanation of the natural world. Rationality does not require that we all take up the biologist's end. Were the biologist to re-train as a mathematician, rationality would not require them to continue pursuing their original end. In turn, it is rationally permissible for a biologist and mathematician to debate which ends we should pursue (given limited resources, for instance). When I refer to 'contingent' ends, they are contingent in the sense that Kant's rational morality does not require that all rational beings take them up. Kantians might be able to give a compelling independent argument that all rational beings must take up the end of reversing climate change or bringing about a workers' paradise, but these arguments will rely on contestable Kantian principles.

In response to (2), the second aspect of the certainty worry, I argued in Chapter 1 that our assents are justified in doctrinal Belief only if a hypothetically necessary condition of pursuing an end is firm assent to a proposition that refers to an idea. I also proposed that this means-end relationship is subject to a doxastic universalisability test. That is, we should ask ourselves whether others would think that a firm assent to a certain proposition is a necessary

means to a proposed end if they were in our position. I also claimed that the doxastic universalisability test rules out firm assent to the proposition that God intentionally orders nature as a necessary for biological research today. I might privately hold that firm assent to God's existence is a necessary condition of pursuing an account of purposive nature. If I ask myself whether others would agree, however, I will concede that they would not, given even a rudimentary grasp of today's biology. Yet in Kant's pre-Darwinian times, a firm assent to the proposition that God intentionally orders nature might well pass the doxastic universalisability test.

The point is that doctrinal Beliefs are revisable, as are social Beliefs. This may be what Kant means when he says that "there is something unstable" (A828/B856) about doctrinal Belief. Doctrinal Belief in this sense does not result in certainty. Instead, it is always subject to the doxastic universalisability test. If biological evolution, human psychology or sociology should one day provide us with the basis for an empirical account of how to reach our goal, we should then revise our doctrinal Belief. Doctrinal Belief is sensitive to the messy and uncertain process of bringing about change because it does not result in comforting certainty.

Recall the *religious vestiges worry*: faith is a religious attitude that we cannot be separate from religious contexts, so secular faith is an incoherent notion. However, if we model social Belief on doctrinal Belief, then this worry never gets going. Kant's model for doctrinal Belief is pragmatic Belief, which is a secular attitude.

Take Kant's claim that doctrinal Beliefs are assents that enjoy practical justification and which are "an analogue" (A825/B853) of pragmatic Belief. In the *Canon*, Kant cites the case of a doctor who must act urgently to save a patient's life without knowing the illness. He uses this scenario as an example of pragmatic Belief. A practical relation justifies the doctor's firm assent (that the patient has consumption—that we saw in Chapter 1): it is a hypothetically

necessary means to save the patient. Kant writes that “he does not know the illness. He looks to the symptoms, and judges, because he does not know any better, that it is consumption. His Belief is contingent even in his own judgment; someone else might perhaps do better” (A824/B852). For Kant, the doctor’s end of saving the patient is contingent because it is dependent on his circumstances. It is not a general requirement of rational morality.

Note that in the case of the doctor, pragmatic Belief is a secular attitude: it is an attitude directed towards people in this world. Kant acknowledges that our knowledge is sometimes insufficient for pursuing our goals (i.e., saving the patient) but also that it is irrational to fall back on faith about other-worldly entities (i.e., that God will save the patient). He thus acknowledges a *very* human condition: sometimes we find ourselves in complex situations that require a decision to act without sufficient evidential justification. In doing so, we reduce a complex situation to a binary decision. In such situations, it is *epistemically* irrational to invoke divine forces because it oversteps our epistemic bounds. The doctor would overstep his epistemic bounds in claiming that God told him the cause of the patient’s illness.³⁶ If pragmatic Belief it is an attitude directed towards people in this world, then it is a secular attitude. It is an attitude that arises in contexts in which we find ourselves with our backs against the wall and lack the knowledge that a divine entity will make good on our decision. If

³⁶ Some people argue that it may be *instrumentally* rational for agents to believe in divine forces, an argument most famously put forward by James (1896, 500-501). Suppose the only way that I can make a leap across the chasm is to believe that an angel or God will assist me. In this case, I seem instrumentally rational in holding the relevant attitude. I am sceptical about these kinds of arguments because they are psychologically implausible. If a subject believes a proposition is true, they will tend to judge that p is true based on the evidence they possess and report as much when asked. In Jamesian cases, however, a subject (when asked) will presumably recognise that they believe for reasons that are irrelevant to whether p is true.

pragmatic Belief is a secular attitude, and it is also our model for social and doctrinal Belief, the latter two are secular attitudes with no religious vestiges to shed.

Recall the *evidentialist worry*: faith violates the principle that we ought to form beliefs (in the contemporary sense) based only on relevant evidence. Wood draws our attention to the compatibility between moral Belief and evidentialism. He thinks that “moral Belief does not violate Clifford’s evidentialist principle’ (Wood 2020, 57) that we ought to believe only on the basis of evidence. According to Wood, evidentialism on the one hand requires us to continue questioning and to remain open to evidence; this is compatible with being practically committed to our goals. On the other hand, an honest commitment to an end is compatible with a thorough analysis of the evidence that might render success unlikely (*Ibid.*, 59). The point is that Belief for Kant begins where knowledge leaves off.

Although I think that doctrinal Belief and not moral Belief is the right model for faith in our social lives, Wood is clearly correct in substance. There is no tension between evidentialism and Belief. In all modes of Belief, we are aware or potentially aware that we lack objectively sufficient grounds for that assent (i.e., evidence).³⁷

However, I want to highlight the depth of Kant’s commitments to evidentialism. In some contemporary epistemological debates about what counts as reasons for believing, *evidentialism* identifies the view that *only* evidence for p counts as a reason to believe p. For instance, evidentialism implies that wanting God to exist is not a reason to believe that God exists. *Pragmatism*, conversely, holds that pragmatic considerations (the costs of being

³⁷ Kant derides “dogmatic faith [that] announces itself to be *knowledge*” because it is “dishonest or impudent” (Rel 6:52): it professes substantive knowledge of the supersensible and thus obstructs our making practical commitments.

wrong, for instance) can be a reason to believe *p*. Pragmatists standardly motivate their view by entertaining a pair of cases in which the evidential support for a belief that *p* remains fixed, but the pragmatic contexts vary from low to high stakes. For instance, suppose you ask a waiter whether a dish contains peanuts. In a low stakes case, you have a minor dislike of peanuts; in a high stakes case, you have a potentially fatal peanut allergy.³⁸ Pragmatists claim that reflecting on cases like these show that non-evidential features can affect our reasons for believing in high-stakes cases, such that what counts as knowledge can vary. However, an alternative explanation for what is going on is that the waiter’s *standard for evidence* becomes higher on learning that you have a fatal peanut allergy.³⁹

In the contemporary debate between evidentialism and pragmatism, Kant is an evidentialist: Belief is rational only in contexts where we lack evidence and thus cannot have knowledge.⁴⁰ He writes that “rational Belief ... is not inferior in degree to knowing” (O 8:141) but is instead a “completely different” (O 8:142) kind of assent: i.e., one that is

³⁸ See Ross and Schroeder (2014).

³⁹ A plausible explanation for what is going on in these cases is that the epistemic norms of belief remain fixed, but that our beliefs can be guided by pragmatic norms. In high-stakes cases, we defer to practical norms; we are rational to do so. Only a philosopher would remain fixated on epistemic norms in a life-or-death situation. As this explanation is not central to my argument, I do not pursue it here.

⁴⁰ Kant considers his own high-stakes case. He says that “it is not enough for the judge, for example, that he *merely Believe* that someone accused of a crime actually committed this crime. He must know it (juridically), or he acts unconscientiously” (JL 9:70; original italics). Presumably, the phrase “one must know” implies that one has an obligation to form beliefs on evidence or gather evidence that could count as knowledge. This is an eminently plausible position. If a proposition is theoretically decidable—in that its object is a possible object of experience—then we ought to assent on the basis of evidence, lest we send an innocent person to jail (for instance).

practically justified. With this point in mind, we can see that Kant's view is that pragmatic stakes do not affect our reason to believe in the contemporary sense.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have developed a Kantian account of social Belief. I showed that social Belief can both make sense of how such an attitude is necessary for pursuing our distant future goals and can respond plausibly to faith's critics. Along the way, I suggested that Belief is necessary for willing our far-distant goals because in willing an end, we commit ourselves to a rational norm. We do so because such a commitment is constitutive of willing something: willing an end is *intending to bring it about* and to do so partly *through one's actions*. I argued that this commitment is constrained by the Attainability Principle: one can rationally will an end only if one thinks the world is such that it is possible to attain and if one thinks of oneself as contributing (in part) to its attainment. Moreover, we saw that the leading objections to the Attainability Principle are not deeply worrying.

Henrich Heine once quipped that Kant developed his notion of practically justified assents as a half ironic afterthought to satisfy his manservant's need for a God.⁴¹ Not only is Heine's characterisation deeply misleading, it is also a distraction from Kant's positive views on the nature and norms of propositional attitudes that go beyond evidence. In trying to lead us away from this distraction, I aimed to show that Kantian Belief lies at the centre of an ambiguous but rational vision of human striving, and that Kant would recommend that we adopt such an attitude in pursuit of our contemporary far-distant social goals. I admit that

⁴¹ Heine (1835, 87).

Kant never talks of a social Belief. If I am correct, however, his philosophy has room for social Beliefs: assents that are necessary means to our shared *contingent social* ends.

In this chapter, I focused on a Kantian answer to the question ‘*what must we Believe?*’ In the next chapter, I turn to the second part of my dual model of Kantian secular faith (rational hope), focusing on the question ‘*what may we hope?*’ Here, I have taken one step towards showing that Kant answers these questions quite differently.

Chapter 5 — Kantian Rational Hope and Secular Faith

Introduction

Hope is part of our everyday life. One might hope that a friend has a good day. A job applicant might hope that they get a job. A parent might hope that their child returns safely from school. In Biden's presidential victory speech, he spoke of a "*hope, joy, and renewed faith in tomorrow to bring a better day*" (my italics).¹ If we do hope, we want to know what that attitude is, what rationalises our holding it, and what is its connection to action.

In the *Canon*, Kant famously asks "what may I hope?" [*Was darf ich hoffen?*] (A805/B833). The aim of this chapter is to clarify his position on the nature and norms of hope, and test whether his account can plausibly respond to the worries of faith's critics—as spelt out in Chapter 3. However, as we saw, in the previous chapter, Kantian scholars have tended to conflate Kantian hope and Belief.² By contrast, in this chapter, I present Kantian hope as a distinct propositional attitude from Belief and explain how hope responds to different kinds of normative constraints than those involved in Belief. Kant's account of hope, as I interpret it, suggests that it is a psychologically necessary attitude (for most of us, most of the time) to maintain our resolve to act towards our far-distant goals. What emerges is twofold

¹ The Washington Post. Joe Biden's victory speech, annotated. November 7, 2020

² See Strawson (2000, 251); O'Neill (1996, 282-3); Gardner (1999, 315-8); Firestone (2009); Flikschuh (2009); Nieman (1994, 156-164); Goldman (2012). For further details see Chapter 4, Section 1.

(1) an account of Kantian hope that is a rational attitude that goes beyond evidence, is necessary to pursue our far-distant goals, and can respond to faith's critics' most prominent worries, and (2) a defence of (what I call) the *Dual and Distinct Thesis*: Belief and hope are distinctive but both necessary attitudes for pursuing our far-distant goals—Belief is constitutive of pursuing these goals, and hence necessary; hope is psychologically necessary for maintaining our resolve in those pursuits—given our psychological propensity to despair if we do not see progress resulting from our efforts. By reversing the tendency to conflate Kantian Belief and hope, this chapter highlights the role Kantian hope might play in our secular lives, and shows that his account is capable of contributing to contemporary debates on hope's nature and norms.

In Sections 1 and 2, which form the body of this chapter, I present and defend my account of Kantian hope. I argue that, like many contemporary theorists of hope, Kant endorses the view that hoping that *p* minimally involves believing *p* is possible but not certain, and desiring that *p* is true. I further argue that, in some contexts, our belief and desire that *p* are psychologically necessary for us to maintain our pursuit of a relevant end. In Section 3, I compare Kantian Belief with hope, and argue that they are distinctive attitudes that complement each other. In Section 4, I assume that the worries of faith's critics also apply to hope. I review their worries and show how Kant's account of hope can reply in a convincing manner. In Section 5, I highlight the implications of my Kantian account of hope and Belief (from the previous chapter) for our understanding of these attitudes in our secular lives.

1.0 Kant on Hope

It is almost a truism that any account of an attitude's rational conditions requires a description of that attitude. So, in this section, I focus on Kant's description of hope—and do so in relation to contemporary accounts of hope. In the next section, I focus on his rational

conditions on hope. In doing so, we take steps towards understanding how Kant’s account of hope involves an attitude that is rational to hold without evidence and necessary for us to pursue far-distant goals, and is an account that can respond to faith’s critics.

1.1 Kant and the Standard Definition of Hope: Desire and belief

Contemporary philosophers tend to analyse hope starting with a minimal standard definition: a subject hopes that *p* only if they desire that *p* and believe that *p* is possible, but not certain (see, for example, Palmqvist (forthcoming)).³ To begin, let’s see how Kantian hope might align with this definition.⁴

On the standard definition, hoping that *p* requires desiring that *p* is true. If I hope that tomorrow will be sunny, I desire that it be true—in the sense that the proposition in question describes a state of affairs that I want to be true. In this way, we speak of hoping that we might achieve something, that a rumour is true and that a recital will go well.

Similarly, Kantian hope requires desiring that *p*. Kant speaks of our hopes as our wants and inclinations—here read as desires. For example, he says that people hope something will be true “because they would like to have it” (Blom-L 24:93), that “all **hope** concerns happiness” and that “[h]appiness is the satisfaction of all our inclinations” (A805/B833; original emphasis).

³ Likewise, Pettit describes superficial hope as “the belief that some prospect may obtain or may not obtain, where one desires that it does obtain” (Pettit 2004, 154) and builds a substantive version of hope upon it. For other accounts that take the standard view as a starting point see McGreer (2004); Kwong (2019); Bovens (1999); Day (1969). Such a view has historical root in Descartes (1649, 389) and Hobbes (1651, I.VI.14).

⁴ See Milona (2020, 99-144) for an excellent summary of the contemporary philosophical discussions of hope.

Moreover, the standard view says: hoping that *p* requires believing that *p* is possible but not certain. Pettit puts it this way, in hope, we form a “belief that the end for which we hope is still an open possibility” (2004, 153). Complexities surround how we should understand ‘possibility’,⁵ however the basic thought is understandable. Suppose a parent is waiting for the safe return of their child. They cannot hope for that eventuality if they have already found the child safe and sound—and thus have certainty. Similarly, I cannot hope that a triangle has three sides as I have analytic certainty. However, I can hope that tomorrow a political party will win the election or that the winter rains will continue. In this sense, I believe that a state of affairs is possible but not certain. Moreover, suppose someone says: ‘I hope that Kim will stop drinking; but I am certain that he won’t.’ On the standard view, they do not express a genuine hope. Here, they merely desire that Kim stops drinking—while believing with certainty that he will not.

Similarly, Kantian hope that *p* requires believing that *p* is possible but not certain. For example, for Kant, the moral person hopes, but does not have certainty that they will receive happiness in proportion to virtue: “Logical certainty of a future life is very hard to attain ... if one considers that here on earth happiness is not always a consequence of good behaviour, hence another world is to be hoped for in which this will occur” (Blom-L 24:200).⁶

⁵ One suggestion is that here might be that epistemic possibility rationally constrains hope. You might desire that there is an elephant in the fridge and believe that it is possible; and, yet, your belief might be irrational because given what you know elephants do not fit in fridges. In this case, your hope is irrational. For a Kantian take on possibility, see Chignell (2014, 105-6). He thinks (somewhat plausibly) that we may rationally hope only for propositions that refer to logically possible concepts. He also claims that we can rationally hope only for concepts that are real possibilities—(on his account) logically possible concepts, whose predicates do not cancel each other out (like a ball that is completely red and green all over).

⁶ See also: “reason is not enlightened enough to survey the entire series of predetermining causes that foretell with *certainty the happy or unhappy* consequences of humankind’s

A common addition to the standard account of hope is a distinction between ‘profound’ and ‘mundane’ hopes.⁷ In mundane hope, one might hope that it does not rain tomorrow or that you will have a nice day. While generally it is accepted that these are genuine cases of hope, they are not profound hope in that they are not “hopes that are essential to our long-term commitments or ones that we build our lives around” (Jackson 2021, 43).⁸ One reason to think there is a substantive difference between profound and mundane hope is that in the former, we have a strong desire that *p* be true (I might, for instance, only care in passing about you having a nice day). Another is that some hopes seem appropriate to build our lives around, whereas others do not. For instance, it might seem appropriate for a political activist to build their life around a hope that the world can rid itself of global warming. But it seems inappropriate to build my life around that hope that you have a nice day.

Given that Kant’s interest in hope is connected with our being morally good agents, Kant’s concern is also with so-called profound or life-structuring hope. The ‘what may I hope’ question arises, for Kant, only if I do what I ought to do.

Before continuing, let’s note that it is natural to read Kantian hope as a mode of assent. For Kant, assent is our most general propositional attitude. For him, an assent is “taking something to be true” (*Fürwahrhalten*) (A820 B848) in the sense of ‘accepting’ or ‘holding’ a proposition to be true, and it can be voluntary or non-voluntary. On this view, thinking,

activities in accordance with the mechanism of nature (although it does let us hope that these will be in accord with our wishes)” (PP 8:370; my italics).

⁷ These labels vary in the literature. See Chae (2020) and Jackson (2021) who distinguish between distinction ‘life-shaping’ or ‘profound’ and ‘prosaic’ or ‘mundane’ hope, Pettit (2004) distinguishes between substantive and superficial hopes, and Chignell (2014) distinguishes between ‘humdrum hope’ and ‘deep, life-structuring hope.’

⁸ See also Chae (2020).

suspending judgment, believing, entertaining, knowing, opining, having faith that p are all forms of assent. Kant typically speaks of hoped-for propositions. He says, for instance, that one “hope[s] for happiness in the same measure as he has made himself worthy of it in his conduct” (A809/B837). I read this propositionally: one hopes that p (that ‘one receives happiness equal to their conduct’).⁹ If hope is propositional and assent is our most general propositional attitude, presumably, hope is a mode of assent.¹⁰

So hope’s standard definition says a subject hopes only if the desire that p and belief that p is possible. Kant picture is similar, our assents are hopes that p:

(1) Only if we desire that p, and

(2) Only if we believe that p is possible but not certain.¹¹

⁹ Here is another typical passage where Kant invokes a propositional hope: “Reason says that whoever does ... as much as lies within his power to satisfy his obligation ... *can legitimately hope that what lies outside his power will be supplemented by the supreme wisdom in some way or other* ... without reason thereby presuming to determine the way or know in what it consists” (Rel 6:171; my italics; Rel 6:52).

¹⁰ As far as I know, Kant never claims explicitly that hope is a mode of assent, and thus a candidate for analysis as a propositional attitude. Some commentators suggest that Kantian hope is non-propositional. See Zuckert (2018), for whom Kantian hope is a feeling, a “felt consciousness *of* our passivity or vulnerability; it concerns, precisely, outcomes beyond our control, and our need of support from that which is beyond us, for our aims to be accomplished, our desires to be fulfilled” (*Ibid.*, 258). On this view, hope is a subject’s appropriate emotional stance towards their world as amendable to their desires and requirements. According to Zuckert, the feeling of Kantian hope is “quasi-motivational” (*Ibid.*, 258) as it does not give us direct reasons for action, but supports us because without hope a subject’s future is closed off—such that they have no reason to do their part in bringing about their ends. However, the textual support for the non-propositional reading of Kantian hope is weak. I am aware only of one passage where Kant speaks of the “feeling” of hopelessness (R 6:71).

¹¹ Chignell plausibly claims that rational permissibility arises at this stage because, in hope, belief that p is possible is rationally constrained by logical and real (or metaphysical)

2.0 Kantian Hope's Rational Conditions

2.1 Rational Permissibility: Action

Kant's full question is: "If I do what I should, what may I then hope? (A805/B833). I take 'may' to indicate rational permissibility. So Kant's question suggests that, for him, action is a condition on hope's rational permissibility when action is available to us:¹² it is rational for me to hope that p only if I do what I should do given that the action is available to me.¹³ Call this an action condition. For Kant, the action condition distinguishes hope from wishing. He claims that if we want to become a better human being, we might think that God will make us better "without [our] having to contribute" but this amounts to "mere wishing" (Rel 6:51). Suppose I wish to run a marathon, but I sit in my office doing nothing to bring about that end (like training and eating well). Kant is making the plausible claim that my wish to run a marathon is just that—mere wishing. In contrast, in rational hope

[e]veryone one must do as much as it is in his power to do; and only then, ... can [they] hope that what does not lie in [their] power will be made good by cooperation from

possibility (Chignell 2014). I present rational permissibility as entering later in the picture in the form of action. But this presentational choice is only to show the similarities between the standard picture and Kantian hope. It does not denote a substantive interpretative disagreement.

¹² Reading Kantian hope as rationally constrained is a widespread move. See Chignell (2014); Goldman (2012); O'Neill (1996); Huber (2021).

¹³ See McGreer (2004) for an alternative view. For her, talk of rational constraints on hope are misplaced. Instead, she thinks that hopes are more or less appropriate.

above. Nor is it absolutely necessary that the human being know in what this cooperation consists. (Rel 6:52)¹⁴

Here, Kant expresses a twofold action condition on rational hope. First, in rational hope, we must do our best to bring about the hoped-for end—engaging in our own “incessant labouring and becoming” (Rel 6:48) as he says.¹⁵ Second, Kant acknowledges that our ability to change ourselves and our world is “not always within our power” (MM 6:482).¹⁶ Thus doing our best might not be sufficient for bringing about our hoped-for end. We cannot—so to speak—always pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

This second point is significant because it suggests that, in Kantian rational hope, in pursuing an end, we recognise that our own agential power is not sufficient to achieve it. Suppose a police officer stops you for no obvious reason and you are worried about them unwarrantedly arresting you. You do exactly what the police officer tells you to do in order to avoid arrest. In Kantian rational hope, you may hope that the officer does not change their mind and arrest you all the same. For Kant, if you use all your agential power to bring about your hoped-for end, then you may rationally hope for what lies outside your agency’s scope.

¹⁴ See also Rel 6:101.

¹⁵ Note that on the standard view, we can hope for a past state of affairs, which by definition fully lies outside our present agential powers. I might hope that nobody was hurt in the tsunami yesterday. Having not seen the news, I believe it is possible and desire that it is true. In this case, even though the event has already occurred, my available evidence does not inform me about its truth. So, from a subjective viewpoint, it is not inevitable. On Kant’s view, such a hope is irrational because it fully lies outside my present agential powers.

¹⁶ Zuckert emphasises that, for Kant, we hope for states of affairs “over which we do not have (total) control” (Zuckert 2018, 247; see also, Blöser 2020).

Notice that, it is the agent's setting of an end (i.e., avoiding arrest) that generates rationally permissible hope and not the action itself.¹⁷

So let's add a rational condition to Kantian hope. Hope that *p* is rational only if

(3) We set and pursue an end but are confronted with our inability to bring that end about.

2.2 Objects of Rational Hope, Lack of Knowledge

At this stage, let's note that Kant usually (but not always) considers hope that *p* to be rational in contexts in which we lack knowledge of *p*.¹⁸ For example, he says we may hope for “a God and a world that is not visible to us” (A813/B841). Elsewhere, Kant claims that we must be “able to hope that ... [we] will attain ... the road that leads in that direction [of moral progress]” even though we cannot have any “[a]ssurance [that we are morally progressing] ... neither via immediate consciousness nor via the evidence of the life [we have] hitherto led, for the depths of [our] own heart are to [ourselves] inscrutable” (Rel 6:51). So Kant is not concerned with any old hoped-for proposition. Instead, his concern is propositions for which we lack knowledge as candidates for rationally permissible hopes.

¹⁷ Kant's action condition on rational hope echoes contemporary usages of the label ‘uninteresting’ or ‘superficial’ sense of hope (Pettit 2004). I have no agency in relation to the possibility of it raining tomorrow, which renders it a superficial hope. As one contemporary philosopher puts it, hope has an “aura of agency” (Bovens 1999, 679), which persists even when we believe our own agency cannot bring about an end.

¹⁸ Kant sometimes says that we are rationally justified in hoping that *p* even though we have historical evidence that not-*p*: “It does not matter how many doubts may be raised against my hopes from history, which, if they were proved, could move me to desist from a task so apparently futile; as long as these doubts cannot be made quite certain I cannot exchange the duty for the rule of prudence not to attempt the impracticable” (TP 8:309).

As we saw in Chapter 1, knowledge, for Kant, is an assent (or holding-for-true) with objective grounds in the form of probabilistic evidence (experience, testimony, mathematical proofs, and inferential reasoning) and subjective grounds in the sense of a subject's awareness, or potential awareness of, the grounds on which they assent (A820-2/B848-50).¹⁹ Thus to say that hope is rational in contexts in which we lack knowledge of *p* is to say that hope is rationally permissible when we lack the objective and subjective grounds of assent that *p* required for knowledge.

Hope, however, also seems consistent with possessing knowledge. For instance, my rational hope that my bike is downstairs is consistent with me knowing that it is the case (say because I can remember where I put it). Similarly, my rational hope that it will be sunny tomorrow is consistent with me knowing the relevant meteorological facts about the extremely high likelihood of sunshine tomorrow.²⁰ The bike and sunshine examples suggest

¹⁹ See Chapter 2.

²⁰ Whether hope and knowledge are conceptually inconsistent is relatively under-explored. Some philosophers claim that hope is consistent with a wide range of credences, even very low ones while remaining noncommittal about whether we can rationally hope for things we know (Jackson 2021). Some philosophers explicitly claim that hope is consistent with knowledge (Chignell 2013). For instance, I can know that my bike is downstairs (if say, I have strong memorial and testimonial evidence) but still hope that it is so. Chignell suggests that we tend to assert the stronger attitude—i.e., assert that we know that *p*, even though we might *also* hope that *p*. Yet again, some philosophers claim that hope is inconsistent with knowledge. I adapt a case from Benton (2018) to show how this claim might be plausible. Suppose a journalist knows a suspect's whereabouts. Further, suppose that the journalist says to the police that he hopes the suspect is home but might not be. Benton suggests that we will likely judge that the journalist has misled the police because the journalist, by saying that they hope that *p*, has “somehow represented [themselves] as not knowing” that *p* (Benton 2018; see also Martin 2011 and Downie 1963). It might be that Benton's case suggests that hope and knowledge are semantically inconsistent. I think the deeper question is whether it suggests that the two attitudes are conceptually inconsistent. Untangling the semantic from conceptual issues surrounding hope's connection to knowledge seems to me a fruitful avenue for future research.

that, even if hope is consistent with lacking knowledge, this does not imply that hope is inconsistent with possessing knowledge.

So I think we should read Kant's discussion of hope and lack of knowledge in terms of subjective grounds of assent. In Chapter 1, we saw that Kant thinks that subjective grounds lie in the "mind of him who judges" (A820/B848) and that they involve the awareness of a "particular subject" (JL 9:66). In the case of knowledge assents, a subject has subjective grounds to assent that *p* only if they are aware of the objective grounds or potentially able to cite them upon reflection. By contrast, in hope, a subject's assent is rational only if they are aware, or potentially aware, that they are assenting *not* solely on objective grounds. Thus, in hope, a subject is aware that their desires play a role in their assent. Such a constraint does not rule out that a subject might possess such objective grounds (in the form of strong evidence), and if they assent on those grounds (and all goes well), their assent will come to count as knowledge. Thus, for instance, for my hope 'that it will be sunny tomorrow' to count as a rational hope, I must be aware or potentially aware that I am *not* assenting solely on the basis of evidence.

We can see the relation between hope and lack of knowledge in two prominent cases of Kantian profound, life-structuring hope. For Kant, one such profound, life-structuring hope arises in our hoped-for happiness in proportion with morality (A809/B837)—the highest good. He thinks that morality's function is guiding us to live rightly, in the sense of following a priori laws, and not making ourselves and others happy. Yet, he famously claims that we ought to pursue as an end the highest good, despite the fact that we lack knowledge of the

relation between happiness and morality.²¹ In the above terms, our assents regarding the relationship between morality and happiness cannot have objective grounds. This is because our knowledge of moral laws is “determine[d] completely a priori” (A807/B835), but our knowledge of happiness rests on “empirical principles” (A806/B834) as it is the “satisfaction of all our inclinations” (A805/B833). Thus, there are no empirical or rationally relevant objective grounds of assent concerning the relation between happiness and morality, and hence we lack knowledge of the highest good. However, according to Kant everyone may rationally “hope for happiness in the same measure as he has made himself worthy of it in his conduct, though only in the idea of pure reason” (A809/B837). Kant is claiming that we are rational to hope that there is a just-deserves principle at work in the world. The basic thought is that it seems morally perverse that people who cheat, steal, and act out of malice intent enjoy a happy life. Even though we lack knowledge of the relationship between happiness and morality, we are rational to hope for such a just-deserves principle—as long as we are aware or potentially aware that we are not assenting solely on evidence.

²¹ Let me head off an objection that Kant is adding another duty (to promote virtue in proportion to happiness) alongside (and thus inconsistent with) a duty to *only* act from moral law. Schopenhauer aired this objection: “[w]e do not find Kant’s doctrine of virtue so pure; or rather the presentation falls far short of the spirit and has in fact lapsed into inconsistency. In his highest good . . . we find virtue wedded to happiness” (1818, Vol. 1, 524). Silber (1963) reads the highest good as adding content to the moral law but as a positive aspect of Kant’s view. On this reading, the maxim to promote happiness in proportion to virtue is a categorical imperative. According to Silber, this additional content supplies a material state of affairs to Kant’s empty moral formalise, and thus does substantive work. Beck (1960) reads the highest good as adding superfluous content—introducing theological notions into Kant’s moral system. These readings are misleading, Kant explicitly says that the highest good does not add additional content to the moral law but is the sum total of one’s duties. See, for example, the highest good “does not increase the number of morality’s duties but rather provides these with a special point of reference for the unification of all ends” (6:5).

For Kant, another instance of profound, life-structuring hope arises in our efforts to establish the “idea of an ethical community” (Rel 6:100) on earth: an as-yet-unseen society on earth “solely designed for the preservation of morality” (Rel 6:94). Kant claims that an ethical community would be arranged only to promote and encourage morality, and its scope would be universal. It refers to the “ideal of a totality of human beings” (Rel 6:96) and the “entire human race” (Rel 6:94). He thinks that it need not replace our political communities (those arranged according to civic laws); instead, an ethical community might exist in the “midst” of a political community and be “made up of all the members” (Rel 6:94) of it.

For Kant, we ought to will an ethical community to reverse the evils that result from our being in a society. He says, “as soon as [one] is among human beings[,] ... [e]nvy, addiction to power, avarice and malignant inclinations ... assail[s] [one’s] nature” (Rel 6:94). The thought is that, even though we want to live in a society to develop our talents, when we live together, we want to get our own way. Kant famously labels this tension our “social unsociability” (I 8:21) and thinks it will manifest in ambition, tyranny, greed, and pursuit of higher rank as opposed to acting from duty—in a word, evil. Here is not the place to discuss Kant’s theory of evil. However, given that evil results from our being in a society, Kant thinks that evil must be addressed at the level of society—which the establishment of an ethical community is supposed to address. However, Kant claims that “we cannot know whether as a whole [an ethical community] is also in our powers” (Rel 6:98). Since an ethical community involves the totality of human beings, it is unclear that we can bring it about because an empirical accounting of everyone (including infinitely many future generations) will always be one step behind, which under the threat of relapse would undermine the whole project—both now and into the indefinite future. Moreover, we cannot possess evidence that the world or other agents will cooperate with our efforts. So we do not have knowledge ‘that bringing about an ethical community is in our powers’ because we lack objective grounds in the form

of evidence (experience, testimony, mathematical proofs, and inferential reasoning). Even though we lack knowledge of the relation between an ethical community and our powers, we are rational to hope that we are progressing towards an ethical community—(again) as long as we are aware or potentially aware that we are not assenting solely on evidence. So, alongside action, for Kant, there is a subjective condition on hope.

Up to this point, Kant’s account of hope looks like this. On Kant’s picture, our assents are hopes that p:

(1) Only if we desire that p, and

(2) Only if we believe that p is possible but not certain.

Hope that p is rational only if

(3) We set and pursue an end but are confronted with our inability to bring that end about, and

(4) We are aware, or potential aware, that we are not assenting solely on objective grounds.

2.3 Hope’s Psychological Necessity

Kant says that it is “impossible for it [i.e., following the moral law] to happen” (A812/B840) if we do not have hope in “a God and a world that is not visible to us” (A812/B840).

Likewise, he says:

[the] idea of the highest good is in the world ... is not ... an empty one; for it meets our natural need, which would otherwise be a *hindrance to moral resolve*, to think for all our doings and non doings taken as a whole, some sort of ultimate end which reason can justify. (Rel 6:5; my italics)

In this way, he claims that hope is necessary for us to always follow the moral law. The basic thought is that, as finite beings, our resolve to act morally will wear away if we experience prolonged ineffectualness of our actions to effect change in the world. So, for Kant, we must necessarily hope that our “well-intentioned effort[s]” (Rel 6:101) are fulfilled sometimes.²² But why?

Chignell (2020) reads hope’s necessity as *moral consequence-dependent psychology*: our psychology is such that we must see good consequences resulting from our actions; if this is absent, we must hope for those consequences.²³ The thought is that to defy despair, we must

²² A common objection to the minimal standard view of hope (a belief and desire that p) is the so-called exclusion problem. Consider two parents searching for their child. They both believe it is possible, and desire it to be true, that their child will return safely. Yet one parent hopes, and one despairs. The exclusion problem says that the standard minimal view cannot distinguish between hope and despair. I think the Kantian account of hope as psychologically necessary for pursuing our goals hints at a way to reframe the exclusion problem. Instead of looking primarily for a third condition of hope that excludes despair, we are looking for an account of hope as a mental state or collection of mental states that resists despair. Hope would be whatever mental state or collection of mental states that help us resist despair—understood here as a disposition to stop pursuing a relevant goal. Thus, the third condition might be satisfied in many potential ways as long as it renders one more likely to continue in pursuit of a relevant goal. Listing these ways would be an empirical matter. This is not the place to pursue this issue.

²³ For a contrasting view, see Cureton (2018) for whom Kant’s claims about rational hope depict “constitutive feature of rationality” and “not merely psychological” (2018, 296). But Cureton does not explain why hope is constitutive of rationality. Instead, he (rightly) claims that, for Kant, “[f]ully rational agents necessarily have reasonable hope in order to avoid lapsing into moral nihilism and despondency” (2018, 297). However, it is unclear to me how Cureton’s point about moral nihilism establishes a constitutive feature of rationality. If his point is that hoping is a part of being rational, this cannot be right as Kant

desire and believe that it is possible that the world is such that our actions can make a difference.²⁴

There are three important upshots of this ‘psychological’ reading of Kantian hope. First, it does justice to the kind of beings that we are—beings that care about the results of our efforts. The thought is that we are beings with embodied needs, and one of these needs is to see that our actions have positive consequences in the world. When this need goes unfulfilled, we despair that our actions will ever result in change and as a result fall into inaction. Second, the reading is plausible not only in moral cases but generally. In cases where we set ourselves a goal, if we experience prolonged frustration of our efforts to reach those goals, we will, in all likelihood, give up (Chignell 2018; 2020; forthcoming (b)). Third, presenting Kantian hope as psychologically advantageous fits the textual evidence. Kant associates hope with “comfort” (Rel 6:76) and with helping us maintain “moral resolve” (Rel 6:5) in the face of not seeing our actions make a difference, both of which read as psychological claims.

One might complain that a consequence-dependent moral psychology reading cannot do justice to the way Kant talks about hope as necessary for *all* agents who pursue the moral law. For instance, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he claims that there is a “*necessary* connection

allows for irrational hopes—“crafty hope” (Rel 6:160) or “mere wishing” (Rel 6:51), hope without action.

²⁴ Insole offers a degrees reading of Kantian hope’s necessity: “there is a reactive relationship between motivation and hope, which is to say, because (and only because) a person grasps moral obligation and has religious hope, they are fully motivated” such that in lacking hope our motivation will suffer “but only to a degree” (2008, 348). I, also, think that hope comes in degrees. Take the case of a parent searching for their missing child. In the first hours, when it is still likely the child is at a friend’s place, the parent requires little hope to look for the child. But by day three, when all obvious locations have been checked, the parent (plausibly) requires much more hope to continue their search. So Insole is on the right track. His reading, however, fails to explain the kind of necessity at issue in Kantian hope. Here, I do not further pursue the degrees dimension of hope.

of the hope of being happy with the unremitting effort to make oneself worthy of happiness” (A810/B839; my italics), wherein presumably ‘necessary’ refers to necessary for *all* rational beings. By contrast, on the consequence-dependent moral psychology reading, Kantian hope is only necessary for *some* agents, those with certain psychological make-ups, in *some* contexts. We can imagine a stoic Kantian moralist or stoic activist whose psychology is ultra-resilient. Faced with misery and lack of progress, they will not fall into despair, and therefore, will not need a despair-defying hope.

If one puts the above complaint in terms of an *incapacity* to hope, the difficulty that hope is only necessary for *some* agents is more pressing. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explicitly claims that promoting the highest good is “inseparably bound up with the moral law” (CPvR 5:114). Exploiting this passage, Insole complains that if hope in happiness, as part of the highest good, is necessary to follow the moral law, then someone without hope would be “unable to follow the moral law” (2008, 341). Insole argues that if ought-implies-can holds, people lacking hope are exempt from following the moral law (*Ibid*). However, Kant famously thinks that all rational beings have a duty to follow the moral law. So the moral consequence-dependent psychology reading would render Kant inconsistent. Or, so the complaint goes.

I think the above complaints are misleading. First, I think Insole’s complaints misinterpret the sense of ought-implies-can at play. In the context of hope, Kant’s ‘can’ is what is hoped for, not a fact about the world. The thought is that it is rational that I ought to set an end, only if I assume that I can reach that end. So, for example, I can only tell myself that I ought to complete to a mountain walk, if I assume that I can complete it. But in the context of pursuing the highest good as an end, we cannot have knowledge that we can reach this end. So the

‘can’ is not a knowledge claim but an assumption.²⁵ If this is correct, in contrast to Insole, the version of ought-implies-can that holds is: since I ought to will to the highest good as an end, I may *hope that I can reach it* even though I necessarily lack the relevant knowledge.

Second, my sense is that Kant doubles-down on the claim that hope is necessary for some people in some contexts. In the previous chapter, we saw that, he entertains the thought of a “righteous man (like Spinoza) ... firmly convinced that there is no God” (CJ 5:452). Spinoza (supposedly) determines his maxims for action only according to the moral law without “demand[ing] any advantage for himself” (*Ibid*), and yet sees people worthy of happiness failing to achieve it in a cold and indifferent universe. Kant says, in a passage reminiscent of Nietzsche, that a righteous Spinoza sees

[those people] in spite of all their worthiness to be happy, nevertheless be subject by nature ... to all the evils of poverty, illness, and untimely death ... and will always remain thus until one wide grave engulfs them all (whether honest or dishonest, it makes no difference here) and flings them ... back into the abyss of the purposeless chaos of matter from which they were drawn. (CJ 5:452)

Kant is emphatic: the righteous Spinoza must “assume the existence of the moral author of the world” or “give up as impossible” morality. If we read impossibility as psychologically impossible—as Chignell (2018, 301) does—Kant is saying that without hope, it is psychologically impossible for someone like the righteous Spinoza to defy despair in our world. Here, Spinoza is a stand in for anyone who is highly immune to despair at the prospect of achieving their goals in light of seeing that their actions contribute little or nothing to

²⁵ See the Attainability Principle in Chapter 4 for further details.

progress towards those goals. If even someone like Spinoza necessarily requires hope's psychological assistance, then the rest of us have little chance of achieving our far-distant goals without hope.²⁶

Indeed, I think the objector to the consequence-dependent psychology reading gets something right: Kantian hope is not psychologically necessary for all agents to pursue their far-distant goals. It is psychologically necessary for most of us, most of the time.

2.4 Kantian Bookkeeping

In the Kantian literature, there is debate about the appropriate content of hoped-for propositions. As we saw, some commentators read Kant as claiming that we may hope that good consequences, *in general*, will result from our actions (Chignell 2018; 2020; forthcoming (a), Ch. 10; forthcoming (b)). However, other commentators read Kant as restricting the appropriate content of hoped-for proposition to *particular* moral objects—“states of affairs that are morally required” (Blöser 2020)—for example the highest good or one's own moral improvement. On the former reading, one hopes that one's actions will be efficacious in general; in the latter, one hopes that a particular state of affairs will obtain through our actions.²⁷

²⁶ The psychological necessity of Spinoza's hope does not impact the Attainability Principle that we saw in the last chapter. He would still violate the Attainability Principle were he not to Believe that his far-distant goal is attainable. Claiming that an attitude (say, hope) is psychologically necessary to do something does not mean that another attitude (say, Belief) is not necessary in another way.

²⁷ Blöser claims that “[w]ithout hope that the highest good is attainable, we face the possibility that our moral actions may in fact fail to contribute to a larger, reasonable whole” (2020).

In my view, Kant blows in many directions regarding the precise content of our hoped-for propositions. I will highlight four such directions:

(1) Kant says that, if we did not hope that our actions made a difference, we would (like the righteous Spinoza) “certainly have to give up as impossible ... the end [of the highest good]” upon seeing the “purposeless chaos” of the world (CJ 5:452).

(2) He says that we may hope “for happiness in the same measure as [we] have made [ourselves] worthy of it in [our] conduct” (A809/B837) and that we “must be able to hope to partake in [happiness] (A813/B841).

(3) He also says that we may hope that we are on the path of “constant progress from bad to better” (Rel 6:48), and hope for an “uninterrupted continuance of this progress [from lower to higher levels of moral perfection] ... even beyond this life” (CPvR 5:123).

(4) In a passage from the *Religion* that we have already seen, Kant invokes hope when he says that we need to see “all our doings and nondoings” (Rel 6:5) as contributing to an ultimate end.

Kant mostly ties hope to progress.²⁸ He says, one may hope “to find oneself upon the good (though narrow) path of constant progress from bad to better” (Rel 6:48). So I take it that, for Kant, the content of all hoped-for propositions in (1-4) involve progress. As I read

²⁸ A possible outlier is hope for empirical miracles. Passages referring to empirical miracles are difficult to interpret. At times, Kant even seems to endorse Belief and not hope in miracles: “Belief (*Glaube*) in miracles in general [is] indispensable” (Rel 6:84). So, here, I leave aside empirical miracles.

Kant, he variously claims that we may hope that: (1) our actions made a difference in progressing towards our goals, (2) that we partake in happiness proportionate to our virtuous conduct, (3) that we are morally progressing towards perfection, and (4) that all our actions contribute to the progress of some ultimate whole. (2) is the obvious outlier as it seems to involve being in a psychological state of happiness—without a notion of progress. But, as Rachel Zuckert (2018, 254) points out, for Kant, happiness is “not a possession but a progression” (AK 28:1090). That is, in Kant’s technical sense, happiness is something we pursue over our lifetime and stretches into the future, as opposed to momentary attainment of a psychological state.

If Kant’s claim is that all hoped-for propositions involve progression in relation to our goals, that claim fits with our experience of profound, life-structuring hope. It is odd for us to hold a profound, life-structuring hope that we will regress in relation to our goal. We might hope to ‘at least not go backwards’, but in the long-term, we do not hope to remain static in relation to our goals.

However, we still need to explain the variation in the content of Kant’s hoped-for propositions? One suggestion might be that Kant presents different accounts of hope throughout his career. This is most probably true. It is widely acknowledged that, through his career, Kant presents different versions of his moral proof of God, to which he connects hope.²⁹ As intriguing as this suggestion is, I think a simpler conceptual point underpins the various propositional content of what we may hope.

²⁹ Kant thinks that we must assent in the mode of moral Belief to a God willing and able to bring about the highest good. In the *First Critique*, Kant suggests that the highest good provides us as moral agents with “promises and threats” (A812/B840) in another life. In the *Second Critique*, he suggest we “ought strive to promote ... the highest good in the world [i.e., in this world]”(CPvR 5:125). In the *Third Critique*, Kant seems to characterise

If hope is a psychological aid for maintaining our resolve and our individual psychologies varies, we should expect that the precise content of hoped-for propositions that an individual requires to vary across individuals. For instance, let's take as given that morality sets for us the goal of bringing about the highest good on earth. If hope is psychologically necessary for an individual to pursue this end, some individuals might need to hope (as a psychological aid) that their actions have good consequences, others that we receive or partake in happiness proportionate to our virtuous conduct, others that we are morally progressing, and yet others that all our actions contribute to some ultimate whole. What an individual needs to hope will depend on their own past experience, social context, economic, and material circumstance, motivations, projects, and commitments—because these inform and individuate our psychological make up. So what is rational for me to hope, might not be rational for you to hope.

An upshot of the above discussion is that we should see Kant as a philosopher emphasising the contextual difference of hope. By contrast, many contemporary hope theorists emphasise its commonality to all humans and suggest an agent without hope is less than human. Take McGreer who claims that “to be a full-blown intentional agent—to be a creature with a rich profile of intentions and emotional states and capacities—is to be an agent that hopes” (2004, 101) and that living a life devoid of hope is “not to live a human life” (*Ibid*). On Kant's picture, hope is common to *nearly* all humans but the content of our hopes might vary. Kant's picture (I submit) is more plausible. It acknowledges the differences between our individual psychologies and allows that hopeless agents are still human.

our relation to the highest good as a “habitus”—a way of thinking (CJ 5:471). For a recent readings of the different version of the moral proof see Wood (2020, 39-51) and Chignell (forthcoming (a), Ch. 10).

Let's sum up. On Kant's picture, our assents are hopes that p:

(1) Only if we desire that p, and

(2) Only if we believe that p is possible but not certain.

Hope is rational only if:

(3) We set and pursue an end but are confronted with our inability to bring that end about

(4) We are aware, or potentially aware, that we are not assenting solely on objective grounds.

(5) We desire and believe that p is psychologically necessary to maintain our pursuit of a relevant end.

3.0 The Dual and Distinct Thesis

Recall, from Chapter 4, that many commentators fail to distinguish between Kantian Belief and hope.³⁰ I think this is a mistake. We can now see why Kantians (and non-Kantian) should stop running together Belief (or faith) and hope: they are distinctive attitudes, which complement each other.

Over this chapter and the last, I have been developing the view that Kant is committed to the *Dual and Distinct Thesis*: Belief and hope are distinctive but both necessary attitudes for

³⁰ O'Neill, for instance, claims that Kant "construes the basics of faith as a form of hope" (1996, 282-3). See Chapter 4, Section 1 "Belief and Hope".

pursuing our far-distant goals—Belief is constitutive of pursuing these goals, and hence necessary; hope is psychologically necessary for maintaining our resolve in those pursuits—given our psychological propensity to despair if we do not see progress resulting from our efforts.³¹

The relationship between Kantian hope and Belief has been under-examined. On one recent reading, put forward by Wood, the relationship concerns different objects. On this view, the object of justified Belief is God's existence, and the primary object of hope is a radical improvement of our moral disposition such that we “may become well-pleasing to God” (2020, 109). Wood claims that the sole ground for that hope is a radical change of heart (*Herzensänderung*) away from our propensity to evil. He emphasizes passages in the *Religion* where Kant argues that we aspire to act solely from duty throughout our lives and not merely as a one-time achievement. As Wood explains, we lack knowledge of our future moral dispositions because we are moral agents “who are still living our lives in time, who we will be, even who we are right now, is always still at the mercy of our freedom, still up to us”

³¹ In the *Canon*, Kant claims that we are justified in Believing in God and hoping for the happiness of which we are morally worthy. Wood (2020) plausibly presents Belief and hope, in the *Canon*, as an ‘absurdum practicum.’ On this view, I know that agents ought to act from duty alone. So I can admire or condemn others’ moral conduct. But, to do what I find admirable in others, I would have to become a “visionary,” a person who is ethically admirable but practically irrational. Or I can remain a ‘scoundrel,” a person who violates moral commitments. Either way, “I would have to cease to be a rational human being.’ (AK 28:1072). Wood argues that, in the *Canon*, Believe and hope provide individuals with sufficient rational incentive to do what they admire in others, without which an individual would be “strangely alienated” (2020, 43) from their moral appraisals. Eventually, Kant abandons the position that Belief in God's existence and the hope for happiness provide an additional incentive to duty. In the *Groundwork*, *Second Critique*, and beyond, Kant thinks that duty alone ought to be sufficient incentive for us to obey the moral law—even if (as flawed human beings) we always struggle to find it so. Given that Kant abandons that position, I do not address the relation between Belief and hope in the *Canon* here.

(*Ibid.*). We know that we ought to have undergone a change of heart that would be manifest in a lifetime of acting from duty alone. But, given that we do not have a God's-eye view of the whole of our lives, it is never a matter of “knowledge, or even justified Belief—but ... always for us a matter only of hope” (*Ibid.*) whether we have undergone or are undergoing such a change.³²

By contrast, Chignell reads Belief as satisfying a modal constraint on Kantian hope as part of Kant's moral proof. Recall that the standard view of hope says: hoping that *p* requires believing that *p* is possible but not certain and a desire that *p* is true. Thus, a subject's belief that something is possible is a modal constraint on their hope. Similarly, on Chignell's account, hope that *p* requires minimally a Kantian Belief that *p* is possible, although hope is compatible with a full-blown contemporary, justified belief. I cannot do justice to Chignell's twelve-step reconstruction of Kant's moral proof here. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that, on his reading, it is rational for a subject who has a moral commitment to bring about the highest good to hope that the world has a just moral order, and such a hope requires that a subject Believe that such a world is possible and desire that it is true. According to Chignell, a subject's hope that the world has a just moral order is rational because it has a “serious moral advantage” (forthcoming (b)), namely, the “profound psychological” effect of warding-off a double state of despair: (1) a subject's general despair that their morally good actions can make a difference to the overall goodness of the world, which leads to (2) a subject's loss of the psychological resolve required to do what they think they have a moral reason to do. On this view, there is a serious psychological-moral “advantage [of a subject] being able to believe or Believe that a moral world order is really practically possible” because

³² Compare Rel 6:66-7.

“[s]ubstantial hope that p requires the positive belief or Belief that p is really practically possible” (forthcoming (b)). For Chignell, thus, Belief satisfies a modal constraint on Kantian hope.

On my reading, the relationship between Kantian hope and Belief is explained by their different objects and kinds of necessity. On the one hand, our hopes are directed at *our progress towards ends*, whereas our Beliefs are directed at *ends themselves*. On the other hand, hope is psychologically necessary, whereas Belief is necessary for us to be consistent practical thinkers. Thus, I agree with Wood that a primary object of Kantian rational hope is a radical improvement in our moral disposition. Kant claims that we hope for a "total change of heart" (Rel 6:76-77; see also 6:48; 6:69) but that claim is compatible with my claim that the proper objects of Kantian hope concern progress in general.³³ I, also, agree with Chignell that hope plays a significant psychological role in warding-off despair by helping us maintain our resolve to bring about our ends. As we saw in Section 2, Kant associates hope with "comfort" (R 6:76) and with helping us maintain "moral resolve" (Rel 6:5) in the face of not seeing our actions make a difference, both of which I read as psychological claims. However, in contrast to Chignell, I read Kant's moral argument (at all points in his career) as one that is supposed to go beyond issues of individual psychologies and pick out features that are necessary for morality in a maximally general sense.³⁴ According to Chignell's reconstruction of Kant's

³³ Indeed, Kant suggests in his essays on history and politics that the objects of rational hope can be political progress: our collective progress towards a more just and peaceful world (see TP 8:309, I 8:29, PP 8:361). For instance, he claims that we are rational to “hope for better times to come” (TP 8:309) in constant progress towards a better state.

³⁴ Chignell detects a radical shift in Kant's moral proof between the *Second* and *Third Critiques*, in which Kant moves from arguing that Belief is necessary for consistency in our practical rational thinking to arguing for the psychological advantages of Belief as a modal constraint on hope. I am doubtful about this supposed shift. As we saw in Chapter 4,

moral proof, an agent who does not require hope to do what is morally right also does not require Belief. Whether or not an individual requires hope to overcome the despair that Chignell describes depends on an individual's psychology. Thus, on his account, Kant's moral proof is reduced to an argument about individual psychologies and the benefits of hoping, which is not the kind of argument Kant makes. As such, my reading of the relationship between Kantian hope and Belief is compatible with Wood's and partially compatible with Chignell's.

Let me conclude this section by highlighting (again) that the necessity of Belief and hope for pursuing far-distant ends differs: Belief is constitutive of, and thus necessary for, pursuing those ends, and hope is psychologically necessary (for most of us, most of the time) to maintain our resolve in pursuit of those ends.

4.0 Responding to Faith's Critics

Let us return to Kantian hope to consider it in relation to faith's critics. In Chapter 3, I suggested a definition of faith as an attitude that 'goes beyond evidence' in the sense that it is not evidentially, or insufficiently evidentially, justified. That definition is vague enough to cover Kantian hope, given that Kantian hope is rationally permissible when we lack objective grounds of assent that *p* (i.e., evidence for *p*). Thus, the worries that faith's critics articulate are appropriate to Kantian hope, or so I will assume.

I argued, in Chapter 3, that a philosophically plausible account of secular faith should satisfy five desiderata. The account should explain how the attitude of secular faith (1) is

in the *Third Critique*, Kant is committed to the Attainability Principle and thus argues for Belief's rationality on the basis of consistent practical rational thought.

necessary for pursuing our far-distant goals, (2) does not produce overconfidence in those goals, (3) does not demotivate us, (4) is truly secular, and (5) is sensitive to key evidentialist principles (such as we ought to form beliefs based only on relevant evidence). In respect of (1), I have shown how Kantian hope is psychologically necessary for pursuing far-distant ends (for most of us, most of the time). In respect of (2) - (5), I argued that those desiderata arise from the well-motivated worries of faith's critics. Thus, a philosophically plausible account of Kantian hope must account for the four worries from which (2) - (5) arise:

Certainty worry: Hope (or faith) that *p* results in a harmful certainty that our goals are the correct goals.

Demotivation worry: Hope (or faith) that *p* undermines our willingness to act to bring about the state of affairs described in *p*.

Religious vestiges worry: Hope (or faith) is a religious attitude that we cannot be separate from religious contexts, so secular faith (or hope) is an incoherent notion.

Evidentialist worry: Hope (or faith) violates the principle that we ought to form beliefs (in the contemporary sense) based only on relevant evidence.

Kant's account of rational hope, I think, provides plausible responses to faith's critics.

Consider the *certainty worry*: hope (or faith) that *p* results in a harmful certainty that our goals are the correct goals, and thus lacks room for debate about what goals we should pursue, and is not sensitive to the messy and uncertain process of bringing about change. However, on the standard reading of hope that Kant endorses, hoping that *p* is desiring that *p* and believing it is possible *but not certain*. Consider the following statement: 'I hope that it will rain tomorrow;

I am certain it will rain tomorrow.’ This statement sounds odd. A good explanation for the oddness is that lack of certainty is central to hope.³⁵

Consider the *demotivation worry*: hope (or faith) that *p* undermines our willingness to act to bring about the state of affairs described in *p*. The Kantian response is that *hope without action* is irrational: it is a “crafty hope”, in which one attempts to “make up for [one’s] lack of deeds” (Rel 6:160). This is because a rational constraint on Kantian hope is that we set and pursue our goals. Suppose that we hope to create an everlasting social order capable of reversing climate change *but do nothing to bring it about*: we desire and believe it is possible without acting. Instead, we slip into mystic waiting for unknown forces to make good on our desire and belief. The Kantian picture says that this attitude (i.e., crafty hope) is perverse—precisely because we do not act. So Kantian hope is not a demotivating but supports us in pursuing our goals.

Consider the *religious vestiges worry*: hope (or faith) is a religious attitude that cannot easily be separated from religious contexts; so secular hope (or faith) is an incoherent notion. There is room for debate about whether or not, in the end, Kant manages to present a secular account of hope (or Belief).³⁶ Indeed, Kant speaks of religious sounding hope for divine

³⁵ Defenders of the standard definition of hope typically appeals to statements like this to defend the claim the hope lacks certainty. However, we stand at risk of deriving a conceptual truth from a norm of assertion. See Chignell (2013) on this point. He claims that we assert the stronger attitude (we assert that we know *p*, even if we also hope that *p*), but that fact does not support a conceptual claim that is irrationality or impossible for agents to hold both. See footnote in Section 2.

³⁶ For a secular reading of Kantian hope and faith, see O’Neill: “Kant’s own hope is that both popular and ecclesiastical faith will be interim measures, and serve as vehicles to a purer faith and more abstract hopes that need no institutions and lack all specificity” (1996, 308). For a religious reading, see Hare: “It is incoherent to hold myself under a demand that I am unable to meet. But if my natural capacities are as Kant says they are, and the moral demand is what Kant says it is, I seem to be in exactly this situation.” The ought-implies-

assistance in “becoming better human beings”³⁷ and similarly religious-sounding hopes that arise from empirical miracles.³⁸

Yet, as I see it, a Kantian approach to hope starts from the secular assumption that hope is an attitude we humans already hold, and then asks: under what conditions is that attitude rational?³⁹ The approach assumes that we already have everyday hopes (for example, that things will go my way, that you will have a nice day, that it will not rain). Then, it acknowledges that some hopes are substantive and some hoped-for propositions in-principle lack empirical evidence. Last, it asks how these hopes can be rational. This approach, I submit, stands opposed to secularising a religious attitude because it starts from the mundane claim that we are hopeful beings: in a pre-religious state, we already hope.⁴⁰ Thus, a Kantian

can that Hare sees here is an ought-implies-can with “divine assistance” (2011; see also 1997), and that (on Hare’s view) is why one assents to God existence.

³⁷ See, for instance, “if he has made use of the original predisposition to the good in order to become a better human being, can he hope that what does not lie in his power will be made good by cooperation from above” (Rel 6:52).

³⁸ For example, see “‘miracle of nature’ ... gives hope of discovering a new law of nature” (Rel 6:88).

³⁹ Zuckert makes a similar point: “The phrasing of this question [What may I hope] suggests that human beings *already* hope, or have tendencies to do so. Reason, then, is to establish which objects are proper or permissible for that preexisting attitude ... not to *produce* it” (2018, 256). See also Blöser (2020).

⁴⁰ Zuckert makes a similar point: “The phrasing of this question [What may I hope] suggest that human beings *already* hope, or have tendencies to do so. Reason, the is to establish which objects are proper or permissible for that preexisting attitude ... not to *produce* it” (2018, 256).

approach to hope avoids the religious vestiges worry because nothing in that approach claims that hope's object must be religious.⁴¹

Consider the *evidentialist worry*: hope (or faith) violates the principle that we ought to form beliefs (in the contemporary sense) based only on relevant evidence. In response, the standard definition of hope that Kant endorses, says that a subject hopes that p only if they believe that p is possible but not certain, and desires that p is true. Believing that p is 'possible but not certain' is a lower epistemic constraint than possessing sufficient relevant evidence for an assent. Thus, while it might be epistemically, or morally, impermissible to believe a proposition without sufficient evidence, it can be epistemically, or morally, permissible to hope that the relevant proposition is true. So, clearly, Kant is not recommending that we believe without evidence.

However, the evidentialist will continue: hope *might lead to* the violation of the principle that we ought to only form beliefs based on sufficient and relevant evidence by contributing to impermissible evidence gathering patterns.

I think the evidentialist's further worry is real. If you hope that p, then, foreseeably, you might tend come to believe that p in an epistemically impermissible way. The core thought is that, by hoping that p, you will be driven to search for evidence that supports p and ignore or avoid looking for counterevidence for p. Thus, you end up believing that p but only because you searched for evidence for your hope that p. In this way, your hope that p biases you into

⁴¹ Kantian approach to hope, also, places a burden on advocates of the worry. For if we already hope in everyday ways (like a hope that it will stop raining), then it is up the worry's advocates to explain how these might be non-religious.

believing that p. By contrast, the hopeless person (in virtue of not hoping) will not gather evidence for p in such a biased way.

In response, we should remain acutely aware that Kant never recommends that we ‘trick’ ourselves into assenting on objective grounds that we achieve our far-distant goals (including by impermissible evidence gathering patterns). However, granting that, in many contexts, we possess ample empirical evidence that our world is not amenable to our best efforts to change it, if we cannot accept that our present collective world is the only way things could be (less a few reforms), *we can and should hope* for more that our evidence gives us reason to assent to on objective grounds. But we should remember that when we assent, in the mode of hope, we are not assenting solely on objective grounds. That was, of course, the (4) rational condition on Kantian hope.

5.0 Implications

Over this and the previous chapter, I have presented and defended a Kantian inspired dual account of secular faith comprising of social Belief and rational hope. I argued that, *in the mode of social Belief*, our assents to propositions referring to ideas are necessary to pursue our contingent ends—particularly distant future totalising goals—like the eradication of poverty, a society organised according to democratic ideals, or a workers’ paradise. I also argued that, *in the mode of rational hope*, our assents to propositions referring to ideas are psychologically necessary to maintain our resolve in pursuing such ends—for some of us, some of the time. Here, I highlight three implications of this view.

First, recently the political philosopher, Peter Hallward has written of emancipatory struggle: “[a]n exercise in political will involves taking power, not receiving it, on the *assumption* that (as a matter of ‘reason’ or ‘natural right’) the people are always already entitled to take it [for themselves]” (2009, 23; my italics). My account above makes sense of

this assumption: it is a social Belief. The relevant proposition, I think, is not one which we can find probable empirical or rational evidence for or against. On the one hand, for all we know, Nietzsche might be right that there is “no such thing as will”⁴² in a voluntaristic sense, and that we cannot “affirm some consensus among peoples”⁴³ because we can never reach such a consensus. On the other, a central controversy in historical and contemporary discussions of natural rights is how to establish a natural right of any kind, lest of all a right of the people to always take power for themselves. Bentham would have decried such ‘natural rights’ talk as metaphysically mysterious “nonsense of stilts.”⁴⁴ On my account, we lack knowledge of such a right, but we have a legitimate social Belief.

Furthermore, recall Buchak’s decision theoretic account of faith that we saw in Chapter 3: it is rational to stop looking for evidence when the costs of looking for evidence outweighs the benefits of refraining. Her account does not do justice to the phenomenology of emancipatory struggle. It is insufficiently strong to characterise an agent engaged in emancipatory struggle as refraining from looking for evidence for a relevant proposition on the basis on a cost-benefit analysis (as Buchak might have it)—even if refraining from looking for such evidence is rational. Presumably, James Baldwin does not take his faith to be a matter of reflecting on a cost-benefit analysis. By contrast, (I submit) he and others like him take a relevant proposition to be true in a deeper sense. On the Kantian inspired account that I put forward, the suggestion is: a constitutive part of exercising political will in emancipatory struggle is firmly assenting, in the mode of Belief, that the people are already entitled to take

⁴² See Nietzsche (1882 §488).

⁴³ See Nietzsche (1882 §345).

⁴⁴ See Bentham (1843).

power for themselves. So someone who fails to assent (upon reflection) to that proposition is not engaged in emancipatory struggle.

Second, a curious feature of my account is that Belief and rational hope are attitudes that pull in different directions relative to our goals: Belief is progressive; rational hope is conservative.

In reflecting on our Beliefs, rationality permits that we debate which goals to set—because Beliefs are constitutive of pursuing distant future goals. We may revise or abandon certain goals (if we discover they are contextually inappropriate) and revise or abandon certain Beliefs (if we give up a goal or realise that others would not think that a particular assent is necessary to pursue our goal). In this sense, Belief is a progressive attitude: we are rationally required to revise or abandon our goals and Belief assents in relation to our context.

By contrast to Belief, rational hope involves sustaining our resolve to pursue our goals—that *we already have adopted*—as opposed to revising or abandoning our goals. In this sense, hope is a conservative attitude. In connection with our rational hope, we enter into the domain of action-supporting attitudes. Suppose that you set your goal as the actual existence of an international proletariat, and in doing so, you hope that we are progressing towards it—in a profound, deep life-structuring way. But further suppose that you discover that the world is not amenable to your attempts to change it. On Kant's model, the role hope plays in your efforts is to provide you with psychological sustenance to keep going, and not to abandon your original goal. In this sense, Kant's rational hope helps us to 'keep the course' on our original path and not to change directions or give up.

Third, faith's advocates often emphasise that secular faith and the world it promotes are *fragile* and thus require continuous work to pursue and maintain. Hägglund, for example, claims that secular faith commitments and its objects are “essential[ly] fragile” (2019, 141)

because they depend on the cooperation of others and ongoing faith. Likewise, Arendt speaks of the world created by faith and hope as the “[f]ragility of human affairs” (1958, 188). The thought is that some institutions, norms, and social arrangements only exist insofar as we pursue and work to maintain them as ideal ends. A beach or a sunset exists without the cooperative work of others. However, a university might only exist insofar as we pursue and work to maintain the ideal of (say) intellectual rigour. But, the thought goes, the pursuit of such an ideal end requires maintaining secular faith that p. That is, with secular faith, we can build such institutions, norms, and social arrangements; without secular faith, they will wither away and cease to exist.

Notice that the dual Kantian account of secular faith explains the fragility of faith and the world it promotes. In the Kantian model, the state of affairs that one sets oneself as an end will never be actualised or completed in the present—be it a world without poverty, a workers’ paradise, a society arranged along democratic ideals or the highest good.⁴⁵ But they are also what I called contingent shared ends: goals of a large collective enterprise. Thus, bringing about such a state of affairs requires not only my Belief and hope that p, but that of multiple people. Moreover, the constitutive nature of Belief for pursuing a future distant goal underlies the ongoing need for someone to Believe that p (at least implicitly). For, if one does not, they are by definition not pursuing the goal.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to clarify Kant’s position on the nature and norms of hope, and test whether this account could respond to faith’s critics. As I have argued, Kantian hope involves

⁴⁵ Zuckert makes the same point in relation to hope: for Kant, a subject hoped for state of affairs is “always, indefinitely, deferred” (2018 214).

a desire that *p* and a belief that *p* is possible but not certain. I also argued that we are rational to hope only if we set and pursue an end but are confronted with our inability to bring that end about, we are aware, or potentially aware, that we are not assenting on objective grounds, and our desire and belief that *p* are psychologically necessary to maintain our pursuit of a relevant end. I showed that this account is both plausible from the perspective of Kantian scholarship and capable of contributing to current debates on hope's nature and norms.

In Chapter 3, we saw that philosophers and non-philosophers sometimes speak of faith that humanity can achieve something or faith in humanity—to which we can now add hope. This kind of talk seems to invoke a rational secular faith: a justified propositional attitude about this-worldly objects that goes beyond evidence. I endorsed Hägglund's claim that something like an attitude (or attitudes) that go beyond evidence is (or are) a necessary condition of pursuing our far-distant future goals. On one hand, as faith's critics claim, faith and hope can be demotivating, irrational, contain religious vestiges, or give an agent an inappropriate sense of certainty towards their end. If that is correct, these attitudes are unproductive and not necessary for pursuing our distant future ends. On the other, an account of faith might accommodate faith's critics worries and explain why faith is necessary for pursuing our far-distant ends. In this and the previous chapter, I have argued that a dual Kantian model of social Belief and rational hope fits the bill. I did not argue for the exclusivity of this model. It may turn out that other religious and secular accounts of faith or hope are appropriate and even necessary for pursuing our far-distant goals. I remain a committed pluralist about faith, but not as a blank cheque. As a philosophical account of secular faith, I have shown that Kantian social Belief and rational hope is a coherent way to fill in the details on the cheque.

Kant famously recommends to us the adage “*Sapere aude!*” (AK 8:35)—Dare to know! It seems to me that we should amend the adage: Dare to know. And, dare to pursue far-distant ends, with Belief and rational hope!

Part II

Chapter 6 — The Necessity of Kantian

Ideas: An Interpretive Problem

Before beginning the present chapter, it will be helpful to summarise my argument's main themes thus far and sketch the argument to come over the next three chapters that comprise Part II. In the previous chapters, I have reconstructed Kant's position in a way that endorses liberalism about Belief: that moral and non-moral ends can justify Beliefs. It embraces a theory of practical attitudes larger in scope than 'moralist' interpretations allow—that moral ends alone justify Belief. For Kant, our moral and theoretical ends justify our Beliefs about propositions referring to ideas in situations where a firm assent to a relevant proposition is a necessary means to pursuing a relevant end. I also argued that the principles that underwrite Belief can be extended to social ends, and that hope is psychologically necessary for us to pursue such ends (for most of us, most of the time).

In the second part of the *Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic*,¹ Kant claims that ideas (like God, the soul, and an infinite-world) are indispensably necessary (*unumgänglich notwendig*) for us to reason in empirical investigation (what he calls the empirical use of my reason—*empirischen Gebrauche meiner Vernunft*) (A677/B705). This raises a challenge to my liberal reading of Belief, namely, differentiating between two

¹ Hereafter, simply *Appendix*.

necessity claims that Kant makes about ideas in empirical investigation: (1) the *Appendix* claim that regulative ideas are *necessary for reasoning in empirical investigation* and (2) the *Canon* claim that assents to propositions referring to ideas, in the mode of doctrinal (or theoretical) Belief, are *necessary for pursuing theoretical ends*, which are presumably the ends of empirical investigation.² That challenge leads to an interpretive problem: if ideas, like God, the soul, and an infinite-world, are a priori concepts, why are they necessary for empirical investigation?

Kant divides the *Appendix* into two parts. I will set aside an influential reading of the *Appendix* that focuses on the first part. According to this reading, the *Appendix* expresses a view about explanation in Kant's philosophy of science: to explain is to derive a single principle for seemingly independent phenomena or to minimise distinct explanatory patterns. This reading is most famously put forward by Michael Friedman and Philip Kitcher.³ My focus is on the less-well studied second part of the *Appendix*, which concerns the ideas—God, the soul, and an infinite-world—which are the subject of special metaphysics (rational theology, rational psychology, and rational cosmology) as opposed to general metaphysics (arguments concerning the nature of objects in general).

Chapter 6 motivates my reading of the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation. I present and reject four prominent readings of that necessity. In Chapter 7, I present and defend *mentalism* about the necessity of Kantian ideas for empirical investigation. Mentalism

² For instances of such a conflation see, for instance, Pasternack, for whom “intimations of a theoretical (vs moral) belief in God [are] found in the First Critique's *Appendix* and *Canon* (2011, 412) and Insole, who claims that Kant calls the objects of doctrinal Beliefs regulative ideas (2016, 48; 2013, 158-9).

³ See Friedman (1974; 2001) and Kitcher (1981; 1995).

is the view that ideas are our most general concepts, in our most general thoughts, in a given domain, and this explains why they are necessary for empirical investigation—they enable us to have systematic thoughts. If this reading is correct, the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation does not concern Belief nor ‘as if’ regulative statements. By contrast, ideas are not propositions that one can form assent about or act ‘as if’ were true; they are a unique mental component: our most general concepts. Chapter 8, then, examines why we are rationally required to systematise our concepts. We will see that, to set our own ends, we need to be in a position to logically connect our propositional knowledge to other propositions. In turn, putting ourselves in such a position requires systematising our concepts.

Introduction

Four Claims

In the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant argues at great lengths against those philosophers who claim to demonstrate knowledge of ideas of pure reason and aims to diagnose why human reason inevitably is drawn to such illusionary knowledge. However, in the *Appendix* to the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant claims ideas as such are not problematic, or ‘dialectical’, but only our incorrect use of them. Indeed, he thinks ideas have a positive use—their ‘good and purposive vocation’. He claims that:

The ideas of pure reason can never be dialectical in themselves; rather it is merely their misuse which brings it about that a deceptive illusion arises out of them ... [O]ur speculation cannot possibly contain original deceptions and semblances. Presumably, therefore, [the ideas] have their *good and purposive vocation* in regard to the natural predisposition of our reason. (A669/B697; my italics)

As we have seen in previous chapters, for Kant, ideas of pure reason are a priori concepts that “go beyond the possibility of experience” (A320/B337); that is, they are non-empirical. There are different kinds of ideas. Practical ideas (A328/B385) involve ‘what ought be done’ propositions (A319/B375). In the *Groundwork*, Kant famously claims that for morality to be possible, we must presuppose that all rational willing beings act “under the idea of freedom” (G 4:448). For Kant, other examples of practical ideas are virtue (A315/B371), a perfect state (A316/B373), and the idea of humanity (B318/B374). By contrast, *speculative* or equivalently *theoretical* ideas (A329/B386; A685/B713) involve ‘what is’ propositions and express a totality of predicates—like an *ens realissimum* (all the positive real predicates in a single being). Other examples of speculative ideas include God (A685-7/B713-16), the soul (A682-4/B710-2), and an infinite world (A684-5/B712-3).⁴

One side of Kant’s story about ideas is well-known: reason seeks to grasp ideas and inevitably fails, because it expects ideas to correspond to “objects in themselves” (A302/B358). Kant argues that claims in which we expect an idea to correspond to an object are “transcendental illusion[s]” (A298/B355), and lack a “touchstone for their correctness” (A296/B352), in the sense that they lack a possible empirical referent. Instead of attempting to grasp ideas and failing, Kant argues that we should diagnose the illusions that lead us to think that we can theoretically grasp ideas, such as the existence of God, the immortality of soul,

⁴ Here, I follow standard readings. According to these readings, the three speculative ideas of God, an infinite world, and the soul are the primary examples of transcendental ideas (see Hoffer 2019, 221; Zuckert 2017, 90; Grier 2001, 131; Allison 2004, 320-2). For an opposing view, see Willaschek, who proposes that we read Kant as devising a “system of transcendental ideas” of “precisely nine ideas” (2018, 169). Willaschek’s account attempts to explain how Kant provides a metaphysical deduction of the ideas. That is not our concern here. At least in the second part of the *Appendix*, Kant’s focus is on the three previously mentioned ideas.

and the freedom of the will. In the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant argues that metaphysical arguments about ‘what is’ that appeal to such ideas “produce a dazzling but deceptive illusion, persuasion, and imaginary knowledge, and thus also eternal contradictions and controversies” (A702/B730). He claims that these arguments inevitably fail because we cannot attain knowledge of ideas, since they are concepts whose objects we cannot encounter in experience. He spends some 350 pages attacking the metaphysical arguments of his predecessors for obscurity and contradictions (A485/B513), arguing that speculative ideas are mere “thought-entities” (A469/B497) and thus “dogmatic rubbish” (A486/B514), whose referent cannot be given in any possible experience (A469/B497).

However, my concern is with a less well-known story that unfolds in the *Appendix*. There, Kant aims to secure a positive role for the “regulative idea[s] of merely speculative reason” (A685/B713) in empirical investigation.⁵

I argue that we can capture Kant’s position on the positive use of ideas in empirical investigation with four claims:

(1) **Definition of Ideas:** ideas are logically possible, contentful concepts concerning totalities of ‘what is’ that do not refer to objects in a possible experience.

(2) **Heuristic Claim:** we can legitimately use ideas as a priori heuristic guides.

⁵ As Allison starkly puts it: “in spite of the errors and confusion brought about by their misuse, the ideas of reason must have a positive role” (Allison 2004, 437).

(3) **Rationality Claim:** rationality demands that we search for the systematic unity of empirical concepts; this is reason's proper and empirical use, in which ideas play a role.

(4) **Necessity Claim:** ideas are necessary for systematic unity in empirical investigations.

The claim in (1) expresses the definition of ideas as a priori concepts that I began with. (I will return to this in Section 1.)

As for (2), in the *Appendix*, Kant wants to argue for a positive use of ideas. He says that ideas have an “excellent” (A671/B699; A668/B696) role in providing us with “heuristic[s]” (A671/B699; A711/B799) in empirical investigation by helping us to frame, conceive, and unify our research projects. Kant insists that the positive use of ideas is limited to a regulative role, in which they provide “guidance” (A671/B699) for empirical investigations and do not refer to “any corresponding object” (A671/B699). Kant contrasts this with a constitutive, negative use of ideas, in which we expect ideas to correspond to objects.

Accordingly, (2) claims that ideas are regulative: they are guides for inquiry but not part of our theories. In this way, their role in empirical investigation is similar to the regulative principles in the first part of the *Appendix*. There, the principle that we should prefer simpler theories over complex theories (parsimony) might help us choose between two equally explanatorily powerful theories, but this does not entail that the world is simpler. I believe that (2) is easy enough to defend. For example, if we seek a single explanatory principle for every event in the empirical world, it *might* be useful to conceptualise the world as authored by God without taking a stance on God's existence. As such, God plays a positive role in our search for this principle, because God stands in for whatever principle we are searching for.

The claim in (3) is normative. It expresses a rational requirement to systematise our concepts fully: we ought to seek a hierarchical connection of our concepts under one principle

or highest concept.⁶ Kant insists that seeking systematicity “belongs to the legislation of our reason” (A700/B728), and is something that “reason does not beg but commands” (A653/B681). Systematicity is not, he insists, a “device ... for achieving economy” (A653/B681). In this sense, it is not merely a tool to organise empirical results, or an explanatory hypothesis (A653/B681). Instead, for Kant, rationality requires that we seek systematicity.

In (4), Kant characterises ideas in their positive role as “indispensably necessary” (A644-5/B672-3) for empirical investigation:

[T]he transcendental ideas are never of constitutive use, so that the concepts of certain objects would thereby be given ... however, they have an *excellent and indispensably necessary* regulative use. (A644/B672; my italics)⁷

I take the necessity claim in (4) to express the radical thesis that empirical investigation necessarily requires a priori ideas—logically possible, contentful concepts concerning (1) ‘what is’ totalities, which do not merely involve (2) an optional heuristic. The *Appendix* thus aims to show that concepts that lack a possible empirical referent are necessary for empirical investigation and not merely the targets of illusionary knowledge. This is to firstly claim that ideas are not necessary for providing us with determinate content about the empirical world (i.e., what it is and how is arranged). Instead, ideas are necessary in determining “how ... we ought to **seek after** the constitution and connection” (A671/B699) of the empirical world. The ‘ought’ here expresses the aforementioned rational demand to seek systematicity. As Kant

⁶ Kant calls this an “interconnection based on one principle” (A645/B673).

⁷ See also A644/B672; A671/B699; A677/B705; A681/B709).

puts it, ideas are necessary if reason wants to have “before its eyes ... systematic unity” (A683/B711).

One set of issues concerns (3). Why should we seek a hierarchical connection of our concepts under one principle or highest concept? Why is it rationally required? Is a rational requirement to fully systematise our concepts overly demanding? We will return to these questions in Chapter 8.

Here, I take up the issues surrounding the necessity claim (4): not only can ideas fulfil a heuristic role in empirical investigation, but they also fulfil a *necessary* role. Kant wants to argue that ideas of God, the soul, and an infinite world are necessary for empirical investigation, and not just *optional* heuristics that we might use in empirical investigation.

An Interpretive Problem

For many people, the necessity claim goes a step too far. Norman Kemp Smith captures the core classical complaint:

The proof is not that [the ideas] are necessary for the possibility of experience, but only that they are required for its perfect, or at least more complete, development. And as Kant is unable to prove that such completion is really possible, the objective validity of the Ideas is left open to question. They should be taken only as heuristic principles. (Kemp Smith 1962, 560)

The issue is that, on the one hand, God might be able to stand in for a single explanatory principle that we are searching for, and this (as we saw) makes Kant’s heuristic claim easy enough to defend. But on the other, if we discovered such a principle, we would no longer

need God as a heuristic concept. Therefore, ‘God’ is unnecessary for empirical investigation, despite Kant’s claims to the contrary.

So the interpretive problem is that if ideas like God, the soul, and an infinite world are a priori formulations, why are they necessary for empirical investigation? After all, empirical investigation is concerned with empirically real objects that are precisely not a priori concepts. One might reasonably assume that such abstract entities either have no place in empirical investigation at all or are unnecessary for it precisely because they are a priori. And indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find a scientist who believes that God, the soul, or an infinite world play a necessary role in science.⁸

I think that the above specific interpretive problem indicates a broader philosophical problem. Consider recent attempts in political philosophy to rehabilitate Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s general will: not the “sum of particular wills” but those “same wills [taking] away the pluses and the minuses which cancel each other out”, in active, continuous rational deliberation of all without representative government—as difficult and absurd as this sounds to achieve (Rousseau 1762, 2.3.2). Recently, Hallward has claimed that the most fundamental political choice is between “empowerment or disempowerment of the will of the people” (2009, 17). Here, he explicitly characterises the general will as that of “all human beings” (*Ibid.*, 18) and “at every stage of development [of the will]” (*Ibid.*, 21). Likewise, Fanon claims that “the important thing is not that three hundred people form a plan and decide upon carrying it out, but that *the whole people* plan and decide even if it takes them twice or three times as long” (1968, 155-6; my italics). To my ears, these characterisations of the general will as the will of ‘all humans’ and ‘the whole people’ sound much like Kantian ideas—

⁸ See Grier (2007, 295) and Zuckert (2017, 89) for the same point.

logically possible, contentful concepts concerning ‘what is’ totalities that do not refer to objects in experience. Moreover, they do not sound like mere heuristics. Consequently, if we can get clearer on why ideas are necessary in empirical investigation for Kant, we might also get clearer about why they may be necessary in other contexts.⁹

Moreover, since the interpretive problem reflects this broader problematic, I think we should resist dismissing Kant’s claim that ideas are *indispensably necessary* for empirical investigation in the way Kemp Smith does.

In claiming that ideas are necessary, Kant is saying something unique—for better or worse. Many people would accept, as Dennett argues, that we can adopt stances as predictive explanatory strategies. One could, for example, adopt a stance that a system is rational in the sense of acting on beliefs and desires and test whether that system is rational in that sense—by comparing experimental results to one’s predictions. Or a scientist could adopt a working hypothesis in order to find evidence for or against it. But if ideas are only heuristics in the sense of a Dennettian stance or a hypothesis, as Henry Allison notes, this ignores a “decisive

⁹ Commentators have tended to focus on the first half of *Appendix* concerning empirical science, arguing that the *Appendix* provides resources to articulate a Kantian philosophy of science. There is a debate about whether we should read Kant as advocating that science should aim for a unification of explanations (Kitcher 1995; Friedman 2001), or instead as advocating for a position concerning how we assimilate empirical evidence and cognitions into existing knowledge (Breitenbach n.d., Ch. 2). In this vein, they see interpretive problems as reflecting problems regarding the unity of science and the structure of scientific knowledge. My focus is on the second half of the *Appendix*, which concerns special metaphysics (rational theology, rational psychology, and rational cosmology) as opposed to general metaphysics (arguments concerning the nature of objects in general). As we will see here, Kant identifies empirical investigation with three forms of empirical inquiry: considering everything in the world (theological), everything in the mind (psychological), and all the events proceeding the event under investigation (cosmological). Today, rational theology, psychology, and cosmology seem like archaic pursuits. Yet I think the relevance to contemporary discussions lies in Kant’s emphasis that ideas concern totalities—i.e., everything in the world, the mind, and all events.

difference between Kantian regulative ideas and pragmatically justified principles of many contemporary philosophers” (2004, 221). The difference is that “the former are deemed necessary, the latter are assumed to be arbitrary, chosen merely because of their convenience” (*Ibid*). The point is that Kant states his position in robust terms: ideas are necessary for empirical investigation. So, if we are to learn something from the Kantian position, we need to do justice to its uniqueness.

Uniqueness does not imply correctness. But before we reject Kant’s position on the necessity of ideas for empirical investigation, we should get clear about the reasons why one might hold Kant’s view. To that end, we are looking for a reading of Kant’s necessity claim that robustly explains the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation. This is because, without such a reading, we cannot explain what is unique and (supposedly) important in Kant’s account of the positive use of ideas. To his reader’s frustration, however, Kant never provides an explicit account of why ideas are necessary for empirical investigation.

I have introduced the problem of the necessity of ideas for empirical investigation. In Section 1, I provide more detail about the aforementioned four aspects of Kant’s position. Section 2 presents and rejects four prominent readings of the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation. In Section 3, I sketch my proposal for why ideas are necessary for empirical investigation.

1.0 An Overview of the Positive Use of Speculative Ideas

In this section, I provide an overview of Kant’s account of the positive use of speculative ideas in empirical investigation by giving my account of the above four claims.

1.1 What are Ideas?

As we have seen in previous chapters, according to Kant, ideas or (equivalently) concepts of reason are non-empirical concepts whose objects go “beyond the possibility of experience” (A320/B377). Thus, we can never be in a position to encounter these objects in experience. He identifies ideas like God, freedom, and immortality as the concerns of traditional metaphysics precisely because they are “concepts to which no corresponding object at all can be given in experience” (A3/B7). They are concepts without an object that appears to us in sensible intuitions.

Ideas, for Kant, are also logically possible, which is to say that such concepts are free of contradictions. For example, a ball that travels faster than the speed of light is logically possible because nothing in the concept ‘ball’ contradicts the idea of travelling faster than the speed of light. A core Kantian claim, however, is that a concept’s logical possibility does not guarantee its object appears to us in sensible intuition.

In *On the Concepts of Reason*, Kant contrasts practical with speculative ideas. He lists three “practical ideas” (A328/B385), which involve ‘what ought to be done’ questions (A319/B375): (1) “a [state’s] constitution providing for the greatest human freedom” (A316/B373) is an idea, as is (2) ‘humanity’, the “idea of what is most perfect of its species” (A315/B 374), and (3) “virtue” (A315/B371). For example, ‘virtue’ is an idea because “we are all aware that when someone is represented as a model of virtue, we always have the true original in our own mind alone” (A315/B371). That is, we have a priori access to the concept of virtue, which we can deploy to judge the moral worth of action instead of drawing on imperfect examples of virtue found in experience. Virtue is a practical idea precisely because it concerns what we ought do. It is thus fruitful and necessary in “respect of actual actions” (A328/B385), and in turn for making moral judgments. Similarly, in the *Groundwork*, Kant

famously claims that for morality to be possible, we must presuppose that all rational willing beings act “under the idea of freedom” (G 4:448).

By contrast, speculative or (equivalently) theoretical ideas (A329/B386; A685/B713) involve ‘what is’ questions. Unlike practical ideas, they are not fruitful or necessary for moral judgments. For Kant, speculative ideas are pure rational concepts because they arise from logical rules for inferring (A330/B386). In *On the Concepts of Reason*, Kant lists three examples of speculative ideas: ‘God’, ‘soul’, and ‘infinite-world’ (B395). Like all other ideas they are non-empirical and logically conceivable.

Moreover, in the second part of the *Appendix*, Kant understands empirical investigation to be exhausted by three questions and links them to the above three ideas. The empirical investigator invokes ideas when they consider everything in a domain of inquiry: what is the original cause of everything in the world (God) (A685-7/B713-16), what is the substance in which all our inner mental states reside (the soul) (A682-4/B710-2), and what are all the events preceding an event under investigation (an infinite world) (A684-5/B712-3). These questions refer to the—somewhat archaic—inquiries of special metaphysics (rational theology, rational psychology, and rational cosmology), as opposed to general metaphysics (arguments concerning the nature of objects in general).

So, on Kant’s picture, speculative ideas are contentful, logically possible, non-empirical concepts concerning ‘what is’ totalities; their content thus concerns the question of ‘what is’ *everything* within a domain of inquiry.

1.2 The Specific Content of Ideas: the Soul, an Infinite World, and God

Let us now consider how Kant presents the content of the three speculative ideas.

The speculative psychological idea, according to Kant, is the soul as a “simple substance, unchangeable in itself” (A682/B710; see also A334/B391). That is, the soul is a singular persistent substance, in which our inner mental states reside. He says that the empirical inquiry at issue is a subject’s representations: “all appearances, actions, and receptivity [in] our mind” (A672/B700), i.e., our inner mental states. Kant seems to argue that when we inquire into the totality of a subject’s inner mental states, we must assume they are unified in a singular physical substance. In Kant’s terms, when we inquire into how our representations form an “empirical unity of all thought” (A682/B710), we must employ the concept of a unity of mental states residing in a simple substance; the idea ‘soul’ thus expresses this totality of inner mental states in a single substance.

The speculative cosmological idea, according to Kant, is nature as “infinite in itself and without a first or supreme member” (A672/B700)—or infinite world. Here, we are supposed to think of an infinite series of events. Kant says that the empirical inquiry at issue involves both “inner as well as the outer appearances of nature” (A672/B700), such that, “in the explanation of given appearances ... we ought proceed as if the series were in itself infinite” (A685/B713). That is, when explaining an empirical event, we should assume that the totality of preceding events is infinite. The argument appears to be that we ought to proceed in this fashion because proceeding as if a series is finite prematurely ends inquiry. In justifying this claim, Kant distinguishes our investigation into empirical events from practical scenarios. In practical scenarios, “we should proceed as if we did not have before us an [infinite] object of sense” (A685/B713), because here, we should proceed as if we are the absolute beginning of a series as free rational beings. Therefore, the idea of an ‘infinite world’ expresses the thought that prior to an event, the totality of events is infinite, whereas the idea ‘freedom’ expresses the thought that we are the absolute beginning of a series. So the idea ‘infinite’ in empirical

investigation expresses a totality of events that infinitely precede an event under investigation, and not a future series.

The speculative theological idea, Kant tells us, is the “rational concept of God” (A685/B713): “as if this being, as the highest intelligence, were the cause of everything according to the wisest aim” (A688/B716).¹⁰ He says that the empirical inquiry at issue is the origin of everything in the empirical world (A686/B724). Since questions of origin would be in tension with the idea of an infinite series of preceding events, the theological idea marks out a different kind of empirical investigation than the cosmological idea. Kant claims that “the speculative interest of reason makes it necessary to regard every ordinance in the world as if it had sprouted from the intention of a highest reason” (A686/B714). Here, at issue is not appearances (inner or outer), but the claim that something intentional is the original cause of all entities in the empirical world. So ‘God’ expresses the idea of ‘an intelligence that intentionally created everything in the world’.

In sum, Kant’s three speculative ideas involve ‘what is’ questions concerning totalities: what is the substance in which all our inner mental states reside (psychological), what is the nature of all the events preceding an event under investigation (cosmological), and what is an original cause of everything in the world (theological). This means that, on Kant’s picture, ideas are contentful concepts concerning ‘what is’ totalities in that their content concerns what is *all* or *everything* within these domains of inquiry. Moreover, we can see that these three questions define Kant’s somewhat limited notion of empirical investigation, such that

¹⁰ Hoffer claims that what sets the idea of God apart from the other two ideas is that it is “tied from the outset to the idea of a system, the general aim of reason” (2019, 222). I see little textual evidence for Hoffer’s claim. Kant consistently links systematicity with each idea.

considering our inner mental states, preceding events, and original causes seem to exhaust empirical investigation for Kant in the second part of the *Appendix*.

1.3 What is the Heuristic Role of Ideas?

A key Kantian distinction concerns the regulative and constitutive uses of ideas. The positive function of the ideas ‘God’, ‘soul’, and ‘infinite-world’ lies in their regulative use: they are employed as background assumptions that guide our empirical investigations without referring to specific objects. They are also not part of our scientific theories.¹¹ By contrast, the constitutive use of ideas would involve the expectation that there is an “object corresponding to them” (A671/B699), such that they would be built into our theories about the world.

Consider parsimony, the principle that simpler theories are preferable. We can imagine the example of a scientist having to choose between two theories of equal explanatory power—one simple, the other complex. In a regulative sense, a scientist takes parsimony as a guide for choosing the simpler theory over the more complex one. In this case, parsimony is not part of our scientific theories because it does not tell us about the world. But if the scientist took parsimony to be a constitutive idea, this would involve the *mistaken* step of insisting that the world itself corresponds to such simplicity, thereby ascribing simplicity to the world and building it into their theory. Likewise, in a regulative sense, a biologist might ascribe minded intentions to diverse organic life to explain how diversity arose. But on Kant’s picture, it is a mistake to make a constitutive claim that organic life actually arose because of

¹¹ Similarly, Kant also says, “a legitimate and excellent regulative principle of reason, which however, as such, goes much too far for experience or observation to catch up with it ... *it only points the way toward systematic unity*” (A668/B696; my italics).

minded intention, thereby mistakenly ascribing minded intention where there is none. In their positive use, God, soul and infinite-world are similarly guiding but not part of theories.

The key reason why Kant claims that ideas have only a regulative use is because they are concepts without empirical referents, we are unwarranted in making claims about the properties of objects that might correspond to ideas. Consequently, if ideas are to be useful for empirical investigation, it cannot be because they refer to objects. Kant maintains that we mistakenly use ideas, and principles like parsimony, beyond their function as guides when we build them into theoretical claims about the world. Therefore, to say that speculative ideas are regulative is to say that they are guides for our scientific theories that do not imply any claims about the way the world is. Thus, I take it that Allison reflects the basic Kantian point when he says that “we are to consider this idea only as a ‘heuristic’ and not as an ‘ostensive concept’” (2004, 439), because they guide us and do not show us how an object is constituted.¹²

The above characterisation of idea as heuristic raises a number of questions, particularly around specifying the regulative function (or functions) of ideas—primarily, what are ideas guides for? In the most general sense, however, we can stipulate that ideas serve a regulative function insofar as they aid us in empirical investigation without referring to objects. This aid can come in the form of providing a principle (like parsimony) to choose between two equally explanatory theories.

¹² Similarly see Zuckert: “Kant emphasizes that we (still) know nothing about the purported transcendent objects of the ideas. Nor, [Kant] emphasizes, do we ‘derive’ anything about empirical nature from them (A673/B701). Rather, we consider nature only ‘as if’ it is related to those ideas or their objects” (2017, 92).

1.4 Rationality and Systematicity

Kant defines systematicity as making “interconnection[s] based on one principle” (A645/B673), bringing various cognitions “under one idea” (A832/B860), and representation thorough “the thoroughgoing unity of ... concepts” (A645/B673). Under my account (defended in detail in Chapter 7), systematicity in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is the mental act of connecting less general concepts to more general ones and these to the most general concept in a given domain. In this way, reason produces a hierarchical ordering of concepts according to their generality. In doing so, we bring one concept into an explanatory relation with a concept of higher generality (e.g., explaining the features of a cat in terms of pets in general). But we also bring unity to a diverse set of concepts: we can, e.g., explain both cats and wombats in terms of mammals. By thinking systematically, Kant thinks, we bring unity to our insights (about, say, cats and wombats)—as opposed to heaping them together in aggregation (A833/B861).

For Kant, reason demands we search after the unconditioned for conditioned objects (A307-8/B364) and thus provide a “resting place” (A584/B612) for the search. Put differently, rationality requires we seek explanations for what needs explaining until arriving at an unexplained explanation. According to Kant, such an unexplained explanation provides a fundamental explanation for a whole set of explanations, which just is his definition of systematicity.

I will say more about what is ‘rational’ about Kant’s rational requirement that we systematise our concepts in Chapter 7. For now, let’s note that, for Kant, systematicity is something we must do because reason tells us so. It is not merely a heuristic device that makes our lives easier—as an organisational overlap on empirical results, or a hypothesis, that, if successful, would provide probabilistic explanation (A653/B681).

1.5 The Necessity of Ideas

The *focus imaginarius* passage is a standard place to look for Kant's claim that speculative ideas have a positive and necessary role in empirical investigation.¹³ Here, he characterises ideas as having:

an excellent and indispensably necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point, which, although it is only an idea (*focus imaginarius*)—i.e., a point from which the concepts of the understanding do not really proceed, since it lies entirely outside the bounds of possible experience—nonetheless still *serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension*. Now of course it is from this that there arises the deception, as if these lines of direction were shot out from an object lying outside the field of possible empirical cognition (just as objects are seen behind the surface of a mirror); yet this illusion (which can be prevented from deceiving) is nevertheless *indispensably necessary* if besides the objects before our eyes we want to see those that lie far in the background, i.e., when, in our case, the understanding wants to go beyond every given experience (beyond this part of the whole of possible experience), and *hence wants to take the measure of its greatest possible and uttermost extension*.
(A644-5/B672-3; my italics)

A striking feature of this passage is Kant's claim that ideas are necessary for systematicity. Kant says that ideas are "indispensably necessary if besides the objects before

¹³ See Massami (2017, 67-74) for an excellent review of recent discussions.

our eyes we want to see those that lie far in the background ... and hence wants to take the measure of its greatest possible unity” (A645/B673; my italics)—that is, seek systematicity. Moreover, he claims there is a positive regulative use of ideas as “directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point”, and that they “serve to obtain for these [empirical] concepts the greatest unity” (A644/B672; my italics).¹⁴

It seems to me that part of Kant’s position regarding the necessity of ideas is explicit: ideas are supposedly necessary for projects which systematise. Kant repeats this claim in slightly different formulations elsewhere. He says:

¹⁴ The *focus imaginarius* passage is complex. Apart from this claim, Kant’s characterisation of the regulative role of ideas includes metaphors such as guides, a projected object, an illusion similar to images in mirrors, something lying beyond experience, projected lines, a convergence at a point, a goal of the understanding, and a projected unified explanation (assumedly as intentional in nature). Kant contrasts all of these examples with a constitutive use of ideas, which mistakenly presupposes that ideas correspond to objects. A common strategy for interpreting the *focus imaginarius* passage involves making a claim about ‘what ideas are’ and then deriving a necessity claim by equating systematicity with another notion. Here are three representative examples. Briesen interprets *foci imaginarii* as an epistemic notion, i.e., as a component of coherentism. This is the view that our beliefs are justified only if they form a mutually supporting web of beliefs. Briesen thus claims that ideas are necessary for “our most central epistemic goal, namely maximizing our set of true beliefs while at the same time avoiding false ones” (2013, 4). Massami interprets *foci imaginarii* as analogous to “vanishing point[s] in perspectival drawing”, which make possible an abstract “perspectival systematic space of reason” (2017, 76) for different interlocutors. Echoing David Lewis, she contends that ideas are necessary for Lewis-style conversational scoreboarding (2017, 77): reason “offers ideas as an imaginary standpoint (*focus imaginarius*), which acts ... as a ‘shared conversational score-board’ with respect to which individual judgments and knowledge claims can be assessed” (*Ibid.*, 77). Allison thinks Kant’s claim that ideas refer to objects lying far in the background makes it “reasonably clear the problem [Kant] has in mind ... is induction” (2004, 427). However, each interpreter goes beyond the letter of the text here: in the *focus imaginarius*, Kant never speaks of epistemic goals, conversational score-boarding, or induction. Grier claims that ideas are necessary in the sense of an inescapable illusion (2001, 128). Apart from Grier, these readings all import concerns beyond the *focus imaginarius* passage. Grier’s reading does not leave room for the necessity of ideas in a positive sense.

[I]f the greatest possible empirical use of my reason is grounded on an idea (that of systematic complete unity...), which in itself can never be presented adequately in experience, even though *it is unavoidably necessary for approximating the highest possible degree of empirical unity*, then I am not only warranted but even compelled to realise this idea. (A677/B705; my italics)

Here, Kant links the necessity of ideas to the systematic unity of empirical concepts. He says that ideas are necessary *for something*; that is, “necessary for approximating the highest possible degree of empirical unity” (A677/B705). Moreover, Kant says elsewhere that “reason cannot think this systematic unity in any other way than giving its idea an object, which, however, cannot be given through any experience” (A681/B709). These passages strongly suggest we should read Kant as maintaining that ideas are necessary conditions for setting out the systematic unity of empirical concepts: when we seek this systematic unity, speculative ideas are necessary for the task.

Moreover, Kant repeatedly makes the heuristic claim that the speculative ideas of God, the soul, and an infinite world help us to think systematically in empirical investigations (A686/B714; A683/B711; A685/B713). For instance, he claims that:

(1) with the idea ‘soul,’ “reason has nothing before its eyes except principles of the *systematic unity*” (A682/B711; my italics), such that empirical investigation will proceed “as far as possible on the basis of a *single principle*” (A683/B711; my italics);

(2) with ‘infinite world,’ reason seeks the “completeness of conditions in it in accordance with some *one principle*” (A685/B713; my italics);

(3) idea of ‘God’ “serves only to preserve the greatest systematic unity in the empirical use of reason” (A670/B698); it means nothing more than that reason bids us consider every connection in the world according to principles of a *systematic unity* (A686/B714; my italics).

So, considering the ideas in practice, what they do is to help us to conceptualise the systematic unity of three types of empirical investigation—psychological, cosmological, and theological. Again, for Kant, we consider some domain ‘systematically unified’ when we articulate a single rule connecting them—as opposed to having an aggregate of concepts. Admittedly, these passages do not contain a necessity claim. But it seems to me that if Kant claims that what ideas do is to help us to think systematic unity in empirical investigations, and they are moreover necessary for empirical investigation, the result of these dual claims is that ideas are necessary for systematic unity in empirical investigation. If this is right, then, as a conceptual necessity, ideas are necessary for systematicity in empirical investigation. If one systematises their empirical concepts in empirical investigation, then one necessarily systematises according to a single principle because that is just what it is to systematise. For example, if I organise books according to date of publication, I arrange them according to a single principle—older books precede newer books. Likewise, Kant thinks that speculative ideas help us articulate a single rule interconnecting our mental states, explanations of events, and the origins of all entities in the empirical world.¹⁵ Thus, common to all three ideas is that they allow us to systematise the empirical world.

¹⁵ Some commentators have taken Kantian speculation to refer to the integration of practical and theoretical reason—and is thus related to Kant’s claim that reason is unified. Henrich (1997) argues along these lines. I put this issue to one side. At least in the *Appendix*, Kant

2.0 Why Are Ideas Necessary: Four Interpretive Approaches

In this section, I present and reject four prominent readings of the necessity of ideas for empirical investigations. In the next chapter, I develop my own reading, according to which ideas are necessary for empirical investigation because they are our most general representations in our most general thoughts in a given domain.

2.1 The Dismissive Reading: Ideas are Unnecessary for Empirical Investigation (Guyer)

A dismissive reading claims that ideas are *not* necessary for empirical investigation. Guyer holds a more developed version of this reading than Kemp Smith's that we saw in this chapter's Introduction. According to Guyer, the "idea of systematicity" is nothing more than a "self-serving delusion" (1997, 42), which is "not a rational basis for action" (*Ibid.*, 44). Guyer attributes to Kant the claim that "only such postulation [of systematicity] can guarantee that we will, sooner or later, achieve such an articulated body of scientific knowledge" (*Ibid.*, 44). He then claims that presupposing that an object "will meet one's needs, rather than obtaining evidence that it does ... independent of one's own wishes" (*Ibid.*, 62), does not make it rational to behave as if the object really does meet those needs.

Guyer formulates his complaint in terms of a regulative "principle of systematicity" of nature, and ascribes to Kant the claim that "representing nature as a whole as systematic makes the search for system a well-motivated activity" (*Ibid.*, 43). He argues that Kant only requires a weaker principle: for a search to be rationally motivated, the only requirement is

maintains that speculation's role is firmly within empirical investigation. Indeed, the *Appendix* does not mention the unity of practical and theoretical reason.

that “we lack any reason that [our search] must fail” (*Ibid.*, 43), because it is rational to continue searching for something where we have no guarantee of failure—or because achieving some partial success may have its own value. Thus, on this reading, assuming nature is systematic is not necessary for discovering systematicity in nature since we only require a guarantee that we will not fail or get some side benefits from partial success.¹⁶

Guyer may have a point. It is one thing to suggest that certain principles are useful presuppositions in empirical investigation. It is another to suggest that empirical investigations, like science, must presuppose that things have a certain property because this is the only way we will be encouraged to look for that property and thus have a chance of a successful discovery. The worry, then, is that Kant’s account of the positive use of ideas amounts to wishful thinking in the following form: we must presuppose an idea in order to discover that the world is a certain way.

In response, I give three remarks. First, Kant’s suggestion concerns the conditions that make *possible* a unity of empirical concepts that we already have. Kant does not presuppose

¹⁶ Guyer admittedly makes this complaint in the context of the *Critique of Judgment* and argues that Kant’s view has changed since the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, Guyer elsewhere characterises the “the ideal of systematicity” (1990, 25) of the *Appendix* in much the same way. He says it is not an “internal feature of our conceptual schemes” (*Ibid.*, 25), but instead it is a presupposition of an “independent existence of a system in nature [that] *must be presupposed* in order to encourage us in the search for it” (*Ibid.*, 26; my italics). He also says, “Kant thinks it can be rational to attempt to satisfy the goal of a systematic organization of knowledge only if we are in a position to suppose that the objects of our inquiry are amenable to such a classification” (*Ibid.*, 26). He provides the following example: “The presupposition that nature is infinitely rich in differentiations encourages the understanding to the ever-increasing diversification of its classifications” (*Ibid.*, 27).

that we will succeed in one task or another.¹⁷ So, contra Guyer, the success of our search is irrelevant to Kant's position.

Second, Guyer's complaint makes it sound like Kant claims that systematicity concerns adopting a necessary means for achieving an end. On Guyer's reading, Kant thinks that the necessary means to discover nature's systematicity is by assuming that nature is systematic. Analogously, the necessary means to discover a systematic connection amongst our empirical concepts would be to assume that they are systematic. So Guyer's suggestion appears to be that the assumption of systematicity motivates us to do something—in action-guiding instrumental rationality—i.e., search for that systematicity. But this cannot be right: Kant's position primarily concerns a feature of theoretical or speculative reason. He says, “the speculative interest of reason makes it necessary to regard every ordinance in the world as if it had sprouted from the intention of a highest reason” (A686/B714), and that “speculative ideas ... mean nothing more than that reason bids us consider every connection in the world according to a principle of systematic unity” (A686/B714). So Guyer's complaint misconceives the direction of Kant's thinking. Kant claims that some feature of reason leads us to seek systematicity, and not that systematicity is a rational guide for our actions: the claim is that rationality demands that we seek systematicity, not that systematicity guides what is rational to do, namely, on Guyer's reading, search for systematicity. Since systematicity does not concern successfully achieving a goal or guiding our actions, worries about wishful thinking turn out to miss their target.

¹⁷ Breitenbach puts it this way: “Kant's argument for the move from a logical to a metaphysical principle of unity does not hinge on a presupposition of the success but rather of the possibility of systematic cognition” (Breitenbach n.d., Ch 2., 14).

Third, Guyer's phrase of the 'idea of systematicity' is problematic. Although in the *Appendix*, Kant sometimes refers to systematicity as an idea (A647/B675; A692/B720; A677/B705), he more consistently refers to ideas being necessary for systematicity. Above, I presented textual evidence supporting this point. Kant also says that ideas help us create systematicity: "one sees only that systematic unity or the unity of reason of the manifold of the understanding's cognition is a logical principle, in order where the understanding alone does not attain to rule, to *help it through ideas*, simultaneously creating unanimity among its various rule under one principle (the systematic)" (A648/B676; my italics). So Kant maintains that ideas help us unify the understanding's cognitions under one principle, which just is systematicity. If this is right, Guyer's reading makes Kant's necessity claim look absurdly circular: the idea of systematicity is a necessary aid for systematicity (which itself is an idea). A less forced reading is that, in the *Appendix*, Kant's concern is a singular demand for systematicity, which he considers in terms of various ideas and principles; for us, ideas are necessary aids in fulfilling this demand. We saw that the official speculative ideas are God, the soul, and an infinite-world. In the first part of the *Appendix*, Kant speaks of "[s]ystematic unity under three principles", that of "homogeneity, specification, and continuity of forms" (A658/B686), which seem to function like the official ideas in guiding the understanding. Kant does not include 'the idea of systematicity' in either the official ideas or principles. So, contrary to Guyer's rendition, Kant concern in the *Appendix* is less with an 'idea of systematicity' than "systematic connection in the idea" (A658/B686). That is, Kant's formulation is that there is systematicity *through* ideas and not an idea that *is* systematicity.

2.2 The Successful Use of the Understanding Reading 1 (Grier)

In contrast with Guyer's view, Michelle Grier (2001) argues that ideas are necessary for the successful use of the understanding because they allow us to connect individual cognition. On

this reading, if we have coherent thoughts, we need to connect our individual cognitions (say, ‘the building is on fire’), with other cognitions (say, ‘fire is dangerous’). Successful use of the understanding readings typically exploit passages where Kant’s claim that: “the law of reason to seek [the unity of nature] is necessary, because without it we would not have reason at all, but without this no coherent use of the understanding” (A651/B679–A652/B680).¹⁸

According to Grier, ideas are necessary for the successful use of the understanding because they give it a “problem set” (2001, 300). She argues that ideas thus enable “us to consider a disparate set of phenomena as ideally unified” (*Ibid.*, 298) and thus discover laws.¹⁹ Grier claims that ideas are required for establishing necessary connections between empirical features (*Ibid.*, 300) and thus provide the understanding with “unconditioned necessity and completeness” (*Ibid.*, 298). On this reading, ideas are necessary for this task because “only by representing the aggregate collection of phenomena in some necessary connection”, can we take such phenomena to “exhibit the necessary connections requisite for the discovery and articulation of laws” (*Ibid.*, 300).

To illustrate her point, Grier imagines someone exhibiting a set of symptoms S1, S2, ... S5. Even constrained by the thought that ‘every event has some cause’, she says that “we cannot define the ‘event’ for which we seek a cause unless we begin to unify the variety of

¹⁸ See Grier (2001, 281-2).

¹⁹ The thought is that the understanding requires the whole of experience to be in view in order to make universal judgments, and reason makes this possible through ideas. Similarly, Allison, reads the passage quote above along with the *focus imaginarius* passage this way. He says that the *focus imaginarius* is “itself a mere fiction, an idea” (2004, 426) amounting to a God’s eye view of things, and that “Kant insists that systematic unity is merely a ‘projected unity’ ... one which must be assumed as a condition of the operation of the understanding (*Ibid.*, 429-30). Presumably, an empiricist would outright resist the assumption that empirical investigation requires us to make statements that hold for all experience.

symptoms into a whole” (Grier 2001, 299). We now postulate this whole as a syndrome, from which we can attempt to connect S1 to S5. Ideas serve this unifying function. Since each symptom as given in experience is only contingently connected (say, experience tells us that S1 appears to cause S2, where S2 appears to cause S3), we cannot rule out that the entire set is not actually affected by some external cause, or is the result of some element (say, S2) or a combination of elements (say, S2 and S4). That is, we cannot determine the necessary law that governs the set of symptoms. According to Grier, the ideas are ideal because they postulate a non-sensible ground in which the “interconnection of properties, objects, states of affairs, themselves are to be viewed as related by necessity” (*Ibid.*, 301). They are not empirical because they do not postulate “an empirical connection of properties” (*Ibid.*, 300-1). On Grier’s reading, ideas are necessary for the understanding because they “serve to identify and set a ‘problem’ for the understanding” (*Ibid.*, 299)—e.g., a set of symptoms—and because “in order to apply causality or to establish the ‘necessary connections’ between the features, we need to view these features themselves as interconnected” (*Ibid.*, 300). Systematic unity, therefore, is only argued to be possible through the use of an idea. Moreover, Grier tells us that “we certainly can and must consider these ‘appearances’ as necessarily connected somehow” (*Ibid.*, 300). So, on this reading, ideas have an empirical application in helping us to connect diverse appearances into a unified set to consider. Moreover, their necessity derives from allowing us to establish necessary connections from diverse appearances.²⁰

²⁰ Massami offers a variant of the successful use of the understanding reading. She claims that ideas are necessary for the successful use of the understanding: “ideas accomplish their indispensably necessary regulative function by laying down the rules that the understanding ought to follow, if it wants to go beyond given experience and take the measure of ‘its greatest possible and uttermost extension’” (2017, 75). She takes ‘greatest possible extension’ to mean intra-conversational agreement. On this reading, “[r]eason

However, Grier’s reading runs into three key problems. First, it seems to conflate the regulative and constitutive use of ideas. For Kant, the positive function of ideas lies only in their regulative use—i.e., as background assumptions that guide our empirical investigation without telling us about objects and thus are *not parts of theories themselves*.²¹ However, to say (as Grier does) that ideas are necessary for the understanding because they unify a set of symptoms into a ‘problem set’ is to build the problem set into a theory against which we can test various symptoms. Suppose that a scientist assumes that ‘God created everything’ as a working hypothesis to find evidence for or against this assumption. This hypothesis would contain a necessarily connected problem set of everything. Now, suppose that she found evidence for this assumption. Even though Grier is correct to point out that such a discovery is impossible, the scientist would have built a necessarily connected problem set of everything into her theory. This suggests that, even if ideas remain a non-sensible ground for necessary connections, on Grier’s reading, ideas are constitutive (contra Kant’s stated view).

Second, even if Grier’s reading could account for the regulative nature of ideas, it fails to establish the necessity of ideas for empirical investigation. For Grier, ideas are the concepts referred to in a hypothesis that supply us with a problem set or syndrome. However, having a hypothesis against which to test various cases, while useful, is unnecessary for empirical investigation. For example, a doctor might engage in empirical investigation only in a

offers ideas as an imaginary standpoint (*focus imaginarius*), which acts ... as a ‘shared conversational score-board’ with respect to which individual judgments and knowledge claims can be assessed” (*Ibid.*, 77) such that interlocutors can come to agreement. The problem with this reading is that the notion of scoreboarding is not present in the *focus imaginarius* passage—nor does it appear elsewhere in the *Critique of Pure Reason* or Kant’s other works.

²¹ For example, Kant thinks we are mistaken to use ideas constitutively when we expect an “object corresponding to them” (A671/B699) and thus build them into our theories about the world.

piecemeal way. They could treat a patient's individual symptoms without ever conceiving of a problem set of symptoms, and might even accidentally discover that a particular symptom is the root cause of an illness. And whilst treating a patient's symptoms as a whole might be the more effective approach, this only shows that the problem set is useful.

Third, Grier's account only shows that *reason* is necessary for the successful operation of the understanding and not *ideas*. Grier's reading does clarify one aspect of Kant's account: we need a faculty to connect individual cognitions of the understanding (like 'the building is on fire' with 'fire is dangerous'). For Kant, reason is the obvious candidate because it is defined as the faculty which organises concepts, phenomena, and theories. But even if we do need reason to organise our empirical concepts into some hierarchy, this does not explain why we necessarily need to organise concepts hierarchically under a *highest* concept (i.e., an idea). Whilst Grier can explain why Kant distinguishes the understanding (as that which supplies concepts) from reason (as that which orders concepts), she ultimately does not establish the necessity of ideas for the successful operation of the understanding or empirical investigation.

2.3 The Successful Use of the Understanding Reading 2 (Allison)

Allison gives another version of the successful use of the understanding reading. For him, thinking systematically *just is* the same mental act as thinking in terms of ideas. According to Allison, Kant's *Appendix* argues that "to think of nature as embodying a systematic unity and to view it *as if* it were ordered by a supreme intelligence are *not two distinct mental acts*" (2004, 441; my italics). He claims that to view nature in the former way "*is just* to view it in the latter" (*Ibid*; my italics). Thus, on this reading, we are psychologically incapable of separating the systematic unity of nature from the idea of God because they comprise the same mental act. Therefore, the necessity of God for empirical investigation arises because we cannot think systematically without equating systematicity with such an idea.

I find Allison's reading unsatisfactory for two key reasons. First, he cites only one passage to support this view—i.e., “[r]eason cannot think this systematic unity in any other way than by giving its idea an object, which, however cannot be given through any experience” (A681/B709, cited in Allison 2004, 441). But we can read this passage another way: could Kant be claiming instead only that ideas are a necessary *component* of thinking systematically? Consider the following. To say that I cannot get to the shops in any other way than leaving my house is only to say that leaving my house is a necessary part of getting to the shops. If I did not leave the house, I would not get there. It is *not* to say that leaving my house *just is* going to the shops. Otherwise, I would arrive at the shops every time I left home. Analogously, saying that reason cannot think systematically in any other way than by giving itself an idea is only to say that ideas are a necessary part of thinking systematically. It does not follow (as Allison suggests) that thinking systematically just is thinking with an idea.

Second, notice that Allison's reading renders Kant's necessity claim psychological insofar it amounts to saying that we are psychologically incapable of thinking systematicity without conceiving of systematicity through an idea. But understood thus, Kant's necessity claim seems implausible. As a psychological fact, we *can* separate these mental acts. Suppose we think of a rainforest as an interconnected system under one principle. We do not conceive it as created by a supreme intelligence. A contemporary biologist can alternatively explain everything in a rainforest in terms of evolution by natural selection without ever considering it a part of divine creation. Yet, on Allison's reading, Kant suggests that we are psychologically incapable of this feat. Allison's reading could be right, such that Kant's view would be simply wrong. But I think this would be a deeply uncharitable reading.

For the above the reasons, I think that Allison's 'same mental act' reading is unconvincing.

2.4 The Ideas as Necessary Placeholders Reading (Zuckert)

One final reading claims that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation because they provide a rational ideal for knowledge, and thus show us what we do not know. For instance, Zuckert claims that, for Kant, ideas are “preconditions for investigation” (2017, 98) because “ideas ... contain a specific suggestion that the [empirical] world might [always] be known otherwise, and known better” (*Ibid.*, 105). Therefore, ideas allow us to “hope that there is something to be found, and to do so, one needs to have the sense that investigation is about something” (*Ibid.*, 98). On this view, ideas encourage us to investigate by suggesting that “there is something ‘out there’ to be found in ongoing empirical investigation” (*Ibid.*, 89-90), beyond our current state of empirical knowledge. In the first instance, ideas can take on this function because they do not tell us about properties of empirical objects and thus does not “predetermine” (*Ibid.*, 90) empirical investigation—instead, investigation is always left open. But within this context, they also tell us something: ideas “provide an image of rationally ideal knowledge” (*Ibid.*, 107), a priori in the form of a completely “rationally ordered world” (*Ibid.*, 99). According to Zuckert, such a formulation not only exceeds our current empirical knowledge but empirical knowledge in general. Thus, ideas provide a projection of a never attainable ideal that we can only strive towards. Ultimately, then, ideas are “nearly empty” concepts or “optimistic placeholders” (*Ibid.*, 89) standing in for objects, which prescribe to us that empirical investigation is always incomplete.

It seems to me that Zuckert does not establish why ideas are necessary for empirical investigation. We can demonstrate this with some examples. Consider a Stoic scientist who cultivates a habit that leads them to enjoy seeking out and defending the wildest hypotheses. In this case, the scientist’s continued investigation depends on her habits and the joy she derives from further investigation. Given that these are strong enough, they would not require

further encouragement from a priori ideas or from anything else. Alternatively, consider a musician who is driven to perform a piece better each time. It might be the case that they are driven to reproduce an idea of the piece—i.e., from some ideal that contains the suggestion that the piece can always be performed better (say by ‘learning’ the piece better and ‘discovering’ its subtleties). But it might also be the case that they are solely driven by an emotional state—say that each better performance brings them joy. Thus, their continued pursuit of better performance depends on a particular emotion and not necessarily on encouragement from a priori ideas. Now, I admit that instances of a Stoic scientist and a *solely* emotionally driven musician are probably rare. However, all this shows is that *hoping* there is something to be found, or hoping that a better performance can be achieved, can also be extremely useful in a psychological sense for persevering in these tasks. So Zuckert’s reading shows that ideas might be useful, but not necessarily useful, for empirical investigation.

There is another way to understand Zuckert’s reading, which I think gets something right and something wrong. I call this a constitutive reading: ideas are necessary for empirical investigation because what it means to engage in empirical investigation is to use ideas. In Zuckert’s terms, what it means to engage in empirical investigation is to assume that we can know the world better. It is likely the case that a constitutive part of empirical science does involve the assumption that we can always know the world better. But still, it is unclear to me why that assumption *requires* ideas. Why can we not just stipulate that we can know the world better?

However, I believe that a constitutive reading does get us on the right track. In the next section, I follow that thought from a different angle: ideas are constitutively necessary for reason because, in Kant’s technical sense, to reason *is* to make generalisations with ideas.

3.0 A Proposal: Our Most General Thoughts

I have argued that prominent existing readings cannot fully account for the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation for Kant.

In my view, Kant thinks that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation because they are our most general representations of our most general thoughts in a given domain. These ‘most general thoughts’ in empirical investigation involve “rational cognition[s]” (A329/B386; A715/B743):²² the product of the mental act of connecting concepts of lower generality to higher ones, and connecting these to the most general concepts in a given domain (i.e., an idea). All cognition (in Kant’s technical sense) necessarily requires that we generalise over non-general representations. In the *Deduction*, for example, cognition is shown to be a product of the understanding *generalising* through concepts which determine particular intuitive content. Similarly, cognitions of reason are the product of generalising through *ideas* over non-general features of empirical concepts. Thus, ideas are necessary in empirical investigation if we are to have rational cognitions in a given domain, because ideas are necessarily *constitutive* of rational cognition.

I will now go on to flesh out this proposal.

²² I read Kant’s reference to rational cognitions as a case of genuine cognition broadly construed. Consider this passage: a “cognition can have arisen from reason” (Vien-L 24:798). In Chapter 7, I present further textual evidence that Kant thinks we have genuine rational cognition in a broad sense.

Chapter 7 — Kant on Cognition, Kant on Reason: The Necessity of Ideas

Introduction

Kant argues that knowledge claims about ideas, like God, are “dazzling” but “illusion[ary]” (A702/B730). Such claims are illusionary, we are told, because ideas are a priori concepts that lack empirical objects and thus lack a “touchstone for their correctness” (A296/B352). Kant insists we should stop trying to ground knowledge of ideas and instead diagnose why we think we can have such knowledge.

In the *Appendix*, however, Kant also wants to claim that, in empirical investigation, ideas have a “positive” (A669/B697) function and are “unavoidably necessary” (A677/B705) for anyone who rationally infers, insofar as they systematise their insights. Ideas, we are told, are never dialectical in themselves—i.e., lead to paradoxes and antinomies—but it is only our “misuse” of them that leads to “deceptive illusion” (A669/B697). It is operator error, not system error—so to speak.

In Part II, I have been considering the question that if ideas like God, the soul, and an infinite world are a priori formulations, why are they necessary for empirical investigation? After all, empirical investigation deals with empirically real objects, not a priori ones that have no empirical referent. For instance, it is questionable whether an a priori representation

of the soul need play any role in empirical psychology, let alone a necessary one.¹ In Chapter 6, I argued that several leading interpretations of the above problem do not fully account for the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation, given we can refer to counter-examples where ideas do not play a role.

In this chapter, I argue for my positive proposal, what I call, mentalism about the necessity of ideas. Mentalism is the view that ideas are our most general concepts, in our most general thoughts, in a given domain, and this explains why they are necessary for empirical investigation. On my view, our most general thoughts, what Kant calls ‘rational cognitions’ or ‘cognitions of reason’, require two ingredients: empirical concepts and ideas. My argument focuses on Kant’s claim that reason is the “supreme faculty of cognition” (A299/B355; see also A702/B730) and that “[a] cognition can have arisen from reason” (JL 9:22, see also Vien-L 24:798).² I take these passages to suggest that *reason produces cognitions*. By analogy with cognitions of the understanding that require a (general) concept and given (particular) intuitions, I claim that cognitions of reason require ideas that play a necessary role in generalising over empirical concepts. On Kant’s view of the human mind, if concepts are general in the sense of what is “common to several things” (A320/B377), then ideas are representations “common to many concepts” (Blom-L 24:260).

¹ See Kraus (2018) for a recent discussion of this point. She discusses the necessity of the soul for empirical psychology as an instance of empirical investigation. By contrast, I aim to establish a general account of the necessity of ideas for empirical investigation.

² Curiously, few commentators take seriously Kant’s characterisation of reason as producing cognitions. If it is noted, commentators normally gloss it. For example, Hanna says that “[t]heoretical reason is cognizing that is aimed at the truth of judgments” (2001, 151) using necessary rules of logic particular to the law of non-contradiction. Similarly, Willaschek says that reason “is [fundamentally] the capacity for *a priori discursive cognition by means of mediate inference*” (2018, 22). Yet, Hanna and Willaschek do not explain how reason produces a form of cognition with much more specificity.

My claim, however, in this chapter is limited. Mentalism claims that *if* we have systematic thoughts (which are rational cognitions) in empirical investigation, then we require ideas. There are further issues concerning, on Kant's view, why we ought to think in a systematic manner and what is the nature of empirical investigation. As we saw in Chapter 6, Kant defines systematicity as an “interconnection based on one principle” (A645/B673) of concepts achieved through the mental act of connecting less general concepts to more general ones. But a rational requirement to systematise our concepts seems oddly high. For instance, it hardly seems true that knowledge requires an agent to systematise their concepts: one’s testimonial knowledge that ‘Covid-19 is deadly’ does not seem to require that one infer that ‘Covid-19 is a coronavirus’. In Chapter 8, I will argue that Kant’s systematicity requirement is a requirement on *systematized* knowledge, which is a mental state epistemically superior to knowledge that the scholastics would recognise as ‘*scientia*’, German speakers as ‘*Wissenschaft*’, and contemporary epistemologists (confusingly) as ‘understanding’. For Kant, systematic knowledge involves assent to a proposition on evidential *and* inferential grounds. Ideas would be necessary only for fully systematized knowledge. I will also argue, in Chapter 8, that empirical investigation in Kant is best understood as a *collective project*, and not an individual one, because most individuals are not in a position to transform their knowledge into a unified system given their limited time, energy, and mental resources. I want to flag these issues and return to them in the next chapter.

If successful, the defence of mentalism that I develop in Chapter 7 and clarify in Chapter 8 resists the following line of interpretation: given that empirical investigation involves setting and pursuing theoretical ends, Kant’s claim that doctrinal (or theoretical) Belief is necessary for pursuing theoretical ends is reducible to his claim that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation. On my view, these claims come apart because the former is a claim

about a mental state, namely, the propositional attitude Belief, and the latter is a claim about a kind of mental content, namely supersensible concepts, like God.

Mentalism, also, stands in contrast with influential attempts to characterise Kant's claim that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation as extremely confused. In this context, Jonathan Bennett arguably speaks for many when he says that Kant's discussion of the necessity of ideas is "a clumsy attempt to rationalise a set of problems which reflect not the structure of reason but the preoccupations of German academic philosophers at the time when Kant was writing" (1974, 261).³

Far from being an archaic piece of German philosophy, what emerges in this chapter is an account of Kant's claim that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation arises from deeply Kantian concerns about systematic thought and cognition that are applicable to contemporary philosophical concerns. These concerns are (1) that systematic thought is conceptual (i.e., rational cognition) and (2) that rational cognition is the product of non-general and general representations—respectively empirical concepts and ideas.

Here is how this chapter is organized. In Section 1, I remind us of Kant's account of the faculties, and link it to textual evidence for the claim that Kant thinks reason produces rational cognition. Section 2 distinguishes between narrow cognition (the product of synthesising intuitions with concepts) and broad cognition (the product of non-general and general

³ See Strawson who claims that the *Transcendental Dialectic's* positive project is "highly problematic in character" and "rest[s] is [im]plausible claims and fallacious argument" (Strawson 1966, 156-6). Likewise, see Schopenhauer: Kant alleges that "the three transcendent Ideas are of value as regulative principles ... But Kant can hardly have been serious in making this assertion" (1818, Vol. 1, 513-514). See also Kemp Smith for whom the *Appendix* is "extremely self-contradictory" (1962, 547), and Guyer for whom seeking the idea of systematicity is a wishful thinking (1997, 42). For my objections to these reading see Chapter 6.

representations). In Sections 3 and 4, I present my reading of Kantian reason and rational cognition. I argue that reasoning (for Kant) is primarily the mental act of connecting concepts of lower generality to higher generality, and then to the most general—what he calls “concept subordination” (A304/B361; see also JL 9:96-99), and that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation when we have our most general thought in a certain domain. Section 5 deals with objections both to Kant’s account and against my own reading, particularly in light of Clinton Tolley’s (2020) indirect reading of rational cognition. In Section 6, I highlight the main implications of my picture.

1.0 Reason Produces Cognitions

1.1 A Reminder of Kant’s Theory of Mind: The Standard Gloss

Kant distinguishes three faculties: sensibility, the understanding, and reason. Sensibility is the faculty through which we are affected by objects through intuitions, which in the most basic sense are sensations (A51/B75). Intuitions are immediate and singular representations (A320/B377) of objects. In this way, our thoughts refer to particular objects, and as such are not ‘empty’.

The understanding is the faculty of concepts. Through it, we think objects that are given to us through sensibility by applying concepts—and thus have determinate thoughts about particular objects. Where intuitions are immediate and singular representations of objects, concepts are mediate and general representations: a concept is “a mark, which can be common to several things” (A320/B377).⁴ Kant claims that the understanding’s cognitions are

⁴ Take for example, this passage: “[metal] is ... a concept only because other representations are contained under it by means of which it can be related to objects” (A69/B94).

the product of the synthesis of intuition with concepts, wherein: “intuition and concepts ... constitute the elements of all our cognition, so that neither concepts without intuitions corresponding to them in some way, nor intuitions without concepts can yield a cognition” (A51/B75; A92/B125). So, for instance, a subject’s having a cognition (e.g., ‘that is a cat’) necessarily involves a general representation (the concept ‘cat’), which generalises over an immediate and singular representation of a particular object (that thing).⁵

Reason is the faculty that connects concepts in abstraction from objects. It is a pure faculty in the sense that reason is “independent not just of experience but of all impressions of the senses ... in which nothing empirical is mixed” (B2–3). Accordingly, reason does not deal with intuitions supplied by sensibility but only with concepts. The function of reason’s role in our mental lives is to connect concepts in analytic assertions, such as ‘a triangle is a three-side-shape’, or by allowing us to make inferences from premises to a conclusion (A298-9/B355-6), in abstraction from objects given in intuition.

The standard gloss on the above claims focuses on the relationship between understanding and cognition. Gomes and Stephenson are representative. They say that “cognition is the output of being given something in intuition and applying a concept or concepts to it” (Gomes and Stephenson 2016, 60).⁶ Let’s state the standard gloss as follows:

⁵ On Kant’s picture, this does not mean that an actual object exists or that one actually stands in a relation to it, but only that such an object could possibly exist and one could possibly stand in such a relation. In this sense, we could cognise a house on the moon, mermaids, and magnetic fields, were they to exist or if our senses “were finer” (A226/B274).

⁶ Or take Allais succinct formula: for Kant, “all cognition requires two ingredients, intuitions and concepts” (2015, 145). Or as in Allison: concepts and sensible intuitions are “the ‘elements’ of discursive cognition” (2004, 77). There are dissenters to the standard reading. For example, we might contrast the standard gloss to a much weaker reading

The standard gloss: Only the understanding produces cognitions, which are products of something being given in intuition and generalisation through concepts.

Most of Kant’s readers are happy to repeat the standard gloss (at least in broad strokes) and for good reason: Kant often expresses a strong commitment to it. For example, a famous Kantian dictum runs “[o]nly from their unification [that of the understanding and sensibility] can cognition arise”, such that, “[t]houghts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (A51-2/B75-6). Or take, this passage: “there are two stems of human cognition ... namely sensibility and understanding, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought” (A15/B29). So the standard gloss is rightly a bedrock of Kant’s picture of our mental lives.

1.2 Rational Cognition: Textual Considerations

However, Kant also seems to be fully committed to what I call the ‘rational cognition’ claim—that reason produces cognition “through concepts” (A715/B743) alone. For Kant also claims that reason is a “source of cognition”, even though it does not “deal with intuitions” (A306/B363), and derives nothing from the senses (A300/B357).⁷

The textual evidence for the rational cognition claim is also strong. Kant characterises reason as the “supreme faculty of cognition” (A299/B355; see also A702/B730), as

according to which cognition just is a basic capacity to “get something in mind” (Firestone and Jacob 2008, 112).

⁷ Take the opening lines of the *Critique of Judgment*; “philosophy is the system of rational cognition through concepts” (CJ 20:195). Or take this remark from the *Jäsche Logic*: “we must first investigate the character of various cognition themselves, and since philosophical cognitions belong to the cognition of reason, we must explain in particular what is to be understood by the latter” (JL 9:19).

“cognis[ing] the particular in the universal through concepts” (A300/B357), and calls its product “the speculative cognitions of reason” (A329/B386). Sometimes, he explicitly says that “[a] cognition can have arisen from reason” (JL 9:22, also see Vien-L 24:798), and that “reason [has] *the power to cognize*“ (A586/B614; my italics). Elsewhere, Kant lists reason on as the sixth and seventh degree of cognitions: “*sixth*: to cognize something through reason, or to have insight” and “*seventh*, finally: to comprehend something (*comprehendere*), i.e., to cognize something through reason ... to the degree that is sufficient for our purpose” (JL 9:65).⁸ While it is not immediately clear what Kant means by ‘degree,’ reason’s inclusion on the list is highly suggestive that Kant thinks that reason produces a form of cognition.

Unless Kant is playing fast and loose with the term ‘cognition,’ the above passages suggest that he endorses the claim that *reason produces cognitions* (at least in *some* sense), and in a way that appears to be inconsistent with the standard gloss. This is because, on the standard gloss, cognition essentially involves intuitions, from which reason is abstracted.⁹

So how can reason produce cognitions without dealing with intuitions? Kant suggests an answer in this passage:

⁸ See Tolley (2020) for a divergent reading of rational cognition. He claims that reason cognises indirect in the sense of relating to intuitions as a whole. I discuss Tolley’s reading in Section 5 “Objections”.

⁹ There is a parallel issue about whether or not, for Kant, intuitions and concepts can come apart. Conceptualist readings say that they cannot. See for example Ginsborg (2008) and Grüne (2011). Non-conceptualist readings say they can. See for example Allais (2009) and Hanna (2005). I do not address that issue here—as nothing in my argument hangs on either reading.

[I]t would be an absurdity for us, *with respect to any object*, to hope to cognize more than belongs to a possible experience of it. (Prol. 4:350; my italics)

Note that whilst the above passage rules out that reason produces cognition with *respect to objects*, the conceptual space is available for my claim that reason produces cognition with *respect to concepts*.

Moreover, reading reason as producing cognitions renders Kant's account of reason discursive. This should not surprise us. After all, it would be implausible to claim that reason is a non-discursive mode of thinking because Kantian reason is discursive by definition. For Kant, an *intuitive intellect* (i.e., a divine mind) directly grasps the relation between given particular representations and general concepts; thus, for a divine mind, a contrast between given particularity and generality is irrelevant. By contrast, a discursive intellect passively receives sensible intuitions (i.e., particular representations) through which "an object is given to us" (A50/B74). After this, the *discursive intellect* spontaneously and mediately places those sensible intuitions under general concepts (A51/B75). Kant claims that finite beings (i.e., beings like us) possess discursive intellects, insofar as sensibility supplies particular representations and the understanding supplies general concepts. On my proposal, rational cognitions are discursive in a loose sense, insofar they are the product of less general and more general concepts. (I will develop this proposal at length in this chapter). It is not discursive in the strict sense of involving passive and spontaneous faculties. If this is right, the understanding and reason share a feature (namely, a capacity to generalise with concepts). Thus, Kantian reason is not a unique mode of thinking as entirely distinct from the understanding—nor is reason analogous to an intuitive intellect that directly grasps the relations between diverse concepts. Rather, reason is a human mode of thinking aligned with our nature as discursive beings insofar as it involves generalisation (with or without sensible

intuitions). The claim that we need to avoid, I argue, is that reason is a non-discursive faculty, which would associate human faculties too closely with intellectual intuition.

Let's take stock. *Prima facie*, cognition in Kant appears to be simply the product of intuitions and concepts. However, on closer inspection, he also allows for *rational* cognitions, i.e., cognitions from concepts alone, which do not involve intuition. How, then, can we account for this puzzle? In the following section, I will distinguish narrow and broad conceptions of cognition, such that rational cognition can be understood as consistent with Kant's account of cognition in a 'broad' sense.

2.0 Narrow and Broad Cognition

2.1 Distinguishing Narrow and Broad Cognition

In various places, Kant distinguishes between non-empirical and empirical cognition. Empirical cognitions are the product of intuitions and concepts (i.e., the standard gloss). Non-empirical cognitions include philosophical or (equivalently) rational cognitions and mathematical cognitions.

Take this passage from the *Jäsche Logic*:

All cognitions are either rational [and mathematical] or empirical ... Philosophy is ... [rational] cognition of reason from mere concepts, while mathematics is cognition of reason from the construction of concepts. (JL 9:22)¹⁰

¹⁰ For further textual evidence that Kant recognises this distinction see his comments that the understanding's cognitions are "cognition[s] in the proper sense" (A78/B103) or "genuine cognition[s]" (B149). Or take this remark from the *Critique of Judgment*: "it was strictly

Consider a triangle. In *empirical cognition*, one measures the sides of a triangle (A718/B746). One's concepts refer to the intuitive content of an empirical object, and thus one has empirical evidence for claims about the lengths of the sides of a triangle. In *non-empirical, mathematical cognition*, one constructs and manipulates a triangle a priori through space as a pure form of intuition (A716/B744). Since, for Kant, both space and time are 'pure forms' of intuition and thus a priori, mathematics involves a priori intuitions (in contrast to empirical intuitions given by the sensibility). In *non-empirical, philosophical cognition*, one (somewhat mysteriously) considers "the particular only in the universal" (A714/B742)—by which Kant means, e.g., one connects a particular kind of triangle to triangles in general and further to shapes in "systematic connection" (JL 9:24). While mathematical cognitions are still "intuitive cognitions" (albeit a priori ones), *philosophical cognitions* are "only discursive [cognitions]" (JL 9:23), which is to say, they only involve concepts.

Such passages suggest, I contend, that Kant thus operates with both a narrow (empirical) sense of cognition and a broad (empirical and non-empirical, namely mathematical and philosophical) sense of cognition.¹¹

2.2 Narrow (Empirical) Cognition

speaking the understanding, which has its proper domain indeed in the faculty of cognition (CJ 5:168). See also A721/B749; A713-716 B741-B744; Vien-L 24:800.

¹¹ It is a common move in the literature to distinguish between the narrow and broad sense of cognition. For instance, Gomes and Stephenson say: "it is clear, then, that intuitions and concepts are each independently necessary for cognition 'in the proper sense' (Gomes and Stephenson 2016, 61) of the understanding. Similarly, Watkins and Willaschek (2020; 2017) and Grüne (2011) distinguishes between broad and narrow notions of cognition. Chignell suggests a distinction between loose and strict cognition (forthcoming (a), Ch. 3). These commentators are correct to note this distinction as far as they go. But they do not give an account of 'non-proper', broad' or 'loose' cognition.

We can now give a preliminary account of narrow cognition, which can be captured sufficiently through two key conditions:

- (1) The **givenness condition**: intuitions must be given (somehow) to the mind.
- (2) The **generality condition**: what is given must be conceptually determined through concepts.

There are three key points in need of clarification.

The distinction of cognition from knowledge. For Kant, cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is distinct from knowledge (*Wissen*). All cognition is a representation (A320/B377)—what today we might call a mental state with semantic features (such as content and reference); knowledge, by contrast, is a mode of assent or “taking [a proposition] to be true” (*Fürwahrhalten*) (A820/B847). So I might represent a book with the *particular* features of bookness and blueness (in an intuition) and represent it with the shared general features of ‘book’ and ‘blue’ (in concepts) that other blue objects and books might share. In this way, I produce the cognition ‘this is a blue book’. By contrast, knowledge that ‘this is a blue book’ also involves my assent to the relevant proposition. Moreover, for Kant, having some cognition—e.g., ‘this is a blue book’—is itself an important reason to assent that ‘this is a blue book’, because cognition can serve as the objective ground for assent: the fact that I have the cognition ‘this is a blue book’ is evidence for p, and thus provides a reason to assent that p.

Givenness. I intentionally rendered ‘given (somehow) to the mind’ ambiguous to capture a vast interpretative spectrum. Here, the adage ‘there are almost as many interpretations of Kant as there are Kant scholars’ seems to hold: interpretations of givenness vary widely. Prominent interpretations include (1) that givenness is satisfied by objects bearing some

causal relation to us, (2) by our direct perceptual awareness of objects, (3) by intuitive marks (representational content) that might come apart from objects (referential content), and even (4) that givenness is satisfied intellectually, i.e. not through intuition.¹² There are very disparate notions, and mitigating between them is not helped by the fact that Kant never appears to give a consistent, technical definition of givenness.

Despite the interpretive disagreements surrounding givenness, all participants tend to agree with a minimal definition: givenness necessarily involves a non-general representation. So, for something to be given to a subject, minimally they must have a representation of particular features. If one does not accept this definition, then the distinction between intuitions and concepts disappears. As we saw, for Kant, an intuition is a representation that is “immediately related to an object and is singular” (A320/B377) and concepts are general representations. Elsewhere, he says that “concepts differ from intuition by virtue of the fact

¹² Here is a brief summary of recent views. Watkins and Willaschek (2017) argue that the existence of intuitions depends on their objects because there is a causal relation between the two, which gives rise to representational content. For instance, they claim that intuition depends “both in its existence and in its representational content, on (the causal relation to) its object” (Watkins and Willaschek 2017, 93). According to them, objects must be given to us causally because “cognition must actually latch onto an object” (*Ibid.*, 86). Allais argues that intuitions depend for their existence on objects being “present to consciousness” (Allais 2015, 106). She understands this as a form of naïve (or equivalently perceptual) realism, according to which a constitutive part of perceiving an object is that our senses provide us with direct perceptual awareness of them. Grüne (2009) argues that the existence of intuitions comes apart from the existence of objects. She argues that intuitions represent their object via intuitive marks and that we can have such representations independently of the existence of objects. Chignell (2017) argues that givenness might be satisfied intellectually and not through intuitions. He argues that intellectual data is given to us by conceiving things as logical and really possible. On this view, “we can conceive of (or intellectually latch onto) some particular things—including some of the favorite objects of speculative metaphysics—in a way that allows us to ascribe further features to them” (Chignell 2017, 141).

that all intuition is singular” (Vien-L 24:905). Our present goal is to understand cognition in the broad sense. For now, this minimal definition of givenness will be sufficient.

Concept generality. Concepts, for Kant, are general representations that can relate to many possible objects, thus satisfying the generality condition. We cannot relate different objects given in intuitions to others without concepts, because intuitions only represent particular features. Instead, concepts mediate between these particular representations. Thus Kant defines concepts as marks “common to several things” (A320/B377), which allow us to *think in generalisations* (A320/B377; A19/B33; A50/B74; A713/B741). Here is a characteristic passage:

[I] became aware that there is something general in the colour red, that is contained along with other things in other representations of the colour red, and he thought by red that which was common to many objects, and this was a concept. A concept, then, is a representation that is common to many things. In the case of *intuitus* [i.e., in intuition], I consider individual things. (Vien-L 24:905)

So, for Kant, concepts are general representations; intuitions are non-general representations. We use concepts to generalise over intuitions.

I think that the most convincing (and perhaps dominant) reading of Kant’s account of concept generality is put in terms of Gareth Evans’ generality constraint:¹³

¹³ Versions of the generality constraint are widely held in the literature. For examples see Allais 2015, 264; Smit 2000; Hanna 2006, 92; McLear 2016, 130.

[I]f a subject can be credited with the thought that a is F, then he must have the conceptual resources for entertaining the thought that a is G for every property of being G of which he has a conception. (Evans 1982, 104)

Under Evans' generality constraint, possessing a concept requires that we have the mental capacity to recombine it with other concepts in different thoughts. As the stock example goes, if we can think a is F and that b is G, we must be capable of thinking that a is G and b is F.¹⁴ My possessing the concept 'bottle' and employing it in the thought 'this is a bottle' requires that I can also think 'that other thing is a bottle'.¹⁵ Thus, for Kant, possessing a concept is not merely an ability to discriminate some thing from another (say, dogs from non-dogs), nor is it a disposition to react in certain way—for example, uttering certain sounds when one recognises a cluster of properties exemplified by dogs. Rather, if one possesses a concept, one can take "together what [different objects] have in common" (Vien-L 24:905).¹⁶ Moreover, since having a concept just is the capacity to combine it with other concepts in thought, the

¹⁴ See Beck (2012) for a contemporary account.

¹⁵ Commentators typically take the following passages as support of the generality of concepts: "In every judgment there is a concept that holds of many, and that among this many also comprehends a given representation" (A68/B93; my italics); "[I]f I think of red in general, I thereby represent to myself a feature that (as a mark) can be encountered in anything, or that can be combined with other representations... A representation that is to be thought of as common to several must be regarded as belonging to those that in addition to it also have something different in themselves; consequently they must antecedently be conceived in synthetic unity with each other" (B133–4n). For example, see Allais (2015, 265).

¹⁶ Notice that the generality constraint reading is compatible with other readings that cash out generality differently. For example, Watkins and Willaschek says that concept generality involves repeatable representations at "different objects on different occasions" (Watkins and Willaschek 2017, 93). As far as I can see, this is the generality constraint: applying say 'cat' to different objects on different occasions.

generality constraint rules out the possibility that a concept uniquely picks out individual objects because we could not recombine such a concept.¹⁷

In Kantian terms, if intuitions were “isolated and separated” (A97) from one another, we could not relate, compare, and connect individual representations. This is why we need concepts for cognition: they represent common features amongst things (in the broadest sense). A concept is a “concept only because other representations are contained under it” (A69/B94), through which we relate to objects given in intuitions. So possessing a concept is being able to relate, compare, connect, and distinguish different representations of things, by taking what is general amongst them. Consequently, concepts provide structure to our thought through the generality condition, in contrast to individual isolated representations. For Kant, this structuring is essential for cognising: through concepts, we come to “compare [representations], to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects” (B1).

Given the above, I think we can express the generality condition as a condition of recombination: that is, if a subject possesses a concept, they can recombine it with other intuitions, concepts, or things in different thoughts—which is to say, across different

¹⁷ One might worry that Kant is committed to the implausible view that we have no singular referring concepts—i.e., concepts that designate exactly one individual thing, for example ‘the oldest living person in Australia on the afternoon of 22 March 2020’. My sense is that Kant is committed to the claim that concepts are partial determinations of things. This is how I read Kant’s discussion of “partial concepts” (compare JL 9:58-9; 9:95) although there is little textually to go on. Even though a concept might singularly refer, this does not imply that we cannot combine that concept with another one. For instance, we can recombine the concept ‘the oldest living person in Australia on the afternoon of 22 March 2020’ with the concept ‘brown hair’, and thus we can form the cognition ‘the oldest living person in Australia on the afternoon of 22 March 2020 has brown hair’. There is one exception, Kant thinks that the *ens realissimum* is a thoroughly determined concept. My views on these matters are indebted to Alejandro Naranjo Sandoval.

conceptual determinations. Moreover, if we contrast this with the minimal account of givenness, we should moreover stipulate that givenness is non-general.

So narrow cognition requires:

(1) The **givenness condition**: intuitions, as non-general representations, must be given (somehow) to the mind.

(2) The **generality-condition**: if a subject possesses a concept, they are capable of recombining it with other intuitions, concepts, or things in different thoughts.

2.3 Broad (Empirical and Non-Empirical) Cognition

Now we need to understand the broader sense of cognition. Under Kant's account, narrow cognition cannot explain rational (or philosophical) and mathematical cognition. In narrow cognition, givenness is satisfied through the receptivity of intuitions. By contrast, rational cognition is cognition *through concepts alone* and mathematical cognition is cognition *through constructed concepts in a priori intuitions (time and space)*. In both cases, empirical intuitions are not given to the mind.

In broad cognition, the generality condition will remain unchanged. This is because it refers to the recombination of concepts with intuitions, concepts, and things in different thoughts.

As for the givenness condition, I think the most straightforward approach is de-emphasising intuitions and instead focusing on the non-generality of representations. This would be to say: givenness, in a broad sense, is satisfied by *any* non-general representation. Thus cognition, in the broad sense, is neutral about what kind of non-general representations we draw on. They could be non-general representations of actual objects, possible objects,

things, or concepts. As I said, all parties to the debate about givenness should agree that givenness is a non-general representation.

Note that the non-generality condition accommodates empirical, rational, and mathematical cognitions. In *empirical cognition*, intuitions satisfy the non-generality condition insofar as they are representations of particular objects or possible objects.

In *mathematical cognition*, we construct through concepts (e.g., constructing a triangle in geometry) by exhibiting it as an object in pure intuition (A713/B741), i.e., through space and time. Space and time for Kant are “essentially single” (A25/B39) representations. So the non-generality condition is satisfied by the pure intuitions of space and time.¹⁸ Precisely, how this picture is supposed to work is complicated and contested.¹⁹ For our current purposes, it is sufficient to say that, in mathematical cognitions, a priori intuitions satisfy the non-generality condition because they are representations given singularly through time and space.

In *rational cognition*, I will argue that concepts satisfy the non-generality condition because they represent particular features, at least in relation to higher concepts—for example the particular feature of ‘red-ness’ as opposed to the more general ‘colour-ness’.

¹⁸ See Allais (2009).

¹⁹ Kant’s philosophy of mathematics is highly specialised. Here, I can give the reader a feel for at least one central issue—how to understand intuitions in mathematical reasoning. Parsons (1992) has argued that mathematical reasoning, for Kant, relies on mathematical intuitions being immediately, non-conceptually available to the mathematician—that is, in the sense of being directly, phenomenologically present to the mathematician. Hintikka (1969) claims that mathematical reasoning, for Kant, relies on intuitions of a particular entity that the human mind constructs, which introduces that particular entity to a general concept. Friedman (2000) claims that mathematical reasoning relies on intuition that is best understood as a correlation between constructive Euclidean geometry and the viewpoint of a spatially located observer.

The point about non-generality in rational cognition is subtle. In one sense, a representation of redness is a general representation insofar as I can relate it to a red ball that is in front of me, but also to other real and possible objects of experience. Our capacity to recombine ‘red’ with other objects, possible objects, and concepts, is precisely what makes ‘red’ a concept for Kant. But in another sense, the concept ‘red’ is a ‘given’ concept insofar as it is a particular colour and not a general representation of ‘colour-ness’. Here, ‘given’ does not mean given in sensible intuitions, but rather lacking generality. That is, possessing the concept ‘red’ might allow us to have thoughts like ‘this and that thing are red’. But on its own, ‘red’ does not endow me with the capacity to have thoughts like ‘red is a colour.’ And, this is not just because that thought also requires the concept ‘colour’—rather, I also need to grasp that ‘red’ is less general than ‘colour’, which requires me to understand the hierarchy of relevant concepts. In this way, ‘red’ is a non-general representation.

It is worth repeating my non-generality point because it is easily misread. Consider, again, the concept ‘red’. It generalises over intuitions (i.e., the standard gloss). My claim is that ‘red’ does not, however, generalise over other concepts (like ‘blue’), and concepts like ‘colour’ generalise over ‘red’. On my view, ‘red’ can be said to be non-general relative to ‘blue’ and ‘colour’. I am *not* claiming that concepts are non-general *simpliciter* but only that concepts can be non-general relative to each other. Intuitions, however, are always non-general (and hence non-general relative to concepts).

Now we have an account of cognition, in the broad sense, as the product of non-generality and generality. Thus, cognition in the broad sense requires:

- (1) The **non-generality condition**: non-general representations as intuitions *or concepts* that are given to the mind.

(2) The **generality condition**: if a subject possesses a concept, they are capable of recombining it with other intuitions, concepts, or things in different thoughts.

3.0 Kant's Account of Reason and Rational Cognition

The next step in my argument is to show how reason can produce cognitions *in the broad sense*. To do this, I need to explain three key ideas: (1) that reason is the faculty of inferring systematically, (2) that inference in the relevant sense involves subordinating concepts of lower generality to higher generality, and to the highest generality in a certain domain, and (3) that the product of these inferences is a rational cognition.²⁰ I argue that rational cognition is consistent with the aforementioned conception of broad cognition, wherein empirical concepts satisfy non-generality and ideas satisfy generality. This fact, I submit, accounts for the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation.

3.1 Kant's Account of Reason

Reason, for Kant, is primarily the capacity to infer more general concepts from less general ones that we use in empirical knowledge claims by applying syllogistic reasoning (A303/B360). To explain this, we can begin by recognising that reason in the most general sense for Kant is the faculty for *connecting* concepts. We can achieve this either by making

²⁰ My account is in broad agreement with Willaschek (2018, esp. 21-35). An important difference between my account and Willaschek's is that he emphasises the indirect nature of reason's relation to an object to explain reason's discursive and cognitive status, whereas I do not. He claims that reason's "discursivity means that any cognition based on reason can relate to its object only indirectly" (Willaschek 2018, 23). Willaschek is correct insofar as reason does relate indirectly to objects—that is, when reason is concerned with ordering and inferring from concepts—that does begin with empirical concepts. However, I argue that he is incorrect if this also implies that reason does not produce cognition in the broad sense.

analytic judgments (i.e., by analysing concepts) or by inference (i.e., by using premises and conclusions in syllogisms).²¹

On Kant's account, we can connect concepts by expressing their relation to objects, but we can also do so by expressing their relation to one another in abstraction from objects. The former Kant calls reason's real use. Here, we take the connection between concepts to be relations "contained in the object and its connection" (A308/B364). Thus, per impossible, we take reason to "refer ... to objects" (A305/B362). The latter Kant calls reason's logical use. Here, we are only "deal[ing] with concepts and judgments" (A306/B363) without considering the objects to which they apply, and thus "merely formal[ly]" (A299/B356).

So to say that reason's logical use is formal, in a Kantian sense, is to say that it is indifferent to the referent of a concept but not indifferent "regard[ing] ... their content" (JL 9:139). For example, in reason's logical use, we abstract entirely from the fact that the concepts 'white' and 'fluffy' can refer to particular white and fluffy things in the world (such as clouds), and consider these concepts in relation to other concepts like 'colour' and 'texture'. By contrast, Kant's pure (or general) Logic is formal in the strict sense that it is indifferent to all semantic properties (content and reference), and only considers the form of thought.²²

²¹ Kant's terms are "immediately cognis[ing] and mediate "inference" (A303/B359). For critical discussion of inference and logic in Kant's critical philosophy see Longuenesse (1998); MacFarlane (2002); Tolley (2020); Willaschek (2018).

²² As is well-known, Kant has another understanding of logic in mind as well—a "transcendental logic" (A57/B81), which is the science of the "pure thinking of an object" (A55/B80). It describes the content out of which thought arise in terms of how the understanding "relate[s] to objects a priori" (A57 B82), and thus this content does not describe objects but thought itself. In this respect, a transcendental logic "abstracts ... from all content ... from any relation of it to the object, and considers only ... the form of

While Kant defines reason as a capacity which can involve analytic judgment, his primary concern is reason's logical use as a capacity for inference (A321/B378) using syllogisms.²³ Moreover, reason infers iteratively to ideas—i.e., a representation of the “totality” of all the concepts in a certain domain (A321/B378).²⁴ As Kant says:

I can draw the proposition “Caius is mortal” from experience merely through the understanding. But I seek a concept containing the condition under which the predicate (the assertion in general) of this judgment is given (i.e., here, the concept “human”), and after I have subsumed [the predicate] under this condition, taken in its whole domain (“all humans are mortal”) I determine the cognition of my object according to it (“Caius is mortal”). (A322/B378)

Kant is describing a syllogism, a generic form of logical argument into which we can place various concepts. The basic thought is this. Our claims from empirical knowledge are justified from empirical grounds (e.g., causal explanation, evidence, testimony, perception, memory, and so on). However, we can justify the same claims on rational grounds by inferring to a conclusion in a syllogism. So I can know that Caius is mortal because a friend told me of his impending death. But I can also know that Caius is mortal because he is part of a class of beings ‘humans’ that are mortal. Here, I know that p merely by virtue of connecting

thinking in general” (A55/B79). See Tolley (2020) for a recent and especially clear discussion of Kant's transcendental logic and how it fits within his broader framework.

²³ As early as *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures* essay, Kant considers reason the “faculty of syllogistic reasoning” (FS 2:59).

²⁴ Note that, for Kant, inference is connecting up *concepts* in abstraction from objects (A322/B37). So, for example, Willaschek is quite right to claim that reason infers iteratively to ideas. But wrong to claim that ideas are totalities of “all the objects” (Willaschek 2018, 23) in a certain domain.

the content of the concepts ‘Caius’ and ‘mortal’ with a third concept, or term—namely ‘human’ (A303/B360). It is called a third term because it is not one of two terms in the conclusion.

The syllogism runs:

Major Premise: All **humans** are mortal;

Minor Premise: Caius is a **human**;

Conclusion: Thus, Caius is mortal (A322/B378-9).²⁵

The connection between Caius and human is that all persons equivalent to Caius are humans. Thus, Kant insists that reason (in its logical, inferential use) uses syllogisms to establish universal rules by connecting less general concepts to more general ones. He claims that these are the universal rules providing us a priori grounds to make an “assertion in general”—that is, to assert the empirically justified proposition “taken in its whole domain” (A322/B378).²⁶ This is what Kant means when he says that reason “seek[s] a concept

²⁵ Here, as is standard, we can render Kant’s example as a categorical syllogism by taking ‘mortal’ to mean all beings that are mortal and ‘Caius’ to mean all persons identical to Caius. Or take another example: “Everything composite is alterable, bodies are composite, therefore, bodies are alterable: (A301-B387).

²⁶ Anderson (2015) points out that hypothetical inferences like *modus ponens* are not reducible to categorical inferences in a syllogism. Consider his example: “If there is perfect justice, then obstinate evil will be punished; There is perfect justice; So, obstinate evil will be punished” (2015, 104). Here, the ‘there is perfect justice’, does not share a concept with the conclusion. So it seems that the inference does not turn on conceptual containment. However, for our purposes, it is enough for a categorical syllogism possibly to involve conceptual containment (or what I will momentarily describe as concept subordination), because Kant’s main objective in characterising reason as a faculty for drawing inferences in determining ‘universal’ conditions for the conclusion.

containing the condition under which the predicate [of a conclusion]” (A322/B378; A330/B387) obtains.²⁷

Moreover, reason seeks ever more general third terms through a series of prosyllogisms (A311/B388; A336/B394)—i.e., a syllogism that takes the major premise of a syllogism as its conclusion. In this way, Kant thinks, reason (in its logical, inferential use) infers upwards to higher levels of generality. So we can connect Caius with ‘human’, with ‘animal’, with ‘living being’. Atop a series of prosyllogisms will sit the highest concept in a given domain—that is, an idea as an “inferred [concept]” (A310/B366) in a major premise.²⁸ So, for Kant, reason (in its logical, inferential use) connects a concept in a conclusion to a more general concepts (i.e., the third term) through the premises of a syllogism, and does so until the highest concept is reached in a given domain.

The key function of reason, then, is to infer more general concepts from less general ones (found in empirical knowledge) by applying syllogistic reasoning. The empirical knowledge claim is the conclusion, and we are seeking the major and minor premises under which the empirical knowledge claim will be true by virtue of the meanings of the relevant concepts. This means that we are looking for a more general concept to ‘subsume’ the predicate of the conclusion—i.e., a third concept or (equivalently) middle term. So, starting from the conclusion, ‘Caius is mortal’, we can ask under what conditions (more general concepts) can

²⁷ See also Kant’s remarks that “[c]oncepts [are] ... predicates of possible judgments [i.e. predicates in conclusions]” (B94).

²⁸ For a different reading of ideas as inferred concepts, see Willaschek (2018). He reads inferred concepts as the outcome of specific rational inferences, which according to him are the “paralogisms, the proofs of the antinomies, and the proof(s) of the existence of God” (2018, 172). By contrast, I read the inference involved as those involved in a series of prosyllogisms from a condition given from the object to the unconditioned. See (A322-3/B379).

this be “assert[ed] in general” (A322/B378)—such that Caius is subsumed by it? Here, we find that ‘being human’ is the more general concept under which we can assert Caius to be mortal in general. This is because ‘being human’ is a more general class of mortal beings than Caius.

Kant’s claim is plausible enough. Suppose you are visiting a natural science museum. You come to think that there is a dinosaur exhibit, and you reach this conclusion partly because you have combined the particular representations of ‘whiteness’ and ‘boneness’ with a general representation of a dinosaur. In Kant’s language, if all goes well, you assent that ‘there is a dinosaur exhibit at the museum,’ and this is an instance of empirical knowledge. This takes place because your assent is derived from empirical cognition—i.e., by representing particular intuitive content as under general concepts. Now, the relevant question here is how can one give a rational (i.e., non-empirical) explanation for why the dinosaur is in the museum—one that does not appeal to causal explanation, evidence, testimony, perception, or memory. Kant’s answer is that we do so by representing the concept of a ‘dinosaur fossil’ under a series of more general concepts—dinosaur, extinct animals, animals, living being, and so on. The *most* general concept in the relevant domain (i.e., things on exhibition in the natural history museum), will be nature.

To complete this account, we finally need to consider where reason fits into Kant’s picture of our mental lives. For Kant, thoughts come in four basic modes:

(1) *Cognition*, in the narrow sense, represents particular intuitive content under general concepts to form propositions (JL 9:91–92).

(2) *Judgment* represents various concepts under a concept of greater generality to form propositions—as Kant says, judgement represents concepts in a “unity of consciousness of

various representations” (JL 9:101–2). It is representing a concept of lower generality under one of higher generality—what Kant calls concept subordination.²⁹

(3) *Inference* derives one proposition from another proposition-based judgment in the above sense—representing a concept of lower generality under one of higher generality (JL 9:114–15). It is thus an explanation of a proposition that appeals to ever more general concepts in a syllogism.

(4) *Systematic inference* derives a proposition by making inferences to a systematic whole (JL 9:139–40), which involves deriving a major premise in a syllogism that is a “subject that is no longer a predicate” (A323/B380)—i.e., an idea or highest concept in a given domain.

Thus reason’s role in our mental lives involves judgment, inference, and systematic inference. This is because these are modes of thought that involve connecting concepts in abstraction from objects. Moreover, these concerns are separate from the question of what attitudes we should hold towards these thoughts expressed in propositions. That question is instead involved in Kant’s analysis of assent or holding-something-as-true.

Here, I am interested in systematic inference because it involves the ideas. In systematic inferences, we “proceed to the unconditional” (A323/B379), a major premise in a syllogism, and that contains an idea. In doing so, we combine evidential grounds (causal explanation, evidence, testimony, perception, and/or memory) with the logical grounds of assent (i.e., an explanation that appeals to ever more general concepts). Consequently, we specify an idea, as

²⁹ Judgment is a tricky term in Kant’s picture. Here, I use judgment to denote concept subordination: “A judgment is the representation of the unity of the consciousness of various representations or the representation of their relation insofar as they constitute a concept” (JL 9:101). For a detailed picture of Kant’s other main uses of judgment see Longuenesse (1998, 81-106).

the highest concept in a certain domain, that articulates a system—i.e., an interconnected “whole” of ever more general explanatory concepts in contrast to a mere “aggregate” (JL 9:139) of concepts.

But since systematic inference (as well as judgment and inference) involves the representation of—or explanation via—ever more general concepts, we need to see how one concept can be more general than another. This leads us to our next topic: *concept subordination*.

3.2 What is Concept Subordination?

To infer a third term in a syllogism, one needs to grasp what it means for a concept to subordinate another, such that a concept is more general than another. Kant calls this concept (or logical) subordination.

According to Kant, concept A subordinates concept B only if all the necessary marks of A belong to B. Thus, ‘animal’ subordinates ‘dog’ because all the necessary marks of animal belong to dog. Kant puts it this way: “[w]hat belongs to or contradicts higher concepts also belongs to or contradicts all lower concepts that are contained under those higher ones”, and “conversely: [w]hat belongs to or contradicts all lower concepts also belongs to or contradicts their higher concept” (JL 9:98).³⁰ Moreover, the relation does not hold in reverse. All the necessary marks of dog do not belong to animal. Having hair, for example, is not a necessary mark of an animal.

³⁰ Another example is found in the *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures* essay: a mark of God is necessity but necessity is only a partial representation of God (FS 2:47).

On its own, however, the above ‘belonging’ notion does not establish how one concept is more general than another. Kant says that we possess many “convertible concepts” (JL 9:98). For example, all the marks of ‘bachelor’ also belong to ‘unmarried man’. All the marks of ‘triangle’ also belong to ‘three-sided shape’. One is not more general than the other.³¹

So Kant defines concept subordination in terms of its extension: concept A subordinates concept B only if the extension of A is greater than B, and insofar as we can use A to represent “the *other concept* and *beside this still more*” (JL 9:98). For instance, he says that “[t]he more things that can be represented through a concept, the greater its sphere. Thus, the concept *body*, for example, has a greater extension than the concept *metal*” (JL 9:96). In this sense, to say that a concept subordinates another concept (and thus to say it is more general) is to say that we represent all the necessary marks of one concept as belonging to at least two other concepts. For example, ‘animal’ subordinates ‘cat’ because I can use the necessary marks of animal to represent ‘dog’ and ‘cat’.

Kant’s suggestion that a concept’s ‘sphere’ is its extension raises an interpretive issue about how Kant understands a concept’s extension.³² In contemporary terms, the issue (somewhat confusingly) is whether a concept’s extension is intensional, and thus a conceptual notion (consisting in a *multitude of concepts* falling under one concept), or extensional, and thus an objectual notion (consisting in a *multitude of objects* falling under it), or whether it is

³¹ Indeed, the belonging principle on its own will establish what Anderson calls Kant’s “official definition of analyticity” (2015, 12) as the containment of a predicate in a subject: “Either the predicate B belongs to the subject A as something that is (covertly) contained in this concept A; or B lies entirely outside the concept A ... In the first case I call the judgment analytic, in the second synthetic” (A 6–7/B 10).

³² This is because Kant seems to equate ‘sphere’ with a concept’s ‘extension’: a concept’s extension is determined by the “things [that] are contained under it” (JL 9:95), and ‘things’ here seems deeply underspecified.

a hybrid notion of the two. In turn, interpreters have asked whether Kant thinks that a concept's extension involves only objects, only concepts, or both concepts and objects.³³

Moreover, this interpretive issue reflects a broader problem with Kant's position. He assumes that, in reason's logical use, we connect the content of concepts through inference and in abstraction from objects. But it is unclear how we grasp what a concept contains. Julie Maybee (2009) attempts to explain the problem away by using the metaphor of concepts resembling baskets containing other concepts.³⁴ For instance, we might say the concept 'child' is a basket that contains infant, toddler, 3-year old, and so on. But Maybee explanation is metaphorical and open to objections, such as disjunctive counterexamples. Consider the disjunction, 'a toddler is a child, or it is sunny outside'. Using the basket metaphor, it a logical consequence that, since it is analytically true that a child is toddler, it is not sunny outside. But the concept 'child' contains nothing about the weather. There are also psychological worries. You might regularly associate unicorns with children, and thus place unicorns in your child 'basket'. But if the extension relation is logical, presumably the relation does not vary across individual psychologies. As Kant says, the issue in logic is "not how we do think, but how we ought to think" (JL 9:94). So, if concept subordination is a logical relation, we need a non-

³³ These are three representative views. Tolley claims that a concept's extension is a non-objectual notion: the extension of "a concept, so far as logic is concerned, should be taken to consist only in lower concepts" (Tolley 2007, 361; see also Friedman, 1992, 68). Longuenesse takes a concept's extension as an objectual notion—as the "objects thought under the concepts" (Longuenesse 1998, 87). For her, concept subordination concerns objects: "[w]hen we subordinate a concept to one that is more general, we attribute the marks pertaining to the concept of greater generality to all the objects contained under the first concept" (Longuenesse 1997, 90). Lu-Adler takes a hybrid approach: "Kant construes the extension of a concept both in terms of the concepts subordinate to it and in terms of the objects thought under it" (Lu-Adler 2012, 58; see also Anderson 2015, 64; Hanna 2001, 130-6).

³⁴ As he says: "[r]eason [begins] to fill up the concept [of mortality], as a basket, with items that belong to it" (Maybee 2009, 20).

question-begging way of explaining how we grasp the necessary marks of a concept—so that, for example, the concept ‘child’ does not contain ‘sunny day’ or ‘unicorn’.

In fact, I think Kant has a compelling story here, wherein concept subordination is a metaphysical-modal relation. He begins by denying that we can solve the problem by thinking that the necessary marks of concepts are “the *real* or *natural essence* of things” (JL 9:61). This denial is the basic Kantian commitment that we are ignorant of the fundamental reality of nature because we cannot be sure that our concepts refer to things in themselves.

Next, Kant tells us that the necessary marks of a concept designate the “*logical essence* of things”, which is “nothing but *the first basic concept of all the necessary marks of a thing (esse conceptus)*” (JL 9:61). To explain this, he says:

If we wish to determine, e.g., the logical essence of body, then we do not necessarily have to seek for the data for this in nature; we may direct our reflection to the marks which, as essential points (*constitutiva, rationes*) originally constitute the basic concept of the thing ... *all the predicates* in regard to which an object is determine through its concept. (JL 9:61; my italics)

It strikes me that Kant is making a point about metaphysical possibility. To help us grasp real possibility, Kant invites us to imagine Julius Caesar: “[d]raw up a list of all the predicates that may be thought to belong to him. You will quickly see that he can either exist with all the determination, or not exist at all” (OPA 2:72). The real predicates are those that could belong to a Caesar that could exist. Consider the proposition ‘Caesar is Roman’. The predicate ‘is Roman’ can belong to Caesar, so it is a real predicate. Now, consider the proposition ‘Caesar is taller than himself’. It is not possible for Caesar to be taller than himself, so the predicate ‘being taller than oneself’ is not a real predicate. The issue is not that ‘being Caesar’ and

‘being taller than Caesar’ generates a logical contradiction, nor that experience teaches us that such a being is impossible (although it also does). Rather, it is a *metaphysical* impossibility: one cannot be oneself and also be taller than oneself. Likewise, at least in the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant seems to hold that there are metaphysically necessary predicates which involve marks which are “essential points” (JL 9:95) of a concept.³⁵ Understood in this way, being an animal is a metaphysical necessity of being a dog but also a metaphysical necessity of being a cat. If we consider the matter in terms of possible worlds, there is no possible world in which dogs and cats are not animals.

In the above passage, Kant says that we can ‘direct our reflection’ to the metaphysically necessary marks to account for a concept’s extension. This process involves running through all the possible predicates of a thing and ascertaining which ones apply.

Indeed, Kant also talks of “logically necessary marks” (Dohn-W 24:727), marks that belong a concept’s essence.³⁶ “One cannot remove these marks without removing the thing itself” (Dohna-W 24:727). However, it is misguided to think that the label ‘logical’ refers

³⁵ For further proof that Kant thinks that concept subordination is a metaphysical notion see his claims that that highest concept in a genus-species hierarchy is a “thoroughly determinate concept” (JL 9:99), “the concept of a thing, or of a possible thing” (Blom-L 24:259) and that “we finally come to a *genus summus* [highest genus], namely, something” (Vien-L 24:911). He calls such highest concepts a “concept that is a genus but not a species” (Blom-L 24:240; see also JL 9:97), in language that mirrors ‘a subject with no further predicate’. I think Kant has in mind here the paradigmatic case of a speculative idea of an *ens realissimum*: the concept of all positive, real predicates in a single being, which is the only concept that “thoroughly determines” (A605/B633; A576/B605) a thing. By comparing any pair of opposite predicates “among all possible predicates of things”, we will find that “one must apply” (A572/B600). The totality of those predicates that must apply to this single being is the a priori thorough determination of the *ens realissimum* (A605/B633). All lower-order concepts will possess all the properties of an *ens realissimum* in the sense that they will be composed from one of these pairs of opposite predicates.

³⁶ What Kant calls “notae logicae necessariae” (Dohn-W 24:727).

only to contradictory free marks. Instead, the label ‘logical’ seems to denote the marks we use in logical subordination of concepts. So, for instance, the logically necessary mark of a body is “extension” (Vien-L 24:839), and this stands in contrast to the “physical necessity that all bodies fall” (Dohna-W 24:727).

So concept A subordinates concept B, and thus is more general, just in case all of A’s marks belong to B and at least another concept. Herein, concept subordination is a metaphysical-modal relation.

3.3 What is Rational Cognition?

So what then is a rational cognition? Kant defines rational cognition as a “cognition of reason from mere concepts” (JL 9:23). However, further details are not forthcoming. But if we keep in mind the above discussion of reasoning through syllogisms (and prosyllogisms) as well as concept subordination, I think a plausible definition becomes clear.

A rational cognition is the representation that we can express as a proposition that contains “a subject that is no longer a predicate” (A323/B379)—i.e., the idea of a whole domain. We arrive at it through systematic inference from empirical judgments by inferring ever higher levels of generality with syllogisms. This is to say:

[We] cognize the particular in the universal through concepts. Thus every syllogism is a form of derivation of a cognition from a principle. For the major premise always gives a concept such that everything subsumed under its condition can be cognized from it according to a principle. (A300/B357)

Consider again the syllogism: all humans are mortal; Caius is a human; thus, Caius is mortal. The relevant rational cognition will be ‘all living beings are mortal’ where ‘living

being’ designates an idea—that is, the domain of all things that are mortal. Or more precisely, the relevant idea designates all concepts that can take the predicate ‘being mortal’.

Moreover, consider this passage:

Logical subordination consists in the fact that *I take that which is common to many concepts* and thereby form for myself a universal concept [i.e., an idea], under which I can *subordinate the individual representations*. (Blom-L 24:260; my italics)

As I read Kant, logical subordination here is inference through syllogisms. Thus rational cognition is the subordination of concepts in a system under an idea. So the passage expresses the two conditions of broad cognition: (1) individual concepts satisfy non-generality, whereas (2) ideas satisfy generality in the sense that they are what is common to many concepts.

According to (1) non-generality, the relevant representation counts as a rational cognition only if it is a representation of non-general features of empirical concepts—that is, *concepts individuated as different representations*.

The case for empirical concepts satisfying the non-generality condition is strong for rational cognition. At numerous points, Kant says that concepts are given to reason: “[f]or pure reason is never related directly to objects, but instead to concepts of them given by the understanding” (A335/B392).³⁷ Moreover, he characterises reason’s central task as ordering concepts; so, without concepts being given to reason, it could not fulfil this task. As he says, reason “does not create any concepts (of objects), but orders them and gives them unity”

³⁷ See also: “*what is given to [reason] is not objects to be unified for the concept of experience, but cognitions of understanding to be unified for the concept of reason, i.e., to be connected in one principle*” (A680/B708; my italics).

(A643/B671; B670; B698). If reason is to undertake its ordering task, it requires something to put in an order. Suppose I ask you to order some books alphabetically by author. You will require the books to be available so that you can order them—since without them you have nothing to order. Similarly, without concepts being given to reason, it would have no representational content to order.³⁸

According to (2) generality, the representation counts as a rational cognition only if we generalise over the particular features of empirical concepts with the most general concept in a certain domain. What this means is that, in representing an empirical concept B with the most general concept A, we represent it with the logical pattern of inference: all of A's marks belong to B and at least one other concept.

The case for ideas satisfying the generality condition is again strong for rational cognition. Indeed, Kant says as much: with an idea, “I take that which is common to many concepts” (Blom-L 24:260). Moreover, the notion that ideas satisfy generality is the conjunction of two key Kantian claims: (1) “every concept ... contains that which is common to several representations” (JL 9:96), and (2) that “an idea is a concept of reason whose object simply cannot be met with in experience” (JL 9:92). The conjunction of these claims is that an idea is a concept which is a common representation, even if we cannot meet this representation in experience.

With the above two conditions in mind, we can summarise a rational cognition as a representation that requires:

³⁸ The question of how Kant thinks we generate empirical concepts is, of course, another issue. See Longuenesse (1998); Merritt (2018); Wang (2021); Anderson (2015, Ch. 13) for a discussion of the generation of concepts.

(1) The **non-general condition**: non-general representations take the form of concepts given to the mind in the form of empirical concepts.

(2) The **generality condition**: a subject possesses the most general concept in a particular domain (i.e., an idea), such that they are capable of recombining it with all other concepts in that domain with the logical pattern of inference. That is to say, all its marks belong to all the concepts in that domain.

4.0 Putting the Pieces Together: The Necessity of Ideas

We can now assemble the full picture. Ideas are necessary for empirical investigation in the following way. For any empirical judgment, rationality requires we infer systematically—i.e., we subordinate the concepts referred to in the relevant empirical judgment to concepts of greater generality until we reach the most general concept in a certain domain. One does so through the mental act of inferring with syllogistic reasoning, which is to cognise through concepts alone (i.e., produce a rational cognition). Like all cognitions (in the broad sense), rational cognition necessarily requires non-general and general elements: empirical concepts satisfy non-generality, whereas ideas satisfy generality. Therefore, ideas are necessary for systematic thinking in empirical investigation. (I return to the question of why rationality requires we infer systematically in Chapter 8.)

Ideas are necessary in empirical investigation because they play a distinctive role in our mental lives: they are the content of our most general thoughts in a certain domain. Like all other concepts, ideas are general representations, which we can recombine with other concepts in different thoughts. What is distinctive about ideas in empirical investigation is not merely that they lack empirical referents, but that we can only rationally combine them with

other concepts in a specific way: with a pattern of inference that all its marks belong to all concept of lower generality in a certain domain.

There is an important caveat. Until now, I have not discussed Kant's rational requirement to systematise our concepts. We will return to this issue in the next chapter.

Indeed, the above way of portraying the necessity of ideas follows Kant's framing. He says, "reason cannot think this systematic unity in any other way than giving its idea an object, which, however, cannot be given through any experience" (A681/B709), and that a system just is "the connection of many cognitions in accordance with an idea" (Vien-L 24:799). Consequently, we will see that when deploying the ideas, "reason has nothing before its eyes except principles of systematic unity" (A682/B711).

5.0 Objections

In this section, I canvas and reply to two objections—one against Kant's position as stated and the other against my reading of rational cognition.

5.1 Objection: Archaic Academic German Philosophy

One central worry about Kant's claim that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation is that he bases that claim on outdated conceptions about reason and logic. Consequently, one might conclude that Kant's claims about ideas are an artificial piece of archaic German academic philosophy, devoid of relevance beyond his own intellectual setting.³⁹ This is

³⁹ Bennett (1974) is a standard bearer for this view: the *Appendix* is "a clumsy attempt to rationalize a set of problems which reflect not the structure of reason but the preoccupations of German academic philosophers at the time when Kant was writing. Where the theory has an effect, it is by tempting Kant into a brutal and insensitive forcing of his material into unnatural shapes, and never by genuinely illuminating it" (261).

because, for Kant, three forms of syllogistic inference (categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive) exhaust logic. From a contemporary viewpoint, this is limited and outdated: Kant cannot account for standard contemporary logical features, such as ‘nested’ quantifiers, for example. That is, for all x , there is a y such that something is the case. For instance, for all people (x), there is a time (y) such that they all experience doubt at that time (e.g., everyone experiences moments of doubt). It cannot capture inferences from ‘ x is greater than y ’ and ‘ y is less than z ’ to ‘ x is greater than z ’. Moreover, it cannot capture inferences involving non-classical logics, in which, for example, the law of excluded middle does not hold. Thus, the objection goes, Kant is rehearsing outdated views about what reason is—merely a faculty for syllogistic inference.⁴⁰

I think we should accept the above worry: Kant’s conception of logic is woefully incomplete by contemporary standards. However, I do not think it substantially undermines the Kantian position, because we can mitigate the account, and say that anyone who rationally engages in generalising over particulars ends up making syllogistic inferences – therefore, they will necessarily use ideas. Stated this way, Kant’s position is about the generalisation of concepts that syllogistic logic successfully captures. Consider this example. Suppose that I come to think that ‘Tim is confident.’ Presumably, I do so partly by virtue of the mental act of combining this *particular* person with a *general* concept ‘confidence’, and not merely combining it with people in general. In this story, Kant’s account still holds: concepts are general, which means that possessing a concept entails that one can apply it to more than one object. One might also think that rationality requires we do not endorse thoughts that contravene the meaning of the concepts involved, such as ‘a rock is confident’. If you accept

⁴⁰ See Tolley (2007) and Willaschek (2018, 173).

this picture of thought, you should also accept that rationality requires we ask what the class of concepts is that can take the predicate ‘is confident’. Otherwise, one might end up endorsing the thought that ‘rocks are confident.’ Kant’s position is that to ask such a question *is* to engage in syllogistic inference from particulars (expressed in a conclusion, gained from experience) to universals (expressed in major and minor premises, accessed rationally). For Kant, one ought to “seek a concept contain[ing] the condition under which the predicate (the assertion in general) of this judgment [from experience] is given ... [and take it] in the whole domain” (A322/B378).

Thus, one can accept Kant’s account of the necessity of ideas for empirical investigation without committing oneself to Kant’s claim that syllogistic logic exhausts logic overall.

5.2 Objection: Rational Cognition is Indirectly Cognition

The second objection concerns my interpretation of rational cognition. I claim that rational cognition is substantively cognition in a broad sense—i.e., a representation that is the product of non-general and general representations. However, commentators do not always read Kant’s account of rational cognition in this way. An alternative reading says that rational cognition instead involves reason *indirectly* cognising. On this reading, reason represents intuitions as a whole insofar as it represents all experience, but it does not represent a particular intuition and thus no particular empirical object. Consequently, one might worry that I misconstrue rational cognition because it is an indirect cognition, wherein *all intuitions taken as a whole* somehow satisfies the givenness condition on narrow cognition.

Tolley, for example, argues that reason’s representations refer to the totality of experience, and thus “can be thought of as cognitions indirectly, but only insofar as its representations can be demonstrated to apply, universally and necessarily (if only ‘regulatively’ rather than ‘constitutively’), to experiences built up out of empirical (sensation-

involving) intuition” (Tolley 2020). On this view, rational cognition corresponds to all intuitions but only regulatively—i.e., without us legitimately expecting the concepts involved to correspond to an actual or possible object.

In one respect, Tolley’s reading is correct. Kant does claim that ideas “represent ... objects indirectly” in their “systematic unity” (A669/B697)—i.e., taken as a whole.⁴¹ Thus, I think that Tolley correctly claims passages like these show that, in Kant’s account of reason, there is a “demonstrable relation to sensible representations” as a whole even “even if no particular sensation is ever named or referred to” (2020).

But Tolley and I diverge on the nature of the demonstrable relation between ideas and intuitions. On Tolley’s reading, the relation is between an idea and all intuitions—and yet it is unclear in what sense this is ‘indirect’. On my reading, there is a natural sense in which reason indirectly relates to intuitions. In empirical investigation, reason starts with empirical cognitions (involving intuitions and concepts) that are given to it by the understanding, and then attempts to place them in a syllogism.

Consider three points in support of my reading. First, while many passages show that there is an indirect relation between ideas and intuitive content (as Tolley claims), this does not rule out that reason produces cognitions. Judging over the whole of experience is a mental act involving generalisation over a whole domain, even if the judgment does not refer to a

⁴¹ Similarly, Kant says “pure concepts of reason or transcendental ideas ... will determine the use of the understanding according to principles in the whole of an entire experience” (A321/B378; also see A300/B367).

particular sensation.⁴² If this mental act is not a form of cognising, it is unclear to me what it can be on the Kantian picture.

Second, it is not clear that the indirect reading can do justice to passages where Kant characterises reason as producing cognition—for example, where Kant claims that “[a] cognition can have arisen from reason” (JL 9:22, also see Vien-L 24:798).

Third, it is a counterintuitive move to deny that reason cognises in the broad sense. If this were the case, reason would grasp the relation between a representation of all intuitions and an idea, but without connecting non-general and general representations. It strikes me that this reading is unattractive because reason would immediately grasp the relations between representations (i.e., between all intuitions and an idea). But immediately grasps the relations between representations just is direct revelation, which Kant reserves for a divine intellect. But that picture of reason is what one is forced to admit, if someone rejects that reason produces cognitions (in the broad sense).

6.0 Implications

I have argued that, for Kant, ideas are our most general concepts and that they are necessary for our most general thoughts. If this is correct, what are the implications for our broader understanding of ideas in Kant?

⁴² Consider the following passage: “All of our cognition is in the end related to possible intuitions: for through these alone is an object given. Now an *a priori* concept ... contains nothing but the synthesis of possible intuitions” (A720/B748). Presumably, Kant means here ‘all possible intuitions,’ and so this passage seems to count in favour of Tolley’s reading. But as Kant continues, all possible intuitions “are not given *a priori* but only discursively, in accordance with concepts” (A720/B748), which I read as a rational cognition ‘through concepts’.

6.1 Against ‘As If’ Regulative Propositions

If my reading is correct, we should not be tempted to read the necessary status of ideas as ‘as if’ regulative propositions—i.e., *as if* God created everything, or *as if* mind is a simple persistent substance.⁴³ To say that something is a necessary ‘as if’ regulative proposition is to say that some attitude or action towards a proposition is necessary. This attitude or action might be an assuming or hypothesising that *p*, or an act of pretending that a relevant proposition is true or using it in one’s practical reasoning.

Thus, to claim that ideas are necessary ‘as if’ regulative statements locates their necessity in a propositional attitude or an action towards a proposition. But this cannot be right.

For Kant, an idea is first and foremost a concept. To say that a concept is an ‘as if’ regulative proposition is as nonsensical as it sounds: a concept is not a proposition. So one cannot have a propositional attitude toward it, regardless of whether one can meet that concept in experience or not. For instance, the terms ‘God’ and ‘mat’ are concepts in the proposition ‘God is on the mat’. I can disbelieve, believe, assent, or hope that ‘God is on the mat’, or use it as a premise in a broader argument. I might even have some other attitude (say, love) towards a concept (say, God). But it is nonsensical to say that I disbelieve, believe, assent, or hope that ‘God’, or use it as a premise.

⁴³ I have in mind a reading like Guyer’s, who reads the God (the highest intelligence) as a “presupposition that everything in nature does have a purpose” Guyer (2006, 167) and ultimately finds that “Kant has described only a heuristic use of these ideas: that is, they can provide us with strategies for the discovery of hypotheses and explanations ... [He] has [not] shown that the regulative use of the ideas of reason ... is indispensable (*Ibid.*, 169).

Kant thinks that we have justified propositional attitudes that refer to ideas—rational Belief (or equivalently faith) and rational hope—and that in some contexts these are necessary for pursuing certain ends. Kant even works through an account of hypothesis as a form of assent in his lectures on logic, the idea being that a hypothesis involves the assumption of an empirically determinable causal explanation (JL 9:84-5). But the appropriate analysis here involves the various modes of assent we can take towards propositions themselves, and not their individual components.

6.2 The Nature of Ideas in Empirical Investigation.

If what I have said is correct, Kantian ideas in empirical investigation are not primarily a rational representation of a goal—that is, some state of affairs that we aim towards—like a world in which we possess a fully unified account of nature.⁴⁴ Nor are Kantian ideas primarily what contemporary epistemologists might call the result of idealisation of empirical objects⁴⁵—i.e., highlighting some empirical properties by downplaying others (i.e., idealisations of gold pick out, entertain, or explore certain features of gold that are not easily discernible in empirical instances of gold).⁴⁶ Finally, Kant’s account of ideas is not that of empirical refinement in the vein of his student Johann Gottfried von Herder:

⁴⁴ Contrast my account with Guyer (1990). Although admittedly, Kant sometimes talks in both these ways—for example, in terms “the idea of a perfect republic, of a happy life” (JL 9:93)

⁴⁵ Although, Kant sometimes talks about scientist’s approximations of “pure earth, pure water, pure air, etc” (A646/B674). These ideas, as I read Kant, are solely heuristic and not necessary.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Elgin (2007, 40). Contrast my reading with Zuckert (2017) and Guyer, who conflates the idealisation role of idea (pure earth, pure water, pure air) with “fundamental explanatory concepts” (2006, 166).

O philosopher, go to the country and learn the way of the farmers, refine this picture into an ideal, and overthrow the unphilosophical manner of living, over-throw the idol which shows you philosophy as corruption of the world, but not through philosophy. (Herder 1765, 23)

Instead, for Kant, ideas are a unique mental component: they are our most general concepts in our most general thoughts; they are necessary for empirical investigation precisely because they enable us to have systematic thoughts.

6.3 A General Application of the Necessity of Ideas

Finally, I want to emphasise the necessity of ideas outside the domains that Kant describes. Today, issues relating to God, the immortal soul, and an infinite world are rarely seen as necessarily preceding empirical investigation. However, I think that Kant's analysis of the necessity of ideas for empirical investigation remains significant beyond the above domains: ideas play a distinctive role in our mental lives across many pursuits. Consider, for instance, a critic of Rawls, who criticises his maxi-min principle—to maximise the welfare of those with the minimum resources in society—because he restricts it to “heads of households” (i.e., adult men) in countries like America.⁴⁷ The criticism is that Rawls arbitrarily excludes children, persons of all genders, and its applicability to other countries.⁴⁸ I think that these critics of Rawls are appealing to a relevant Kantian thought: if you think that a feature or principle applies (or should apply) to someone or group of people, you should seek the most general condition under which it could hold. If Rawls had done so, he would have recognised that his

⁴⁷ Rawls (1971, 128).

⁴⁸ See, for example, Okin (1989, 89).

principle should include all persons. The Kantian point is that Rawls's error is one of rationality: he fails to infer to the highest concept in the relevant domain.

Conclusion

Kant claims that, without an empirical referent, arguments based on ideas produce imaginary knowledge. But he also claims that ideas have a necessary role in empirical investigation. The aim of this chapter was to understand Kant's claim about the necessity of ideas, alongside his claim that reason produces cognition. I have argued that Kant's references to 'rational cognition' and the 'cognitions of reason' refer to cognition in a broad sense, the conditions of which are non-generality and generality. On my account, empirical concepts satisfy the non-generality condition in rational cognition, whereas ideas satisfy the general condition. Thus, in empirical investigation, anyone who rationally infers to the highest degree of generality in a given domain necessarily uses ideas in a rational cognition. Consequently, ideas are the representational contents of our most general thoughts because they constitute the highest concepts in a given domain. Such concepts are reached through a process of concept subordination, and in this way, ideas are necessary for us to have our most general thoughts.

Chapter 8 — Why Seek Systematicity?

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that Kant allows for moral *and* theoretical ends to justify Belief, and that this account of Belief is philosophically compelling. In addition, I have been resisting the following thought: given that empirical investigation involves setting and pursuing theoretical ends, Kant's account of the *necessity of Belief* for pursuing certain theoretical ends is reducible to his account of the *necessity of ideas* in empirical investigation.

I have argued that, for Kant, ideas are necessary for empirical investigation because they allow us to have systematic thoughts, namely, our most general thoughts in a given domain. On my view, we can (and should) disambiguate a claim about the necessity of a *mental state*, i.e., the propositional attitude Belief, from a claim about the necessity of certain *mental content*, i.e., supersensible concepts, like God.

In the previous chapter, I claimed that, for Kant, systematic thoughts are rational cognitions, which require two ingredients: empirical concepts and ideas. *If* in empirical investigation we are to fulfil a rational requirement to systemise our thoughts, then ideas will be necessary for empirical investigation. We cannot merely assume, however, that systematicity is a rational requirement. We need an argument. In this chapter, I will argue that Kant's requirement to systematise our concepts in empirical investigation plausibly rests on the principle that, to set our own ends, we need to be in a position to logically connect our propositional knowledge to other propositions. I will argue also that empirical investigation is best conceived as a *collective project* and not an individual one (see Section 4.0 "An Over-Demandingness Worry"). If I am right, then not only can we disambiguate Kant's claim about

the necessity of Belief for pursuing theoretical ends from his claim about the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation, but we can do so in a philosophically tenable manner.

To begin, consider the following:

T-Rex, dinosaur, extinct reptiles, reptiles in general, animals, living being, purposive beings, beings, substance, things in the world, things in general...

Suppose you drew up the above list, Kant would call that mental act systematising your concepts: connecting less general concepts to more general ones. For Kant, not only can we systematise our concepts, but we also ought to. He claims, for instance, that reason “does not beg but commands” (A652/B680) that we systematise concepts, and that systematicity “belongs to the legislation of our reason” (A700/B728). So, for Kant, rationality requires we systemise our concepts.

It is worth pausing to consider how radical Kant’s position is. On his view, systematicity is something we *must* do because rationality requires it. Systematicity is not merely *rationally permissible*—it is not just a “device ... for achieving economy” (A653/B681), as an organisational addendum to our empirical results. Nor is systematicity simply a hypothesis that, if successful, would provide some probabilistic explanation (A653/B681). According to Kant, systematicity is something we must seek because rationality requires it. It follows, however, that we in fact fail to be rational most of the time since we routinely fail to systematise our concepts. If you look around you and consider all the objects for which you have concepts, it is likely that you have not systematised even one of those concepts. You have failed to be rational on Kant’s account. Thus, if reason ‘commands’ us to systematise our concepts, it is an oddly high requirement: who has the time, energy, or mental resources to systematise *all* their concepts?

If rationality requires us to systematise our concepts, what (if anything) is ‘rational’ about this requirement given that so many of us fail to meet it most of the time? Responses to this question divide into two main camps: (1) the ‘heuristic’ reading and (2) the ‘dynamics of reason’ reading.

The *heuristic* reading: on this reading, systematicity is only rationally permissible, despite Kant’s claims. Any supposed ‘rational requirement’ to systematise our concepts only has a heuristic or methodological justification: we find it useful to suppose that nature is systematically organised in order to help organise our knowledge. As Guyer puts it, for Kant, the “existence of a system in nature must be presupposed in order to encourage us in the search for it [or at least assume] ... that we will not be frustrated by failure when we do search for it” (1990, 26). In Chapter 6, I argued that heuristic readings like Guyer’s get the direction of Kant’s claim wrong. Kant claims that reason leads us to seek systematicity, and not that systematicity is a rational guide for actions: systematicity is not a guide for what is rational to do—rather, rationality guides us through its demand that we seek systematicity.

The *dynamics of reason* reading: on this reading, reason has its own ‘dynamic’—i.e., a description of what reason is and a normative structure—a set of rules for its application.¹ Reason comes as a package, so to speak. On the one hand, reason is the faculty that connects concepts in abstraction from objects and seeks a unified explanation. On the other, it prescribes that we systematise our concepts, and this prescription stems from the fact that ‘reason’ intrinsically involves seeking a unified explanation. Since this prescription stems

¹ See, for example, Longuenesse (2005, 233); Buchdahl (1992); Grier (2001).

from the nature of human reason, rationality requires systematicity because this is the only way we can be self-consistent reasoners.

Defenders of the latter reading point out that Kant distinguishes between systematicity as (1) a “logical maxim” and (2) a “transcendental principle” (A307-8/B364). The logical maxim expresses (1) an abstract prescription to seek fundamental explanations. It is merely an abstract rule of thought that does not lay claim to the world. The transcendental principle expresses (2) the claim that the world has a fundamental explanation.² It involves a claim about the world. But (1) and (2) interact with each other: since (1) demands that we seek a fundamental explanation, we expect that (2) a fundamental explanation exists. In this way, we mistake an abstract prescription for a claim about the world, and fall into an “unavoidable” (A341/B399; A341/B399), if natural and inevitable (A298/B355), transcendental illusion. On this reading, Kant’s rational requirement for systematicity stems from (1) the logical maxim. (I will provide a fuller treatment of the logical maxim shortly).

In my view, the dynamics of reason reading is correct as far as it goes: Kant locates a rational requirement for systematicity that stems from the logical maxim. Moreover, this reading captures a key Kantian distinction between systematicity as an abstract principle (i.e., the logical maxim) and an illusionary knowledge claim about the world (i.e., the transcendental principle). It also explains why Kant thinks that a demand for systematicity is prescriptive, even whilst it can lead to illusionary knowledge claims.

However, commentators rarely defend the logical maxim as such. Indeed, they are normally content with repeating Kant’s distinction between the logical maxim and the

² Grier puts it this way: (1) and (2) are “two different ways of viewing the same necessary demand for unity” (Grier 2001, 274).

transcendental principle.³ Where they do defend the logical maxim, they only do so in general terms. For instance, Allison claims that even a “scientifically minded positivist” (2004, 331) can accept the logical maxim because it does not make claims about the world, but only expresses a prescription for thinking. I think, however, that Allison’s claim is too general to explain why the logical maxim is a rational requirement. Consider a rational requirement to hold a coherent set of beliefs. Such a requirement is rational not *only* because it is not about the world.⁴ Or, consider Bennett’s Wittgensteinian charge that Kant’s rational demand to seek systematicity is not rational at all, but is merely a philosopher’s irrational “craving for generality” (1974, 267).⁵ After all, an irrational prescription to think generally is irrational whether we make claims about the world or not.

We can now specify our opening question further as a problem: Kant defines reason under a unique dynamic—it is the faculty that connects concepts and seeks unified explanation, as well as involving a prescription to systematise concepts. But it is unclear why

³ Grier, for example, says that the logical maxim “expresses the subjective necessity or demand ... that there be complete, systematic unity of thought” (Grier 1997, 3) but offers no defence of the logical maxim itself.

⁴ For an excellent recent discussion of the topic, see Willaschek (2018, 24-70). He claims the logical maxim expresses inference, iteration, and completion, which are “features of universal reason”, and thus the logical maxim is “grounded in universal reason” (Willaschek 2018, 69). According to him, rationally inferring from one belief to another is a “powerful tool of thought”; iteration is an “important cognitive tool”; and completion expresses the “certainly correct [claim] that any such series of questions must end somewhere” (*Ibid.*, 69-70). But it is unclear to me why we should focus on these features of reason. For instance, there are many other powerful tools of thought: making our concepts clear and distinct, or thinking by analogy.

⁵ Or take a literary example. In reflection on two young boys that have taken their own lives, Yiyun Li observes that “each had their own reasons to make a decision that looked similar only to those wanting an explanation” (2019, 14). Her point is that general explanation tends to smooth over individual differences between cases, and it is the craving of people external to the relevant situation.

this is anything more than a dogmatic stipulation. Here, I aim to address this problem by providing a justification for Kant’s claim that rationality requires systematicity.

In Section 1, I overview systematicity and reason’s so-called logical maxim. I argue that they are equivalent. Section 2 unpacks and defends a partial version of the logical maxim, and Section 3 treats the full version. I argue that anyone committed to the partial version should be committed to the full version. In Section 4, I respond to the worry that this account of systematicity is overly demanding, given it *prima facie* does not look like the full version can apply to finite agents like us.

1.0 Setup: Systematicity and Reason’s Logical Maxim

1.1 A Distinction: Reason’s Logical Maxim vs. Its Transcendental Principle

Kant claims that a central feature of reason is that it seeks the conditions for ‘the conditioned’ and the totality of those conditions, which is ‘the unconditional’. Kant puts it this way: “[reason] seek[s] somewhere for a resting place in the regress from the conditioned, which is given, to the unconditional” (A584/B612).

Following standard interpretations, I will put Kant’s claim less obscurely: reason seeks *explanations* (conditions) for what needs explaining (what is conditioned), but also a complete set of those explanations, which is an unexplained explainer (the unconditional).⁶ But perhaps even this formulation requires unpacking with three remarks.

⁶ Watkins, for example, expresses the search for the unconditional as the following: “reason is interested not only in explanations (conditions) of whatever stands in need of explanation (what is conditioned), but also in total and complete explanations, that is, in

First, in what follows, I am going to speak of ‘explanations’ as designating logical explanation—i.e., as a premise in a syllogism, and take this as equivalent to Kant’s talk of conditions. Kant sometimes speaks of ‘explanations’ (A685/B713; A684/B712), but he more typically uses the term ‘conditions’,⁷ which in our relevant sense can be equated with premises in an inference.⁸ Kant argues that we can justifiably assent to propositions from evidential grounds (e.g., from causes, evidence, testimony, perception, or memory). This is the kind of causal explanation that dominates the philosophy of science. But he also thinks we can justifiably assent to propositions on logical grounds (i.e., explanations that appeal to more general concepts in syllogisms). Logical explanation is what we invoke when we explain the fact the ‘Caius is mortal’ by virtue of the fact that he is human. We judge the truth of this explanation merely by virtue of connecting the content of the concepts ‘Caius’ and ‘mortal’ with a third concept or term—namely ‘human’ (A303/B360).⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, ‘explanation’ is equivalent with condition throughout, and explanation in this sense means logical explanation, which is *non-evidential* and *non-causal*.

explanations that cover everything that stands in need of explanation (i.e. that explain everything conditioned) and in terms that do not themselves admit of further explanation (i.e. in what is ‘unconditioned’)” (2016, 1038). Likewise, Allison expresses this feature of reason as demanding that we “never stop seeking conditions until one gets them all; never rest satisfied with an explanation that leaves something unexplained, and so on” (2004, 331).

⁷ For example, in the second part of the *Appendix*, Kant introduces the idea of a highest intelligence (i.e., God) as a “schema, ordered in accordance with the conditions of the greatest unity of reason” (A670/B698).

⁸ Kant famously uses ‘conditions’ in different contexts. Kant claims that the a priori institutions of space [and time] are “the condition[s] of the possibility of appearances” (A24/B39), and that the categories of the understanding (like causality) are “subjective conditions of thinking [that] should have objective validity” (A89/B122).

⁹ This is what we saw in the previous chapter.

Second, Kant distinguishes two ways reason seeks an unconditioned explanation: via a logical maxim or a transcendental principle.¹⁰

(P₁) Logical maxim:

The proper principle of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed.

(A307-8/B364)

(P₂) Transcendental principle:

[W]hen the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., *contained in the object and its connection*). (A308/B364; my italics.)

Kant's language is not transparent. Grier has gone a long way to clarifying Kant's position by distinguishing between a logical and transcendental use of reason (Grier 1997; 2001, 119-22).¹¹ The logical maxim (P₁) prescribes a task: *seek* a fundamental explanation for

¹⁰ Here, Kant's terminology is messy. Sometimes, he describes the logical maxim as a principle (A306B362; A30/B364), but he also wants to differentiate a logical maxim from a "principle of pure reason" (A307/B364). Sometimes he calls the transcendental principle (A309/B366) the "supreme principle of reason" (A307.B364). Attempting to keep things straight, I follow Grier's now conventional labels P₁ and P₂ for the logical maxim and transcendental principle, respectively.

¹¹ See also Allison (2004) and Boehm (2012).

everything. The transcendental principle (P_2) contains a claim about the world: everything *has* a fundamental explanation.

The basic thought is that reason's logical use (P_1) expresses an abstract demand to seek further and more fundamental explanations, and yet it is a "purely formal requirement", whose use is not "justified in relation to objects" (Grier 2001, 120).

In the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant characterises reason's "logical use" (A307/B364) (P_1) positively as the "proper principle of reason" (A307/B364). He refers to the maxim as "subjective necessity" (A297/B353), a "logical maxim" (A307/B364), a "formal and logical procedure of reason" (A306/B363), a "subjective law" (A306/B363), and a "[logical] principle" (A306/B363). The label subjective—along with formal and logical—emphasises that the maxim is an abstract rule that does not entail any knowledge claims. As such, P_1 prescribes rules for thinking and does not express a thesis about the world. Kant says that the logical maxim is "only a logical prescription" (A309/B365), and as such, does not "prescribe any law to objects" (A306/B363). He also says that it does not "justif[y] us in demanding of objects themselves" any relation to them that would provide them with "objective validity" (A306/B362-3). Therefore, it is easy to agree with Grier when she says that Kant's logical maxim "express[es] a fact about reason[,] not about objects" (2001, 120).

The transcendental principle (P_2) resembles the logical maxim (P_1) except it makes claims about objects (A308/B364) and thus is objective.¹² That is, P_1 and P_2 are identical except that P_2 makes a further claim about the world. So reason's logical maxim is a prescription to seek

¹² Neiman captures the objectification of Kant's transcendental principle well when she says that we "reify the unconditioned" (1994, 100), which is a merely formal dictum.

ever more fundamental explanations. By contrast, when we use the transcendental principle, we mistakenly think that the world conforms to these ever more fundamental explanations.

In non-Kantian terms, we might say that a rational demand to seek explanation comes apart from any metaphysical dependence. So the logical maxim (P_1) expresses a fact about rationality in abstraction from objects. It is subjective in the sense that it implies no metaphysical commitments and is only a feature of our reason. By contrast, the transcendental principle (P_2) expresses the same fact about rationality but relates it to objects. It is objective in the sense that we use it to make claims about the world.

Kant's position that the logical maxim (P_1) as a rational demand comes apart from metaphysical dependence is not as foreign as it might initially sound. Contemporary philosophers often claim that we have a rational demand to hold a coherent set of beliefs. I take it that they are not necessarily making any metaphysical claims about the purported coherence of the world. Similarly, Kant's position is that the logical maxim implies nothing about the way the world is.

Third, Kant's distinction between P_1 and P_2 plays a central role in his negative account of speculative metaphysics. Part of the error that Kant diagnoses with speculative metaphysics is that it unwarrantedly slides between the two, and that it ultimately ends up affirming the truth of P_2 : our most fundamental explanations are explanations about the world.¹³ Since the logical maxim demands that we seek an unconditional explanation, it seems that we are justified in expecting that an unconditional explanation exists—that is, an unconditioned object. But this

¹³ See Grier (2001, 121-2) on the slide between the two principles.

is to slide between P_1 and P_2 . Since we can never meet an unconditioned object in experience, Kant thinks that seeking the unconditional in an object ends in contradiction.¹⁴ Thus, for Kant, we fall into error and confusion by assuming that P_1 corresponds to an object (A648/B676). Kant puts it this way: “this need of reason [i.e., the logical maxim] has, though as misunderstanding, been taken for a transcendental principle of reason ... overhastily postulates such an unlimited completeness in the series of conditions in the objects themselves” (A309/B366). Moreover, the distinction plays a role in Kant’s doctrine of transcendental illusion because Kant wants to show that, while P_1 is not an illusion (because it does not make a metaphysical claim), P_2 is an “unavoidable” (A341/B399; A341/B399), natural and inevitable (A298/B355) transcendental illusion.¹⁵ Indeed, much of the *Dialectic* is

¹⁴ Kant thinks this slide is unjustified on two counts (see Boehm 2012, 313-4). First, we cannot arrive at the unconditioned analytically from the conditional because to be conditioned is to be conditioned by one or more conditions, and thus the concept ‘unconditional’ is not contained in the concept ‘condition’. Second, the transcendental principle involves a claim about the existence of unconditioned objects. But on Kant’s view, our claims about the existence of objects are only justified synthetically by appealing to objects of experience. Because experience is conditioned, we cannot experience unconditional objects and thus cannot appeal to them. Thus, we cannot justify the slide synthetically. Moreover, Kant suggests that expecting the existence of an unconditional object is an “unavoidable illusion” (A339/B397; A407/B434)—one that involves us necessarily drawing metaphysical conclusions from the logical maxim when we consider metaphysical questions. Sometimes, he even suggests that we must “presuppose a transcendental principle” (A651/B679; A308/B365) to use the logical principle and further presuppose that the logical principle is objectively valid (A651/B679). But Kant also thinks the illusion and necessary presupposition of the objective validity of the logical maxim can come apart from affirming the metaphysical conclusions that arise from them. Thus, according to Kant, the illusion’s inevitability does not always fool us—so long as we recognise it as an illusion.

¹⁵ See Grier (1997; 2001, 122-130) for a fuller discussion of the error involved in the transcendental illusion. She claims that the error in affirming the transcendental illusion is that that “this conflation must be understood as a failure to see that the necessary principle P_2 has a merely regulative, not a constitutive, use (as P_1) when viewed in connection with the theoretical knowledge given through the understanding” (1997, 13).

concerned with diagnosing errors that arise from affirming P_2 , that is, affirming a transcendental illusion as a metaphysical claim.

1.2 Systematicity and the Logical Maxim

Kant's logical maxim (P_1) is important to our discussion because Kant presents systematicity *just as* P_1 in the *Appendix*. He characterises systematicity as the “logical principle” (A648 B676) and as “merely something subjectively and logically necessary” (A648 B676). He says, “[t]he logical principle of reason demand[s] this [systematic] unity as far as it is possible to bring about” (A649 B677), such that “reason aim[s] at nothing but its own formal rule” (A686 B714), which just is P_1 . Kant also contrasts systematicity with the “transcendental principle of reason” (A648 B676). Moreover, consider this passage:

The unity of reason is the unity of a system, and this systematic unity does not serve reason objectively as a principle, extending over objects, but *subjectively as a maxim*, in order to extend it over all possible empirical cognitions of objects. (A680/B708; my italics. See also A650-1/B678-9)

Kant repeatedly characterises systematicity as logical, subjective, and formal, which moreover supports the suggestion that systematicity just is the logical maxim (P_1). Kant's language mirrors the language of the logical maxim. It also aligns with Kant's repeated claim that systematic unity is not a “constitutive principle for determining something in regard to its direct object” (A680/B709). That is, systematicity, like the logical maxim, does not imply metaphysical dependence and thus is not a property of objects. Therefore, I am in agreement with Grier when she equates the logical maxim with a subjective demand for systematicity

and claims that “[t]he central aim of the *Appendix* seems to be to articulate the positive function of this demand [for systematicity], or principle, of reason” (Grier 1997, 3).

In the Introduction, we asked why rationality requires us to systematise our concepts. Now, we can see that if systematicity just is the logical maxim (P_1), then this question is equivalent to asking: why does rationality demand that we seek ever more (logical) fundamental explanations until we reach an unexplained explainer—if only as an abstract rule? In Kantian terms, our question is why is P_1 (the logical maxim) a principle of reason?

1.3 The Logical Maxim in Two Steps

We are now equipped with a distinction between the logical maxim and the transcendental principle, and we also have a definition of systematicity as logical maxim. Accordingly, we can separate the logical maxim into partial and full versions:

Logical maxim (P_1)

P_1 (*partial*): as an abstract rule, rationality demands that we seek more fundamental explanations and do so iteratively.

P_1 (*full*): as an abstract rule, rationality demands that we seek more fundamental explanations—*unendingly* (i.e., until we reach the most fundamental explanation: the *unconditional*).¹⁶

¹⁶ My reading is close to Grier (2001, 119-21). For a different reading see Willaschek (2018, 63-4) who claims that the logical maxim applies to any piece of cognition that is

The partial version is ‘partial’ because it expresses only one aspect of the maxim. It says that rationally requires us to give a chain of explanations. The full version is ‘full’ because it expresses the whole maxim. It says that rationally requires we give a complete chain of explanations. The full/partial distinction is mine—not Kant’s. However, it can help get understand the logical maxim. If we have any hope of defending P_1 (*full*), we will need to defend P_1 (*partial*).

2.0 Logical Maxim (*partial*)

2.1 The Content of Logical Maxim (*partial*)

Let’s begin with P_1 (*partial*). Three remarks are in order. First, P_1 (*partial*) restates reason’s nature as a rational requirement. Recall that, for Kant, reason is primarily the capacity to infer more general concepts from less general ones that we use in empirical knowledge claims by applying syllogistic reasoning (A303/B360). Thus, reason produces a hierarchical ordering of concepts according to generality. In doing so, we bring one concept into an explanatory relation with a concept of higher generality (say, explaining features of a cat in terms of pets)—as opposed to heaping them together in aggregation (A833/B861). P_1 (*partial*) says that we are rationally required to seek such an explanation by means of hierarchically ordering concepts: if we are to be self-consistent reasoners, we should do whatever stems from the nature of reason.

inferentially or epistemically conditioned, and that it aims at comprehending systematicity in nature (as opposed to a mere ordering of concepts).

Second, the rational requirement in P_1 (*partial*) is iterative. In Chapter 7, I explained that reason seeks ever more general concepts through a series of prosyllogisms (A311/B388; A336/B394)—i.e., a syllogism that takes the major premise of a prior syllogism as its conclusion. If we follow Kant here, P_1 (*partial*) is an iterative requirement. Again, if we are to be self-consistent reasoners, we should do whatever stems from the nature of reason.

Third, P_1 (*partial*) requires us to seek more fundamental explanations. But we can further ask: explanation for what? Puzzlingly, Kant’s original statement of the logical maxim says that we should seek more fundamental explanations for “conditioned cognitions of the understanding” (A307-8/B364). But the term ‘conditioned cognition’ is somewhat ambiguous, and therefore invites a number of interpretations. I will discuss the three most obvious.

(1) *All empirical cognitions*. We might think that Kant is saying that all empirical cognitions must be inferentially conditioned.¹⁷ Thus, to count as an empirical cognition, we must infer that cognition from other cognitions (i.e., propositions) in a syllogism. This would imply that for any empirical cognition to be a cognition, we would have to infer it from more general premises in a syllogism. On that reading, the bar for empirical cognition is restrictively high. The cognition, ‘there is a cat on the mat’, would not count as an empirical cognition unless we connect ‘cat’ with ‘animal’. Thus, it is plausible to contend that Kant

¹⁷ See, for instance, Guyer (2003) who interprets Kant as claiming “without explanation that reason and its ideal of systematicity are somehow directly involved in the generation of empirical concepts and cognition” (281). He cites Kant’s claim that “[f]or the law of reason to seek the unity of nature is necessary, since without it we would have no reason, and without that, no coherent use of the understanding, and lacking that no adequate mark of empirical truth” (A651/B679). I, like Pickering, think that the notion of ‘truth’ here operates “not at the level of the understanding forming concepts, but at the level of reason ordering concepts” (2011, 437).

does not think that all empirical cognitions are inferentially conditioned: it is overly mentally taxing and thus psychologically implausible.¹⁸

(2) *Cognitions in a system of knowledge.* Alternatively, one might think that a conditioned cognition is one that is inferred from a more general cognition (i.e., it is conditioned by the more general cognition), such that a conditioned cognition is part of a system of knowledge. For instance, Marcus Willaschek says that inferentially conditioned cognitions “count as conditioned (in the relevant sense) if the only way for it to constitute scientific [i.e., systematic] knowledge is by being derived from general premises” (2018, 57). However, on this account, only cognitions that are already partially systematised can be part of a system of knowledge. But this amounts to saying that something (a cognition) can only become part of a system if it is already part of that system. So it is unclear how one brings unsystematised cognitions into a system of knowledge.

(3) *Empirical knowledge claims.* I think that the most convincing approach is to say that P_1 (*partial*) requires that we explain empirical knowledge claims. I think that despite Kant’s idiosyncratic language, what he is saying is that we explain some propositions evidentially and causally; these propositions are ‘conditioned cognitions of the understanding’. They are conditioned in the sense of being explained by some fact about objects in the world (broadly construed). We can come to make an empirical knowledge claim about these propositions. We do so by assenting to the relevant proposition on the basis of cognitions of the

¹⁸ It is also implausible to claim that empirical cognition requires a subject to merely be merely ‘in a position’ to inferentially relate concepts to one another without actually performing the mental act of inference. Presumably, infants and small children can have the empirical cognition ‘that thing is a tiger’ without being in a position to connect ‘tiger’ with ‘cat’ or ‘animal’.

understanding. Moreover, I think that Kant is saying that we can also explain these same propositions logically—and thus non-evidentially and non-causally—through its ‘inferential conditions’. This means that after “draw[ing] the proposition ... from experience merely through the understanding”, one can also seek to make an “assertion in general” (A322/B378). We do so by assenting to the same proposition on the basis of a logical connection between concepts (e.g., that ‘fruit’ is more general than ‘apple’).

Given the above-mentioned problems with (1) and (2), I think it is plausible to assume that, for Kant, the logical maxim requires (3) we explain empirical knowledge claims by logically connecting our concepts. Thus, P_1 (*partial*) requires us to seek logical explanations for empirical knowledge claims, and to do so iteratively.¹⁹

2.2 The Rational Requirement in Logical Maxim (*partial*)

If what I have said is right, P_1 (*partial*) involves a commitment to the effect that, for any empirical knowledge claim, we ‘ought’ to justify it on both (1) evidential and (2) logical grounds. In both cases, how should we understand the ‘ought’?

The requirement in (1) is evidentialist, which means that if you make an *empirical* knowledge claim, it is rational to assent only if you possess evidence for that claim. In more contemporary language, we might spell out the requirement in terms of beliefs. You are rational required to believe that ‘the earth is round’, and that ‘the moon is not made of

¹⁹ Put in Kantian language, P_1 (*partial*) somewhat awkwardly reads: we should iteratively seek more fundamental *logical* conditions (i.e., explanations) for propositions that you can already assent to on *empirical* conditions—or grounds (e.g., through evidence or causes).

cheese', if you have strong evidence for these propositions. As we saw in Chapter 2, Kant is deeply committed to evidentialism and rightly so.

One very Kantian thing to say about the requirement in (2) is that reasoning in conformity to reason's principles—here, P_1 (*partial*)—just is reasoning itself. So the relevant 'ought' disappears. Why should I conform to the principles of rationality? Because not conforming to them just is to stop reasoning.

However, understood in the above way, the requirement in (2) is unsatisfying for two reasons. First, it renders the requirement dependent on asserting a definition of reasoning. As we saw, Kant defines reasoning just as seeking explanations (conditions) for what needs explaining (what is conditioned), until an unexplained explainer (the unconditional). But such a definition raises a number of questions. For instance, why not define reason more broadly as the process of drawing inferences by applying logical rules? Moreover, why think there is one thing called reason, rather than different kinds of reasoning in theoretical, moral, and aesthetic domains?

Second, if we state the requirement in (2) as a condition on empirical knowledge, the 'ought' in P_1 (*partial*) seems hopeless. There, our empirical knowledge claims are rational only if we assent on evidential grounds and logical grounds. But that is an exceedingly high bar for empirical knowledge. Suppose a scientist assents that the double helix is an accurate model of DNA on the basis of relevant probabilistic evidence. I think most people will agree that the scientist's assent counts as knowledge without them further explaining the relevant proposition in terms of more fundamental concepts. Indeed, Kant agrees. He thinks the

scientist's knowledge is knowledge based on "common cognition" (JL 9:72; A832/B860) that is unsystematised cognitions.²⁰

So we need to say more about the requirement in (2)—to explain why we are rationally required to justify our empirical knowledge on logical grounds. We can state the underline principle as follows:

Systematicity Principle: To set our own ends, we need to be in a position to logically connect our knowledge that *p* to other propositions.

The Systematicity Principle concerns what we do with knowledge—and not a rational condition of knowledge itself. The basic thought is that setting our ends as our own requires that we not only have evidence that *p*, but that we can situate *p* within a broader set of propositions. It will be useful to consider an example.

Volunteer: You come to know that prisoners are poorly treated in your area from an expert in such matters. You comprehend the meaning of the statement, and it is true.

Moreover, you can cite the expert's testimony. On Kant's account, you know that *p*. Your knowledge even comes to be action guiding because, on the basis of your knowledge of those prisoners, you volunteer to work with them for an afternoon every week. However, you do not necessarily have the cognitive abilities to make appropriate decisions about

²⁰ Kant is explicit here: knowledge begins unsystematised, consisting in "ordinary cognition" (A832/B860) or "common cognition" that remains a "mere aggregate" (JL 9:72); and, by contrast, knowledge can become a science [*Wissenschaft*] consisting in the "complex of a cognition as a system ... rest[ing] on an idea of the whole" (JL 9:72).

similar cases—for example, where a lesser or greater sacrifice is required, or the needs you could meet are more or less pressing.

Contemporary epistemologist, Alison Hills has suggested that examples like Volunteer show that we can possess knowledge “without cognitive control, and so without understanding why [p]” (2015). She describes the difference between knowledge and (non-Kantian) understanding as one of ‘cognitive control’. As opposed to knowing why p: “if you understand why p (and q is why p) then you have cognitive control over p and q and thus you can (in the right circumstances) manipulate the relationship between p and q” (*Ibid.*). Thus, you can follow explanations of why p; explain p in your own words; draw the conclusion that p (or p*) from information about q (or q*); given the information that p (or p*), give the right explanation, q (or q*). Such cognitive control ‘puts you in a position,’ in my terms, to connect one’s knowledge that p to other propositions.

The terminology is messy. Kant reserves the term ‘understanding’ for our ‘faculty of concepts’, and might call something similar to Hills’ ‘understanding’ our systematic knowledge’ or ‘comprehension’ (JL 9:65). However, for Kant, Hills, and many other contemporary ‘understanding’ theorists, we can distinguish between two epistemic states—between mere knowledge that p and a higher epistemic state—where in the latter one grasps the coherence relations between p and a larger body of information.²¹

In Kant’s case, he is following the scholastic tradition that views *scientia* or *Wissenschaft* as epistemically superior to knowledge—“the scholastic concept of this science [a system of

²¹ See Grimm, Baumberger and Ammon (2017) for further contemporary discussion of ‘understanding’.

cognitions of reason from concepts]” (JL 9:23).²² According to that tradition, we can relate to propositions in different ways—importantly here, both as empirical knowledge and *scientia*. If we possess empirical knowledge with respect to some proposition, we know that it is true based on relevant evidence. If we possess *scientia* with respect to some proposition, we know that the proposition is true and can demonstrate the truth of that proposition via a syllogism. So, to count as a *scientia*, I must not only possess empirical grounds, but also logical grounds, for p. *Scientia* requires that we assent that p on the basis of evidence and on the demonstration that p via a syllogism, and thus put ourselves in a more coherent epistemic position with respect of p.

The problem with empirical knowledge, according to Kant, is not only that we lack cognitive control over the relevant propositions, as Hills suggests, but our lack of cognitive control prevents us from setting our ends as our own. In the Volunteer example, for Kant, you set the end of helping prisoners on the knowledge gained from expert testimony. However, you lack the *scientia*, and cognitive control that accompanies *scientia*, to make the end your own. Given that you do not logically connect your knowledge about prisoners with other nearby propositions, you do not connect the claim that we should help prisoners in your area with more general claims—such as, we should help prisoners in general or we should help the needy in society. This is because you do not connect the concept ‘prisoners in your area’ with ‘prisoner’ or with ‘needy persons in society’. Thus, you lack the cognitive control to set the relevant end as your end, as opposed to the expert's end, because you cannot provide general reasons for holding your end.

²² See also A695-6/B723-4; A738/B766; A832/B860.

Indeed, Kant offers us a health-warning: pursuing systematic knowledge without considering why we pursue it is unfulfilling. Kant scornfully characterises Scholastic philosophy as a *scientia* or *Wissenschaft* of “cognitions of reason from concepts”—that it builds “systematic connection[s] [...] without looking to see how much the [systematic] knowledge contributes to the final end of human reason” (JL 9:24). Scholasticism remains neutral about which ends we should reason for: it “gives rules for the use of reason for any sort of end one wishes” (JL 9:24).

Kant’s point is that systematising for its own sake will leave us unsatisfied because we ultimately want to bring a system of concepts into connection with our lives. He emphasises, again and again, to his students that systematic reasoning alone will not bring them “satisfaction” (JL 9:24; Vien-L 24:800). He observes that many people who start by pursuing *scientia* with “great diligence and happiness [*großem Fleiße und Glücke*]” (JL 9:24) ultimately find no satisfaction in all of their knowledge. These people often turn into misologists—reason-haters” (Blom-L 24:26; 24:800; Vien-L 24:800; G 4:395), because they expect too much of reason: that it will tell them which ends to pursue.

Unsurprisingly, Kant thinks his own practical philosophy rides in to save the day. The practical philosopher’s conception of *scientia* consists not merely in giving rules for the use of reason, and thus telling us how we should systematically connect our knowledge. It also consists in “see[ing] how all cognitions fit together in an edifice, in a rule-governed way, *for such ends as are suited to humanity*” (Vien-L 24:800). Thus the practical philosopher’s conception of *scientia* is employing systematic knowledge to make a “choice among various ends” (JL 9:24).

So practical philosophy’s innovation on the Scholastic notion of *scientia* is to identify it with a second-order philosophical inquiry into the setting of ends, and not with a higher

epistemic attitude. Thus, he contrasts the Scholastic concept of science with his own “worldly concept” of the science of the “ends of human reason” (JL 9:23). *First-order inquiries* involve the pursuit of empirical knowledge. But this presupposes a *second-order inquiry* into systematising that knowledge: that is, to ask what *end* the whole of that knowledge can serve. The problem with merely first-order inquiry is evidenced by Kant’s views on the Enlightenment. He sees it as having “brought more hardship” than happiness, and as having driven human beings further “from true contentment” (G 4:395). So the practical philosopher systematises our empirical knowledge in order to ask how we *should* use—i.e., to what ends we should put—our knowledge. Again, we are rationally required to justify our empirical knowledge on logical grounds because doing so is necessary to set our own ends.

The practical philosopher thus asks how we want to use our knowledge, not in a piecemeal fashion, but as a system. Consequently, systematicity for Kant does *not only* consist in drawing rational inferences from empirical knowledge claims, and thus unifying them into systematic knowledge. It also consists in asking for what end should we pursue this system of knowledge. To ask and answer this question, in Kant’s words, is to be a “legislator of reason”—to give oneself reasons to use systematic knowledge towards some end, as opposed to an “artist of reason”—one who is merely skilled at reasoning (JL 9:24).

So Kant is encouraging us to step back from first-order inquiry, to view its results in the most general light (i.e., as a system), and then asking about what ends these results serve. To do so, we must justify our empirical knowledge on logical grounds.

3.0 Logical Maxim (*full*)

3.1 Giving more fundamental explanations, unendingly

We might accept that rationality requires that we give more fundamental explanations for our empirical knowledge claims, as P_1 (*partial*) holds. But Kant thinks we must do so unendingly.

This thought we can refer to as the full version of the logical maxim P_1 (*full*):

P_1 (*full*): as an abstract rule, rationality demands that we seek more fundamental explanations—*unendingly* (i.e., until we reach the most fundamental explanation—the *unconditional*).

Kant's line of thought in P_1 (*full*) seems to be as follows. Reason demands we seek a totality of explanations, but further explanations do not lie beyond a totality of explanations, such that the totality of explanations is an unconditional explanation (i.e., is one that requires no further explanation). So, once we begin seeking the totality of explanations, we are committed to seeking an unconditional explanation.

But why think that further explanations do not lie beyond a totality of explanations or conditions, such that it follows that seeking more and more conditions simultaneously commits us to seeking the unconditional?

To see the problem, consider the dissimilarity between 'all the gold that exists' and 'the totality of explanations'. 'All the gold that exists' rules out any further gold existing analytically. If you put all the gold that exists in a pile and point to something else and said, 'this is also gold', you have not understood the meaning of 'all'. This is because all the gold that exists in a pile logically rules out that there is more gold that is not in the original pile.

Similarly 'a totality of explanations' (a pile of all explanations, so to speak) seems to rule out further explanations. However, built into the concept of explanation is the notion that you can ask for more of them—and in a way you cannot of gold (all of the gold is either there or

not). Therefore, can one even consider ‘a totality of explanations’ and ask of this totality whether or not further explanations are possible? Kant seems to think that either this further explanation is internal to the set of total explanations, such that it does not explain the total set after all. Or, it is external to the set, and the set is not the totality of explanations. Kant’s way out of the problem is deny both options and claim that an unconditioned explanation—the “unconditioned” (A307-8/B364; also see A418/B445; A584/B612)—explains the totality of explanation instead.

Here are two representative passages:

The absolute whole of the series of conditions for a given conditioned is always unconditioned, because outside it there are no more conditions regarding which it could entail the unconditioned” (A417–8/B445).

Reason demands this in accordance with the principle: If the conditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and hence the absolutely unconditioned, is also given, through which alone the conditioned was possible” (A409/B436).

Unfortunately, Kant never provides an argument for the claim that an unconditioned explanation explains a totality of explanations. However, I think we can specify a plausible argument:²³

²³ Here, my reading is indebted to Watkins (2016).

P1. Some objects are conditioned, and thus are explainable through these conditions (premise).

P2. One or more conditions condition a conditioned object (analytic truth).

P3. The set of all conditions is the totality of conditions (analytic truth).

C1. Objects that are conditioned have a totality of conditions, and thus are explainable through these conditions (P1-P3).

P4. The ‘totality of all conditions’ is an unconditioned condition (premise).

C2. Thus, given a conditioned object, it has an unconditioned condition, which is thus explainable through this unconditioned condition (C1-P4).

The starting assumption (P1) draws from the *Aesthetic* and the *Analytic*. A central lesson of the *Aesthetic* is that space and time are subjective conditions of our minds. Thus, insofar as objects are given to us, they are fundamentally spatiotemporally conditioned. A central lesson of the *Analytic* is that our taking up of these objects in thought has empirical and a priori rules: that is, empirical concepts and the categories. Thus, in so far as spatiotemporal objects are objects of our thought, empirical concepts and the categories condition them. By contrast, things in themselves are not conditioned.

The next step (P2), follows by definition. For an object to be conditioned is for it to be conditioned by a set of one or more conditions. The next step (P3), also follows by definition. Collect up all the conditions and you have a totality of conditions. If we assume that this totality is an unconditioned condition (P4), it (paradoxically) follows that a conditioned object has an unconditioned condition (C2).

So the argument turns on (P4). Why should it be that the ‘totality of all conditions’ is unconditioned? I think that the answer is best put in terms of a *reductio*. Assume that the ‘totality of all conditions’ is conditioned. If this is the case, this amounts to saying that another condition conditions the totality of all conditions. Yet this cannot be the case because if it were, the totality of all conditions would not contain all the conditions, and hence would not be the totality of all conditions. Thus, a *reductio* suggests that there would be a condition—so to speak—outside of the totality of conditions, which is a contradiction. Therefore, on the threat of a *reductio* a ‘totality of all conditions’ must be unconditioned.²⁴

3.2 Evaluation of Logical Maxim (*full*)

I think the above argument is the best version of Kant’s position that we can give. But it is worth considering if the position is plausible.

One challenge is that ‘an explanation of the totality of explanations’ is incoherent. The dominant approach to theories of explanation is causal: explaining an event or phenomenon is identifying its cause. Our challenger says that it is incoherent to ask what is the explanation of the totality of explanations because that is to ask what is the cause of something that is not an

²⁴ Another way of putting the this same point in modern mathematics is the following. One might worry that all the natural numbers cannot form a totality since there will always be a number greater than the greatest natural number in a given series. But the theory of transfinite numbers shows that we can make sense of a totality of natural numbers by assigning an infinite ordinal. But, as Walden in defence of Kant points out, “a generalization of the same worry still arises in this framework” (2019, 582). This is because when we construct a set of all ordinal numbers Ω , we can construct its successor $\Omega + 1 > \Omega$. However, by hypothesis, this ordinal must be an element of Ω , which means that $\Omega + 1$ is less than Ω . So we arrive at a contradiction. Therefore, there cannot be a set of all ordinals.

event or phenomenon. Thus, Kant is making a category mistake in asking for an explanation of the totality of explanations, because such a totality is not an event or phenomenon. On this view, to provide a total explanation just is to identify all the causes.

I think the above challenge is misleading. Kant thinks that we have two distinct kinds of explanation, one evidential (which is broadly causal) and the other logical. Central to the Kantian position is that if we are to explain anything in the world, it must stand in “accordance with this law [of causality]” (A189/B234). Kant argues that this is because we can view events as part of an objective process unfolding over time only by conceiving them as necessarily ordered by causality. Thus, he attempts to provide a proof of the claim that “[a]ll alterations occur in accordance with the law of the connection of cause and effect” (B232). But *systematic* explanation is a logical explanation and not a kind of explanation about things in the world. It explains the relation between propositions based on the content of the concepts that they refer to—crucially, *in abstraction from objects*. Our challenger might question our use of the term, ‘explanation’, preferring to say that all explanation is causal.²⁵ But then the challenge is merely verbal; they need only accept the following. We can trace basic logical connections between concepts and do so informatively. The basic logical

²⁵ Moreover, it is not immediately obvious that causal explanation exhausts explanation. Consider two prominent examples in the literature. *Strawberry sharing*. Consider Marc who fails to share 23 strawberries evenly among his three children—without cutting the strawberries or children! (Lange 2013, 488). While Marc’s beliefs and desires about his children might have caused him to share the strawberries, there is a non-causal, mathematical explanation for why Marc failed to share them evenly: the mathematical fact that 23 cannot be divided evenly by three. *Stick throwing*. Imagine throwing a bunch of sticks in the air such that they twist in many directions as they fall (Lipton 2004, 9–10). Now suppose we freeze the sticks. We will find that significantly more sticks are near the horizontal than vertical axis. There is a non-causal, geometric explanation: there are many more ways for a stick to be horizontal (spin on the horizon plane) and only two ways for a stick to be vertical (up and down). See Reutlinger (2017) for a more detailed survey of these issues.

connection I have in mind is connecting concepts according to their generality (for instance, golden retriever, dog, pet, animal, and so on—such that the necessary features of dogs belong to golden retrievers). If the challenger accepts this, there is not much distance between Kant’s position and their own.

A more serious challenge comes from rationalism. Kant seems to assume that if further explanation is internal to the set of total explanations, then it cannot explain the total set after all.²⁶ But with the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) in mind, our rationalist challenger might say that a totality of explanations is self-explaining. The argument might take the following shape. Every fact has an explanation (PSR). Let’s assume that there exists a set of explanations *S* that explains all facts. Call it the *totality of explanation assumption*. If this assumption holds, *S*’s existence must have an explanation. Either *S* (internally) explains itself or something else (externally) does. But something else cannot explain *S* because this would contradict the totality of explanation assumption – if something else did, *S* would not be the totality of explanation. Thus, *S* is internally self-explanatory.

Of course, the above argument mirrors closely the cosmological arguments for the existence of God, and Kant thinks that these rely on the ontological argument in a way that is suspect (A606-7-B634-5). Moreover, Kant denies that P_1 (*full*) involves any existence commitments, such as those expressed in the totality of explanation assumption.

But I think we need to give our rationalist challenger a more compelling response. Their argument is not about the existence of God, and the force of the totality of explanation assumption does not stem from an existence claim. Instead, its force stems from a shared

²⁶ Della Rocca (2010) makes a similar point.

concern with Kant that we can conceive of the totality of explanations, which itself can stand in need of explanation—that is, Kant’s P3 (i.e., the set of all conditions is the totality of conditions). Kant seems to claim that if a total set of explanations stands in need of explanation, then it *cannot* be explained by itself. He invokes a *modus tollens*, and I have argued that he might plausibly do so on the threat of a *reductio*. But our rationalist challenger invokes a *modus ponens*: if a total set of explanations stands in need of explanation, then it *can* be explained by itself. Our rationalist challenger thus also has a principled reason to do so. Something else cannot explain S (the set of all facts)—on pain of contradicting the totality of explanation assumption—even if one makes no ontological commitments. And this claim follows as a consequence of something that Kant is committed to: that a set of explanations S explains all facts.

I think the Kantian thing to say is that the kind of set of explanations in the *totality of explanation assumption* is not merely a pile of facts (at least for Kant). Rather, the set is a series of propositions ordered into hierarchy based on the concepts involved—from less to most general. On the Kantian picture, one then asks for an explanation in the *logical* sense, and one reaches this by positing *higher order concepts* in a series of propositions in a syllogism. Thus, as we saw in Chapter 7, the kind of explanation in question appeals to ever more general concepts, and concepts for Kant *necessarily* generalise over more than one concept or object. So, on this picture, it is logically impossible for a concept to serve its (logical) explanatory role and be internal to the set of explanations it is trying to explain. This is because, by definition, such a concept is more general than the total set of explanations (and the concepts they involve). Thus, the explanation is external to the total set of explanations.

Here, of course, we might simply part ways with Kant. But this involves parting much earlier—indeed, back at the point of concept generality, which is to say that possessing a concept requires that we have the mental capacity to recombine it with other concepts in

different thoughts. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 7, many contemporary philosophers (like Evans) share that notion of concept generality.

In sum, the content of P_1 (*partial*) concerns our empirical knowledge claims—seek more fundamental explanations for our empirical knowledge claims. But the rational requirement to seek more fundamental explanations stems from a requirement to pursue *scientia*. Someone with *scientia* with respect to some proposition requires (1) evidential and (2) logical grounds. This twofold requirement reflects our contemporary epistemic practices. Moreover, I grounded this twofold requirement in the Systematicity Principle: to set our own ends, we need to be in a position to logically connect our knowledge that p to other propositions. Finally, if one agrees with P_1 (*partial*), one should also agree with P_1 (*full*) and think it is rational to fully systematise our concepts—on the threat of a reductio.

4.0 An Over-Demandingness Worry

I have claimed that systematicity just is the rational requirement that we seek a totality of explanations until we reach an unconditional explanation. But what is the scope of this requirement?

There are three key answers in the literature. I argue, however, that each is insufficient. I will briefly explain these interpretations before providing my own response.

(1) *Categorical*. For some commentators, the scope of the rational requirement to systematise includes everyone and is categorical: it is the kind of obligation that all rational beings must have, if they are to be rational. Allison, for instance, characterises the requirement as a “intellectual categorical imperative” (2004, 312), whilst Mudd claims that

the rational requirement “binds agents categorically” (2017, 83).²⁷ Of course, this does not mean that we in fact do systematise our concepts, but only that when we fail to systematise our concepts, we also fail at being rational.

But couched as a categorical requirement, the rational requirement to systematise seems overly-demanding. While one might think that systematising one’s concepts is praiseworthy, it need not be obligatory (but rather ‘supererogatory’, as ethicists say). In everyday life, we do not think that a rational person must provide both evidential and logical grounds for all of their empirical knowledge. Moreover, we do not think that they must provide logical grounds and do so unendingly, until they reach an unconditioned explanation. Suppose I come to have a representation expressed in the proposition, ‘it is raining outside’, and do so based on seeing droplets of water falling from the sky. If all goes well, I would come to have empirical knowledge that it is raining outside. I think few people would think that I am rationally required to demonstrate the truth of that proposition via a syllogism.

So a central worry about the categorical reading of systematicity is that Kant does not seem entitled to claim that reason demands that all rational beings seek explanations until they reach an unconditioned explanation. By contrast, he seems entitled to claim that it is praiseworthy *because* one is going above and beyond one’s immediate obligations.

Willaschek captures this point well:

After all, most people are not scientists and thus simply are not in the business of transforming their body of cognitions into a unified system ... [I]t would be absurd to

²⁷ See also Grier characterises the rational requirement to systematise as unavoidable for us (2001, 286).

claim that ordinary people stand under an obligation to look for conditions for each and ever [sic] one of their inferentially and epistemically conditioned cognitions” (Willaschek 2018, 68).

(2) *Vacuous*. In response, Willaschek describes the logical maxim as “appl[ying] under the condition that no other, more urgent concerns prevent us from following it” (2018, 70). Thus, he argues that the logical maxim holds for everyone but “vacuously so for most” (*Ibid.*, 70), because we typically have more pressing practical concerns than seeking a full explanation. On this reading, the logical maxim expresses an imperative that an ideal individual rational agent would do under ideal circumstances, but it does not bind us because we are not ideal rational agents.²⁸

While Willaschek correctly diagnoses the over-demandingness problem, his ‘vacuous’ reading is not plausible. Consider Ira, an ideal rational agent. Ira explains a particular empirical knowledge claim in terms of more general concepts, and does so such that her interlocutors are satisfied by the level of logical explanation given. Here, Ira does not seem rational in providing more fundamental explanations after all of the interlocutors are satisfied. Indeed, it seems irrational for Ira to keep going. So, *even in the ideal case*, it does not appear to be rational to seek systematicity unendingly. Moreover, Kant typically does not speak of ‘vacuous demands’. For example, in his moral philosophy, Kant thinks we have perfect and imperfect moral duties, where the former admit of no exceptions, whilst the latter—like a duty

²⁸ For an even weaker reading, see Proops (2010). He reads the logical maxim as contingent on our wishes: “[s]hould one not wish to proceed rationally in inquiry, one will stand under no obligation” to systematise (*Ibid.*, 456). This is seems wrong. For Kant, we always stand under an obligation to be rational.

to help others—can admit of exceptions in light of other considerations. So, even an imperfect moral duty does not vacuously hold for most; rather, it is defeasible.²⁹

(3) *Non-categorical*. At this stage, one might say that the scope of the rational requirement to systematise includes everyone, but only as an imperfect duty—a non-categorical and defeasible obligation. The upshot of appealing to imperfect duties is that it renders Kant’s position plausible whilst using familiar Kantian tools. Viewed in terms of imperfect duties, systematicity is an obligation that is defeasible considering other competing reasons—say, limited time or energy. Consider a migrant worker who works long hours, lives in cramped quarters, is isolated from family, and lacks support networks. If systematicity is an imperfect duty, the logical maxim gives a migrant worker some reason to systematise their concepts, but without it being that case that they ought to always, or even necessarily, do it. For the migrant worker, competing reasons will outweigh the logical maxim most of the time, given their material, and social circumstances. There is thus room within the Kantian framework to plausibly spell out the rational requirement to systematise as only an imperfect duty. But while plausible, this interpretive route renders the requirement very weak—as the migrant worker example shows, which (as we will see) is unattractive.

(4) *Categorical (Again)*. I think the demand to systematise our concepts is best read categorically: when we fail to systematise our concepts fully, we also fail at being rational. The first reason is textual and the second is a conceptual point about the over-demandingness worry.

²⁹ Along similar lines, Stephenson asks whether Willaschek has “defended [Kant’s view] only by stripping it of anything especially Kantian” (Stephenson 2020).

First, I think Kant wants to tell us something urgent, and appealing to imperfect duties misses this urgency. Recall that Kant says that “reason does not beg but commands” that we systematise our concepts (A652/B680), and that systematicity “belongs to the legislation of our reason” (A700/B728). To my ears, these are not the words of someone who thinks systematicity is a vacuous or defeasible requirement.³⁰

Second, I think the ‘over-demandingness’ talk here is misplaced.³¹ Imagine a librarian demanding I return my overdue copy of Kant’s *First Critique*. They email me every day and demand I return the book. They demand only what I owe the library and their demands are not aggressive. Here, it does not seem like the librarian is being overly-demanding. Indeed, one might think that I should return the book without needing to be asked. Likewise, a theory of rationality that demands only what is rational cannot be overly-demanding. We are, in fact, in a position where we cannot meet many of our obligations, both rational and moral. But this does not relieve us of these obligations. If I have lost the book and lack the funds to replace it, my obligation does not magically disappear. At the very least, I should feel some remorse. It is inappropriate for me to say that the librarian is demanding too much. The issue is not that a legitimate demand is too demanding; the issue is that I find myself in the position of not being able to fulfil it. Similarly, the rational requirement that we seek a totality of explanations until we reach an unconditional explanation is not automatically illegitimate because we find ourselves in a position in which we cannot meet it.

³⁰ Of course, for Kant, reason still commands imperfect, or defeasible, duties (G 4:421-2). So I intend this textual point only speculatively.

³¹ See Goodin (2009) for similar concerns about over-demandingness worries in moral philosophy. See also Levinas (1961), in the Continental tradition, who claims our most meaningful ethical obligations to others are infinite.

But there is an important way in which returning a book and meeting the demand to fully systematise our concepts are disanalogous. In principle, an individual could meet a demand to return a missing book (they could search harder for it). But in principle, it seems that an individual's time, energy, and mental capacities are insufficient to fully systemise their concepts: there are just too many other pressing issues. If ought-implies-can holds, it does not appear to be the case that an individual is in any position to meet Kant's demands of rationality. So what, then, is left to individuals?

I think the Kantian point is that limited, embodied, individual human beings can attempt to meet the rational requirement to fully systematise their concepts only if they work together actively and collectively with other individuals to create intellectual communities that aspire to meet the demands of rationality. Kant often says that reasoning, *Wissenschaft*, and philosophy are collective pursuits—they involve intersubjectively communicable assents, “regardless of the difference among the subjects” (A820-1/B848-9). To be successful, these pursuits moreover require intergenerational effort. Reason, as Kant says, will become “fully developed” only in the “remote distance” (I 8:30). It is, then, individuals playing their role in a collective project who will become fully rational—that is, by working together.³²

Textually, there is not much to fall back on here. Kant does not say that the logical maxim (and thus the demand for systematicity) addresses individuals or all rational beings collectively. So I am not attributing the above position to Kant but saying that it is a Kantian way to address the over-demandingness worry.

³² For a similar discussion Willaschek (2018, 63-4).

I think a political example is instructive. In Chapter 6, I suggested that we might criticise Rawls for limiting his maxi-min principle—to maximise the welfare of those with the minimum resources in society. He arbitrarily restricts maxi-min to “heads of households” (i.e., adult men) in countries like America and thus arbitrarily excludes children, persons of all genders, and all other countries. I also suggested that, when we criticise Rawls in this way, we are appealing to a Kantian point: if you think a feature or principle applies (or should apply) to someone or group of people, you should seek the most general condition under which it could hold. We can now put the criticism in terms of systematicity. Rawls fails to seek a totality of (logical) explanations until he reaches an unconditional explanation. And although systematicity is explicitly about generalising empirical knowledge claims, which that maxi-min principle is not, I still think the principle is an instructive example. Like all individuals, Rawls’s time, energy, and mental capacities were limited, and he found himself within certain social and political structures. The Kantian point is that, even if Rawls cannot meet his rational obligations, it does not relieve others working in a Rawlsian tradition of an obligation to fully systematise the maxi-min principle. Of course, there may be good reasons to reject a fully generalised maxi-min principle. But we cannot rule this out until we have done the work of fully systematising our political concepts. This work is the work of an intellectual community collectively aspiring to the demands of rationality.

Likewise, in empirical investigation, the rational demand for systematicity counters a twofold complacency about empirical knowledge—contentment with the current state of science combined with a satisfaction that the present state is all that can be accompanied in one's lifetime—by requiring intellectual communities to work together across generations to aspire to the demands of rationality. Indeed, Kant claims that scientists engage in ‘lazy reason’ when they “regard [their] investigation into nature, what ever it may be, as absolutely complete, so that reason can take a rest, as though it had fully accomplished its business”

(B689-90/B717-8). As with the political example, the Kantian point is that, even if individual scientists cannot meet their rational obligations to systematise their concepts, it does not relieve others working in their intellectual communities from an obligation to fully systematise their concepts.

Conclusion

It is important to remember (again) that Kant's claim that doctrinal (or theoretical) Belief is necessary for pursuing theoretical ends cannot be reduced to his claim that ideas are necessary for empirical investigation. The former concerns a mental state (i.e., Belief) and the latter concerns a kind of mental content (i.e., supersensible concepts). In the previous chapter, I argued that, for Kant, systematic thoughts are rational cognitions, which require two ingredients: empirical concepts and ideas. I claimed that *if* in empirical investigation we are to fulfil a rational requirement to systemise our thoughts, then ideas will be necessary for empirical investigation. However, I did not provide an argument for why we ought to systematise our concepts. The aim of this chapter was to address that issue.

I began this chapter with a hierarchy of concepts: T-Rex, dinosaur, extinct reptiles, reptiles in general, and so on. Kant calls our connecting these less general concepts to more general ones 'systematicity'. It produces a hierarchical ordering of concept according to generality.

I have argued that systematicity just is Kant's logical maxim, which itself is a plausible rational requirement. I claimed that its plausibility rests on the principle that, to set our own ends, we need to be in a position to logically connect our propositional knowledge to other propositions. We can break the logical maxim into component parts. In its partial form, it consists in a requirement to connect less general concepts to more general ones through more fundamental levels of explanation. It does not apply to 'garden-variety' empirical knowledge

but knowledge as a science—*Wissenschaft* or *scientia*. In its full form, under the threat of a *reductio*, the logical maxim requires that we systematise our concepts fully—and this stems from the nature of concepts. Concepts are always general representations, and they enable us to always ask for more general concepts until we reach the most general concept in a given domain. Moreover, the rational requirement to systematise *is* very demanding: it holds for everyone even though it seems many cannot meet it. But this should not stop us pursuing the material and social conditions under which the demand can be met by all.

With systematicity, I think Kant is proposing a vision of human beings who rationally engage in first-order inquiry and who are also willing, able, and rationally obligated to engage in second-order inquiry. While first-order inquiry (for Kant) involves the pursuit of empirical knowledge, second-order inquiry involves asking what ends such knowledge (once systematised) can serve. As such, a rational demand to seek systematicity is not merely a philosopher's craving for generality, nor is it merely a heuristic that we presuppose to help us organise our knowledge. Instead, it is an important part of what it means to be a rational being in the world.

Concluding Remarks

I now pull together the main claims of this study in some concluding remarks. There is strong textual support for liberalism about Kantian Belief: the view that Kant allows for moral and theoretical ends to justify Belief. We find in the *Canon* that Kant endorses rational Belief (*Vernunftglauben*) as both moral Belief (*moralischen Glauben*) and doctrinal (or theoretical) Belief (*doctrinalen Glauben*) (A824-31/B852-59).

This study began, however, by highlighting tensions within liberalism about Kantian Belief. First, it was unclear whether we can provide a compelling example of an agent's doctrinal Belief that does not involve only a limited set of agents (namely, metaphysicians), whereas Kant thinks that his insights into Belief are accessible to everyone and capture universal human concerns. Second, it was unclear why the scope of ends should be limited to moral and theoretical contexts alone and cannot extend to social, political or aesthetic ends (although Kant does not expressly claim the latter). Third, it was unclear how Kant's account of non-moral Belief relates to his account of hope. If Belief and hope are both necessary in moral contexts, as Kant claims, then, presumably, they are also necessary in non-moral contexts.

In this study, I have tried to draw attention to the ways in which we can resolve such tensions in liberalism. In Chapters 1 and 2, I showed that we can extract a plausible non-metaphysical example of doctrinal Belief from Kant's writings. I argued that, according to Kant, a philosopher-historian who pursues a complete human history necessarily assents to the idea that human rationality will develop fully in the distant future. In this way, a central result of the study was a defence of liberalism about Kantian Belief.

Concluding Remarks

In chapters 3 through 5, I showed that the principles underwriting the necessity of Belief and hope for pursuing certain ends generalises to social ends, and that Belief and hope are distinct propositional attitudes but both necessary for pursuing certain goals. I, first, showed that if Kant's account of Belief and hope is to give a philosophically compelling accounts of secular faith, then it should satisfy five desiderata. We want an account of secular faith as an attitude that (1) is necessary for pursuing our far-distant goals, (2) does not produce overconfidence towards those goals, (3) does not demotivate us, (4) is truly secular, and (5) is sensitive to key evidentialist principles. I, then, presented and defended, the Dual and Distinct Thesis: Kantian Belief and hope are distinctive but both necessary attitudes for pursuing our far-distant goals; Belief is constitutive of, and thus necessary for, pursuing those ends, and hope is psychologically necessary for pursuing those ends. I argued that Belief's necessity rests on the Attainability Principle—that (roughly) one can rationally will an end only if one thinks of that end as attainable partly through one's actions. Moreover, I showed how hope is psychologically necessary (for most of us, most of the time) to maintain our resolve in pursuit of far-distant ends. In both cases, I argued that Kantian Belief and hope satisfy the five desiderata on secular faith.

Since Kant claims that ideas (like God, the soul, and an infinite-world) are necessary for empirical investigation, on pain of conflation, it is important to differentiate between doctrinal Beliefs involved in theoretical ends and the supposed necessity of ideas in empirical investigation. In chapters 6 through 8, I argued for mentalism about the necessity of ideas in empirical investigation: the view that ideas are our most general concepts, in our most general thoughts, in a given domain, and this explains why they are necessary for empirical investigation: they are necessary for systematic thought. Thus, ideas are not propositions that one can form assent about or act 'as if' were true; they are a unique mental component—our most general concepts. I argued that empirical investigation is best understood as a collective

Concluding Remarks

enterprise: individuals working together to create intellectual communities that aspire to meet the demands of rationality.

Once we take liberalism seriously, we find that Kantian doctrinal Belief, as opposed to moral Belief, is an appropriate model for agents' propositional attitudes towards ambitious goals. Indeed, appreciating the non-moral aspects of Kantian Belief and hope involves embracing a theory of Kant's practical attitudes larger in scope than traditionally commentators have allowed. The result, however, is a rational account of our propositional attitudes, which more accurately captures the full range of our experience as ambitious, end-directed agents.

References

Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1979. "Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief." Reprinted in (1987) *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Allais, Lucy. 2009. "Kant, Non-Conceptual Content and the Representation of Space." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47 (3): 383–413.

———. 2015. *Manifest Reality: Kant's Idealism and His Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2016. "Kant's Racism." *Philosophical Papers* 45 (1-2): 1–36.

Allison, Henry. 2004. *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Ameriks, Karl. 2012. "The End of Kant's Critiques: Kant's Moral 'Creationism.'" In *Kant's Elliptical Path*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Anderson, Lanier. 2015. *The Poverty of Conceptual Truth: Kant's Analytic/synthetic Distinction and the Limits of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Audi, R. 2008. "Belief, Faith, and Acceptance." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 63 (1-3): 87–102.

Badiou, Alain. 2009. *Logics of Worlds*. London: Continuum.

Baldwin, James, and Richard Avedon. 1964 [2017]. *Nothing Personal*. New York: TASCHEN.

Basu, Rima. 2019. "The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs." *Philosophical Studies* 176 (9): 2497–2515.

Beck, Jacob. 2012. "The Generality Constraint and the Structure of Thought." *Mind* 121 (483): 563–600.

Beck, Lewis White. 1960. *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beiser, Frederick C. 1987. *The Fate of Reason*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

———. 2006. "Moral Faith and the Highest Good." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Paul Guyer, 588–629. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

References

- Bennett, Jonathan. 1974. *Kant's Dialectic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benton, Matthew A. 2018. "Knowledge, Hope, and Fallibilism." *Synthese* 198 (7): 1673–89.
- Biden, Joe. 2020. "Joe Biden's Victory Speech, Annotated," November 7, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/11/07/annotated-biden-victory-speech/> Accessed 20 December 2020.
- Biernot, David, and Christoffel Lombaard. 2020. "Finitude, Temporality and the Criticism of Religion in Martin Hägglund's *This Life*." Review of *This Life*, by Martin Hägglund. *Theological Studies* 76 (2).
- Bishop, John. 2007. *Believing by Faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bittner, Rüdiger. 2009. "Philosophy Helps History." In *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, edited by Amélie Rorty and James Schmidt, 231–49. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Blöser, Claudia. 2020. "Hope in Kant." In *The Moral Psychology of Hope*, edited by Claudia Blöser and Titus Stahl. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Boehm, Ori. 2012. "Kant's Regulative Spinozism." *Kant-Studien* 103 (3): 292–317.
- Bovens, L. 1999. "The Value of Hope." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Breitenbach, Angela. n.d. "Kant on the Ideal Unity of Science." Unpublished manuscript.
- Briesen, Jochen. 2013. "Is Kant (W)right? – on Kant's Regulative Ideas and Wright's Entitlements." *Kant Yearbook* 5 (1): 1–32.
- Brunkhorst, Hauke. 2020. "A Marxist Educated Kant: Philosophy of History in Kant and the Frankfurt School." *Kantian Review* 25 (4): 515–40.
- Buchak, Lara. 2017. "Faith and Steadfastness in the Face of Counter-Evidence." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81 (1-2): 113–33.
- Buchdahl, Gerd. 1992. *Kant and the Dynamics of Reason*. Oxford and Cambridge Mass.: Blackwell.
- Byrne, Peter. 2007. *Kant on God*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.
- Chae, Lee-Ann. 2020. "Hoping for Peace." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 98 (2): 211–21.
- Chance, Brian A., and Lawrence Pasternack. 2019. "Baumgarten and Kant on Rational Theology: Deism, Theism and the Role of Analogy." *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Lectures on Metaphysics*.
- Chignell, Andrew. Forthcoming (a). Unpublished manuscript.

References

- . Forthcoming (b). “Despair, Trust, and Difference-Making: A Secular Version of Kant’s Moral Argument.” In *Kant and the Contemporary World*, edited by Caranti Pinzani. New York: Routledge.
- . 2007a. “Belief in Kant.” *Philosophical Review* 116 (3): 323–60.
- . 2007b. “Kant’s Concepts of Justification.” *Noûs* 41 (1): 33–63.
- . 2013. “Rational Hope, Moral Order, and the Revolution of the Will.” In *The Divine Order, the Human Order, and the Order of Nature*, edited by Eric Watkins, 197–218. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2014. “Rational Hope, Possibility, and Divine Action.” In *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason: A Critical Guide*, edited by Gordon E. Michalson, 98–117. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2017. “Kant on Cognition, Givenness, and Ignorance.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55 (1): 131–42.
- . 2018. “Religious Dietary Practices and Secular Food Ethics; Or, How to Hope That Your Food Choices Make a Difference Even When You Reasonably Believe That They Don’t.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Food Ethics*, edited by Mark Budolfson, Anne Barnhill, and Tyler Doggett. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2020. “Hope and Despair at the Kantian Chicken Factory.” In *Kant and Animals*, edited by John J. Callanan and Lucy Allais. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clifford, William Kingdon. 1877 [1999]. “The Ethics of Belief.” In *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays*, edited by Timothy J. Madigan, 70–96. Amherst, Mass.: Prometheus.
- Cohen, Alix. 2014. “Kant on the Ethics of Belief.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 114 (3): 317–34.
- Cohen, Hermann. 1904/1907. *System Der Philosophie, Zweiter Teil: Ethik Der Reinen Willens [System of Philosophy, Second Part: Ethics of Pure Will]*. Berlin: Bruno Cassirer.
- Critchley, Simon. 2012. *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*. London and New York: Verso Books.
- Cureton, Adam. 2018. “Reasonable Hope in Kant’s Ethics.” *Kantian Review* 23 (2): 181–203.
- Dawkins, Richard. 2006. *The God Delusion*. London: Bantam Books.
- Day, J. P. 1969. “Hope.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (2): 89–102.
- Denis, Lara. 2005. “Autonomy and the Highest Good.” *Kantian Review* 10: 33–59.
- Dennett, Daniel Clement. 2006. *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. New York: Penguin.

References

- Derrida, Jacques. 2002. *Acts of Religion*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Descartes, René. 1649 [1985]. "The Passions of the Soul." In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol I*, translated by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, 325–405. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dewey, John. 1934. *A Common Faith*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Elgin, C. 2007. "Understanding and the Facts." *Philosophical Studies* 132 (1): 33–42.
- Estlund, David. 2020. *Utopophobia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Evans, Gareth. 1982. *The Varieties of Reference*. Edited by John McDowell. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Firestone, Chris L. 2009. *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason*. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Firestone, Chris L., and Nathan Jacobs. 2008. *In Defense of Kant's Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Flikschuh, Katrin. 2009. "Hope as Prudence: Practical Faith in Kant's Political Thinking." *International Yearbook of German Idealism* 7: 95–117.
- Friedman, Michael. 1974. "Explanation and Scientific Understanding." *The Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1): 5–19.
- . 1992. *Kant and the Exact Sciences*. Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press.
- . 2000. "Geometry, Construction, and Intuition in Kant and His Successors." In *Between Logic and Intuition: Essays in Honor of Charles Parsons*, edited by Gila Sher and Richard Tieszen, 186–218. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2001. *The Dynamics of Reason*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Fugate, Courtney. 2014. "The Highest Good and Kant's Proof(s) of God's Existence." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 31 (2): 137–58.
- Gardner, Sebastian. 1999. *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Routledge.
- Gava, Gabriele. 2015. "The Fallibilism of Kant's Architectonic." In *Pragmatism, Kant, and Transcendental Philosophy*, edited by Gabriele Gava And Stern, 46–66. London: Routledge.
- . 2019. "Kant and Crusius on Belief and Practical Justification." *Kantian Review* 24 (1): 53–75.
- Gettier Edmund, L. 1963. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (6): 121–23.
- Ginsborg, Hannah. 2008. "Was Kant a Nonconceptualist?" *Philosophical Studies* 137 (1): 65–

References

77.

———. 2014. “Oughts Without Intentions: A Kantian Approach to Biological Functions.” In *Kant’s Theory of Biology*, edited by Eric Watkins and Ina Goy, 259–74. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Godfrey-Smith, Peter. 2014. *Philosophy of Biology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Goldman, Loren. 2012. “In Defense of Blinders: On Kant, Political Hope, and the Need for Practical Belief.” *Political Theory* 40 (4): 497–523.

Gomes, Anil, and Andrew Stephenson. 2016. “On the Relation of Intuition to Cognition.” In *Kantian Nonconceptualism*, edited by Dennis Schulting, 53–79. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Goodin, Robert. 2009. “Demandingness as a Virtue.” *The Journal of Ethics* 13 (1): 1–13.

Grier, Michelle. 1997. “Kant on the Illusion of a Systematic Unity of Knowledge.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14 (1): 1–28.

———. 2001. *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grimm, Stephen R., Christoph Baumberger, and Sabine Ammon, eds. 2017. *Explaining Understanding: New Perspectives From Epistemology and Philosophy of Science*. New York and London: Routledge.

Grüne, Stefanie. 2011. “Is There a Gap in Kant’s B Deduction?” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19 (3): 465–90.

Guyer, Paul. 1990. “Reason and Reflective Judgment: Kant on the Significance of Systematicity.” *Noûs* 24 (1): 17–43.

———. 1997. *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2000. *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2003. “Kant on the Systematicity of Nature: Two Puzzles.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 20 (3): 277–95.

———. 2006. *Kant*. London and New York: Routledge.

Hadisi, Reza. n.d. “Kant and the Source of Epistemic Normativity.” Unpublished manuscript.

Hägglund, Martin. 2019. *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom*. London: Profile Books.

Hallward, Peter. 2009. “Radical Politics and Political Will.” *Radical Politics* 155: 17–29.

Hanna, R. 2005. “Kant and Nonconceptual Content.” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2):

References

247–90.

Hanna, Robert. 2001. *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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

Hare, John. 2011. "Kant, The Passions, and The Structure of Moral Motivation." *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (1): 54–70.

Heine, Henrich. 1835 [2007]. *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Henrich, Dieter. 1997. *The Unity of Reason*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Herder, Johann Gottfried von. 1765 [2010]. *Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Michael N. Forster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hills, alison. 2016. "Understanding Why." *Noûs* 49 (2): 661–88.

Hintikka, J. 1969. "On Kant's Notion of Intuition (Anschauung)." In *The First Critique*, edited by T. Penelhum and J. J. MacIntosh. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Hobbes, Thomas. 1651 [1998]. *Leviathan*. Edited by John Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hoffe, Otfried. 1994. *Immanuel Kant*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Hoffer, Noam. 2016. "The Relation between God and the World in the Pre-Critical Kant: Was Kant a Spinozist?" *Kantian Review* 21 (2): 185–210.

Honneth, Axel. 2017. *The Idea of Socialism: Towards a Renewal*. Cambridge: Polity.

Howard-Snyder, D. 2013. "Propositional Faith: What It Is and What It Is Not." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (4): 357–72.

Höwing, Thomas. 2016. "Kant on Opinion, Belief, and Knowledge." In *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, edited by Thomas Höwing, 201–22. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter.

Huber, Jakob. 2021. "Defying Democratic Despair: A Kantian Account of Hope in Politics." *European Journal of Political Theory* 20 (4): 719–38.

Hume, David. 1748 [2007]. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter Millican. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Insole, Christopher. 2008. "The Irreducible Importance of Religious Hope in Kant's Conception of the Highest Good." *Philosophy* 83 (3): 333–51.

References

- . 2019. “Free Belief: The Medieval Heritage in Kant’s Moral Faith.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 57 (3): 501–28.
- Insole, Christopher J. 2013. *Kant and the Creation of Freedom: A Theological Problem*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2016. *The Intolerable God: Kant’s Theological Journey*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.
- . 2020. *Kant and the Divine: From Contemplation to the Moral Law*. Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, Elizabeth. 2021. “Belief, Faith, and Hope: On the Rationality of Long-Term Commitment.” *Mind* 130 (517): 35–57.
- Jacobi, F. H. 1787. *David Hume über Den Glauben Oder Idealismus Und Realismus: Ein Gespräch*. Loewe.
- James, William. 1896 [1992]. “The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy.” In *Writings 1878-1899*, 445–704. New York: Literary Classics of the United States.
- Kahn, Paul W. 2011. *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kitcher, Philip. 1981. “Explanatory Unification.” *Philosophy of Science* 48 (4): 507–31.
- . 1993. *The Advancement of Science: Science Without Legend, Objectivity Without Illusions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kleingeld, Pauline. 1999. “Kant, History, and the Idea of Moral Development.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 16 (1): 59–80.
- . 2007. “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race.” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57 (229): 573–92.
- . 2008. “Kant on Historiography and the Use of Regulative Ideas.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science. Part A* 39 (4): 523–28.
- . 2017. “Contradiction and Kant’s Formula of Universal Law.” *Kant-Studien* 108 (1): 89–115.
- . 2019. “On Dealing with Kant’s Sexism and Racism.” *SGIR Review* 2 (2): 3–22.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. 1996. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kraus, Katharina T. 2018. “The Soul as the ‘guiding Idea’ of Psychology: Kant on Scientific Psychology, Systematicity, and the Idea of the Soul.” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 4 (471): 4.

References

- Kvanvig, Jonathan L. 2003. *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kwong, Jack M. C. 2019. "What Is Hope?" *European Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1): 243–54.
- Lange, Marc. 2013. "Really Statistical Explanations and Genetic Drift." *Philosophy of Science* 80 (2): 169–88.
- Leech, Jessica. 2014. "Making Modal Distinctions: Kant on the Possible, the Actual, and the Intuitive Understanding." *Kantian Review* 19 (3): 339–65.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1961 [1991]. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Li, Yiyun. 2019. *Where Reasons End*. New York: Random House.
- Lilla, Mark. 2007. *The Stillborn God*. New York: Vintage.
- Lipton, Peter. 2004. *Inference to the Best Explanation*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. 2009. "Providence as Progress." In *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, edited by Amélie Rorty and James Schmidt, 200–215. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Longuenesse, Beatrice. 1998. *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 2005. *Kant on the Human Standpoint*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Longworth, Guy. 2017. "Faith in Kant." *The Philosophy of Trust*, 251–71.
- Lu-Adler, Huaping. 2012. "Kant's Conception of Logical Extension and Its Implications." Dissertation.
- MacFarlane, John. 2002. "Frege, Kant, and the Logic in Logicism." *Philosophical Review* 111 (1): 25–65.
- Mariña, Jacqueline. 2000. "Making Sense of Kant's Highest Good." *Kant-Studien* 91 (3): 329–55.
- Martin, A. M. 2011. "Hopes and Dreams." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Marx, Karl. 1844 [1998]. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Vol. 333. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Massimi, Michela. 2017. "What Is This Thing Called 'Scientific Knowledge'? – Kant on Imaginary Standpoints and the Regulative Role of Reason." *Kant Yearbook* 9 (1): 63–84.
- Maybee, Julie. 2009. *Picturing Hegel*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

References

- McGeer, Victoria. 2004. "The Art of Good Hope." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592 (1): 100–127.
- McLear, Colin. 2016. "Kant, Getting Acquainted With." In *Kantian Nonconceptualism*, edited by Dennis Schulting, 171–97. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2020. "On the Transcendental Freedom of the Intellect." *Ergo* 7 (2): 35–104.
- Mendelssohn, Moses. 1785 [1929]. "Morgenstunde Oder Vorlesungen über Das Daseyn Gottes." In *Moses Mendelssohns Gesammelte Schriften Band 3.2*. Berlin: Christian Friedrich Voß.
- Mensch, Jennifer. 2017. "What's Wrong with Inevitable Progress? Notes on Kant's Anthropology Today." *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 4 (1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2017.1390917>.
- Merritt, Melissa. 2018. *Kant on Reflection and Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mills, Charles W. 2017. *Black rights/White Wrongs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Milona, Michael. 2020. "Philosophy of Hope." In *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, edited by Steven C. van den Heuvel, 99–116. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Mudd, Sasha. 2017. "The Demand for Systematicity and the Authority of Theoretical Reason in Kant." *Kantian Review* 22 (1): 81–106.
- Mugg, Joshua. 2016. "In Defence of the Belief-Plus Model of Faith." *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8 (2): 201–19.
- Nagel, Ernest. 1961. *The Structure of Science*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Neiman, Susan. 1994. *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1886 [2002]. *Nietzsche: Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Neill, Onora. 1989. *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1996. "Kant on Reason and Religion." *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*.
https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/o/oneill97.pdf.
- Okin, Susan Moller. 1989. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Palmqvist, Carl-Johan. Forthcoming. "Analysing Hope: The Live Possibility Account." *European Journal of Philosophy*

References

- Parsons, Charles. 1992. "Arithmetic and the Categories." In *Kant's Philosophy of Mathematics: Modern Essays*, edited by Carl J. Posy, 135–58. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Pascal, Blaise. 1670 [1995]. "Pensées." In *Pensées and Other Writings*, translated by Honor Levi. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pasternack, Lawrence. 2011. "The Development and Scope of Kantian Belief: The Highest Good, The Practical Postulates and The Fact of Reason" 102 (3): 290–315.
- . 2014. "Kant on Opinion: Assent, Hypothesis, and the Norms of General Applied Logic." *Kant-Studien* 105 (1): 41–82.
- . 2017. "Kant on Faith: Religious Assent and the Limits to Knowledge." In *Palgrave Handbooks in German Idealism*, edited by Matthew Altman, 515–38.
- Pettit, Philip. 2004. "Hope and Its Place in Mind." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592 (1): 152–65.
- Pickering, Mark. 2011. "The Idea of the Systematic Unity of Nature as a Transcendental Illusion." *Kantian Review* 16 (3): 429–48.
- . 2016. "Kant's Theoretical Reasons for Belief in Things in Themselves." *Kant-Studien* 107 (4): 589–616.
- Pippin, Robert, and Martin Hägglund. 2019. "Limited Time." *Thepointmag*. May 22, 2019. <https://thepointmag.com/remarks/limited-time-robert-pippin-hagglund-this-life/> Accessed: Nov 19, 2021.
- Proops, Ian. 2010. "Kant's First Paralogism." *Philosophical Review* 119 (4): 449–95.
- . 2021. *The Fiery Test of Critique: A Reading of Kant's Dialectic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quarfood, Marcel. 2006. "Kant on Biological Teleology: Towards a Two-Level Interpretation." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 37 (4): 735–47.
- Rawls, John. 1993. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2000. *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Reath, Andrews. 1988. "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (4): 593–619.
- Rescher, Nicholas. 2000. *Kant and the Reach of Reason: Studies in Kant's Theory of Rational Systematization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rettler, Bradley. 2018. "Analysis of Faith." *Philosophy Compass* 13 (9).

References

- Reutlinger, Alexander. 2017. "Explanation Beyond Causation? New Directions in the Philosophy of Scientific Explanation." *Philosophy Compass* 12 (2).
- Rocca, Della. 2010. "PSR." *Philosophers' Imprint* 10 (7): 1–13.
- Rorty, Amélie, and James Schmidt, eds. 2009. *Providence as Progress*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, Richard. 2002. "Hope and the Future." *Peace Review* 14 (2): 149–55.
- Rorty, Richard, and Gianni Vattimo. 2005. *The Future of Religion*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ross, Jacob, and Mark Schroeder. 2014. "Belief, Credence, and Pragmatic Encroachment." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 88 (2): 259–88.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1762 [1997]. "The Social Contract." In *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, edited by Victor Gourevitch, 39–152. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Royce, Josiah. 1908 [1995]. *The Philosophy of Loyalty*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Schilbrack, Kevin. 2019. "Spiritual Values for Those Without Eternal Life." Review of *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom*, by Martin Hägglund. *Sophia* 58 (4).
- Schmitt, Carl. 1922 [1968]. *Political Theology*. Translated by George Schwab. Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. 1818 [1958]. *The World as Will and Presentation: Vol. 1*. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover.
- Shumin, Bi. 2020. "Chinese Writer Who Wrote SARS-Themed Sci-Fi Novel Talks about COVID-19 Outbreak." March 19, 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1183152.shtml> Accessed 19 December 2020.
- Silber, John R. 1963. "The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant's Ethics." *Ethics* 73 (3): 179–97.
- Smit, Houston. 2000. "Kant on Marks and the Immediacy of Intuition." *Philosophical Review* 109 (2): 235–66.
- Stang, Nicholas Frederick. 2016. *Kant's Modal Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stephenson, Andrew. 2020. "XXX." Review of *Kant and the Sources of Metaphysics*, by Marcus Willaschek. *Dialectica*.
- Stevenson, Leslie. 2003. "Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge." *Kantian Review* 7: 72–101.

References

- Strawson, P. 1966. *The Bounds of Sense*. London: Methuen.
- Strawson, P. F. 2000. *Entity and Identity: And Other Essays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sweet, Kristi. 2013. *Kant on Practical Life: From Duty to History*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tolley, Clinton. 2007. "Kant's Conception of Logic." Dissertation.
- . 2020. "Kant on the Place of Cognition in the Progression of Our Representations." *Synthese* 197 (8): 3215–44.
- Trullinger, Joseph S. 2013. "Kant's Two Touchstones for Conviction: The Incommunicable Dimension of Moral Faith." *The Review of Metaphysics* 67 (2): 369–403.
- Voltaire. 1734 [1901]. *The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version*. Translated by William F. Fleming. New York: E.R. Du Mont.
- Walden, Kenneth. 2019. "Reason Unbound: Kant's Theory of Regulative Principles." *European Journal of Philosophy* 27 (3): 575–92.
- Wang, Weijia. 2021. "Kant on the Formation of Empirical Concepts." *Kant-Studien* 112 (2): 195–216.
- Watkins, E. 2016. "Kant on Materialism." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24 (5): 1035–52.
- Watkins, Eric, and Marcus Willaschek. 2020. "Kant on Cognition and Knowledge." *Synthese* 197: 3195–3213.
- Weil, Simone. 1947 [2003]. *Gravity and Grace*. Translated by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr. London and New York: Routledge.
- West, Cornel. 1993. *Keeping Faith*. New York: Routledge.
- Willaschek, Marcus. 2016. "Must We Believe in the Realizability of Our Ends? On a Premise of Kant's Argument for the Postulates of Pure Practical Reason." In *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, edited by Thomas Höwing, 223–43. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- . 2018. *Kant on the Sources of Metaphysics: The Dialectic of Pure Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Willaschek, Marcus, and Eric Watkins. 2017. "Kant's Account of Cognition." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55 (1): 83–112.
- Wood, Allen W. 1970. *Kant's Moral Religion*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1978. *Kant's Rational Theology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

References

———. 1999. *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2020. *Kant and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yancy, George. 2015. "Dear White America." December 24, 2015.

<https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/24/dear-white-america/> Accessed 19 December 2020.

Zuckert, Rachel. 2007. *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the "Critique of Judgment."* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2017. "Kantian Ideas of Reason and Empirical Scientific Investigation." In *Kant and the Laws of Nature*, edited by Michela Massimi and Angela Breitenbach, 89–107. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2018. "Is Kantian Hope a Feeling?" In *Kant and the Faculty of Feeling*, 242–59. Cambridge University Press.

———. 2021. "Loneliness and Ambiguity in Kant's Philosophy of History." In *From Modern Hopes to Postmodern Anxieties.*, edited by Paul Wilford and Samuel Stoner, 62–76. Pennsylvania: Penn Press.