



The Position of God in Kant's Moral System

PROGRAMME

09:00 – 09:30	Registration and Coffee	Room F.11
09:30 – 09:40	Welcome and Introductions	
09:40 – 10:45	Harry Lesser (Manchester) <i>Kant and Human Imperfection.</i>	
10:45 – 11:05	Coffee	
11:05 – 12:05	Stijn Van Impe (Ghent) <i>On The Immanence and Transcendence of Kant's Realm of Ends and Ethical Commonwealth: The unsolved dilemma of human autonomy and divine grace.</i>	
12:05 – 12:25	Wendy Brockie (UCE in Birmingham) <i>Reply to Stijn Van Impe</i>	
12:25 – 13:00	Discussion	
13:00 – 13:45	Buffet Lunch	
13:45 – 14:30	Courtney Fugate (Leuven) <i>The Postulation of God's Existence as an Act of Moral Autonomy</i>	
14:30 – 14:45	Coffee	
14:45 – 15:45	Keynote Address: Professor Stephen Palmquist (Hong Kong) <i>Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God.</i>	
15:45 – 16:45	Plenary Discussion	

The event will close at 17:00

This event has been organised with the support of the UK Kant Society

ABSTRACTS

Harry Lesser (University of Manchester): "Kant on human imperfection"

One of the features of Kant's religion is his belief in universal human imperfection, or even "radical evil": we are not totally corrupt, or incapable of acting rightly, but we are corrupt enough to find it difficult. This belief has some important consequences for his ethical theory, which have been noticed before now, but have received insufficient attention.

Most importantly, Kant holds that morality applies only to corrupt rational beings, such as humans. Beings with a holy will, such as God, do not consider what they "ought" to do, but simply consider what is good and do it. The good appears as an "ought" only if there is a possibility of not wanting to do it, as is the case with humans. Not only is it always possible that one will not want to do what is right, but it is almost certain that sometimes this will be the case, and quite certain that one does not have the kind of control over one's emotions that would enable one to guarantee that one will always want to do what is good. This explains why Kant adopts the disturbing view that only the sense of "ought" can be the proper moral motivation. To act out of love is beautiful, but not safe as our only motive, because it is not in our power to love others at all times; but it is in our power to preserve the sense of duty. My paper will argue that this thesis of Kant's, which derives from his religious views, can also be defended on empirical grounds, and is in fact correct.

Stijn Van Impe (Ghent University, Belgium): "On The Immanence and Transcendence of Kant's Realm of Ends and Ethical Commonwealth: The unsolved dilemma of human autonomy and divine grace."

This paper focuses on the tension field of human autonomy and divine grace within the framework of the immanence and the transcendence of Kant's 'Realm of Ends' ('Reich der Zwecke'), 'Realm of Grace' ('Reich der Gnaden') or 'Ethical Commonwealth' ('ethisches gemeines Wesen'). The contribution starts by presenting a survey of and a commentary on Kant's different accounts and definitions of his ideal of an ethical community as elaborated in passages from *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Lectures on Ethics* (1784-1785), *On a Discovery According to which Any New Critique of Pure Reason Has Been Made Superfluous by an Earlier One* (1790) and *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1793). Second, an exposition will be given concerning the precise significance and the paradoxical interaction of human autonomy and divine grace for the foundation or accomplishment as well as the completion or destination of Kant's ethical community. It will be shown that the discussed themes gain an apparently different importance following the *Groundwork* or the *Religion*. Third, a twofold reading and interpretation of Kant's ethical community as both immanent and transcendent will be presented in a way that links such an approach to the broader frame of Kant's ethico-theology, that is, to the transition in Kant's moral system from 'ethical ought' to 'religious hope'. The paper will be concluded by pointing out some unsolved philosophical burdens in interpreting and understanding the described relations. Also, some prospects for future investigation will be spelled out concerning the legitimate possibilities within Kant's philosophy to substitute the role of divine grace for an ethical community by Kant's – present-day more attractive – ideas of 'autocracy' and 'sensus communis moralis'.

Courtney Fugate (Catholic University Leuven, Belgium): "The Postulation of God's Existence as an Act of Moral Autonomy."

Kant's postulation of God's existence, and his subsequent claims that we must regard all duties as divine commands, are often thought to corrupt the moral incentive and to undermine his conception of freedom as autonomy. In his commentary, Lewis White Beck has managed to avoid these conclusions, but only at the price of degrading moral postulation to a mere requirement of consistent theoretical reasoning without an ounce of real practical significance – a conclusion clearly at odds with Kant's own intent. Allen Wood also avoids these difficulties, but in order to do so he is forced to prefer arguments found only in Kant's unpublished notes and lectures to those that Kant specifically authorizes in the second *Critique* and elsewhere. Furthermore, Wood's strategy, like Beck's, fails to provide the act of postulation with any genuine moral significance.

The difficulties encountered by these commentators, I will argue, stem from their failure to take seriously Kant's restriction of the argument to a *subjective* significance in the penultimate section of the Dialectic of the second *Critique*. Based upon a reading of this section, as well as a few key passages from the *Fortschritte* essay, I will show that: 1) The images of God as moral architect and as holy law-giver belong to a larger world-image that is specifically constructed to be maximally conducive to the cultivation of virtue if held to be true by the moral agent. 2) Kant thinks that this world-image is an entirely free construction of reason as a whole, i.e., a) it is the rule for conceiving the world that would naturally spring from theoretical and practical reason in conjunction were they authorized to project such an image, and b) reason is indeed *free* to do so since this world-image concerns the supersensible. 3) Since this image increases the moral incentive (how will take some explanation), and indirectly furthers the cultivation of virtue, the act of freely affirming (postulating) God's existence, and the existence of the object of this world-image in general, is itself an act with *moral significance*, indeed it is one through which reason as a *whole* freely asserts the rule of its own nature, i.e., it is a specific and very special act of autonomy through which the theoretical and pure practical employments of reason for the first time freely combine to form a unity. In conclusion, I will offer some comments on the open question of whether or not this postulation is itself a duty.

Professor Stephen R. Palmquist (Hong Kong Baptist University): "Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God."

Kant is well known as the philosopher who virtually destroyed the three traditional ways of attempting to prove God's existence: the ontological, cosmological and physico-theological (or teleological) arguments. That he believed these could be replaced by his own "moral" argument, albeit carrying a more qualified practical validity than the absolute proof that is the goal of theoretical arguments, is also commonly understood. What has never been recognized is that in Book Three of *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* Kant provides a further argument for God's existence, one that is specifically aimed at and based on the necessity of organized religion for the ultimate fulfillment of humanity's moral quest. Kant argues that victory over the evil in human nature can be obtained only through participation in a moral community, that making such a community work is a universal duty of mankind, and that the purpose of such a community cannot be achieved without giving it a religious orientation by postulating God as an internal moral lawgiver to all participants. Belief in God, as the Lawgiver of a moral community that sees itself as a "People of God", thereby becomes a duty for all persons who wish to avoid despair in their commitment to do all they can to bring about the kingdom of ends.