

FREEDOM, GOD AND HISTORY
IN KANT'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

FREEDOM, GOD AND THE END OF HUMANITY:
RELIGION AND HISTORY IN KANT'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

By

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Abstract

Kant's concepts of God and history occupy integral yet paradoxical positions in his practical philosophy. He appeals to God as a postulate necessary to practical reason, that which serves as the only unifying ground for freedom and the empirical world. In addition to their more systematic expression, his arguments regarding the practical function of the concept of God often take on a practical-psychological dimension. Kant argues that we need to postulate the existence of God in order to be able to pursue the goal of living a moral life in a moral world with a sense of confidence. This same line of argument is found in his essays on history when Kant writes of a providentially guided natural process, and thus serves as an indication of the thematic connection between God and history. And yet it is precisely this conception of God and history that is problematic. The concept of history as a teleologically directed process leans towards a deterministic view of human development, one which conflicts with the conception of human beings as autonomous agents. Some critics have argued that this conflict is only an apparent one, and that other elements of the Kantian system resolve any tension between freedom and determinism within this concept of history. Others have argued that this conflict marks the failure of Kant's concept of history.

In this thesis I shall explore this problem. Through establishing the deep connection between God, history and morality in Kant's thought, I intend to show that this is a fundamental Kantian problem, not a marginal one. My emphasis will

be on the practical implications of this problem, primarily those having to do with the question of the consistency between Kant's concept of God and history on the one hand and freedom and autonomy on the other. I shall argue that despite attempts to save the concept of history, it ineluctably conflicts with Kant's view of human beings as autonomous, responsible agents. The concept of God, however, is another matter, and I shall endeavor to demonstrate that it in fact can be made consistent with practical reason.

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Introduction. Kant and the Problem of Moral Totality¹: The Move towards Religion and History

*“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will”
Hamlet V, II*

Hamlet’s revelatory comment can be used to shed light on a paradox that lies at the core of Kant’s concept of history. Throughout Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet vacillates and struggles with the destiny assigned to him; in whatever form his hesitancy expresses itself, it nonetheless persists, unfortunately to a point where irrevocable damage is done to himself, his family and his country. It seems as though the dilemma always remains the same for Hamlet: to reconcile the demands placed upon him by destiny and circumstance with his own thoughts, conscience and will. Kant can be said to be striving toward much the same end with his concept of history, although more objectively and on a much grander scale. The tensions in Kant’s account are similar to those Hamlet must work his way through. For Kant, the end of history, which is coeval with the destiny of humankind, is accessible to reason. And yet despite knowing this end, thoughtful people are confronted with the problem of the price that they and others must pay in the course of its realization. Hamlet’s problem, it can be argued, would not trouble a different sort of

¹The phrase ‘moral totality’ is one used by Yovel in his book *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton University Press. Princeton: 1980). It seems a particularly apt and succinct way of describing what for Kant means the totality of moral conditions.

person, one less prone to reflection. So it is the case in Kant's concept of history. While all persons are bound up in human destiny, and while even the most unreflective is capable of knowing what is required of her (viz., to be moral), it is only those of a philosophical bent for whom history is a problem, or even a subject for consideration. Their reflective tendencies take them beyond the consideration of what they as individuals ought to do; they also look at human action from a higher, more global perspective, from which they see vast amounts of empirical evidence that points to the conclusion that human destiny is as much characterized by selfishness, immorality and violence as it is by any positive characteristic, if not more. These reflective persons must then consider how it is that what ought to happen will happen, and in doing so they turn to God and history.

Providence shapes our ends on Kant's account of history. It guides our actions through mechanisms of nature that lead to the cultivation of our *rational abilities and more encompassing and civil forms of political society*. This idea of a teleological process underlying history will seem thoroughly non-Kantian at first glance. History, as defined by Kant, is a temporal process in which human freedom and rationality develop and exercise an increasingly greater amount of control over human existence in the world. This description seems consistent enough with Kantian ethics, insofar as it implies that human beings are responsible for their own development. However, for a number of reasons that we shall examine here and in the chapters that follow, Kant does not follow that line of thinking, and in fact takes his argument in a completely different direction by introducing the idea of a teleological natural process, one laid out by the creator of the

world, that works, often in spite of human intentions, towards the fulfillment of human destiny. What is implied by this is that Kant holds a radically divided concept of the human being. We see this view expressed consistently throughout his work, but it is of particular importance if we are to understand what he attempts to accomplish through his philosophy of history. According to Kant, we are creatures of two natures – sensible and intelligible – and these two natures place very different demands upon us. Reason and freedom require us to be moral beings, living in accordance with the categorical imperative and living as though we were members of a purely moral community; but our physical, embodied nature compels us to pursue inclinations and desires, and at the same time makes us creatures subject to the laws of not a moral world but the sensible one. Of course, this does not mean that we somehow lead two separate lives; on the contrary, the source of the problem stems from the interaction of reason and nature. We are simultaneously part of two causal orders, one in which we are utterly determined, the other in which we are utterly self-determining. The tension between these two positions is obvious, and it is this tension which drives Kant's account of history. As a way of bringing these two orders together, Kant presents a view of the progressive development of the human species in which humankind is cultivated and prepared by nature for the task of using its freedom to its proper end, viz. moral action.²

²Many controversial and problematic assertions have appeared in this introduction, e.g. that providence plays so prominent a role in Kant's concept of history, that there can even be such a thing as 'moral development' in Kantian ethics. These particular problems will be addressed, although not necessarily resolved, in the study that follows.

I. Aims and Limitations of this Study

The issue we shall explore here is whether such an account of history is tenable in light of the foundations upon which it is built, viz., Kant's concept of practical reason. I say practical reason rather than Kantian ethics in order to suggest that there is a whole of which the concept of history and moral philosophy are parts.³ It would be easy enough to demonstrate the glaring inconsistencies between Kant's discussion of individual autonomy in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* and his account of the development of the human species in his "Idea for a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose". It would also be easy to disregard the history essays as fanciful excursions into a new area of thought and not a well-grounded part of the Kantian system. However, rather than take up either of these strategies, I shall explore another alternative, which is that Kant's concept of history is representative of a significant theme that grows out of his concept of practical reason. This theme is best described as reason's drive towards a totality of moral conditions, or, more simply, its drive to live in a world which is both responsive to and reflective of morality. It is this same theme that leads Kant to postulate the existence of the moral author of the world, a postulate which grounds his view of a providentially guided natural process.

It is with this theme of practical reason's desire for totality in mind that I shall examine the interconnection of freedom, God and history in Kant's practical thought.

³This is not to say that morality is not at the heart of practical reason. It is only to indicate that practical reason is not limited to formal ethics alone, and includes as integral components the philosophy of religion, history and politics.

Through the course of this examination, I shall also try to establish the importance and implications that this connection has for understanding Kant's conception of practical philosophy. This aim will occupy our attention in this introduction and in the first chapter. The second half of this study will address some of the practical problems that arise when Kant tries to bring morality together with his conceptions of God and history. At this point I should stress that both my analysis and critique will focus on practical rather than speculative issues. For example, I shall not concentrate on the question of whether Kant imports illegitimate metaphysical presuppositions into his notion of the postulate of God, nor shall I attempt to determine whether his conception of teleological judgments, so important to his conception of human cultural development, can be made consistent with his critique of speculative reason. What I shall do instead is concentrate on the practical implications of Kant's concept of a teleological conception of history, grounded in his notion of providence and God as the moral author of the world. The crux of my critique is found in the following related questions: Does Kant's idea of a divinely ordered moral universe and historical process require the moral individual to at once commit to a belief in the power of her freedom as well as a belief in a deterministic set of mechanisms that undermine that power? Are there aspects of Kant's philosophy that allow for the compatibility of these two beliefs? Before addressing these questions, however, I shall first establish their importance to Kant's work by providing an interpretation of both the structure of his understanding of history, as it is informed by his conception of the social dimension of moral development, as well as the relationship

between politics and ethics in his philosophy of history (chapter II).

Obviously, any of these areas of Kantian thought – morality, history and religion – can and have been examined independently of one another; and although there is not nearly as much commentary written on history or religion as, say, the thing in itself or the categorical imperative, there are a number of good books and essays dealing with both of these topics. Much of the literature on Kant's concept of history dwells on its shortcomings, although some commentators look at it in a more favorable light than authors.⁴ For example, Yovel and Despland do not completely accept Kant's concept of history, but both are willing to defend it on certain grounds (i.e., its status as a reflective concept). In contrast to their efforts, Fackenheim's essay "Kant's Concept of History" presents what is probably the classic argument against this concept of history, concluding that it in fact fails because it results in either the destruction of freedom or in the destruction of history.⁵ However, of these three authors, Despland is the only one to give deep consideration to the relationship between Kant's concept of religion and his concept

⁴Another interpretation, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, is offered by Sam Ajzenstat ("Liberalism between Nature and Culture: Kant's Exegesis of Genesis 2-6". *Liberal Democracy and the Bible*. Ed. Kim Ian Parker. The Edwin Mellen Press. Queenston: 1992. 129-154). In his view, history is representative of Kant's attempt to explain the development of reason and morality as part of a nature. While his interpretation is an interesting and provocative one, it differs markedly from the others with which I am engaging here and to address it adequately would go beyond the limits of my study. For our purposes, we must assume the more traditional notion of a phenomenal/noumenal split which holds human sensible existence to be governed by nature and human intellectual life to be free and self-determined. Some discussion of it will appear in the next chapter, however, as it relates to the "Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History".

⁵See 48-49 of Fackenheim's "Kant's Concept of History" in *The God Within: Kant, Schelling and Historicity*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto: 1996.

of history. In the case of Kant's philosophy of religion, Allen Wood is one of the few scholars who has written extensively on the subject in recent years. However, even Wood's book *Kant's Moral Religion*, which provides an excellent account of the importance of religion to Kant's moral *Weltanschauung*, does not address the relationship between practical reason, religion and history. What this indicates is that there is room for further exploration of the interconnection of what could be characterized as more marginal or peripheral areas of Kantian thought to the core of his practical philosophy, viz., ethics.

Many elements of my study do coincide with the work of other authors, however. My conclusions regarding the failings of Kant's concept of history are very much in line with Fackenheim's, for example. However, Fackenheim's essay does not explore the connection between history and religion or moral consciousness in general, but stops with the demonstration that Kant's conception of moral freedom cannot be reconciled with the idea of a historical process that makes freedom possible. My interpretation also finds support in the work of Yovel and Despland, both of whom provide excellent analyses of the relationship between Kant's moral concerns and the development of his concept of history. And further, while Yovel tends to downplay the religious dimension of Kant's conception of the end of history and the means by which it is to be brought about by opting for a more "humanistic" interpretation of Kant's work⁶, Despland clearly

⁶Yovel's treatment of the religious elements affiliated with Kant's concept of history clearly indicate that he is more concerned with 1) establishing that history is in fact a human project and 2) de-theologizing Kant's concept of history. On the interpretation I shall offer, both of these aims are problematic.

acknowledges its “theistic basis”.⁷ However, my efforts diverge from those found in the work of Despland and Yovel insofar as I address the issue of whether religion and history can be made consistent with the fundamental concepts of Kantian practical philosophy – viz., freedom and autonomy, and issue which neither author directly address.

In focusing on such a specific set of themes and problems in Kant’s practical thought, it will be necessary to restrict my treatment of several topics that in a more comprehensive study would receive more thorough attention. As I have already mentioned, there are several issues pertaining to Kant’s speculative philosophy that I shall not treat in any detail, viz., the speculative critique of the traditional arguments for the existence of God, the phenomenon/noumenon distinction and the theory of teleological judgments. With respect to the topic of religion, I shall not delve into the various aspects of Kant’s views on historical faith, universal religion, scriptural interpretation, the church, etc. Instead my focus will be on Kant’s conception of God as a practical postulate, along with the connection of that postulate to his understanding of history. In discussing his views on history, the majority of my analysis will have to do with the foundations of this concept⁸ rather than the actual details of the process which Kant describes (i.e., the evolution of different forms of government and social order). What concerns me most is what motivates Kant to turn to a concept of history – viz., the desire to achieve a moral world – and how that motivation finds its root in his conception of practical reason. It is to this

⁷Despland, *Kant on Religion and History*, 85-86.

⁸What Fackenheim might call the “a priori” conditions of history (Fackenheim,40) .

topic that we shall now turn.

II. The Highest Good and the Dialectic of Practical Reason

In order to better understand the drive towards moral totality and its relationship to history, we need to first take a close look at Kant's discussion of the dialectic of practical reason.⁹ In Kant's view "pure reason", in "both its speculative and practical employment", ends up in a dialectic, for each form "demands the absolute totality of conditions for a given thing" (*CPrR*, 107). In demanding this totality, reason follows what is for it a kind of natural need; but at the same time, there are limitations which stand in the way of its comprehending this totality, viz., the limits of human knowledge. The dialectic of speculative reason occurs when reason seeks to find the unconditioned for the totality of all experience; it confuses and deludes itself because it seeks in the realm of appearance what can only be found in a thing in itself. The dialectic of practical reason is similar to that of speculative reason. Practical reason also seeks the unconditioned for all its conditions. However, it is able to locate this unconditioned in the moral law, in its own pure principle of action which allows it to determine itself. Now, all conditions under which an agent acts rest on what Kant calls inclinations and natural need. What this means is that the unconditioned principle of the moral law does not on its own constitute the entirety of "the object of practical reason", but that the totality of conditions must be

⁹Although the themes raised by the dialectic of practical reason are discussed in a number of other texts (e.g., the Canon of Pure Reason in the first critique and sections 83 and 87 of the third critique), the *Critique of Practical Reason* deals with it most directly. It is this work which we shall focus on specifically, however other texts will be cited when helpful or appropriate.

taken into account as well (*CPrR*, 108). This object of practical reason is thus made up of not only the moral law, that which must be the highest motivation of the will and that to which all other desires are subordinated; indeed, these other desires are also included in the total object of the will's desire, and thus they form part of the object of practical reason, that which Kant calls the highest good.

The highest good (*höchsten Gut*) is composed of two parts which indicate what Kant perceives to be an ambiguity in the word highest.¹⁰ He says that the term highest can mean supreme (*supremum*) or perfect (*consummatum*). The supreme is the “unconditional condition” and the latter is “that whole which is no part of any larger whole of the same kind” (*CPrR*, 110). After laying out these definitions, Kant describes the parts of the highest good. Moral virtue is the supreme condition “of whatever appears to us to be desirable” viz., our happiness; however, this does not mean “that virtue is the entire and perfect good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings” (*CPrR* 110). He goes on to write that “[f]or this, happiness is also required”. Understanding Kant's conception of happiness is not always easy, especially as it must be conditioned by moral worthiness. What he appears to mean by happiness is a state in which a rational yet finite being would be able to achieve the sum total of what she reasonably desires.¹¹ Therefore,

¹⁰See book II, chapter II of the *Critique of Practical Reason* for Kant's discussion of the highest good. All latin phrases are taken directly from his text.

¹¹The clearest single definition of happiness offered by Kant in the second critique appears in his discussion of the postulate of God. There he writes “[h]appiness is the condition of a rational being in the world, in whose existence everything goes according to his wish and will. It thus rests on the harmony of nature with his whole end and with the essential determining ground of his will” (*CPrR*, 125).

the conjunction of happiness and morality must involve some kind of harmonization of the empirical world and freedom, and this harmony provides the foundation for the possibility of the highest good.

Why does Kant make this effort to connect the rational and the sensible? It seems strange, if not contradictory, that after taking such pains to separate the self-determining activity of the will from the will as it is affected by inclination, and then arguing for the absolute hegemony of the former over all desires, Kant would include the pursuit of natural inclination in his concept of the highest good. In doing so, one could argue that he has compromised the purity he sought to establish both in the *Analytic of the second critique* and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. And although his ethical theory can be seen as presenting a rather harsh, ascetic view of moral life, one in which inclinations, desires, personal preferences, even personal relationships, are all made to bend to the demands of the moral law, there is no obvious reason why it needs to take happiness into account.¹² As free rational beings, our obligations to ourselves and to others lie on a higher plane than our satisfaction or contentment, and pleasure and pain, however much we are inclined to desire and fear them respectively, should not serve as

¹²Cf Lewis White Beck's criticism of the highest good (*A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*. L.W. Beck. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago: 1960. 244-245). Beck argues that there can be no obligation to pursue happiness via our pursuit of the highest good because happiness itself is a non-moral motive. The only moral motive is the moral law; the pursuit of happiness is heteronomous and subject to empirical conditionality. Beck goes on to conclude that the highest good cannot be made logically consistent with "genuine morality", and at best it may be "psychologically necessary" to the moral endeavors of individuals, something we need but is not and cannot be connected with the concept of morality itself.

determining grounds for our actions, at least not if we are to live moral lives. And yet, after drawing virtue and happiness apart, Kant endeavors to bring them back together.

The confusion generated by this move is lessened if we remember that it is necessitated by practical reason's drive towards totality. The conception of this drive demonstrates that while Kant builds his ethical theory around a conception of the pure activity of the will, he does not deny that the will desires other things, objects connected to the senses and the physical side of human nature. He only argues that the lower be subordinated to the higher in moral matters, or else we can have no morality at all and we would be nothing but slaves to our drives and needs. Therefore, while Kant distinguishes between different ends pursued by the will in support of his account of morality, he does not deny the fact of the embodied, natural dimension of human existence. It is in recognition of this dimension that he makes an effort to re-connect happiness and moral worth in the form of the highest good. And while the Analytic sets out the formalized, theoretical foundation of ethics, it does not preclude a treatment of the complex relationship between the various dimensions of human existence.

The only way the Analytic would preclude such an account is if the Dialectic collapsed into contradiction. But this is precisely what Kant argues the solution to the dialectic of practical reason avoids, insofar as it provides reason with a way to get around a problem that would otherwise make its operation impossible. It is in seeking a unity between the unconditioned (the categorical imperative as the principle of the pure rational will) and the totality of conditions (natural human desires and inclinations) that practical

reason encounters its dialectic, as is expressed through the antinomy of practical reason. As dual-natured beings, we are not only obligated to will in accordance with the moral law, we also seek happiness, understood as the satisfaction of our desires as sensible beings. And yet “one cannot be assumed by practical reason without the other belonging to it” (*CPrR*, 113). The relationship between moral virtue and happiness is not an analytic one, however; each is a distinct component of the highest good, belonging to causal orders (*viz.*, the sensible and intelligible) that are mutually independent. Happiness, insofar as it has to do with the satisfaction of our desires and inclinations as sensuous beings, can only be brought about through the manipulation of natural laws, those which are, as far as we can comprehend them, wholly separate from the intelligible realm and its form of causal power, freedom. But the structure of the highest good demands that conformity to the moral law, as it is the only proper determining ground for the pure, rational will, must be at once prior to (in the order of thought) and the efficient cause of happiness. Yet the idea that moral action could cause happiness seems impossible if all relationships between causes and effects in the sensible world are governed by natural laws. Freedom as a causal power is restricted to the intelligible world, while natural causality determines the world of appearance. Therefore, unless there is some way to bridge the gap between these two, the highest good would be impossible to realize. According to Kant, the stakes are quite high here, affecting reason’s most fundamental interest:

Since, now, the furthering of the highest good, which contains this connection [between observing the moral law and happiness] in its concept, is an *a priori* object of our will and is inseparably related to the moral law,

the impossibility of the highest good must prove the falsity of the moral law also. If, therefore, the highest good is impossible according to practical rules, then the moral law which commands that it be furthered must be fantastic, directed to empty imaginary ends, and consequently inherently false. (*CPrR*, 114)

Oddly enough, Kant does not present much of an argument for what he considers to be so important a point, viz., that the moral law is dependent upon the possibility of the highest good. Indeed, one of the chief criticisms to be made of Kant's view of the highest good is that there can be no such connection between it and the moral law. The moral law is the only imperative a moral agent is obliged to follow and therefore it must stand alone. And even if it were possible to think of the moral law being in this sort of relationship to the highest good, it is not clear how it might differ from or what it might add to the moral law. Lewis White Beck formulates this problem nicely in the following passage from his commentary on the *Critique of Practical Reason*: "For suppose I do all in my power – which is all any moral decree can command of me – to promote the highest good, what am I to do? Simply act out of respect for the law, which I already knew" (Beck, 244). Beck points out that the highest good is simply redundant, a vacuous edition to the moral law. There are, of course, other ways of interpreting Kant's views on the highest good. Allen Wood, for example, argues that the "highest good is not among our duties, it is the unconditional totality of all ends of pure practical reason" (Wood, 95). It is in uniting the unconditional (the moral law) with the totality of conditions (those aimed at by an embodied rational being) into a single purpose that Wood thinks Kant avoids the

redundancy charge and presents a consistent conception of practical reason.¹³

While it is not my purpose to adjudicate between these two interpretive positions, it should be noted that each finds support in Kant's texts. Beck's view seems correct in light of Kant's strong critique of heteronomy and non-moral motivations. By introducing happiness into his moral philosophy through the highest good, Kant does seem to violate one of his own cardinal principles. And yet Wood's point is well taken. For all the emphasis Kant places on rigorous formalism, he also provides a more rounded account of human existence, one which includes an understanding of what it means for human beings to have a natural side, to seek a state of physical well being. Furthermore, this 'natural side' need not be limited to a notion of happiness, as we shall see shortly, although this seems to be the case in the second critique. This understanding of the dual nature of humanity leads Kant in other places to consider the complex interrelationship of the two sides. It is this consideration that leads him towards his concept of history. However, before we delve further into the connection between the concept of history and Kant's concept of the highest good, there is another dimension of Kant's argument in the Dialectic that we need to examine.

III. The Need for God: the Postulates of Practical Reason and Kant's Concept of

¹³See chapters 2 and 3 of Wood's *Kant's Moral Religion* for an elaborate defence of this view. Wood argues that it is mistaken to assume that because Kantian moral philosophy rests on a formalistic basis it cannot take into account the desires and ends of limited beings who live and act in the sensible world. Wood argues that Kant is very concerned about the relationship between the finite and moral nature of human beings and that he never disavows the possibility of a harmonious relationship between both.

Moral Faith

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant argues that in order to extricate itself from its dialectical problems practical reason needs to appeal to three practical postulates: immortality, freedom and God. Through these postulates Kant provides an account of what is required if agents are to believe in the possibility of realizing the highest good. The moral law itself is not a postulate, but rather “a law by which reason directly determines the will” (*CPrR*, 133). Freedom is considered a postulate insofar as it allows a practical extension of the positive use of reason that is denied by speculative reason.¹⁴ It is freedom which allows the will to have the causal power to determine itself, independent of any form of natural determinism. The postulate of the immortality of the soul is meant to ensure the possibility of moral perfection, as something carried out by an individual agent. The final postulate, that of God understood as the moral author of the world, provides reason with a guarantee of the coincidence between moral actions and dispositions and happiness. We shall concentrate here primarily on the last of the postulates – God. The function of freedom is fairly obvious and requires no further explanation. Some further comment is required about the character of the postulate of immortality, however.

The highest good is achieved when 1) virtue is perfected in the character of

¹⁴See the third antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is beyond the capacity of speculative reason to either deny or affirm the possibility of freedom.

the moral agent and 2) happiness is awarded in proportion to virtue. Some inevitable confusion would seem to arise in bringing these two together. For example, does the happiness found in the achievement of the highest good hinge upon moral perfection, and, if it does, how can any single individual reach this level of virtue? This question is made even more complicated by Kant's introduction of the postulate of the immortality of the soul. This postulate emphasizes the need for an infinite duration of one's "personality" in order to become morally perfect (*CPrR*, 129). But to what is Kant referring here, to the personality of a rational yet finite being or as a purely rational being, one which is somehow liberated from its physical existence? The problem is that both of these options seem incoherent. If an agent's soul is liberated from the body, what is left to oppose or confront the will? And in the absence of such obstacles, how can there be any moral development? It would seem that human beings would simply become morally perfect with no effort whatsoever as soon as their earthly lives ended. As for the other alternative, that human beings continue to exist for eternity in another material form, it seems highly unlikely that Kant would take this seriously. To assert that such an existence is part of the postulate of the immortality of the soul would definitely seem to contravene the limits of the critique of speculative reason.

But while concerns can be raised about this postulate on its own, there are also troubles with its relationship to the second postulate of practical reason, i.e., God as the moral author of the world. The postulate of God is required in order that reason can at

least think of a reconciliation between the moral efforts of human beings understood as intelligible beings and the natural world. On our own, we simply cannot guarantee any kind of necessary link between what we do and seek to realize and how the world about us will respond. That is why Kant thinks we need to postulate “the existence of a cause of the whole of nature, itself distinct from nature, which contains the exact coincidence of happiness with morality” (*CPrR*, 125). But what this postulate indicates, as opposed to that of the immortality of the soul, is a kind of earthly achievement of the highest good, something which takes place in space and time and not in an atemporal intelligible world. This would seem to demonstrate a kind of division in Kant’s account of the highest good, one in which Kant offers two distinct eschatological accounts, one that is worldly and one that is other-worldly.¹⁵ Both of these themes seem to coexist in Kant’s work and for this reason it is hard to privilege one over the other, and even harder to see how they might relate. And though this is an interesting topic in itself, its pursuit would take us far of course. Instead, we shall examine the development of the worldly vision into a concept of history.

However, before we move on to this task, it is important to take note of the argument Kant presents for allowing agents to legitimately believe in what he describes as the “objective reality” of these postulates (*CPrR*, 133). Although it may seem strange given the critique of speculative reason to assert that these objects can exist in some way,

¹⁵Cf. Michael Despland’s discussion of these themes in Kant’s work (Despland, 277)

it is not if their function is remembered. Kant is adamant that these ideas are used only to allow practical reason to act as it is supposed to, to seek to realize the highest good. If reason cannot assume these postulates, then it cannot free itself from the dialectical snare in which it becomes entrapped. Allen Wood dubs this the *absurdum practicum* argument.¹⁶ Any moral agent who recognizes the binding character of the obligation to pursue the highest good and yet does not commit herself to believing in what is required to make this possible would find herself in a *practically* absurd position. Without this belief, the agent could not pursue the highest good, and if she cannot pursue the highest good, she could then not help but acknowledge that she could not be moral, insofar as the highest good and the moral law are necessarily linked. But then the agent would either have to view herself as evil and incapable of being moral or admit that she was being irrational by trying to act in accordance with the moral law without believing in the postulates.

It is this need to believe in the postulates which grounds Kant's concept of moral faith. He argues that morality, though it does not begin in religion and though the moral law is not dependent upon some sort of divine decree but is accessible to reason itself, eventually leads to religion.¹⁷ The idea of a moral God is required if the highest good is to be possible, and thus religion becomes inextricably connected to Kant's moral outlook.

¹⁶Wood discusses this argument repeatedly throughout his book, but a particularly good formulation is found in Chapter 1 (pp. 25-34).

¹⁷NB Kant's claim that "through the concept of the highest good as the object and end of pure practical reason, the moral law leads to religion" (*CPrR*, 130).

However, at the same time, the belief in God required by practical reason is not equivalent to theoretical knowledge of God, which is impossible. The best way to explain this curious notion of a rational faith is to say that practical reason has the licence to take reason beyond its speculative limits for the sake of its practical interest. In this way, what Kant describes as being religion is truly a kind of rational faith. And although the articles of that faith are limited technically to his discussion of these postulates, they play an instrumental part in his conception of history as a providentially guaranteed teleological process. It is in striving to achieve a moral totality which links practical reason ineluctably with the entire realm of empirical phenomena that Kant turns towards a consideration of history.

IV. The Psychological Need for God and the Turn to History

In opening our discussion of the way in which Kant's conception of the dialectic of practical reason leads him to a concept of history, it is helpful to consider one of the more obvious objections to be made against his conception of the highest good. The objection is that the entire notion of the highest good seems based on wishful thinking more than anything else. Even if we grant that there are no contradictions involved in Kant's arguments in the Dialectic, there still seems to be something almost naive about his project here. In order to achieve the goal that our own reason sets for itself, we have to believe that there is a God. But why not simply accept that the world may not conform to our best intentions, that sometimes bad things happen to good people and that the earthly rewards for wickedness may exceed those for righteousness? Even if all this were the

case, our obligation to be moral would not be lessened. There would also seem to be something more honest about Kant's theory if it were not so insistent upon fulfilling the desire for happiness.¹⁸

This objection holds even if we take into account that happiness must be strictly limited by moral considerations, for it is still by no means obvious how and why it is conceived of as a necessary component of the highest good. It is in light of this problem that we need to consider another aspect of Kant's account of the highest good, viz., the psychological state of the moral person. As we have seen, the dialectic of practical reason rests on Kant's conception of the nature of reason and its drive to encompass the totality of all conditions. That is why the formal component of morality is simply not enough for practical reason. Human beings live and act in the world, and thus all acts of will have some relationship to material content. On top of this, Kant conceives of human beings as driven by certain natural desires and inclinations, and these are something with which reason must engage. What all of this indicates is that for human beings moral experience of necessity goes beyond the merely formal conditions of willing; it has a strong phenomenological and psychological dimension to it. This is demonstrated through Kant's discussion of the subjective need people have for God, both rationally and emotionally.

A very fine passage from the *Critique of Judgment* illustrates this point. After

¹⁸NB. that this objection differs from those discussed earlier. Whether the heteronomy of the highest good corrupts morality, or whether or not the moral obligation to pursue the highest good is redundant is not what is at issue here. What we are concerned with is the psychological outlook that is required in order to believe in the possibility of and pursue the highest good.

discussing the moral proof for the existence of God in section 87 of the third critique, Kant describes what he considers to be the predicament of “the righteous man” who “actively reveres the moral law” but “who remains firmly persuaded that there is no God” (*CJ*, 452). According to Kant, this person would “encounter limits” in his endeavor to lead a moral life, for he cannot expect anything more than a fortuitous and contingent coincidence between his moral acts and nature. Kant becomes more specific and describes this amoral nature as often being characterized by ‘natural’ human acts, e.g., “[d]eciet, violence, and envy”. Beyond these, death, disease, ill health and other similar factors also come into play. What becomes apparent is that Kant is deeply concerned with not only the metaphysical grounds for morality, i.e., the possibility of freedom, but also the psychological foundation required in order to pursue one’s moral obligations with zeal and confidence. Kant writes that in the face of such human behavior and natural obstacles, “the well-meaning person would indeed have to give up as impossible the purpose that the moral laws obligated him to have before his eyes”. It is in order to avoid this catastrophic result that the righteous man finds he must turn to God as the guarantor of a moral world order. Moral despair, although it is not a part of the formal argument for the highest good and the postulates of practical reason plays a crucial role in Kant’s understanding of the need for a religious element in moral consciousness.

Yovel and Wood both recognize the distinctive nature of this argument in Kant’s practical philosophy. In his analysis of the postulate of God, Yovel points out that there are two different approaches taken by Kant in establishing this postulate, and in doing so

provides us with useful distinction that helps to clarify Kant's position. The first approach is based upon the formal or logical requirements of Kant's system. We need to postulate God in order to be able to pursue the task of realizing the highest good. Since we are not the creators of the world, we can guarantee ourselves no necessary relationship between our moral efforts and the responsiveness of nature, as is required but the highest good. However, there is something more in addition to this formal requirement. We also have a psychological need for God (Yovel, 88-89 and 105-107). Not only do we need to be able to *think* without contradiction that we can pursue the highest good, we need to *feel* confident that we can do so. The concept of God as the moral author of the world allows us to feel this confidence, and thus it fulfills a deep emotional and psychological need and not simply a formalistic rational one. Wood makes the same point in his discussion of the problem of moral despair in Kantian ethics. When faced with a world that is sometimes hostile or indifferent to moral efforts, the moral agent could, after experiencing a number of failures and setbacks, come to question the possibility of bringing goodness about in the world, and in doing so doubt the possibility of achieving the highest good (Wood, 158-159). This doubt could then be so damaging that the good person could not pursue a moral life with any degree of confidence. If this doubt took hold, it would seem the best that could be hoped for is a morally solipsistic life, one in which individuals are concerned only with their own inner, moral state and not with any positive interaction with others and the world.

One might wonder if moral solipsism is not a contradiction in terms. And yet clearly

there are aspects of Kantian ethics which would seem to serve as a legitimation of this form of morality. If I will to be a good person, irrespective of whatever results my efforts may have, then I have done enough. But given Kant's efforts in the Dialectic of the second critique to establish a connection between the formal act of willing and the results of moral action in the world, it seems unlikely that this more isolated, individualistic conception of morality is his final view on the subject. On the contrary, as Yovel argues, there seems to be a progression from the more individualistic conception of moral perfection found in the first and second critiques to a more universal concern found in the third Yovel, (70-72). As he reads Kant, the more narrow concern for individual reward found in the second critique, for example, in the guise of happiness, gives way to a desire to make the world over in the image of morality, to make nature conform to its needs and requirements. He goes on to argue that this represents a turning point in Kant's philosophy that leads to the concept of history, for the highest good then becomes a "historical goal" (Yovel, 72). This is not to say, of course, the happiness vanishes in the third critique, but rather that the concern which underlies happiness – the drive to reconcile the moral with the natural – begins to take a different shape.

Given this connection between the pursuit of the highest good and history, it is not surprising to see versions of the psychological, "moral despair" arguments appear in the context of the history essays.¹⁹ This line of argument is especially important to Kant's

¹⁹NB. the passage at the end of the "Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History" which exhorts reflective persons not to lose their faith in providence (*PW*, 231). The same theme is brought out in a different form in the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" when Kant talks

conception of history. Why is history a problem for Kant, and why does he think it a problem for reflective people in general? The likely answer to this in light of the problem of moral despair is that history confronts us with the most comprehensive account of all that can and has gone wrong in the world, of the atrocities committed by human beings against other human beings, of war, oppression, civil conflict. In addition to these are obstacles thrown into the path of humanity by nature, things such as natural disasters and shortness of life. When faced with the immense spectacle provided by history, along with its seemingly randomness and contingency, it is hard for the moral person not to feel as though what her rational nature demands of her – that is to be moral and live a moral life in the world – is simply not possible. And even if the obligation is recognized, the possibility of carrying it out seems remote, perhaps even non-existent. Therefore, it is not enough to look to oneself alone, or even to one's location in a particular country during a particular period. It is also not sufficient to say 'I have confidence in the moral order of the world' when confronted with the phenomena of history. The thinking person must find some way of ordering this display. It seems this is the problem Kant has in mind when constructing his progressivist account of history; for under it, all that seems to be detrimental to the moral life of humanity is linked with the notion of a positive future, and thus the terrible events of the past become steps towards that future. On this view, war between states leads towards increasingly more peaceful and civil relationships between

about the "plan of nature" that philosophers must look for if the "world drama" of history is to make sense (*PW*, 40-41).

states, eventually culminating in a cosmopolitan world order. The possibility of human beings living together in moral communities is also greatly increased through this process.²⁰

However, in attempting to view history in this way the rational person is confronted with the same problem that led to the dialectic of practical reason. History deals with empirical phenomena, the unfolding of events in the world.²¹ These events then fall under the jurisdiction of natural laws, those which govern the empirical world. But if this is the case, it would seem that no moral purposes or direction could be found in history. The only way this could be achieved is if some purpose could be attributed to nature. That is why God, or more particularly, providence, must be part of the historical process in Kant's account. As was the case in the solution to the antinomy of practical reason, a third party that can bring together both the world of nature and of intelligible beings must be postulated.

At this point, a number of the ideas we have discussed need to be spelled out in more detail. However, before we leave this section some last words regarding the 'wishful thinking' objection are in order. Even if one were tempted to accept Kant's argument about the progressivist nature of history (obviously, this is a very large "if"), it is not at all clear that one would be obliged to embrace it joyfully, as he seems to recommend. It is

²⁰The relationship between humankind's moral destiny and politics will be considered more deeply in chapter II. However, it is important to note for the moment that the nature of this relationship is often ambiguous in the history essays.

²¹See "Idea for a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose", (*PW*, 41).

clear that in offering a philosophy of history which in some way vindicates the self-interest of tyrants and events such as war, Kant is recommending the acceptance of a plan that is extremely unjust to individual members of the human species. For example, how are those who suffer incredibly or are destroyed in a violent war that serves as a precursor to a world historical event to be redeemed? This may not be a problem for a radical utilitarian, or one who believes that all redemption takes place in an afterlife, but it would seem to be a very serious problem for a thinker like Kant who talks of the dignity of rational beings as ends in themselves, creatures whom even God has not right to use as means (*CPrR*, 132). In light of this, it would seem that the more rational response to the view of God and history offered by Kant would be that exemplified by Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamozov. He is willing to accept that God exists and has ordered the world in a certain way, but he is not willing to accept God's order.²² Kant's acknowledges this problem himself in the "Idea" essay when he says that it remains "disconcerting" that in the progress of history some people will labor only for the sake of later generations and be denied the possibility of taking part in the enjoyment of the results of history (which in the case of politics is a stable, civil international order).²³ Nevertheless, it seems that Kant's likely answer to Karamozov would be that one needs to stand in a relationship of confidence and trust to the world, for without those bonds, nothing but desperation and anxiety could follow.

²²See "Rebellion" in Book Five of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Trans. David Magarshack. Penguin Books. London: 1958 (275).

²³See the third proposition in the "Idea".

However, this is clearly not a satisfactory response to this criticism, and although we shall not address this problem further, it is one we must keep in mind as we study Kant's views on history.

V. The End of History: Ethics and Politics

Now that we have a sense of the practical needs that lead to the development of Kant's concept of history, we need to ask how it is that he sees history unfolding. What is Kant's vision of the end of history? One might argue that there is no unified vision at all, that whatever Kant thinks about the end of history has to be pieced together through an examination of various texts. This is certainly true to an extent. Kant's writings on history, for example, tend to focus on the empirical phenomena of history and hence what is political. It is in the context of these writings that Kant claims the end of history will only be reached in a cosmopolitan society, or when a federation of free states is established. Here legality, constitutions and civil arrangements represent the material out of which the end of history is made.²⁴ But we know from the above analysis that there is also a moral dimension to Kant's concept of history. The end of humankind is a moral one; this is a view supported by all three critiques and the *Religion*. Human destiny is achieved only when we become moral and transform the world we live in so that it corresponds and responds to our moral needs. What this would seem to amount to is some sort of communal life in the Kingdom of Ends described in the *Groundwork*, or the

²⁴See "Idea for a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose" and "Perpetual peace: A Philosophical Sketch".

more concrete ethical commonwealth described in the *Religion*.

This image of making the world into a moral place is one which is both powerful and obscure. Kant struggles at times in successfully articulating how it is that the moral end of humanity fits together with the political end. Much of this struggle has to do with his phenomenal/noumenal distinction, the former being the world in which we exist as embodied, empirical beings, the latter an expression of what we are that is beyond nature, viz., our intelligible, free selves. The more dramatic this split is in Kant's writings, the worse the problem becomes. Are we to think of this moral end as somehow coinciding with the political end, of the ethical commonwealth co-existing with, and perhaps even reflected by, political society? At times Kant seems to lean towards this view, although the distinction between the two is never completely collapsed (see *Religion* 87-88, for example). And yet this raises many questions about the relationship between the two. For example, which comes first, political order or ethical order? In light of Kant's concept of historical development, it seems clear that the political comes first. He directly acknowledges this at one point in "Perpetual Peace" when he says that good moral attitudes do not produce good constitutions but rather good constitutions produce "moral culture" (*PW*, 113). And yet he makes it clear in the same essay that his view requires that politics be subordinated to morality, that the latter is always of greater worth and thus politics must always "pay tribute" to it (*PW*, 125). What this would seem to indicate is that morality serves as the basis for politics, if not in the order of time, then in terms of its value and in the order of thought. But even if we grant this, the tension between these

positions is obvious and difficult to resolve. Later on in this study I shall address this tension in greater detail (chapter II). It is my contention that Kant himself does not work out a satisfactory solution to this problem of the relationship between ethics and politics and that this has implications for how we are to understand the function of not only history but also religion in his practical thought. However, before examining these issues further, we need to develop a better understanding of the concepts and structures that comprise Kant's view of history, and in particular its relationship to religion and morality within the framework of practical philosophy. It is to this end that the analysis of the "Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History" in the next chapter is directed.

Chapter I. “In the Beginning”: Kant’s Theologico-Philosophical Account of the Origins of Human History

In the introductory chapter we saw that the concept of God is integral to Kant’s conception of the highest good, and that we must postulate the existence of God in order to think of the highest good as being possible. One of the arguments Kant produces in support of this position is of a practical-psychological orientation. He argues that in order to avoid succumbing to moral despair when faced with all of the terrible events that occur in the world (e.g., war), events which are often indicative of the corruption and immorality of the human species, we must be able to think of a moral author of the world, one who is able to guarantee that the world will eventually come to reflect and respond to moral actions. In this way, moral individuals will not live their lives as though they were lonely voices crying out in the wilderness. This same notion of God as the guarantor of the progressive development of morality in the world appears in the essay “Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History” in the form of providence. There Kant warns reflective persons, those who worry and become depressed when they contemplate the world, that they must not be “discontent with that providence by which the course of the world as a whole is governed” (*PW*, 231). What Kant suggests in this passage is that providence has organized the natural world, including human beings qua natural beings, in such a manner that it supports rather than hinders the development of human rationality and freedom.

In the “Conjectures”, Kant provides a brief account of how human efforts interact with this natural world and how this interaction characterizes the course of human development. What is developed are the capacities for rational thought, self-determination and moral consciousness. These topics occupy Kant’s attention in the first half of the essay. In the second half he turns to the social and political development of human kind through the evolution of culture and civil society. This sketch of these two areas of history is presented in the form of a philosophical interpretation of Genesis chapters II through VI. Why Kant elects to couch his account in this Biblical story is not entirely obvious, but as he describes what he thinks is the philosophical significance of the events of this story, it becomes evident that he thinks it reveals the most fundamental stages and elements of the universal story of human rational development. With this in mind we shall concentrate upon the first part of Kant’s account, the development of the capacity for self-determination and of moral consciousness. Kant maps the course of this development onto the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

What is particularly interesting about this section is the way it appears to differ from Kant’s other writing on history. Unlike the “Idea” or “Perpetual Peace”, the “Conjectures” presents us with an image of human beings directing, albeit clumsily and unconsciously, the course of their own development. Nature is present, but seemingly as something to which reason is opposed rather than something secretly guiding the process of human development. In the “Idea” and “Perpetual Peace”, this development is explained as a product of nature, something carried out often in spite of human intentions.

And yet talk of nature and providence is present in “Conjectures” as well. It continually crops up, most often to suggest that the efforts made by human beings are carried out in an environment carefully designed by a providential nature. The co-existence of these two elements generates a great deal of ambiguity in Kant’s account, along with a series of difficult interpretive questions. For example, are human beings and nature both responsible for the course of human development? How could such an account be made coherent in light of Kant’s views on autonomy and responsibility? These questions also lead us to consider further what the significance may be of Kant’s use of the Biblical story as the vehicle for his account of human origins. Is the presence of God in the garden story important to Kant, or is it merely the image of human existence in the Eden that appeals to him? My response to this last question is that both are important to Kant, that his selection of the Garden of Eden story allows him to have a model of human development which invokes the view of God that is so crucial to his conception of practical reason. Over the course of this chapter I shall endeavor to demonstrate the validity of this interpretation, and in the process to further establish the connection between religion and history in Kant’s thought.

I. Interpretive Issues Surrounding the “Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History”

More than one commentator has noted the peculiar character of the “Conjectures”

essay.¹ Its unusual form and even its content help to distinguish it from what is already often construed as a peripheral part of Kant's work, his essays on history. When looked at from this point of view, it is tempting to say that it does not merit serious consideration. Kant himself writes that it is an exercise in which the imagination is allowed to indulge in "as healthy mental recreation" (*PW*, 221). He goes on to add that what he is writing is to be thought of as a "pleasure trip", and for that reason he asks his readers to allow him permission to use "a sacred document" as his map (*PW*, 221-222). But while all of this seems to lend support to the idea that the "Conjectures" essay is not of any special importance, we must be wary of dismissing it out of hand. The main reason for this (aside from the fact that it was written by a tremendous thinker in one of the most productive periods of his career)² is that it deals with key themes which reflect the larger Kantian concerns we have already discussed. Therefore, while it may be a mistake to place too much emphasis on the importance of this short paper, it would also be a mistake to underestimate its potential significance.

The problem, however, is what to do with this unusual essay. It seems that there are two main interpretive questions that it poses for its reader, one having to do with content the other with form (i.e., its use of Biblical exegesis) . With respect to content, one is

¹See, for example, Fackenheim's "Kant's Concept of History" (*The God Within: Kant, Schelling and Historicity*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto: 1993) and Ajzenstat's "Liberalism between Nature and Culture: Kant's Exegesis of Genesis 2-6" (*Liberal Democracy and the Bible*. Ed. Kim Ian Parker. The Edwin Mellen Press. Queenston: 1992).

²The "Conjectures" essay was written in 1786, shortly after the *Groundwork* and between the composition of the first and second critiques.

confronted with the problem of how to understand the relationship between nature and freedom in the essay. Are they simply opposed to one another, and if they are, what are the implications of this opposition? The first part of the essay, as was mentioned above, depicts the origin and earliest stages of rational and ethical consciousness in human beings. Adam and Eve develop a consciousness of their freedom from instinct, and in the process appear to break away from the guardianship of nature. Reason is represented as a self-activating and self-determining power, something that operates in relation to instinct, but is not dependent upon instinct for its operation. Thus Kant appears to create an opposition between natural determinism in the form of instinct on the one hand and freedom and rational self-determination on the other.³

This opposition sparks questions about the status of culture, instinct, and the nature of moral progression in his philosophy. This last issue, it has been argued, provides the sword upon which Kant's concept of history must inevitably fall. Fackenheim in his influential article on Kant's concept of history presents this position very forcefully. He argues that Kant's conception of morality, based as it is upon an uncompromising notion of freedom, cannot be subjected to a historical process which helps it to develop; if it is, he argues, morality would be utterly destroyed and along with it the concept of history

³A more detailed exposition of this section of the "Conjectures" will be offered in the next section. To begin with, I want to establish a context of typical interpretive issues and responses surrounding the essay. In doing so, I hope to more clarify what is distinctive about the interpretation I shall offer and its relationship to my overall project.

(Fackenheim,48-49).⁴ A similar point is made by Yovel. Although he is more charitable to Kant's concept of history than Fackenheim, he acknowledges that Kant's understanding of history as the history of rational development is based upon what he calls the "historical antinomy", viz., that reason must have and yet cannot have a history.⁵ It is difficult to avoid this conclusion if one accepts that the structure of reason, both in its speculative and practical functions, exists a priori and is in fact the ground for all experience we have. This view of reason would then seem to resist any attempt to explain its development through a series of historical (empirical) events. If we took Kant's views on the a priori nature of reason to their extreme, it would be difficult to see how there could be any notion of development at all. Even if there must be a moment of 'awakening' in the conscious life of every rational being, it is difficult to see how once that moment occurs rational and ethical consciousness would not be in possession or aware of all its definitive content. Certainly, it is conceivable that despite possessing this content, a rational being

⁴It should be noted that Fackenheim views the relationship between freedom and nature as being less problematic in the "Conjectures" than in other works. He argues that because Kant makes more of a distinction between moral freedom and cultural freedom in the "Conjectures", moral freedom is not dependent upon nature (Fackenheim, 41). However, as is evident in the conclusion of his paper, Fackenheim does not think that Kant successfully maintains this distinction within his concept of history.

⁵Yovel is charitable to Kant insofar as he regards his work on history as a precursor to Hegel's. However, the problem of the historical antinomy is one he thinks Kant's philosophical system is unable to resolve. Since the will, if it is to be thought of as free, cannot be determined by anything other than itself (i.e., no external conditions or temporal sequence of events), it cannot be thought of as changing or evolving in a process which takes place in time, as part of a series of events in the world. It is this division between atemporal reason and the empirical world that leads to the historical antinomy. Reason cannot have a history, even though Kant clearly thinks it has one and it clearly forms an important part of his work (Yovel, 271-272).

may err and misuse his reason, both in its speculative and practical forms, but this error would not be rooted in a lack of development in reason itself. However, in the “Conjectures” we are not presented with this view of human rational life. Human rational capacity is presented as developing in stages, with moral consciousness only arising at the end of the process.⁶

Along with the development of this consciousness there comes a separation between reason and nature.⁷ This theme is brought out very strongly by the “Conjectures”. Kant dramatically states that when the human beings who live in the Garden of Eden develop not only rational consciousness but moral consciousness – that is, consciousness of themselves as members of an order of rational beings who are to be treated as ends in themselves – they are released from the womb of nature (*PW*, 225-226). For both Fackenheim and Yovel this release represents a break between freedom and nature.⁸ For the development of this consciousness is something which Kant describes as occurring through human effort and experience, and not through the efforts of nature itself. But if one accepts the idea that freedom must be conceived of as utterly independent of nature

⁶This question of how reason can possibly develop is one of the most difficult posed by Kant’s concept of history. It is not my intention to attempt to resolve it here, for in order to do so it would be necessary to provide a thorough examination of many areas of Kant’s speculative philosophy (e.g., the concept of nature, time and the sensible/intelligible distinction). My analysis and critique, however, do depend on Kant’s radical conceptions of autonomy and freedom and the practical problems created when these are placed within the context of his views on historical development.

⁷It is worth acknowledging Kant’s ties to Rousseau on this point. Cf. *The Second Discourse*.

⁸See Fackenheim, 49, “The core and revolutionary part of the Kantian view is that freedom and reason are not part of the human substance, and not given by nature. They are self-given, in an act which tears man loose from nature”. Cf. Yovel, 191.

and entirely responsible for the course of its self-development, then it is difficult to see how the conclusion Fackenheim draws can be avoided. For whatever free rational consciousness is, it must be of its own accord; it cannot be generated by natural processes. When this problem is added to that created by the a priori notion of reason, the difficulties and contradictions in Kant's concept of history are increased.

It seems that the only way to get around these problems is to argue that the "Conjectures" does not actually present such a divided vision of nature and freedom. This is the view offered by Samuel Ajzenstat in his essay "Liberalism between Nature and Culture: Kant's Exegesis of Genesis 2-6". Ajzenstat argues, contrary to Fackenheim, that what the "Conjectures" presents is not an account of reason tearing itself way from nature but of evolving within the context of nature (Parker, 129). He contends that the opposition between freedom and instinct in the first portion of the essay should not be interpreted as an opposition between freedom and nature in general, and that Kant holds a much broader conception of nature that encompasses both. He points to several passages in the "Conjectures" and in other works which seem to suggest that reason is in fact a product of nature, or at least is grounded in nature, whatever part in its cultivation we may have (Parker, 146).⁹ One of the great benefits of this interpretation is that it allows us not

⁹Ajzenstat produces other arguments in support of his position. For example, he argues that in many places in Kant's work, including the second portion of the "Conjectures" essay, he presents a view of political evolution that indicates there is a continuity rather than a discontinuity between ethics and politics (Parker, 139-143). If politics can produce arrangements which promote actions that bear an external resemblance to moral actions, then it can be understood as a precursor to moral development. He goes on to say that this aspect of his reading of the "Conjectures" "absolves us of the need to say moral consciousness was there at the very beginning of social and political life" (Parker, 143).

only to untangle but simply to cut through the knotted relationship between instinct and freedom presented by Fackenheim. If rational and moral consciousness are in some way natural phenomena and thus a part of nature, then there would seem to be no contradiction involved in saying that they undergo a process of temporal development. However, Ajzenstat also acknowledges that there are elements of Kant's philosophy which resist this reading, particularly his conception of "radical autonomy" and his emphasis on justice as opposed to "the natural desire for happiness" (Parker, 144-145). And while Ajzenstat thinks that these elements have a place within the scope of Kant's naturalistic view, one could also argue (in line with Fackenheim) that they resist any attempt to draw them into such a view.

The interpretations of Fackenheim and Ajzenstat can both be supported by Kant's work. On the one hand it seems, as Fackenheim says, that Kant's understanding of a developmental history cannot be reconciled with his notion of freedom so long as each represents a different sphere of human experience, viz., existence as a natural being and as a moral agent subject to the laws of an intelligible world. But at the same time, Ajzenstat is correct in asserting that there is a complicated relationship between nature and freedom presented in this essay, and it certainly cannot be defined by the freedom/instinct opposition alone. It should be made clear at this point that I do not intend to argue either against or for either interpretation of this problem in Kant's essay, but rather only to establish a context of interpretation. And although I tend to support Fackenheim's basic conclusion about the failure of Kant's concept of history, Ajzenstat provides a formidable

counter-interpretation of the relationship between freedom and nature in his essay. In addition to this I would add that my reading of the “Conjectures” is similar to his that it dwells on the place of rational development within a larger natural structure. However, on my reading this has less to do with Kant’s naturalism than it does with his conception of providence as the organizing force of nature. It is in focusing on this religious dimension of Kant’s concept of history that my work diverges from that of Ajzenstat’s.¹⁰

This religious dimension of Kant’s understanding of history brings us to the second interpretive problem mentioned above, which is how we are to understand the form in which this essay is presented, viz. a piece of philosophical Biblical exegesis. Commentators often connect this form in some way to Kant’s views on religion, but very seldom do they address its potential theological implications. In fact, the existence of such implications is often disregarded, overlooked or rejected. One likely reason for this is that despite the use of a Biblical story, the guiding force that is appealed to in the “Conjectures” appears to be nature and not God. That is why most who discuss this essay focus on the question of nature or natural teleology. It is also difficult to see any good reason to take Kant’s use of the Bible seriously in this context given the remarks he makes at the outset of the essay that we looked at above. However, even though he makes these

¹⁰It should also be noted that if one were to accept Ajzenstat’s reading many of the problems I shall raise later would seem to disappear. But in the context of this study, I am working under an interpretation of Kant’s practical philosophy which is more in line with the work of Fackenheim and Yovel, in that I regard the sharp freedom/nature distinction as a central one in Kantian thought, not only logically but psychologically (see introduction for further discussion). In a more comprehensive study I would spend more time addressing the interpretive conflict which exists between these two authors and Ajzenstat.

comments, he does not say that his claims in the essay are groundless speculations. He carefully distinguishes between an account of the beginnings of history comprised of pure conjecture (a fiction) and one comprised of conjectures that are grounded in human nature (*PW*, 221). He claims to be providing the latter in this essay. This claim is then connected with further comments he makes about his choice of the Genesis story. He says that he will use this story in a way which accords with “experience mediated by reason”, and which will demonstrate that the origins of human history correspond to the events described in the story (*PW*, 222). What these remarks seem to indicate is that for Kant the selection of the Genesis story as the blueprint for the origins of history is not frivolous or arbitrary, nor is it ironically intended, but rather that the opposite is the case. There is something about this story, its view of human nature, of God, the fall and expulsion, that in his view tells us about the true nature of human origins.

Of course, even if we take these comments into account, one could still argue that the use of the Genesis story in this essay is not reflective of any theological dimension in Kant’s account of history. William Galston offers an interpretation that rejects the notion that there is such a dimension in this essay in his book, *Kant and the Problem of History*. He argues that the opposite is the case and that Kant uses the story, in part, as a critique of religious doctrine pertaining to God. According to Galston, Kant is seeking to reconcile natural science and the idea of moral progress through his concept of history. The “Conjectures” essay is meant to show how these two seemingly disparate elements can be brought together, the natural law disclosed by science being made to eventually

harmonize with the moral capacities of human beings through a long process– history. With this in mind Galston turns to the question of why Kant uses the Garden of Eden story as the foundation for his conjectures on history’s origins. He argues on the one hand that Kant uses this story because of elements in it that suggest man qua rational beings cannot be completely reduced to nature, and that as a result the history of reason must be understood in part as the “the progressive self-development of reason” (Galston, 80). This allows Kant to use this story in order to develop a moral account of history, one in which nature must be reconciled with morality.¹¹ However, Galston also suggests that Kant is providing a critique of certain aspects of the Biblical story, specifically the notion that humankind is marked by the original sin of its ancestors and that we exist due to miraculous origins. Galston argues that Kant rejects these elements of the story , and in doing so endorses the view that “man’s moral improvement is secular and self-wrought” (Galston, 88). He adds that Kant rejects the ambiguity of the Biblical story by holding a progressivist view of history, claiming that the Bible does not clearly endorse this view (Galston, 88-89).

While Galston’s analysis of the “Conjectures” is compelling in many respects, his attitude towards it is potentially problematic insofar as he argues that Kant uses the Genesis story as a means to criticize the Biblical account of human origins. This view is largely based on the fact that Kant’s interpretation of the story does not agree with certain

¹¹Cf. Fackenheim and Ajzenstat.

of its most crucial aspects, primarily its account of the creation of humanity by God. It is true that Kant very conspicuously begins his interpretation of Genesis with the second chapter, avoiding entirely the first which deals with the creation of humankind and the world. He further avoids discussing creation by ignoring the first nineteen verses of the second chapter, picking up the thread of the story only when man begins to exercise speech by naming animals (Gen. 2:20). However, even if we acknowledge the selectivity of Kant's interpretation, all remnants of its theological dimension are not removed, as I shall argue shortly. Kant also demonstrates in other works such that he is very ready to include a notion of divine creation within his conception of the moral end of humanity. For example, in his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* Kant makes explicit reference to the creation of human beings by God, and elaborates on the significance of the relationship of human beings and their creator for the development of history (*LR*, 28:1077-78).¹² He also includes a notion of divine creation within his discussion of the end of humanity in the *Critique of Judgment* (sec. 84). And while Galston is certainly right in saying that one of the primary aims of Kant's concept of history is the reconciliation of nature and morality, we have already seen that for Kant this simply cannot be carried out by human effort alone. God must be postulated if this end is to be regarded as possible. This point is echoed in the "Conjectures" where Kant speaks of providence having laid out a direction which history will follow (*PW*, 231).

¹²The pagination here is used in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology*. Ed Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge: 1996.

Of course one could respond to this by saying that it is not at all clear what Kant means by providence in this essay, and that it may in fact mean nothing more than nature. Within the context of this essay, it seems that nature is the more important term, providence only being mentioned towards the end. But this conception of nature finds its grounding in Kant's conception of God. The antinomy of practical reason demonstrates that the only way we can conceive of this kind of harmony between nature and morality, one which is geared to promote moral purposes, is through the concept of a divine author of the world – God. This argument is further supported by Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. First of all, even though Kant distinguishes between the ultimate purpose of nature (the cultivation of human beings) and the final end creation (the moral existence of humanity), it is equally clear that the former needs to be subordinated to the latter (see sec. 83 and 84). Again, it is only the concept of God which can ultimately allow us to conceive a purposive natural arrangement that promotes the fulfillment of our moral destiny.¹³ This point is further developed in Kant's discussion of the moral proof for the existence of God. There he argues that without conceiving of a moral cause of the world, we would be unable to see any necessary relationship between whatever natural purposes we might think of as existing in the world and our final purpose, which is to make ourselves moral (sec. 87).¹⁴ Of course, one can speak of the mechanisms of nature that operate in history

¹³The distinction between these two purposes will be reconsidered again in more detail in the conclusion of this study.

¹⁴My treatment of these passages has been brief, but necessarily so, given the complexity of Kant's theory of teleological judgment. It is enough for the purposes of this study to establish the parallel

to be dealt with in the next section, is the role that providential nature plays in directing this process.

Kant begins his account of the origins of human history with a fully developed pair of human beings, as can be found, he says, in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (*PW*, 222). The primary reason he offers for beginning with just this one pair is that it would be fruitless to engage in speculation about the origins of humanity prior to the first pair because to do so would set us a drift on a sea of possible natural causes that may have preceded the existence of human beings. He takes this point even further by saying that the existence of human beings cannot be deduced from nature.¹⁵ This distinction between the existence of human beings and natural development is extremely important within the framework of Kant's concept of history. Human history can only begin with reason, not with nature (understood as a concatenation of biological drives and natural laws that determines a creature). Looked at from a slightly different angle, this means that biological or natural origins are not what interest Kant here; instead he is only interested in the development of rational and ethical consciousness.¹⁶ While this

¹⁵"If we are not to indulge in wild conjectures, we must begin with something which human reason cannot deduce from prior natural causes – that is, with the *existence of human beings*" (*PW*, 222). At the same time, it is clear from the introduction and other remarks in this paragraph that Kant thinks nature, taken in a broader sense of a purposive arrangement, is crucial to his account. We shall discuss this issue in greater detail in the next section.

¹⁶This perspective gives us reason to think that Kant does not accept the Genesis story as providing a true account of the descent of all of humanity from one pair of ancestors. As a thinker who holds the empirical sciences in such esteem, and who is also very critical of reductive explanations of natural phenomena, this story would seem too incredible for him to take as factually accurate. At the same time, however, Kant is very slippery when it comes to making firm pronouncements on this any many other religious issues. And as we see in the passage under discussion, Kant argues that there are

formulation is somewhat inadequate because it suggests a sharper separation between reason and nature than Kant will subsequently invoke in this essay, it is nevertheless accurate, for it indicates the defining characteristic of his account of history, namely that it is the history of human ethical development and the rise of the influence of freedom and rationality over and against the power of instinct.

Kant's selection of the couple from Genesis as the starting point of his account is not so strange, then, given the kind of history he wants to tell. According to Kant, we are introduced to these two without knowing how they came into the world, and we must conceive of them as having no biological predecessors nor any period of childhood. We also must "imagine" that they have developed under their own power the abilities to stand, walk, speak and think, for Kant says that these are skills that they had to cultivate for themselves (*PW*, 222).¹⁷ Being in possession of these abilities make them both responsible for and in control of themselves, as well as able to further cultivate and develop themselves. Kant stresses this notion of self-cultivation, claiming that these abilities do not simply flow out of some innate source. From this description it would seem to follow that history cannot begin until freedom and reason are already on the scene, and that whatever the natural prehistory of these powers might involve, it is irrelevant to history

good reasons for nature to begin with only two persons, i.e., to ensure a common lineage and avoid the threat of immediate war (*PW*, 222). But in any case, if we remember that Kant is concerned with telling the history of ethical and rational consciousness rather than any kind of natural history of the human organism, the issue does not seem to be one of great importance.

¹⁷Kant cites Genesis 2:20 and 2:23 in support of this claim.

proper. Yet Kant does not hold that human beings are completely free of the guidance of nature and operating under the power of their own rational freedom at this stage. In fact he forwards the opposite view, writing that “[i]nitially” human beings are “guided solely by instinct, that *voice of God* which all animals obey” (*PW*, 223). Thus, despite the presence of thought and speech, human beings are not completely self-determining in the earliest beginnings of history; they are still under the guidance of forces which must be thought of as lying outside the sphere of influence held by freedom and reason.

Kant presents us with a paradox then in the first few pages of this essay. Although they are in primitive forms, reason and freedom are present in human beings from the first stage of history; and yet despite their presence, human beings are still animalistic, directed by instinctual impulses. How are we then to understand the relationship between these two constitutive dimensions of human beings? It is clear that in Kant’s view neither can be reduced to the other. However, he does provide an explanation of the development of reason in relationship to instinct, beginning with the most infamous episode in the Genesis story, the eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

According to Kant, the act of eating this fruit represents the first time that reason comes into conflict with the directives of instinct, for it is instinct which directs man and woman to eat certain types of food (*PW*, 223). But this natural direction proves to be too weak and it gives way to a new force, something capable of overriding it and giving new orders, capable of creating new, non-natural desires – reason. It is reason which first allows humanity to go beyond the bounds set for it by nature. This act is followed by a

second one, the prolongation of animalistic sexual desire through refusal; in doing this, mere sexual appetite was transformed into something more distinctly human, love (*PW*, 224). In Kant's view, these are the first two steps in a series of events that will see people become ever more aware of not only their freedom from natural determinism but as well their ability to be self-determining, to make their own choices and follow their own plans. However, accompanying this break from nature is a kind of existential anxiety and fear, for in proportion to the increase in consciousness of freedom there is an increase in the sense of separation from the parental care of nature, as well a rise in the feeling of responsibility that this separation brings (*PW*, 224 and 226). This third step, where human beings come to fear, care for and worry about their future lives, helps to fill out the first dim consciousness of freedom human beings acquire. In short, it means that people begin to feel the weight of their own maturity. Following this step is the first dawn of ethical consciousness, which rounds out the process. In comparing themselves to animals, human beings discover that their reason gives them a dignity that no other form of life on earth has, thus making them an end of nature, not simply a part of it (*PW*, 225). The result of this process is that the change from creatures of instinct to beings in whom rational consciousness is awakened and active is what drives man and woman out of the garden completely.¹⁸ What this means on Kant's interpretation is that freedom and rationality are

¹⁸We must be careful about how we think of the concept of change here. As we have already seen, Kant's account does not allow for the development of reason out of instinct. Rather, reason, and along with it, freedom, activate themselves. In this sense, one can say history only begins with freedom and rationality, and that nothing prior to the operation of these two characteristics can be made part of Kant's philosophy of history. Or, in other words, if nature had a hand in the creation of these capacities

not compatible with the pre-rational life found in the garden (or pre-rational natural state), that of an animal guided by instinct. On the contrary, rationality cannot help but supplant the guidance of nature as the most influential factor in human affairs.

After completing his analysis of the stages in the development of consciousness, Kant goes on to offer an interesting and important interpretation of the concept of “the fall”. In doing so he connects the initial stages of the historical process with a much broader notion of the progression of the human species. However, given the fact that his interpretation of the Edenic story is so positive, emphasizing rationality over nature and the progressive development of human powers, we might wonder why he persists in describing “the release from the womb” of nature as a fall, or as necessitating a fall.¹⁹ One might argue that in doing so Kant is simply toying with and subverting traditional religious terminology. But a close examination of this passage reveals that Kant in fact uses the concept of the fall to a very different effect which is essential to his understanding of history.

in human beings, this cannot be made a part of history, and in fact it would have to be relegated to what could only be characterized as dim, unknowable pre-history. This relationship between reason and history and the role of nature is one we will return to, for it is at once central to Kant’s account of history and highly problematic.

¹⁹See *PW*, 226-227. Kant says that the attainment of rational self-consciousness (the fourth stage of the development of rational consciousness) is “associated with man’s *release* from the womb of nature”. Shortly after, in the context of an explanation about what conclusions are to be drawn from his account, Kant describes “the first step” of reason, its attempt to assert control over human life and to replace instinct as its guiding force, as a “fall”. However, it is a fall not because it is undesirable, but rather because reason is not yet able to exercise its powers properly; instinct opposes it too strongly, and as a result reason and freedom are compromised and natural impulses, which are healthy and good for human beings qua biological organisms, are distorted and deformed.

Kant's treatment of the fall adds a number of important new elements to his account of historical development. The first of these is the idea that a distinction must be made between what is good for the human race as a whole and what is good from the perspective of individual human beings (*PW*, 227). The moral development of the species is a long, perhaps even interminable, process on Kant's account, and though it is arduous from the standpoint of individuals, it ends in the highest good for humanity comprehended as a whole. As we shall see in the next chapter, this move from a consideration of the moral development of individuals to that of humanity provides one of the strongest links between Kant's ethical theory and his political and social philosophy.

The second important concept introduced by Kant's understanding of the fall is that of the development of evil from freedom. In the case of the first couple, prior to reason's awakening "there were no commandments or prohibitions" (*PW*, 227); indeed, there could not have been any for these would, in Kant's view, require rational comprehension on the part of those who would obey. Natural drives in the form of instinctual impulses are what guided human beings in their pre-rational state, and these impulses cannot be blamed for any bad or evil acts committed by human beings. In fact, Kant asserts the opposite and says that "the history of *nature* begins with goodness, for it is *the work of God*; but the history of *freedom* begins with evil because it is the work of man" (*PW*, 227). When reason awoke it brought about the possibility of both moral good and evil, for it was only at this point that human beings could be morally responsible for themselves, and thus only then that there could be a morally right and wrong way to act. Evil does not lie in the act

of going against nature by doing what nature forbids, but rather it lies in the possibility brought on when human beings are liberated from nature's control. That any human being would fall – or more accurately, fail – at the beginning of his or her own history of self-determination is for Kant a foregone conclusion.²⁰ Once rational consciousness begins to develop, that is, once human beings are under the new and untested guidance of reason, instinct is no longer a paternal force looking after the natural (biological) interests of man and woman; it is instead a force that opposes freedom, one which at this early stage is still very formidable, even more powerful than reason. Fledgling reason, charged by its own nature with the task of controlling human behavior, could not (and cannot) help but founder when confronted with the power of instinct, although it is equally true that instinct cannot suppress reason. However, it is nonetheless the case that in Kant's estimation it is reason and freedom which are responsible for evil.²¹ Even though these powers cannot help but struggle and falter upon their first exercise (it is *practically* inevitable), they are the only location in which responsibility can be seated.²²

²⁰Cf. Kant's comment at *PW* 233, that no one "is entitled to ascribe his own misdemeanors to an original crime committed by his earliest ancestors." He then adds that the actions of the first couple would be carried out by any agent when first exercising his rational capacities. What this indicates is that the fall is not something which happens only once in a specific point in history; it is rather something that each of us might (and perhaps must) undergo. In this respect, there is a direct connection between this essay and Kant's discussion of radical evil in the *Religion* (see the next chapter). The problem of evil and the "misuse" of reason is then in this sense both ontogenetic and phylogenetic.

²¹See *PW*, 227. The relationship between reason, freedom and evil will be discussed in greater detail in chapter II.

²²Here one might raise questions about the accuracy and coherence of Kant's interpretation of Genesis as it relates to his understanding of evil. In the Bible, it seems clear, at least on the surface of the text, that a moral transgression takes place when Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

The third idea introduced in this section is one which is extremely important for our purposes, and that is the distinction that begins to appear between the work of nature and God on the one hand and humanity on the other. In the initial stages of this essay, it seems that nature, defined as instinct simply stands in opposition to reason. However, there are other hints, brought out more definitively in this passage, that Kant holds a very different conception of nature. As Ajzenstat points out in his essay, Kant begins the “Conjectures” by telling us that the first beginning of history is a product of nature, and in doing so establishes a conception of nature as that which not only interacts with reason in the course of human development, but actually encompasses human development within its scope (Parker, 146) . I would take this argument in a different direction, however, for on my interpretation the reference to nature as the work of God (*PW*, 227) is crucial to understanding Kant’s conception of nature in this essay. As I indicated in this last section, there is good reason to read such comments as having more than a metaphorical meaning. What this passage does, in conjunction with Kant’s discussion of providence at the end of the essay, is to establish that God, as the author of nature, must in some way act in conjunction with human effort if the end of history is to be realized. This end will

However, when we read Kant’s account no moral transgression takes place; on the contrary, all that occurs is the violation of a natural boundary, one set by instinct, which is not to be understood as a moral prohibition. What Kant seems to mean, despite the slightly confusing rhetoric he uses regarding the first pair, is that evil only becomes possible once rational consciousness begins to develop, and further, that because rational control over actions is difficult to assert at first, it is very likely that the first crime any conscious rational being would be guilty of is heteronomy, the subordination of the will to desire in a situation where adherence to the categorical imperative is in order. Obviously, eating the fruit against the recommendation of nature would not be an example of such a situation, but once human interaction begins to take on moral dimensions, as it does in the fourth stage, situations calling for a moral response would quickly present themselves (even if there were only two persons in the world).

be realized according to Kant when freedom and nature are harmonized in such a way that human beings are able to fully develop their capacities and free themselves from living under the pressure of the oppressive and often self-destructive dualism that the freedom/nature separation generates (although this can never be completely eradicated or overcome so long as we are embodied beings living in the sensible world)²³. Culture as the process of the cultivation of human capacities must be brought together with nature in such a way that the natural needs and rational activities of human beings do not conflict. And while on Kant's view human beings bear much of the burden involved in accomplishing this goal, this task is not entrusted to humanity alone, whether considered on an individual basis or as a collective entity. A third party enters the picture, an agent who orchestrates what appears to be the tumultuous disarray of history, viz., God, understood as providence.

III. God: Nature and Providence

That on our own we are incapable of realizing our moral destiny, whether as individuals or in groups (e.g., nations), in its world-historical dimensions is a central tenet of Kant's moral, religious, political and social thought. Providence, through the means of

²³The question of how this is to be achieved is an interesting one. In the "Conjectures", Kant only sketches an answer, however it appears that what he has in mind is not only the triumph of reason in human affairs, but also that instinct and reason are brought into a true harmonious unity. Reason would not simply dominate instinct on this account; rather, it would mold itself to fit the requirements of nature. In a lengthy footnote, Kant argues that to achieve this is the aim of "a perfect civil constitution" (*PW*, 228). This passage is an interesting one, for it goes against the grain of any interpretation which seeks to privilege reason over instinct. Yet at the same time we cannot forget that the end of history is to make the world of human affairs rational and moral. But along with this, it is clear that Kant envisions some kind of balance being achieved between reason and nature, the effect of which will be the recovery of nature as something which was lost when reason and nature initially split.

a teleologically directed series of natural arrangements, plays a large part in achieving this end. In the “Conjectures” essay, Kant discusses how our destiny is set in motion, our part in its fulfillment, and how we must think of its fulfillment as relying, in part, upon divine aid. It is this latter component of the process of historical progression that will now be of concern to us.

By looking at the role providence plays in this essay, significant insight can be gained into the nature and characteristics of Kant’s conception of God as it relates to human practice. From the beginning of Kant’s conjectural account of the origins of human history, the concept of providence as the overarching plan of nature is co-mingled with the concept of freedom. At the same time Kant tells us that we must think of the first pair of human beings as being without natural predecessors and responsible for their own development, he also tells us how providence²⁴ has arranged natural conditions, and even human nature itself, such that humanity will develop along its proper path. As was mentioned in the last section, in the early part of his account, before reason is active in human beings, Kant describes instinct as “*voice of God* which all animals obey” (*PW*, 223). God, conceived of as the guiding force of all nature, sets down the manner in which all animals, including human beings, behave. However, as the essay progresses, Kant

²⁴Kant actually uses the term “nature” rather than God or providence when discussing the arrangements in the garden and why human history needed to begin in this way, but one paragraph later he describes God as guiding all natural creatures (animals) through instinct (*PW*, 222-223). This provides grounds for interpreting Kant as having in mind not merely mechanical nature but a purposive nature, one which is given its purpose by God. Moreover, even if one were to dispute this connection, there are strong indications at the end of the essay that any plan of nature is to be understood as a plan set out by providence (*PW*, 231 and 233).

shifts away from this view, as does the Genesis story, creating the impression that human beings are entirely responsible for whatever course their development takes. Yet, even when this shift occurs, the concept of a providential arrangement is maintained. Despite humankind's release from the womb of nature, Kant still discusses the role that nature and providence play in directing human affairs. For example, towards the end of the essay, providence is discussed as having 'set up' the general conditions in which human beings find themselves in such a manner as to promote our development in a certain direction. Kant tells us that two of the things human beings abhor most - war and the brevity of life on earth- are conditions which reflect "an order of nature" put in place by providence, conditions which are meant to spur our development (*PW*, 231-232).²⁵ This does not mean that within the confines of these conditions we cannot exercise some degree of control; it simply means that we do not have full control over the situations in which we find ourselves, and that the myriad of conditions that define those situations will play a great part in shaping our actions. In this sense, God acts as a *mediator* in human affairs, partially influencing the general direction of events but not wholly determining them.

²⁵The contrast between this point about the brevity of life as a good thing and the postulate of the immortality of the soul is obviously very striking and it is difficult to know what to make of it. One might try to argue that it indicates Kant's abandonment of the postulate, along with a new line of thinking which puts a notion of historical development in its place. While there might be something to this, it is not a completely satisfactory interpretive solution. Its chief fault is demonstrated by the date of the "Conjectures essay"; it was written in 1786, two years before the *Critique of Practical Reason* and its argument for the immortality of the soul appeared. However, it may be fair to say that this discrepancy is representative of Kant's obscure thoughts on the subject of immortality and how it relates to empirical existence. Yovel notes the problems with Kant's conception of immortality and offers a new way of interpreting it so that it is more coherent. He says that immortality could be thought of as referring to the species rather than to individuals, thereby making moral perfection the end of history and not a personal goal (Yovel, 296).

This conception of God is problematic, however. If it is accepted, it would seem that freedom and autonomy would be subject to some kind of control, control which would be external to both insofar as its effects would not be direct results of self-determined action. This brings us to the most crucial issue which to be raised regarding the theological dimension of Kant's concept of history: can it be reconciled with his conceptions of freedom and autonomy?²⁶

One way of getting around this particularly difficult question, at least as it applies to the "Conjectures", is to say that Kant actually presents a very different relationship between God and human reason than I am suggesting here. He does this by intimating that God is a part of reason, an expression of the noble character of rational thought rather than a supreme being. Although Kant equates the voice of God with instinct early in the essay, as he continues to interpret the Genesis story it becomes clear that the voice of God is transferred from nature to reason. This is exemplified in his discussion of the concern for the future which, he says, occurs as a moment in the development of rational consciousness (*PW*, 225). There he refers to Genesis 3:13-19, the passage in which God is depicted as condemning Adam and Eve to a life of toil and strife upon the earth after learning that they have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Kant's

²⁶I would also add that this problem need not be restricted to the theological dimension of Kant's account of history. Even if one wishes to look at it as a natural teleological account the problem remains, for autonomy and freedom are still threatened by deterministic force. Further, by dismissing the theological dimension in favor of a more 'scientific' teleological view, one loses Kant's explanation of how we can come to legitimately think of nature being arranged in this way in the first place, viz., through the postulate of a moral author of the world. Cf. discussion of this issue in section I of this chapter.

interpretation of the story things look quite different. Rather than hearing the voice of God as though it were external to them in some way, they become aware through their own rational consciousness that they will have to toil for all the days of their days, and that, unlike animals, they are forced by their own awareness to worry about their lives. Kant even goes so far as to say that the couple reproached themselves for that use of reason which led them to this consciousness of their own future, whereas the Bible speaks of God upbraiding them for their actions and pronouncing a sentence upon them (*PW*, 225).²⁷

If we follow this line of interpretation, it would appear that Kant uses the Biblical narrative in a more subtle and complex way than I have suggested here. However, there are problems with this reading. First of all, it is not at all clear that within the context of this essay Kant maintains such a view of God. Many of his comments about nature and providence indicate that he views them as actually influencing the function of the empirical world (e.g., his discussions of “the order of nature” or the path set out for us “by providence” (*PW*, 231-233)). It is certainly properly Kantian to say that these statements cannot be regarded as statements about a demonstrable world order, and that they must be regarded as reflections that extend out of a practical interest, grounded in empirical

²⁷Cf Genesis 3:24 and *PW*, 226. The Bible reads “He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life”. Kant’s text reads “restless reason, irresistibly driving him [man] on to develop his innate capacities, stands between him and that imagined seat of bliss, and does not allow him to return to the state of rude simplicity from which it had originally extracted him”. Kant connects his formulation to the Genesis passage very clearly by referring to it at the end of the sentence just quoted.

observation. But this does not mean that within the limits of these qualifications, Kant does not intend them to be taken seriously as principles for the interpretation of nature which serve the needs of practical reason. To reduce God to an all-too human expression of reason would mean that we could not believe in the universal order we are required to believe in to pursue the highest good.²⁸

There is another reason to question this line of interpretation; it is based on textual considerations. In the “Conjectures”, Kant seems to go out of his way to avoid bringing in the story of creation, but in a related passage found in his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* he clearly connects the creation of mankind by God with human history. In this passage, Kant says that “God created the human being free, but gave him also animal instincts; he gave the human being sense to be moderated and overcome through the education of his understanding” (LR, 28:1077). This remark in itself is not so important, especially since Kant goes on to say that humanity is responsible for its own education and cultivation, so that it would have itself to thank. Thus, even if Kant does hold that God created humanity, it does not follow that this creation need result in any kind of determinism. But there does appear to be a strong teleological element to Kant’s view, as is exhibited in the following statement: “God wills the *elimination of evil through the all-powerful development of the germ towards perfection*” (LR, 28:1078). Humankind is not ‘created’ to wallow in evil – or, in more neutral terms, ignore its moral

²⁸A more elaborate treatment of this point will be presented in the conclusion.

end – but rather is meant to develop its capacities and pursue that end.²⁹ What this statement indicates is that Kant views human freedom, conscious effort and self-development as standing within a larger framework in which the course of that development is set.

The tension created between human freedom and providential nature in this passage is obvious, and, I would argue, is manifested in the “Conjectures” as well, although perhaps in a subtler way. But even within the context of that essay, it does seem clear that human freedom is not simply operating independently of all natural influence, nor is it simply ‘working on nature’ to mold it to further its own purposes and advance its own development. Providence, through nature, shapes and influences that development in various ways. Does it follow, then, that Kant’s views on freedom and providence, and thus history, cannot be reconciled, that they must stand in contradiction to one another? In order to adequately address this question, we need to take a closer look at Kant’s account of the manner in which human history advances, particularly in its social and political dimensions. At the same time, we need to further examine the rationale behind Kant’s turn to history and religion, as this will advance our understanding of the nature of his conception of historical progress, its mechanisms, spheres of influence and scope.

²⁹Cf. the first proposition of the “Idea”. There, Kant argues that “*All the natural capacities of a creature are destined sooner or later to be developed completely and in conformity with their end*”. The connection between this ‘natural teleology’ and Kant’s view on the divinely guaranteed development of humanity is clear. It also serves to further demonstrate the connection between natural teleology (as it relates to humanity) and the concept the moral author of the world that I have suggested is so central to his account of history.

Chapter II: The Kingdom of God on Earth: God and the Moral-Political Development of Humanity

In the previous chapter we looked at Kant's "Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History" and developed a basic idea of how his views on history connect to his views on morality and God. The concept of God plays a crucial role in Kant's account of how we, as rational beings, are to develop our rational capacities through a progressive historical process. This served to further establish the suggested connections between morality, God and history outlined in the introduction. In Kant's view, without the concept of a moral author of the world, we are unable to see how the world in which we live can be made to correspond to all of our practical needs. Of course, one could argue that even without this concept we can will ourselves to be moral, and furthermore we could attempt to force ourselves onto nature and make it yield to our desires and conform to our needs; but in doing so, we would have no guarantee that our efforts would be successful. If freedom (our causal power as intelligible beings) and nature cannot be reconciled, if nature is indifferent to the requirements of the highest good, then the best we can achieve is a contingent, even lucky, reconciliation between it and ourselves. The drive to manipulate nature to this end may be one that springs from our own reason, and in that sense it may well be a priori; however, that still would not mean that nature must

necessarily conform to our needs, but only that we have an obligation to try and make it do so.¹

Given Kant's conception of the highest good as the a priori object of practical reason, the agreement between nature and humanity's moral end must be guaranteed or vouchsafed for us, or, more accurately, we must be able to think of it as being so.²

Reason is able to do this because speculative reason cannot declare such a union to be impossible and because it is a requirement of practical reason that we are able to think of this union as being possible. Therefore, we can and ought to think of the world as being purposively arranged to meet and respond to our moral needs (although we can never know this to be the case). But what does this mean, what factors and conditions are taken

¹The contrast here is between a necessary and contingent relationship between our needs and nature. One could certainly argue that human beings are able to organize nature to suit their purposes, learning its laws and manipulating it for their own ends, whatever these might be. At times Kant even speaks this way. But in reference to the highest good and the moral need for God, Kant is arguing for a different relationship between rational beings and the natural order, one in which the gap between them is closed and they are linked necessarily. Kant thinks that human beings on their own are simply not capable of achieving this unification. The only agent which is capable of performing this task is the one who we can think of as having laid the foundations of the world, viz., God.

²One might object to this by saying that Kant may be requiring us to commit ourselves to a belief which is wholly untrue, which is that there is in fact an objective natural order that corresponds to our needs. However, we must remember Kant's distinction between what we can believe on practical grounds and what we can know through looking at the world. We cannot know such an order to exist. Thus, from the perspective of knowledge, there can be no answer to this question 'is this true?', because it is not a speculative question. This problem is well captured, I think, in a vivid episode in the Bible. When Jesus is brought before Pilate he declares that he is in the world to testify "to the truth", and that everyone who belongs to the truth listens to his voice (John 18:37). The noble, educated Roman governor responds with the question "What is truth?". What this seems to indicate is that Jesus and Pilate are operating under two completely different conceptions of truth. Pilate presumably cannot understand what Jesus means because it is so alien to him; it is not the truth of fact, of objectivity, that he is accustomed to. The truth of which Jesus speaks is only found in a way of life based on a belief in God and morality (love). In this sense, the truth is dependent upon the belief, not the other way around. Now, while Kant's philosophical views on practical faith may not completely coincide with this religious story, it seems the basic distinction between the orders of truth are reflected in his distinction between speculative knowledge and practical faith.

into account in this 'purposive arrangement'?

In the introductory chapter we saw that there is a lack of clarity surrounding Kant's treatment of happiness as the completion of the highest good in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. But it also seemed that the concept of happiness proportionate to moral worthiness is connected with the concept of history, that is, the concept of the achievement of a moral order on a global or species-wide scale over an extended period of time. Indeed, reason's drive for totality, its need to take in all empirical conditions, would seem to lead it inevitably towards a concept of a world that would come to reflect and coincide with the moral attitudes and actions of human beings. Even if isolated individuals were able to live moral lives and achieve happiness, this would hardly seem adequate when placed alongside the all-encompassing concept of the highest good as a totality. Moreover, it is not at all obvious that anyone would be able to achieve these ends in isolation. Kant is clearly sensitive to the influence that environment has upon individuals as moral agents, and he is especially concerned about social environment.³ Although moral responsibility always lies within the individual alone, his or her social interaction with others can make it more or less difficult to be moral, depending upon the character of those with whom he or she interacts. If one lives, works and socializes with a group of morally depraved individuals who seek nothing but pleasure and self-interested gain, or even people who have some principles but throw them over in favor of what they consider

³For example, see the beginning of book III of his *Religion*, 85.

to be more immediate practical considerations (e.g., lying to spare another's feelings), then one will find it much harder to act morally without enduring very unpleasant consequences, such as being duped or taken advantage of by those who disregard moral constraints, or perhaps being socially ostracized by those who dislike moral purity. Even though Kant holds people to uncompromisingly high standards, he is extremely concerned with the damaging effect that such experience might have on individuals. That is why it is not enough that we postulate some kind of abstract agreement between morality and nature that would make individual happiness and moral perfection possible. We must also be able to conceive of a similar arrangement at work which promotes the development of moral relationships between persons. In this way, morality is not merely subjective but intersubjective, and thus it requires that not only nature, but social and political relationships between persons be included within its scope. It is here that Kant's concept of history comes into play. He provides an account of the slow but sure progression of not only morality but all aspects of human life (with particular emphasis on the political).

And yet this idea of a providential arrangement of conditions which promote a certain type of society seems to create difficulties. We ended the last chapter by posing the question of how it can possibly be consistent with the central concept of Kant's ethical theory, viz., freedom. When we examine his work on history more closely, we see that Kant is not simply describing some sort of agreement with a general nature, understood perhaps as purely external circumstances that stand opposed to embodied rational beings. In his history essays as well as in the *Critique of Judgment* we are presented with a picture

of providence (via nature) as directly guiding the development of human society. Kant even goes so far as to describe nature as using man's paradoxical desire to enter into society and yet be free of it (a natural characteristic on his account) in order to promote the establishment of civil society.⁴ But this would mean that providence manipulates not only external conditions (e.g., the natural environment) but the internal nature of human beings to achieve its purposes. Kant describes this manipulation as taking place in ways which individual agents are often unable to recognize, and which can be completely contrary to their own intentions. In doing so, it seems that Kant sees no discrepancy between this view of providential influence and his theory of moral development, and that in fact he draws the two together to form a comprehensive vision of humankind's development through history.

The main reason behind this seemingly problematic connection, one could argue, is that on Kant's account moral development is something left strictly to individual agents; only they have the ability to will in accordance with or out of respect for the moral law, or to do the opposite. However, the 'external' development of human beings is another matter. Providence, via nature, can and does play a large role here. The political history of mankind is, on Kant's account, the product of a dialectic progression driven by the interaction of natural mechanisms (i.e., unsocial sociability) created by providence with human reason. This means that providence has set the world up (including human beings

⁴See the fourth proposition of Kant's "Idea for a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose" (*PIW*, 44-45). This natural tendency, as Kant describes it, will receive further discussion later in this chapter.

as phenomenal beings) in such a way that we cannot help but develop in a certain way, choosing forms of government and social arrangement according to the circumstances we face. However, alongside with this view, Kant seems to presupposes that a clear line can be drawn between political and ethical development, as well as between providential influence through nature and human self-determination through autonomy.

What we will question in this chapter is whether any such lines can be drawn. We need to look closely at Kant's account of the operation of providence in human history, and in particular the idea that such an influence can be strictly limited to the 'external' or the political, leaving the pure will to its own guidance. We also need to examine further the reason Kant goes beyond the scope of individual effort and seeks to link human moral development to a teleological account of progress in the sphere of politics. In order to do this, we need to consider the importance of social considerations to his ideas about moral development. This is the task that will occupy our attention in the next section.

I. The Importance of Social Relationships to Kant's Understanding of Moral Progress

Freedom can be seen as the starting point of history in Kant's account. Similar to his definition of Enlightenment as "*man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity*" (*PW*, 54), Kant locates the origin of human history as the moment at which human beings begin to direct their own existence, each realizing that his own reason is the guide he must follow, not any external authority, however it may be conceived. But in Kant's account of

the origins of history, human beings are not ‘fully enlightened’ upon the first use of their freedom, and what could be termed ‘moral consciousness’ -- that of the dignity of rational beings over purely natural creatures -- does not arise right away (*PW*, 225). In this respect there is a kind of development involved in rational consciousness. At the same time, Kant describes the first ‘steps’ reason takes as a fall, for when confronted with the force of instinctual needs and drives it falters.⁵

This account of humankind’s historical beginnings bears a close relationship to his discussion of radical evil in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Kant locates the origins of evil squarely in the rational will. According to Kant, a person is evil when he “is conscious of the moral law but has nevertheless adopted into his maxim [subjective rule for action] the (occasional) deviation therefrom” (*R*, 27). This means that the structure of a morally sound maxim is reversed. Acting out of a reverence for the moral law is, or ought to be, the supreme condition for any moral agent; but when one wills to do evil, one puts another condition, in the form of an “incentive” or desired objective, in place of the moral law (*R*, 31-32). This explanation of evil makes it sound as though it is something which applies purely to individual actions, or at most individual persons. But Kant’s account of evil as “radical” goes much further than this. He says that the human being, as a rational yet embodied being, possesses a “propensity to do evil”, one which is “*inextirpable*” but which may be “*overcome*” (*R*, 32). We tend to do evil because we find

⁵See Chapter I for a more detailed treatment of this notion of the ‘fall’.

it so difficult to follow the principles that we lay down for ourselves as rational beings, instead putting before these other concerns such as the satisfaction of desires. On Kant's view, this is a propensity common to all human beings by virtue of our constitution, and it is only in this way that we can be described as naturally evil (*R*, 27). To say that nature is otherwise responsible for evil is to break the connection between evil and our capacity to control our actions as moral beings. If indeed we are "by nature" evil, if we cannot help but transgress any moral standard we set for ourselves because some force within us irresistibly compels us to transgress, then it makes absolutely no sense to ascribe moral responsibility to human beings at all. That is why Kant provides such a thorough defence for the position that the source of both good and evil lie in the will. It is with this view in mind that Kant interprets the key notions presented through the Garden of Eden story (*R*, 36-37). Innocence is humanity's original state, but this only means that each of us does not begin from evil but rather from a state in which she is capable of willing a good or evil maxim. No antecedent condition (i.e., as part of a temporal series) can determine the will of an individual.⁶ However, although no direct determination is possible and the will must be regarded as being fundamentally autonomous, the dual nature of the human being as a

⁶The problems associated with the doctrine of radical evil are well documented. Some of the more noted problems are the difficulty of reconciling Kant's account the will with that of time, change in moral character and the extirpation of past evils. See Fackenheim's essay "Kant and Radical Evil" in *The God Within: Kant, Schelling and Historicity* for a critical treatment of radical evil. Another illuminating essay dealing with this issue, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's *Religion*" by John R. Silber, appears in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Harper Torchbooks. New York: 1934. Although the topic of radical evil is a fascinating one, to treat it in a more thorough fashion than we have here would take us too far off course.

sensuous yet intelligible being does play a role in the propensity of individual agents to do evil. As dual natured beings whose acts of will are intimately related to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we cannot help but notice the effect that living in the world has upon us. Taken in the broadest sense, the sum total of these effects lie on the nature side of the nature/reason division. It is in dealing with our own natural desires, needs and inclinations, as well as those of others, that the problem of being good, and of bringing good into being in the world, is at its sharpest.

In recognizing the difficulty of the task of becoming moral, Kant's sensitivity to context and situation is demonstrated, for he holds no illusions about how hard it is for human beings to live up to the rigorous standard presented by his moral theory. It is this same sensitivity which leads him towards a philosophy of history. The problem of the fall, of evil and the development of moral capacity cannot be solved simplistically; none of these can be adequately addressed by a mere fine-tuning of one's maxims so that they are in accord with the categorical imperative, nor even by the moral achievement of isolated individuals. The problem of evil is as much an individual problem as a collective one, not merely subjective but also social.⁷ In the *Religion*, Kant asks the question of how mankind

⁷Sharon Anderson Gold provides a nice summation of the importance of this theme to Kant's account of moral development in her essay, "God and Community: An Inquiry into the Religious Implications of the Highest Good" (*Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*. Ed. Rossi and Wreen. Indiana University Press. Indianapolis: 1991). She argues that in Kant's view, "[t]he propensity to evil...is not something that is simply "within me" or "within you" but something that operates *between us*." She goes on to say that for Kant "our hope to effect a revolution "within" rests upon the transformation of the social conditions of our existence" (124-125). She bases her commentary in large part on the ethical commonwealth passage from the *Religion*, although she interprets the role and status of God in Kant's practical philosophy in a very different way than I do. She describes God as "an activity" undertaken by a community of believers living together in an ethical state (129). Further discussion of the

is to raise itself out of evil (*R*, 87). The answer is not simply that each has to pull himself up by his own bootstraps (although the capacity to do this is a priori condition of Kant's account). As long as individuals live together in a non-moral state (i.e., not bound together by moral laws but merely by political ones), they will constantly tempt one another to transgress, exciting each other's vanity, greed and jealousy. Therefore, according to Kant, the end of humankind's moral development must be met in a state, an "ethical commonwealth", "designed as a protection against this evil and a furtherance of goodness in man" (*R*, 85-86). This society of ethical persons would "ever extend itself, aiming solely at the maintenance of morality" and thus aid individuals in maintaining the steadiness of their moral dispositions by reducing the temptations which are generated by living in community with other human beings.

What the ethical commonwealth passage provides is a clear indication that the problem of personal moral perfection and the achievement of the highest good cannot be viewed independently of social considerations. Thus, it is not only our natural surroundings that we need to worry about as persons concerned with the problem of human moral development, it is other people as well. However, placing this passage within the context of Kant discussion of history, it raises a number of difficult questions. The political overtones in Kant's account of the ethical state which people ought to strive towards are striking. But how are we to conceive its relationship to politics in general, or,

view will follow in the conclusion to this study.

more specifically, Kant's understanding of human political development? Does the process which guides political development also influence moral development? Is it possible that it could not? And yet Kant often draws a very sharp distinction between ethics and politics in his work, and even within this passage itself.⁸ The tension between the apparent political dimension in Kant's account of the ethical end of mankind and his separation of the political and the moral in his history essays will be of great importance in the next stage in our examination of his conception of history.

II. The Division Between Morality and Politics in Kant's Concept of History

It is clear that Kant's conception of the ultimate end of humanity is a moral one, whether it be described as the development of humankind's moral capacities or as the achievement of happiness in proportion to moral worthiness. Although these two goals are quite different on the surface, they share a common foundation: practical reason's drive towards a moral totality, manifested through its desire to make the world in which we live conform to the dictates and spirit of morality. We have already seen how this drive is important in the move Kant makes from considering these issues from the perspective of individual agents to taking account of them on a more social, intersubjective level. It is when addressing the issue of how morality is to be realized in the world on this level that Kant speaks of human beings as a 'species' and formulates a clear picture of the stages and mechanisms of historical development, as reflected largely

⁸Cf., for example, Kant's comment that an "ethical commonwealth" in the form of a church "really has, as regards its basic principles, nothing like a political constitution" (*Religion*, 93). This comment is indicative of Kant's reluctance to bring politics and morality into contact with one another.

through political institutions.

The precise nature of the relationship between morality and politics is not always clear in Kant's history essays, however. In "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" and "Perpetual Peace", there is a strong indication that the end of history Kant has in mind is purely a political one – the unity of civilized nations in a law governed international order.⁹ Further, Kant often seems to divide the political and the moral, the former having to do with the public and external and the latter with the internal and private¹⁰. Kant frequently refers to the political as dealing with the laws by which human beings mutually regulate their outward behavior.¹¹ Morality is a matter of the

⁹See, for example, proposition seven of the "Idea" and Kant's discussion of the federation of free states (a cosmopolitan world order) in "Perpetual Peace" (*PW*, 102-105). At this time I should say that we shall not devote any discussion to the actual stages of this development, but instead examine its conceptual foundations in Kant's thought.

¹⁰The division between ethics and politics has serious implications for understanding Kant's particular brand of liberalism. Although this topic is only indirectly related to our present purposes, it is worth keeping in mind as we discuss this area of Kant's thought. That Kant is a giant in the history of liberal thought is without question. However, assessing the content of his legacy is a controversial enterprise. On my interpretation, as this chapter will reveal, the sharp separation between ethics and politics that Kant tries to maintain collapses under the weight of the teleological structure that rules over both moral and political development. This casts Kant in the light of a 'metaphysical' liberal, one who grounds his account of liberal politics in a metaphysical account of human nature and/or a philosophy of history. Some argue that this in fact represents an anti-liberal strain in Kant's thought, and in liberalism in general insofar as it subordinates the political, the primary purpose of which is merely to regulate external behavior, to the moral which deals with hearts and minds, and thus the realm of the private. Ajzenstat makes this point in his "Liberalism between Nature and Culture", as does Bernard Yack in his essay "The Problem With Kantian Liberalism" (*Kant and Political Philosophy*. Ed. Beiner and Booth. Yale University Press. New Haven and London: 1993).

¹¹This can be seen, for example, in Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*. There he makes a distinction between legality and morality in human actions, the first having to do with actions which conform to the requirements of a law but which can be done without any internal commitment to the law, i.e., not for the sake of duty (*MM*, 6:219). He subsequently goes on to define public right as having to do with the regulation of the external interaction between persons, but as not having to do with the regulation of their internal motivations. Kant even goes so far as to say that so long as a person's behaviour is lawful, he is

internal nature of persons, having to do with the purity of their thoughts and dispositions. One may act prudentially out of self-interest and achieve a result which has the outward appearance of being moral, and yet since the maxim upon which the action was done was not born out of a moral disposition, it does nothing more than correspond to the moral law in a superficial sense, and in itself has no intrinsic worth. This division between the intrinsic and the internal over against external is essential to Kant's understanding of the difference between what is morally and politically good; it is the reason why he is able to say that "the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils (so long as they possess understanding)" (*PW*, 112). At the basis of this distinction there lies a metaphysical consideration, which is that the political and moral aspects of human life have to do with two distinct causal orders, that of the sensible world and that of the intelligible. The importance of this distinction is illustrated in particularly striking fashion in the "Idea". There, Kant writes that the manifestation of acts of free will in the world "are determined in accordance with natural laws" (*PW*, 41). This means that history, as a discipline whose material is the record of human affairs that occur in the world, must deal with the explanation of these affairs in terms of natural laws. This argument extends to politics as well, and thus the development of humanity's political history as a phenomenon

free to desire to impinge upon the freedom of others (*MM*, 6:231). One need only look at the intelligent devils passage in *Perpetual Peace* to see that this same view of law applies to much of his discussion of politics.

in the world must be explained (*if* it is to be explained at all¹²) according to some kind of natural law or laws. This would mean that politics falls squarely under the empirical or sensible, while morality falls under the intelligible.

However, there are also indications in Kant's work on history that this line between the internal and the external is not a sharp one and that there is overlap between the two. This is shown through two different lines of argument, one that focuses on the question of priority in value, the other priority in time. The first contends that politics derives its value from its relationship to morality. This view of the moral/political relationship is demonstrated in a number of different passages. In the "Idea" for example, Kant remarks that all good enterprises that are not grafted on to a morally good attitude of mind are nothing but illusion and outward glittering misery" (*PW*, 49). This comment appears in the context of an argument in which Kant states that when humanity is at the half way point of its development it exhibits only the first beginnings of true morality in its civil and political arrangements. Thus it appears that on his view the merely political in itself holds little or no value in itself (except perhaps as a precursor to a moral state of affairs). The nation of intelligent devils, then, while capable of creating a well-run state with effective coercive laws regulating the external behavior of the citizens, is a far cry from what Kant

¹²Kant is careful when he speaks about the status of his idea of history. It is not something we can know, for it involves a teleological account that reason can only posit in relationship to what it observes empirically. In that respect, it is only an idea, a heuristic device we are entitled to use only to interpret empirical phenomena as it relates to our rational activity. He also argues that this idea is practically "useful", one which aids us in our efforts to fulfil our duties as moral beings (see the ninth proposition in the "Idea").

would consider the moral end of humanity and thus the perfect form of human community. Elsewhere in “Perpetual Peace”, Kant also argues for the connection of morality and politics in the concept of practical reason (*PW*, 116, 123). Kant challenges those who would seek to separate morality and politics, arguing that all politics which is in true accord with the dictates of practical reason will “pay tribute to morality” (*PW*, 125).

In contrast to the first, Kant’s second line of argument suggests a different kind of relationship between morality and politics. In order of value, there is no doubt that morality comes first, and that the value of politics must therefore be understood in light of that of morality.¹³ However, in the order of temporal development, it is very clear that on a species-wide level political development precedes that of morality. This position is most strongly demonstrated in “Perpetual Peace” when Kant says that we cannot expect the “moral attitudes” of people “to produce a good political constitution; on the contrary, it is only through the latter that the people can be expected to attain a good level of *moral culture* [italics mine]” (*PW*, 113). The entire structure of Kant’s concept of political development supports this view of its relation to moral culture.¹⁴ What motivates people to begin their journey out of a state of nature and to seek more stable and peaceful forms

¹³It is worth noting here the similarity of the relationships between morality and politics and virtue and happiness in Kant’s thought. Kant does not deny the importance or value of the more ‘worldly’ or pragmatic aspects of human existence, but he insists on their subordination to morality and freedom. It is in and through the latter that their true value and worth are to be realized on his account .

¹⁴Cf. Ajzenstat’s essay “Liberalism between Nature and Culture: Kant’s Exegesis of Genesis 2-6”. He presents a very similar argument regarding the normative priority of morality over politics in Kant’s account and the place of politics ahead of morality in “the order of natural development” (Parker, 141).

of political association is not any love or respect for their fellow human beings; it is rather selfishness, fear, the desire for recognition – the drive to be both free of society and to enter into. Moral culture, as Kant calls it, is only a very late development; prior to it, natural desires, set and manipulated according to a designed plan of providential nature (as we shall soon see) dominate the history of human development.

We discussed some of the more obvious problems with this view of moral development in section I of the last chapter, and further discussion will follow in the next section and the conclusion. However at the moment it is important to notice how this developmental relationship of politics and morality connects with one of Kant's more vivid presentations of humanity's moral end to be realized in the world, viz., the ethical commonwealth. As was mentioned above, there seems to be a significant political component to Kant's conception of an ethical state as it is presented in his *Religion*. Although the "ethical commonwealth" is one which Kant thinks is very different from a purely political state, it is nonetheless a political arrangement of sorts. This is intimated by Kant's claim that the ethical commonwealth, like a purely political commonwealth, would also have a public constitution and laws, although these would obviously be of a wholly different character than those found in the political commonwealth (*R*, 87-88). In the political commonwealth, laws would be geared towards the regulation of external behavior and thus would be supported by coercive governmental power. In the ethical commonwealth, laws of virtue, mutually agreed upon by the citizens in an absolutely free manner, would be the foundation for social order. And yet there is also a pragmatic

dimension to Kant's description of this commonwealth. As we have seen, Kant stresses that for human beings evil is very much a problem of social interaction, of persons drawing out the worst in one another and thereby corrupting one another from a moral point of view. While politico-civil laws and institutions do much to curb and check the destructive tendencies of human kind, they do not extend, on Kant's account, to the moral core of persons - the free, autonomous will. Because immorality can and will persist under such conditions, Kant thinks that human beings must strive to achieve an even higher form of unity, one of moral beings living together under moral laws.¹⁵ He describes this as a duty "the human race has towards itself", and then adds that it should be understood as "the promotion of the highest good as a social good" (*R*, 89). In introducing the notion of the highest good here, Kant paves the way for a connection between the ethical commonwealth and his concept of God.

What this connection shows us is that on Kant's view although human beings have a duty to strive to realize such a commonwealth, they cannot do it alone; they must be able to believe that "Providence" will supplement their own efforts (*R*, 89-90). In this respect, the continuity between the argument forwarded in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the discussion of the ethical commonwealth in the *Religion* is very obvious. At the same time, however, there is also an evident connection between this view of development of

¹⁵Once again, the theme of moral despair and edification appears here. Despite all of the emphasis Kant places on individual moral responsibility and freedom, he is still keenly aware of and concerned with the complexity of moral experience, and, in particular, with the influence of environment upon moral agents.

the ethical commonwealth and Kant's teleological account of the progression of history. In both cases, conscious human effort and intentions are simply not enough to realize the end product. Of course, the similarity between these two accounts is not an identity, for the moral person who desires to live in an ethical commonwealth is not the same as someone living in a political state of nature. But what is indicated by the common appeal to external help (i.e., external to the autonomous will of a moral agent) is that Kant's view of moral development and moral community in the *Religion* bears a close relationship to his view of historical development. This connection only becomes more dramatic when we consider the integral relationship between nature and providence .

And yet if we accept that one of the central tenets of Kant's account of historical development is the dependency of human beings on a process which controls them as natural beings, that pushes them in a certain direction, often contrary to their own intentions, there are problematic implications that need to be considered. What this view of history seems to entail is that the human capacity to be moral is cultivated, and not by human beings alone, but through the aid of a providentially directed natural plan. But then how is this notion of cultivation to be reconciled with the idea of morality as that which comes about through the autonomous choices and actions of individuals? In order to address this question, we need to turn our attention to more specific elements of the account Kant provides of this cultivation process.¹⁶

¹⁶It is worth noting at this point that there are other interpretive avenues open that circumvent this question. Again, Ajzenstat's interpretation of Kant would completely bypass this problem; in fact, it would involve denying the problem exists at all. If morality is in fact a part of nature, then its

III. Providence and Its Influence in History

We have already touched on the question of how providence functions within Kant's concept of history. Simply put, providence is a concept which allows persons to form a progressive, teleological account of the moral development of human kind as it unfolds in a history that takes place in the empirical world. In "Perpetual Peace", Kant defines providence as the "underlying wisdom of a higher cause, showing the way towards the objective goal of the human race and predetermining the world's evolution" (*PW*, 108). This idea of providence 'predetermining' the evolution of the world is what will be of particular concern to us in this section. According to Kant, providence uses natural mechanisms (unsocial sociability, selfish inclinations, geography, climate) in order to ensure that humanity develops as it should. Often nature and providence appear to be equivalent and interchangeable in his view (e.g., in the ninth proposition of the "Idea"). Why Kant oscillates between the two terms is not entirely clear. One explanation, offered in *Perpetual Peace*, is that he thought that to use the language of 'nature' was more appropriate when trying to establish a rational, yet empirically based account of the mechanical processes behind historical development (*PW*, 109). We might also wonder if Kant was not trying to avoid the charge of simply offering a theodicy instead of a philosophical conception of history, something he clearly would be eager to avoid in light

development and cultivation through some kind of evolutionary process would in no way be problematic. Aizenstat, however, does express misgivings about the moral and political implications of this doctrine.

of his critique of theodicy.¹⁷ But whatever the case may be, it is clear that Kant's conception of a purposive natural order geared towards the realization of human destiny is dependent upon his conception of God as moral author of the world.¹⁸

It is safe to say, then, that providence and nature are integrally connected within the context of Kant's discussion of history. It is also important to recognize that providence provides an important link between the political and moral within this view of history. In the *Religion*, Kant stresses that the ethical commonwealth – also known as the kingdom of God on earth – cannot be founded by human effort alone, and people must believe in the possibility that God or “Providence” will aid them in their efforts (*R*, 92).¹⁹ This is not to say, however, that Kant thinks human beings should simply lie back and await divine assistance; on the contrary, he resists this notion strongly, arguing that moral actions only

¹⁷See Kant's essay, “On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical trials in Theodicy” (*Religion and Rational Theology: Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Cambridge: 1996). Despland offers some interesting comments on this subject. He holds that one of the chief distinctions between traditional theodicy and Kantian philosophy of history is that in the former, human beings are subject to an inevitable process and thus are cast as “slavish” subjects of an “imperious God”, while in Kant's view, history is a process which can be both realized and interrupted by free, human effort (Despland, 81). Despland is certainly correct in emphasizing that Kant does assign human freedom an essential role in the process of history, however whether Kant's conception of God has deterministic elements is not so clear.

¹⁸Discussion of this issue in the previous chapter should be sufficient to establish the viability of this connection between providence and nature.

¹⁹However, Kant immediately qualifies this statement by saying that “man must proceed as though everything depended upon him” and that “only on this condition dare he hope that higher wisdom will grant the completion of his well-intentioned endeavors” (*R*, 92). Depending upon the interpretive path one follows here, the tension between freedom and determinism in Kant's account is either relaxed or heightened. I am obviously pursuing the latter option here. Despland, for example, pursues the former, insofar as he emphasizes the importance of freedom in Kant's account, although he also upholds the legitimacy of Kant's conception of God and history in his philosophical system. .

have worth if they flow from our individual dispositions, and further that we must endeavor to be moral and cannot be made so by an external influence. He also holds that we cannot know the course of providence for certain, for it is not a matter upon which our speculative powers can pronounce judgment. We are led to posit its existence out of a practical need, as something which supplements our own actions. It is further worth noting that this is true for politics as well. Even though Kant's account of political development is dominated by his views on nature, he does occasionally argue that human beings cannot and should not leave the course of the world's political improvement to nature, and that we have a duty to strive to realize the goal of perpetual peace (*PW*, 109).

And yet it is precisely this intermingling of self-directed human activity and the providential assistance of nature that makes Kant's account so problematic. For at what point do the purely autonomous efforts of rational agents take over the course of history (if ever), and where does the work of nature leave off? Do both work together through the empirically evident course of history? According to Kant, nature works through manipulation, setting up the conditions of the natural world in such a way that human beings are constrained to follow a certain developmental path. As phenomenal beings, our nature is also included within the scope of this arrangement. In the "Idea", for example, Kant describes nature influencing the 'internal' life of human beings, utilizing what he describes as a natural human tendency to be both social and unsocial in order to forward

the overall cause of human development.²⁰ In “Perpetual Peace”, it is “selfish inclinations” and “hostile attitudes” which provide the “natural mechanisms” by which human political development can be manipulated in order to direct human political development (*PW*, 112-113). In this passage, however, Kant indicates that human beings are responsible for organizing a good state, and that it is well within our capacity to do so. This would seem to clearly undercut the deterministic element in Kant’s account. However, when he speaks of humankind’s “*moral purpose*”, he appeals strongly to determinism, asking what part nature plays in making sure that what we ought to become we do become (viz., moral beings living according to the laws of freedom) (*PW*, 112). He further explains this idea by saying that this does not mean nature imposes a duty upon us to pursue a moral existence, but rather “nature does it herself, whether we are willing or not”. Now, clearly this does not mean that either nature or providence can actually make us moral, for this would run completely contrary to Kant’s view of the free nature of moral choice. What it does indicate is that through the use of natural mechanisms that lead humankind to engage in hostile actions, we are pushed by providential nature in a definite direction, politically speaking, and that this process of political development underlies the possibility of moral relationships eventually arising in a societal context.

But there are still problems presented by this view of moral cultivation. It seems odd to say, for example, that the human drive to either enter into social interaction or be free

²⁰See the fourth proposition in the “Idea”.

of it is not intimately connected with human rationality. Yet on Kant's account, it would seem to fall squarely under the influence of nature. To complicate matters further, one of Kant's own descriptions of this dual tendency belies this reason/nature separation, for he says that man "encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas" (*PW*, 44). Here nature is shown as impinging upon the realm of rational thought and self-directed activity. And yet if nature manipulates human behavior at this level, it is directly affecting what is supposed to be beyond all influence of nature – viz., the rational will.²¹ One might argue that Kant is simply expressing the idea that human beings must develop by struggling with certain conditions, one of these being their own natural impulses which tend to lead us in a certain direction. But this seems to be an inaccurate interpretation of what Kant is saying. Providence, through nature, is portrayed as ensuring a certain outcome, even if it comes in spite of all human efforts to realize a contrary state of affairs (i.e., a state of perpetual war and violence, of civil inequality and strife and of hostility between nations). Kant is not

²¹One might take issue with my formulation of this problem. It could be said that I am not acknowledging an equivocation in the Kantian meaning of the term nature. Nature, on the one hand, is that which governs the appearance of all phenomena and thus the empirical world (e.g., *PW*, 41). But Kant often uses the term nature in reference to reason as way of describing the formal structures, principles or ideas of reason which are natural to it (e.g., the transcendental ideas of pure reason (*CPR*, B 380) or the natural dialectic of reason (*CPrR*, 108)). This is of course true, however the problem still remains. Reason, even though it has its own nature, is the realm of spontaneous, free activity, that which flows from itself and not from another source. Let us restrict this point to the area of morality. Although in order to be truly autonomous, I must will to act in accordance with the categorical imperative, this is nonetheless an act which flows from my own freedom; it is not imposed upon me from without but rather is a product of my self-determination. However, as an empirical being subject to natural laws, I am determined by something else – nature – over which I have no direct control. It is my contention that Kant's concept of unsocial sociability is controlled by nature in this sense, for it is in fact a mechanism of empirical nature.

arguing that human beings learn from their mistakes and on the basis of that learning develop new theories about government and new modes of political practice. On the contrary, this kind of enlightened approach to the progress of politics is one Kant seems to deny, arguing that it only surfaces very late in human history, and then as a product of amoral political conditions.²² For a much longer period, providential nature seems to be in the driver's seat, pushing us along a certain path, and it is not until it has brought humanity to a fairly sophisticated level of civilization that what Kant calls the process of enlightenment (viz., the release of human beings from their self-incurred immaturity) can truly begin.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, he provides a striking account of how this process of cultivation works, while at the same time providing an indication of how he thinks it is to be reconciled with human freedom. He says that "the ultimate purpose of nature" is to look to humankind's "culture" (*CJ*, 430). Nature prepares us to pursue our final end (viz., becoming moral and living together in a moral community), a requirement of which is that we be able to pursue purposes which we ourselves set (*CJ*, 431). Nature accomplishes this by manipulating human development in certain ways. Kant says that nature looks to the cultivation of both skill and discipline. The first has to do with the development of various dimensions of social existence, including the arts and sciences, as well as class and political systems. As is the case in the history essays, we see Kant describe the course and

²²See propositions seven and eight in the "Idea".

methods of human development as being “unintentional” from the perspective of individual agents, but as a “deeply hidden and perhaps intentional endeavor of the supreme wisdom” (*CJ*, 433). Discipline, on the other hand, has to do with the cultivation of the internal side of persons through “the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires” (*CJ*, 432). Kant’s explanation of discipline is especially interesting, for he does not throw over the notion that we as individual persons are responsible for being under the control of our own desires.²³ Instead, he suggests a curious form of unity between the efforts of nature to prepare us for our moral destiny and our own responsibility for our moral predicament. Although it is offered as a bridge between natural teleology and freedom, it is precisely this connection which generates unavoidable tension in Kant’s account of historical development. It seems as though it is only through nature that we can be sufficiently liberated from the domination of the senses that we can be able to act morally. And yet what becomes of the responsibility individuals incur from the first misuse of reason and freedom? Could the first pair of human beings in the Genesis story that Kant makes so much of really be held responsible for their own actions? If human beings exist at a time when the work of providence in the world is not yet done, how can they be held equally responsible as moral agents to those live in a more developed age?²⁴ In light of these difficult questions, it would appear that Kant’s philosophy of history creates more

²³Cf. Fackenheim’s treatment of this issue in sections VI and VII of “Kant’s Concept of History”.

²⁴See Fackenheim’s essay. He argues that these are the kinds of problems which Kant’s concept of history is unable to solve, and which therefore indicate its failure.

problems than it solves.

These problems are very obvious and indicate the weakest points in Kant's concept of history. However, beneath them there is a much larger issue here which applies to Kant's practical philosophy as a whole, and that is whether or not any notions of providence or historical teleology can be consistent with Kantian conceptions of freedom, autonomy and responsibility. This question touches directly on the antinomy of practical reason and the postulate of the existence of God discussed in the first chapter. These are crucial components of Kant's moral philosophy. Therefore, the resolution of the concerns we have raised regarding the role of providence in human development will have an impact on our understanding of the structure and internal consistency of the entirety of Kant's practical thought. Before drawing any conclusions on this score, we need to consider the possibility of presenting a defence of Kant's understanding of history and providence. In order to do this, we shall look at arguments presented by Yovel and Despland for the place of a teleological account of history (with or without God) in the system of critical philosophy. We shall also return to a consideration of Kant's concept of rational faith and the needs and limits of practical reason to see whether these can be used to save providence and history, or if perhaps they do the opposite and show that Kant asks us to commit ourselves to an internally inconsistent belief system. This will provide the 'acid test', so to speak, and help us to determine whether or not Kant's concepts of God, providence and the teleological progression of history can legitimately find places in his practical philosophy.

Conclusion. Assessment of Kant's Concepts of Providence and History from the Perspective of Practical Reason

“The concept of freedom”, Kant writes in the preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, “is the keystone of the whole architecture of the system of pure reason and even speculative reason” (*CPrR*, 3). The freedom of the mind to determine objects, and thus to be free of determination by them, bears a resemblance to the freedom which allows and demands the will to determine itself. Speculative and practical reason find their common bond in freedom, as it is the unifying ground for these two areas of Kant’s critical project, which is to establish through critique the limits and tasks of reason. Given the absolute importance of freedom, it is clear that any question of its violation within the framework of Kantian thought must be closely examined. As we have seen, questions about the occurrence of such a violation can be raised with respect to Kant’s concept of history. There the tension between freedom and some form of determinism is both prominent and extreme. As we have discussed in the previous chapters, much critical attention has been devoted to this problem by critics and defenders of Kant, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that his concept of history could be considered a failure.¹ Now, one might argue that even if this is the case, it is of no serious consequence, for the concept of

¹This is the conclusion drawn by Fackenheim, for example..

history is at most a peripheral subject in the Kantian system, one whose inadequacies or even contradictions are too far away from the core of the system to have any detrimental impact on the whole. Thus, even if Kant seems to have overstepped himself and violated the most central concept in his philosophical system – freedom – in coming up with this conception of history, it is of little matter, a blip on the screen, as it were, but not a philosophical disaster.

Dismissing the concept of history is not so easy, however. As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout the preceding chapters, Kant's concept of history grows out of a key theme in his moral philosophy. This theme is moral totality, specifically understood as the drive to generate a moral world, one which is responsive to and in conformity with morality. Practical reason seeks a unity between the intelligible and the sensible, or freedom and nature; it recognizes not only the need for it to determine itself according to the fundamental law of freedom, viz., the moral law, but it also acknowledges the pull that needs and desires exert upon the human being. Thus it seeks a reconciliation between the two sides of human nature, one which, as we saw in the introductory chapter, culminates in the achievement of happiness in proportion to moral worth. The concept of history, I have argued, along with others,² represents a further development of this theme, one which moves beyond a consideration of the single individual and into the more complex social and political dimensions of moral experience. The rational drive for totality that

²See, for example, Yovel's discussion of the highest good as a historical goal (Yovel, 72) .

Kant describes ineluctably raises the issue of how human beings are to develop in relationship to the world around them, and thus to each other within social and political environments; at the same time, it also leads to the question of how this development relates to the phenomenon of human history.

Characterized in this way, there is no contradiction between Kant's concepts of freedom and history. It would seem properly Kantian to say, based on the principles of his moral philosophy, that whatever happens in human history is the responsibility of human beings, or that the world we live in – the social, political, moral world – is as we make it. And indeed Kant does say this, but not only this, as we have seen. He also holds that human effort on its own (meaning conscious intentions and self-directed actions) is not enough to carry out the magnitude of the task in question. For insofar as we are intelligent beings who must execute their plans of action in a world controlled by natural processes, and further, insofar as we ourselves are natural beings subject to these processes, we find it incredibly difficult (though not impossible) to do what we are supposed to do, viz., make ourselves moral. Given the complexities and problems involved in this task, Kant thinks we need assistance, or at least that we need to believe that we will be assisted. This aid is provided by that which can guarantee the possibility of a reconciliation between freedom and nature. Kant calls this agent God, or, more specific to the case of history, providence.

Up to this point in our analysis, we have looked at the apparent incompatibility of Kant's account of a providentially guided historical progression and his conception of

freedom and responsibility. The contradiction here, if there in fact is one, would seem to be both very serious and quite obvious. In light of this we must ask whether Kant does in fact make such an error by bringing these two differing views of human development together.

There is certainly reason to think that Kant does not make this mistake and that his concept of history is integrated into critical philosophy. Yovel and Despland both hold that this is accomplished through the *Critique of Judgment*.³ Two basic arguments support this position. The first is that history, conceived of as a process furthered by purposive natural arrangements, tells only part of the story, and not even the main part at that.⁴ Here we must remember that Kant draws a formal distinction in the third critique between the ultimate purpose of nature (i.e., human cultivation) and the final purpose of creation (humankind's self-realized moral end).⁵ The final end of creation is humankind's moral development, a development which by definition can only occur through the autonomous activity of individuals; it cannot be imposed upon them from without, not

³See Yovel, 141 and 161-168 and Despland, 72-77.

⁴Cf. Fackenheim, 48. He provides a similar treatment of this aspect of Kant's view of history, but he is much more skeptical about its success. And while neither Yovel or Despland argue that Kant's concept of history is wholly successful, both seem to accept the division between what is controlled by nature and what is determined by freedom, combined with the reflective status of the idea of history, as being successful. Where they both agree with Fackenheim is in recognizing that the noumenal and phenomenal, or the moral and the natural, are still not reconciled through this concept of history (see Yovel, 277-279 and Despland, 278-280). The difference between these two authors and Fackenheim at this point lies in the more extreme conclusions of the latter, which is that Kant's concept of history fails completely because of this problem.

⁵See *CJ* sections 83 and 84.

even by a divine power. As we have seen, however, Kant recognizes that much of this development is dependent upon social considerations, that people are not good in a vacuum or in isolation from others; they live in the world, and even though they are responsible for themselves, the world affects the course of each individual's moral development. This leads Kant to describe a historical process by which the world, operating under purposively orchestrated natural laws, complements and aids humanity's efforts towards reaching its end. This form of aid, Yovel and Despland claim, does not undermine human freedom or autonomy, for it deals only with human beings as natural beings, and then only up to a certain point in their development. Nature aids people in overcoming the dominance of instinct and in the cultivation of abilities by means of which the environment (both ecological and socio-political) can be manipulated and controlled; but in doing so it does not cross the line and infringe upon the rational autonomy of human agents. If it did, rational autonomy would be utterly destroyed. However, because nature only sets the stage for rational development, ensuring its possibility by preparing human beings for the activity of self-liberation, it does not infringe upon the sphere of autonomy in any way.⁶

The second reason to support the conclusion that the concept of history has a legitimate place in the Kantian system has to do with its status as a concept. Yovel and Despland both point out, quite correctly, that the concept of historical progression is one

⁶See chapter III for a more detailed discussion of the idea of "cultivation" and its place in the historical process.

that has the status of being reflective rather than determinative.⁷ It involves no claim to a knowledge of how things are, but instead only serves as a methodological principle which rational judgment allows us to use in our investigation of nature and the empirical world. This would seem to mean that we make no speculative ontological commitment to either an intentional structure of nature or an author of that structure when we speak of nature's part in history.⁸ We only approach nature in a particular way, in light of the practical task set to us by our own reason, in an effort to find grounds upon which we can think of nature as being supportive of or responsive to our efforts. On this interpretation, the pattern of historical development which is supposed to be guided by nature is projected onto it.⁹

However, despite the support that can be produced for both these points, they are problematic. As was discussed at some length in the last chapter, the kind of sharp separation between the sphere of rational autonomy on the one hand and nature on

⁷See Yovel 161 and Despland 70-71. Kant describes the distinction between these two types of judgment in sec. 82, 83 and 88 of the *CJ* (429).

⁸This is the interpretation that Yovel adopts (Yovel, 161). Here he and Despland part ways. While Despland agrees with Yovel in saying 1) that no natural teleological processes infringe upon autonomy and 2) that the status of reflective teleological judgments is essential to Kant's argument, he does not take these to indicate a denial of the role of or need for God in the process of history. NB. Despland 73 where he at once stresses the distinction between providence and nature "as two teleological systems which pursue distinct though related ends" and the status of God "as the Creator of the system of Nature".

⁹Yovel uses the term projection in his account of the relationship between the "intentional subject" who must act and the end of the world which is to be realized: "*when speaking of the moral idea, we are not dealing with a Platonic idea in itself, but with an end projected by man's rational will*" (Yovel, 178).

the other that is required in order to make Kant's account of history viable is suspect. Nature would inevitably bump up against and overrun the boundaries of autonomy during the process of humanity's 'culturalization'. Even if one wanted to defend this process as being somehow necessary to the liberation of human beings, this could not be done in such a way to make it wholly consistent with Kant's radical notion of autonomy. One might argue that freedom, defined narrowly as a causal power possessed by an intelligible being, would not be compromised in this process, and further that Kant never says human beings do not exercise the power of freedom in the course of history; he only argues that on another level, one beyond human intentions, nature seeks to realize purposes that may be (and often are) contrary to those intentions. In this sense, then, freedom is preserved, for it is still the power by means of which individual agents can act to realize certain ends, even if those ends are displaced by a teleological plan, whether immediately or in a distant future. But can the same be said of autonomy? In my view, this is unlikely, if not impossible. Autonomy would have to involve rational consciousness of one's own intention in pursuing a particular end through action. Any process by which another end was pursued and the intention of the autonomous will subverted would reduce autonomy to mere illusion. Of course, Kant does allow that one's own motivations might be cloudy, and that we can never have perfectly clear knowledge of ourselves when we act (a testimony to Kant's strength as a psychologist). But there is a great difference between the obscurity of the self-knowledge of rational persons who determine their own courses of action and the machinations of a process that works upon those persons, as something

outside of the rational will. It is the latter conception of the relationship between will and providential nature that contradicts Kant's concept of autonomy.¹⁰

Fackenheim, as we have seen, draws a similar conclusion. He argues that Kant's attempt to develop a philosophical concept of history leads to two equally untenable options: 1) That nature is responsible for the development of morality, in which case the Kantian conception of morality vanishes, or 2) morality must develop only through reason and thus be completely separate from any notion of natural teleology, reducing nature and history to the status of being "facts without value" (Fackenheim, 45). But if this is true, the connection between nature and morality which is central to the highest good is either lost or destroys moral freedom, and thus Kant's concept of history would have to be regarded as a failure. Another, more radical possibility is that this flaw in Kant's concept of history is representative of a larger problem lying at the heart of Kant's account of the highest good and the postulate of God as moral author of the world. If God is conceived of as determining the course of human affairs, even if only mediately through certain natural mechanisms, would such a concept not stand in contradiction to the rational will and the idea of self-directed human development?

¹⁰One might argue in response to this that there are passages where Kant clearly acknowledges that human freedom can disrupt this process by acting in a way contrary to the will of God as moral author of the world, and that therefore it is not bound to follow the inexorable will of God or set teleological plan. An example of this is found towards the end of Kant's discussion of providence in the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (28:1113). He writes that "man's use of freedom has to depend upon him, even if it should wholly conflict with the plan of God designed for the moral world". However, this does not solve the problem posed by Kant's concept of history, but rather only serves to show its depth. That Kant is unable to recognize the problem that this view of God poses for his concept of history as a teleologically directed natural process is indicative of a much larger problem he has in reconciling freedom with determinism.

One could respond to this question by invoking the second point discussed above in defence of Kant's position. So long as God, or providence, or nature as a 'cunning influence' are clearly recognized as postulates or heuristic principles, then the conception of the rational will as self-determining is not jeopardized. We put into nature what we need to find there in order to act as we ought. No legitimate ontological claims regarding purposive plans or the existence of God as some sort of supersensible entity can be made, for any of these would be transcendent and beyond the critical pale of our speculative capacities. Practical reason, however, gives us warrant to think of these postulates without contradiction, for we have need of them in order to believe it possible to realize the full scope of our moral destiny, and they are not declared impossible by speculative reason (which deals strictly with the realm of appearance when used legitimately). If we accept this interpretation of the postulate of God, or any similar heuristic concept, then all of the talk of God in Kant's practical philosophy is kept safely within the critical limits he establishes in his three critiques.¹¹

That Kant should not be dismissed out of hand as careless in his discussions of God is obvious. His treatments of God, providence and history ought to be examined against

¹¹Of course this view of heuristic concepts leaves open the problem of whether they can be convincing enough to do the job we need them for, which in the case of human practice is to convince us of the possibility of realizing our moral destiny. However, Kant does not require us to simply impose upon nature what we will. In the case of history, for example, we look for evidence of natural mechanisms that aid in the process of human development. Thus, to use the language of projection is slightly misleading here, although certainly not inaccurate. Kant's conception of the relationship between the human intellect and nature is complex enough to require us to find some kind of evidence and argument to ground whatever heuristic principles we might adopt.

the backdrop of his critical philosophy to see if they are consistent with it. However, equal caution needs to be exercised before declaring that just because Kant thinks of these concepts as only having a purely practical and heuristic status, all concerns regarding them ought to be set aside. Surely, if Kant were to argue that we ought to conceive of autonomy as an illusion in order to believe that someday it will be an actuality, we need not and should not regard this claim as being consistent with his moral philosophy on the grounds that it is 'only a conception'. It is precisely this problem – that there may be an inconsistency in the articles of rational faith – that remains unaddressed if we regard the postulates or the concept of historical progression as projections that we impose upon nature to suit our purposes. Of course, we do this according to Kant, but we do not do only this. We must believe in these projections as well. They are subjective requirements of our being able to pursue with conviction our self-conceived practical destiny, including not only the moral but also the social and political dimensions of our lives. That is not to say that we do know or can know that God exists, or that a moral author of the world arranged it to suit our needs as rational beings, but it does mean that we have to believe this to be so, and that this belief is an integral part of our being able to pursue our final end as rational beings. Further, what would it mean, or, more to the point, what would Kant be telling us to do if he said that we need to project God onto the universe but that we need not believe in that projection? Certainly, this would keep Kant's concept of God well within the limits of reason, but it would also seem to disregard the very real religious component of Kant's practical thought. Religion must be rational, but there must be *faith*

as well. And although the concept of God is only something we can think of and believe in insofar as it pertains to our duties and obligations as moral beings, we must nonetheless believe.

The question becomes, then, whether Kant's concept of God and not simply his concept of history can be made consistent with the core concepts of his moral philosophy, viz., freedom, autonomy and responsibility. Kant's ethics are engaged in a reciprocal relationship with his philosophy of religion; moral consciousness leads to religion and religion is required to make the full scope of humanity's moral destiny possible.¹² The postulate of God is therefore a crucial part of the structure of the highest good. However, are we required to accept, in light of the concerns that have been raised about determinism, that the concept of the moral author of the world contradicts Kant's notions of freedom and autonomy? Insofar as the moral author of the world is to be thought of as guaranteeing the receptivity of nature to moral actions, and thus the *possibility* of happiness, it does not seem inconsistent with the idea that human beings make themselves moral. To say that God is the moral author of the world does not necessarily mean that there is a divine force working to orchestrate a particular outcome in human affairs, but rather only that the conditions of the world have been set up in such a way that moral

¹²To say that the relationship is reciprocal rather than hierarchical may seem contentious, for it seems more obvious to read Kant's notion of religion as growing out of his ethics and in that sense being completely dependent upon them. While this is true to a degree, I think this interpretation can lead us to misinterpret the structure of the highest good. Furthermore, it can lead to an underestimation of the importance the concept of the highest good has for the understanding of the other various threads of Kant's practical philosophy, e.g., political and social philosophy

efforts will eventually be rewarded by a correspondence between the dispositions of agents and circumstances in the world. And while human beings do have a particular end they ought to pursue (viz., to be moral and to realize the highest good in the world), it is up to them to pursue it. God merely waits in the wings, so to speak, after having set the stage. In that sense a genuine, rational belief in God would not entail that the believer view herself as being autonomous and yet not autonomous, self-determining and yet determined.

However, one could still argue that this view of God still leads to a violation of rational autonomy. We have already seen that practical reason's drive towards totality can be understood as leading to the concept of providence and history that Kant proposes. Once we conceive of the highest good as being guaranteed by God, it then becomes inexorable, something which does not lie in our hands alone. If this is the case, a conception of providence in conjunction with a notion of the historical development of mankind towards achieving the highest good would seem to follow suit. On this view, the concept of God as providence grows out of Kant's concept of God as the moral author of the world and the sins of the progeny visit the parent. However, in response to this position, the argument can be made that Kant could have stopped at describing God as the moral author of the world without connecting Him with history, and for good practical reasons. This would mean that even if a vague concept of God as the author of creation in conformity with morality is necessary, the details of that authorship (i.e., how it can be seen through experience) are wholly beyond the scope of either theoretical or practical

reason, and further, that practical reason runs the risk of undermining itself if it seeks to present an account of the mechanisms by which God would harmonize nature and morality. And while this may mean that human beings run the risk of falling into moral despair when faced with the evils and horrors of war or violent civil strife, this is a small price to pay when compared with the prospect of destroying the heart of moral philosophy. In short, our practical need for a sense of confidence in security cannot override our sense of autonomy as Kantian moral agents.

One might argue that by limiting the conception of God in this way, we would only be averting our eyes when it suits us, and when in fact we should look deeper and try to see more. And yet Kant's own views on religion and its place in practical philosophy tell us that we cannot see more. We do not look into nature and see God, for God is not an object of nature; rather, we find in ourselves a need for a concept of God to fulfill our moral obligations, and this is what both drives and limits our belief. Put another way, it is precisely because we postulate and believe in God out of a practical need that we should not think of Him as undermining our practical destiny. And further, even if our belief in God forces us to acknowledge the possibility that our actions may in fact be completely determined by a divine will, that at some level of which we have no comprehension freedom and nature blend into one,¹³ we still cannot have any knowledge of this whatever

¹³NB. Kant's discussion of the possibility of a *concursum divinum* with human actions in the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*. There he argues that while we cannot understand how our actions can be free and yet the product of a divine will, we also are completely unable to have knowledge of the "intelligible world" and "the laws by which it is governed" (LR, 28:1106). Thus from a practical point of view Kant denies the thought of autonomous actions being determined by something

and so the possibility cannot override for us what is a fact of our existence: that we are bound to follow the moral law, and that we can think of ourselves as belonging to an intelligible realm, able to exercise the power of freedom independent of all nature. Therefore, we cannot commit ourselves to a notion of God that would involve the determination of our free actions without committing to a contradictory belief system in which we would hold ourselves responsible for our development and yet under which we cannot think of ourselves as being responsible.

It is in asking us to do this that Kant's concepts of providence and a progressive history fail as components of his practical philosophy.¹⁴ But rather than arguing that this failure extends to include the entirety of Kant's practical account of God, it is more accurate to say that it applies to it only insofar as it demands we think of God *as* providence. The notion of rational belief employed by Kant, with its limitations depending on its practical purpose, can be used to demonstrate that his account of a providentially guided historical process leads us to take a view of ourselves that cannot be held harmoniously with the concept of rational autonomy. It is important to emphasize

other than us, but he qualifies this with a reminder about the limits of human knowledge, and in doing so acknowledges the possibility of a form of complete determinism.

¹⁴It is worth reiterating at this point that there are other interpretative avenues open, primarily that suggested by Ajzenstat. If one does not accept the need to regard freedom and nature or the sensible and intelligible as being radically distinct from one another in Kantian thought, one could argue, as Ajzenstat does, that the idea of moral development through history within Kant's philosophy is not at all contradictory as an account of moral psychology, though it still leaves open Fackenheim's concern that it would relativize morality unacceptably. However, as I said earlier, to address this line of interpretation against that which I have followed in this study would involve a much more detailed and comprehensive account of Kant's philosophy than I can provide here. Thus, we only need note the viability of Ajzenstat's interpretation as an alternative to that which has been offered in this study.

that this is a practical and not a speculative argument. It may be the Kant does import illegitimate metaphysical assumptions into his concepts of history and God, and indeed arguments have been to this effect,¹⁵ however what we are concerned with here are illegitimate practical concepts, those which undermine that which they are meant to support, viz., human freedom. Kant's concepts of providence and history are meant to resolve difficult problems raised by his systematic separation of nature and freedom, or the sensible and the intelligible. To this extent, these concepts are meant to be liberating, augmentations of the power of freedom. But by the same token, what they also represent is an attempt to solve practical problems (e.g., a lack of reconciliation with nature, moral anxiety) by seeking their resolution beyond the realm of human practice, thereby subjugating freedom to nature and providence. It is for this reason that providence and history are inconsistent with Kant's view of persons as responsible, self-determining beings.

But if we move beyond the role providence holds in history, what are we to say about the view of God Kant presents us with? I have argued that it can be interpreted in a manner consistent with the principles of human freedom and autonomy. However, that would seem to mean that we need to make some kind of ontological claim regarding the existence of God, one which extends beyond the limits of speculative reason. This could lead to an almost Kierkegaardian view of Kant, for at the limits of the understanding faith

¹⁵Yovel makes this point when he writes of the practical postulates resting on a suspension of the basic rules of critical (speculative) philosophy (Yovel, 274-275).

would be born. But this seems to go against the grain of other elements of Kant's practical conception of religion. All religion is kept within the limits of reason alone; what we are able to think about religion in positive terms (e.g., regarding the existence of God), we are able to think only on practical grounds. In its extreme form, this thesis entails that God is created by human beings for the sake of human practice. Kant gives this thought a particularly forceful and dramatic expression at times, as is evident in the *Critique of Practical Reason* where he proclaims in the voice of the righteous man "I will that there be a God" (*CPrR*, 143). It is this view of Kant's concept of God which underlies the more 'humanistic' interpretations of his religion such as those offered by Yovel and Anderson Gold.¹⁶ Yovel calls Kant's "theory of the Deity strictly humanistic", arguing that the "postulate if the existence of God tells us nothing of God, only of man and the world" (Yovel, 121).¹⁷ But even if one accepts this interpretation, it does not mean that the concept of God should be interpreted in a reductive fashion. It could be argued that what Kant expresses through his discussion of the concept of God and its function is his understanding of how a community of autonomous subjects is to be formed, and thus how subjective individualism connects with intersubjectivity. Through the concept of God as

¹⁶For Anderson Gold's interpretation of the function of God in Kantian practical thought see the final section of her essay "God and Community: An Inquiry into the Religious Implications of the Highest Good" (Rossi and Wreen, 129-130). She argues that Kant's conception of God is bound and limited by his idea of moral actions and relations between ethical beings.

¹⁷Despite his insistence on this interpretation, it is worth noting that Yovel does acknowledge that Kant's practical postulates in general are problematic in that they do seem to make some kind of pseudo-ontological claims about that intentionality which orders the world, i.e., God, claims which he regards as illegitimate (Yovel, 276, 295-298, see also n13). This indicates a recognition that the purely humanistic interpretation he recommends finds itself in some tension with Kant's texts.

the *idea* of the purely rational will, subjective individualism is made universal, encompassing all particular rational beings and therefore binding all persons together. It is by viewing each other in light of this idea that each of us comes to recognize others as rational beings subject to the laws of freedom.

There are grounds for such a reading, for when Kant writes of the unity of a community of ethical persons under God, they are not united through worship of a divine entity, but rather through a mutual commitment to a moral life (*R*, 95-96). And yet he does not seem to give up the idea that there is a supreme being, and moreover, that we need to think of there being one in order to make our moral destiny realizable. It is for this reason that Kant's practical conception of God is not one which can be subsumed into his purely formal ethics; nor is it an afterthought tacked onto his moral philosophy. And while his conception of God in connection with his views on history leads to some serious internal problems within the system of his practical thought, these problems, in my estimation, are not indicative of any fundamental inconsistency between Kant's understanding of religion and his moral philosophy. That there is such an intimate relationship between his philosophy and religion is very illuminating and significant. It strongly indicates that in Kant's view religion is not merely one in a series of subjects to be dealt with by philosophy, about which it must make some sort of pronouncement, but that it is something much more. It is an area of human thought and experience that finds its place, and legitimately so, in the foundations of philosophical thought.

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