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**On the Alleged Pre-Critical Moral Philosophy
in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason***

Abstract: Time and again, one finds in literature the view that Kant held a pre-critical or semi-critical moral philosophy in the *Canon* chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is shown, firstly, by the fact that practical freedom is understood as cognized through experience, and, secondly, by the fact that Kant not only allows a sensible incentive for the observance of the moral law, but considers it necessary. Against that, it is argued in this essay that, firstly, moral philosophy as such is not addressed at all in the *Canon*; and secondly, that the *Canon* by no means approves of sensible incentives with regard to the morally required promotion of the highest good. What however is indeed addressed, although only in the *Second Section* of the *Canon*, is moral theology.

Keywords: practical freedom; moral and sensible incentive; moral philosophy and moral theology; the highest good and the postulates of pure practical reason.

I.

In the literature on Kant, one repeatedly finds the thesis that Kant held in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and there especially in the *Canon* chapter of the *Transcendental Doctrine of Method* a 'pre-critical' or 'semi-critical' moral philosophy. The attribute, meant disapprovingly, does not refer here to the state reached with the first *Critique* in *theoretical* philosophy, but to the state reached with the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and then especially with the second *Critique* in *practical* philosophy.

The 'pre-critical' aspect of the moral philosophy of the *Canon* consists, so it is explained, in the fact that practical freedom is conceived there as recognizable through experience and, moreover, that as an incentive for the compliance with the moral law, not this law itself comes into consideration, but the hope of an expected reward. Thus, it would be a matter of a "eudaemonistic" moral philosophy.

Accordingly, two passages are consistently referred to as – at least prima facie – unimpeachable 'principal witnesses' for the presentation of evidence, one from the *First* and one from the *Second Section* of the *Canon*:

"We thus cognize practical freedom through experience, as one of the natural causes, namely a causality of reason in the determination of the will".¹

¹ KrV A 803 / B 831. In cases where, as here, the punctuation mark does not belong to the quoted text, I place it, contrary to what is usual, after the quotation marks.

For Kant's works I shall use the following abbreviations: Br = Correspondence; EaD = The end of all things; FM = What real progress has metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?; GMS =

"Thus without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization, because they would not fulfill the whole end that is natural for every rational being and determined a priori and necessary through the very same pure reason."²

To begin with, one argument *against* the thesis – also *prima facie* – is already the fact that in 1787, i.e. two years after the publication of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and almost simultaneously with the completion of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant did not change anything in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the two passages cited.³ It will be seen that he indeed maintained also later on⁴ the conviction, *allegedly* finally abandoned by him with the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals; KpV = Critique of practical reason; KrV = Critique of pure reason; KU = Critique of the power of judgement; Log = Logic (Jäsche); MpVT = On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy; Päd = Lectures on Pedagogy; Refl = Notes; RGv = Religion within the boundaries of mere reason; SF = The conflict of the faculties; TL = Doctrine of virtue; TP = On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice; V-Mo/Collins = Moral philosophy lecture notes Collins; V-Mo/Mron = Moral philosophy lecture notes Mrongovius; V-Mo/Mron II, = Moral philosophy lecture notes Mrongovius II; V-MP-K2/Heinze = Metaphysics lecture notes Heinze; V-MP/Volckmann = Metaphysics lecture notes Volckmann; V-Th/Pölitz = Philosophical doctrine of religion lecture notes Pölitz; V-MS/Vigil = Metaphysics lecture notes Vigilantius; VARGV = Drafts for Religion within the boundaries of mere reason; VAZeF = Drafts for Towards eternal peace; VT = On a recently prominent tone of superiority in philosophy; WDO = What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?

I refer only to the Akademie Edition (= AA), since the reader can easily find the corresponding pages in the Cambridge Edition (= CE). The number before the colon refers to the volume, the number after it to the page; a full stop is followed by a reference to the line (example: 08: 211.10-13). For the *Critique of pure reason*, reference is made to the 1st (A) and the 2nd (B) edition. – My additions within quotations are in square brackets. Such brackets also indicate omissions. My italics = m/it; my translation = m/tr.

Translations of quotations from Kant are taken or adapted, *unless indicated otherwise*, from the *Cambridge Edition of the Writings of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992ff. Minor changes to these translations have been tacitly made by me.

Where I have myself translated writings of Kant into English, I have put priority on the highest possible correspondence with the original. That may sound (as my own English writing can of course, and also might do) in places a bit awkward or even somehow "teutonic". I have unfortunately just the great disadvantage that Kant's mother tongue and not English is my native language.

A critical remark on the CE is unfortunately pertinent. On the one hand, I was forced to translate into English texts by Kant not included in the CE. In order to be as much as possible in agreement with the terminology used by the CE, I was often compelled to read this edition intensively. On the other hand, many years of experience with errors discovered again and again in the CE had taught me not to take over its translations of my Kant quotations without checking them. To my great regret, though, I must confess that I had not expected such a deplorable result. The number of philosophically relevant translation errors in the CE is so large, that this edition is simply out of the question for serious Kant research. It cannot be trusted. Rather, for each sentence, even if the probability is low, one must consider the possibility that it does not correspond to Kant's original. Only the comparison with the original would bring salvation, which, however, would make the translation of the CE insofar superfluous.

² KrV A 813 / B 841.

³ As Kant himself states in the preface to the second edition, he made changes only in the first half of the book, "because time was too short, and also in respect of the rest of the book no misunderstanding on the part of expert and impartial examiners has come my way". (B XLf.) But also these revisions refer only to the "mode of presentation". "I have found nothing to alter either in the propositions themselves or in their grounds of proof, or in the form and completeness of the book's plan". (KrV B XXXVII) Kant could hardly have judged in this way in the face of a revision, which is fundamental to moral philosophy, especially since he was so aware of the "fundamental" of the allegedly entirely new doctrinal piece that he based in the *Critique of Practical Reason* his positive judgment of the "christian" principle of morality precisely on it. (See KpV, AA 05: 129)

⁴ Note also what is already anticipated even in the conclusion of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (AA 02: 372.23-373.07) from the remarks in the *Canon* and in the second *Critique*.

I now argue, firstly, that moral philosophy is not addressed at all in the *Canon*, and I discuss this in particular in the context of the passage quoted from the *First Canon Section*. I argue, secondly, that the passage quoted from the *Second Section* in no way means the approbation of *sensible incentives* with regard to the morally commanded promotion of the highest good. Thus, if the *Canon* were indeed about moral philosophy, it would in any case not be '*pre-critical*'. Corresponding to the double negative results regarding moral philosophy is the positive one that the *Second Section* of the *Canon* is about *moral theology*; and the incentives mentioned in the passage quoted from that section turn out to be moral incentives. Another important result of the investigation, in which also misunderstandings concerning the doctrine of the postulates will come up, is that with the "majestic ideas of morality" just not, as can be read again and again, the moral laws themselves are meant, but the idea of the highest good as a (moral) world, constituted according to these laws, and the idea of the proportionality, to be realized in it, of happiness and morality as worthiness to be happy.

II.

As far as the assertion is concerned that the *Canon* is about moral philosophy, what Kant himself says about it at the beginning of the *Second Section* of the *Canon*, should actually suffice to deny it:

"The second question [What should I do?] is merely practical. As such, to be sure, it can belong to pure reason, but in that case it is not transcendental, but moral, and thus it cannot be in itself a subject for our critique."⁵

The subject of the *Canon* in general is the correct practical use of pure reason and of its ideas.⁶ The topic of the *First Section* is then this use with reference to the idea of freedom with the result that nothing can be found out about it within the framework of the transcendental philosophy of the first *Critique*, but that for the practical use of reason the "practical freedom", known by experience as "a causality of reason in the determination of the will", is sufficient.⁷ With this concept of freedom, which goes decisively beyond Baumgarten, Kant creates, to be sure, an important prerequisite for his later moral philosophy.⁸ But in the *First Section* of the *Canon*, a step into moral philosophy, since this lies outside the realm of transcendental philosophy, is explicitly to be avoided.⁹ Therefore, laws given by reason are *presupposed* without further ado, and from their unquestioned claim to 'ought' practical freedom is concluded as the "faculty of determining oneself *from oneself* [through reason], independently of necessitation by sensible impulses."¹⁰

The *Doctrine of Elements* in the first *Critique* had only been able to demonstrate the *logical* possibility of (transcendental) freedom, while its *real* possibility, not to mention its

⁵ KrV A 805 / B 833; see further KrV B 28f.; KrV A 569 / B 597 (AA 03: 384.07-09); KrV A 801 / B 829 (AA 03: 520.26; 03: 520.35-37); KrV A 842 / B 870 (AA 03: 544.23f.).

⁶ See for this KrV A 796f. / B 824f.

⁷ See KrV A 803 / B 831.

⁸ See for this Geismann, Georg: Zur Rolle der Freiheit in Kants (Moral-)Philosophie, in: Kant-Studien, 111 (2020); or Geismann, Georg: On the Role of Freedom in Kant's (Moral) Philosophy, in: www.georgeismann.de.

⁹ See KrV A 801 / B 829.

¹⁰ KrV A 534 / B 562 (m/it).

reality, remained an unsolved and *theoretically*, i.e. within the framework of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, unsolvable problem.¹¹ However, the *practical* use of pure reason, the possible 'correctness' of which, insofar as such use exists, is the subject of the *Canon*, presupposes precisely this freedom; and the possibility of making practical use of its idea as a concept of pure reason thus presupposes the real possibility of transcendental freedom. But since this presupposition is excluded by the findings of the *Doctrine of Elements*, there can be within the first *Critique* no "a priori principles of the correct use"¹² with reference to freedom. "[S]o in a canon of pure reason we are concerned with only two questions that pertain to the practical interest of pure reason, and with regard to which a canon of its use must be possible, namely: Is there a God? Is there a future life?"¹³ For the possibility of making a practical use of these two ideas, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are not necessary preconditions; and thus the *Second Section* of the *Canon* is concerned with "whether and in what way the practical use of the ideas of God and immortal soul as *possibly fulfilled* concepts is correct."¹⁴ For the possible answer to these two remaining questions, "pure moral laws", with their answer to the "merely practical" question, are to be *assumed*, as well, as a "guiding thread"¹⁵, as it is then indeed done in the *Canon*.¹⁶ But the subject here, as later in the *Dialectic* of the second *Critique*, is the doctrine of the highest good,¹⁷ whereby, however, the foundation of moral philosophy,¹⁸ preceding this doctrine in the *Analytic* of the second *Critique*, is just lacking in the *Canon* of the first *Critique*. Of the question: "What may I hope?" Kant says that it is "simultaneously practical and theoretical"¹⁹, and insofar as the question is *practical*, for the answer to it "practical freedom" (and only it), which is proven to be *practically* sufficient, comes into play. The transcendental idea of freedom still remains a problem and with it the possible practical use of pure reason related to it. Consequently, also

¹¹ See KrV A 558 / B 586; A 803 / B 831.

¹² KrV A 796 / B 824.

¹³ KrV A 803 / B 831.

¹⁴ Wolff, Michael: Freiheit und Natur. Zu Kants architektonischem Programm von Philosophie, in: Waibel, Violetta L. et al. (Eds.): Natur und Freiheit. Akten des XII. Internationalen Kongresses, Berlin / Boston 2018, vol. I, 137; for the train of thought as a whole see *ibid.*, 135-137.

¹⁵ KrV A 805 / B 833.

¹⁶ See KrV A 807 / B 835.

¹⁷ In a reflection probably dating from 1780-83, Kant noted: "For the Canon: The end of all of metaphysics is God and the future, and the end of these is our conduct, not whether we ought to make it accord with morality, *but whether it is without consequences.*" (Refl 5637, AA 18: 273 [second emphasis mine])

¹⁸ With the 'practical postulate' (KpV, AA 05: 46.11) of the "fundamental law of pure practical reason" (KpV, AA 05: 30), the *Analytic* at the same time makes possible the establishment of a principle a priori of the correct use of the idea of transcendental freedom as a postulate of pure practical reason, which, as said, is not possible in the *Canon*. (KpV, AA 05: 122) "Aiming at the highest good, made necessary by respect for the moral law, and the presupposition, flowing from this, of the objective reality of the highest good leads [...] to that of which speculative reason contained nothing but *antinomy*, the resolution of which it could base only on a concept that was problematically indeed thinkable, but not demonstrable or determinable as to its objective reality, namely [to] the *cosmological* idea of an intelligible world and the consciousness of our existence in it, by means of the postulate of freedom (the reality of which it demonstrates through the moral law and with it the law of an intelligible world as well, to which speculative reason could only point but could not determine its concept)." (KpV, AA 05: 132f. [partly m/tr]) Transcendental freedom now becomes the faculty of beings, insofar as they belong to the moral world of the highest good (*regnum gratiae*). (see KpV, AA 05: 132.19-21; 23-26; KrV A 811f. / B 839f.; A 815 / B 843). – On the difference between 'practical postulate' and 'postulate of pure practical reason' see: Wolff, Michael: Warum das Faktum der Vernunft ein Faktum ist. Auflösung einiger Verständnisschwierigkeiten in Kants Grundlegung der Moral; in: Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie, 57 (2009) 522-527.

¹⁹ KrV A 805 / B 833.

the 'moral theology', outlined in the *Second Section* of the *Canon*, is under the reservation of that foundation of moral philosophy.

As far as in the literature a moral philosophy is nevertheless assumed for the *Canon*, already the *First Section* serves as proof for the occasionally held thesis that Kant, when he spoke of the 'proof through experience'²⁰, had the moral precept (as such not yet a theme) only as 'principium diiudicationis' in mind, not also as 'principium executionis'. This would in case of practical freedom, as a natural cause,²¹ rather consist in whichever sensible impulses (inclinations). Now, an imperative as an objective law of freedom is, to be sure, a product of *pure* reason,²² it determines the will with regard to what one should do. But whether also the will-determining causality is one of *pure* reason and whether there is thus transcendental freedom as absolute spontaneity, remains, with all irrelevance for the *practical* use of reason, *theoretically* still a problem.²³ "Causality of reason *in the determination of the will*"²⁴ means that pure reason as cognitive faculty provides the principle of judgement, i.e. says, what one ought to do. However, the 'I ought' does not only imply the assumption of the validity of the respective imperative, but at the same time the assumption (expressed in the conclusion to the 'I can') of the *capacity* to act according to the imperative. However, given the ignorance of the kind of determinacy of reason itself, the principle of execution also remains indeterminate. Thus, in the *First Section* of the *Canon*, the moral incentive of respect for the law is neither required nor excluded.²⁵ Thus, neither the moral precept as such, nor the kind of the incentive are a subject here. It is quite simply not about moral philosophy, but, "if there is to be any legitimate use of pure reason at all,"²⁶ about 'the sum total of the a priori principles of such a use and, to be sure, a *practical* use',²⁷ with which then the *Second Section* deals. Moral philosophical knowledge, on the other hand, presupposes the *real* possibility of a pure practical use of reason and thus of transcendental freedom, and insofar it requires a critique of pure practical reason,²⁸ which Kant provides in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

III.

The *Second Section* of the *Canon*, however, does now seem to prove irrefutably that Kant allows here an incentive resting on inclinations and thus a heteronomous action in the sense of the second *Critique*, and insofar holds a 'pre-critical' moral philosophy. Before turning to this section, I would like to discuss how Kant expressed himself on the same

²⁰ See KrV A 802f. / B 830f.

²¹ See KrV A 803 / B 831. For the thesis, that Kant rather thinks of a freedom (independence) *from* (not: of) the natural causes, see above Geismann, Georg: Zur Rolle der Freiheit (fn. 8).

²² See KrV A 802 / B 830 in connection with A 800 / B 828.

²³ See KrV A 803 / B 831 (AA 03: 521.26-31; 03: 522.05).

²⁴ KrV A 803 / 831 (m/it).

²⁵ Cf. for this also KrV A 554-558 / B 582-586.

²⁶ KrV A797 / B 825.

²⁷ See KrV A 796f. / B 824f.

²⁸ Cf. KpV, AA 05: 08.04f.

subject in later writings.²⁹ Kant's so-called 'critical' or 'mature' moral philosophy serves, after all, as a background against which only the position, allegedly held in the *Second Section*, can appear as 'pre-critical'. It will be seen that Kant, instead of departing later from its disavowed statements, rather repeats them and is, regarding this, which is remarkable, exposed in the literature to an occasional similar criticism as in the case of the *Canon*.

The doctrine of the practical postulates in the second *Critique* has given rise to many misunderstandings. Thus, the renowned Kant scholar Brandt has put forward, admittedly neither as the only one nor even as the first,³⁰ the strange thesis³¹ that according to Kant's teaching an atheist cannot be moral, because he is, due to the conviction, connected with the denial of the existence of God, that there could be no happiness proportionate to the worthiness to be happy, released from the moral obligation as such, since the moral law has no binding force at all for him. According to Kant, from the impossibility of the highest good would follow the falsity of the moral law.³² Referring, out of all texts, to the famous Spinoza passage³³ in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,³⁴ Brandt claims that "the atheist [is denied by Kant] the actual capability for virtue"³⁵, and quotes as *proof* the following sentence from that passage: "The end, therefore, which this *well-intentioned* person had and should have had before his eyes in his compliance with the moral laws, he would certainly have to give up as impossible".³⁶ Brandt continues by concluding: "the atheist cannot keep to his resolve to be virtuous." Well, according to Kantian teaching, he *should* even (and therefore can) continue to hold on to *this* resolution: "Every rational being would still have to recognize himself as strictly bound to the precept of morals".³⁷ Only³⁸ the *other* resolution, of which

²⁹ A certain redundancy is unavoidable and sometimes even intended by this procedure; for wherever, also in case of different formulation, Kant's considerations are the same or similar, interpretation, explanation, and commentary must also be the same or similar.

³⁰ The first was possibly Reinhold (1788); see for this Schulz, Eberhard Günter: *Rehbergs Opposition gegen Kants Ethik*, Köln / Wien 1975, 86f. Brandt was also, however, not the last. Only recently, Timmermann matched him. See Timmermann, Jens: *Emerging Autonomy: Dealing with the Inadequacies of the 'Canon' of the Critique of Pure Reason* (1781); in: Stefano Bacin / Oliver Sensen (Hrsg.), *The emergence of autonomy in Kant's moral philosophy*, Cambridge 2019, 115f.

³¹ Brandt, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit bei Kant*; in: *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik*, 1 (1993) 25-44; later also in: *Id.*, *Gerechtigkeit und Strafgerechtigkeit bei Kant*; in: Gerhard Schönrich et al. (Eds.), *Kant in der Diskussion der Moderne*, Frankfurt 1996, 425-463. Critical to these two papers: Oberer, Hariolf: *Gerechtigkeit und Strafe bei Kant*; in: *Id.* (Ed.), *Kant. Analysen – Probleme – Kritik*, vol. III, Würzburg 1997, 194 ff.

³² Cf. KpV, AA 05: 114; similarly already KrV A 811f. / B 839f. Albrecht argues "that the passage [KpV, AA 05: 114.01-09] at least does not fit seamlessly into the *Critique of Practical Reason*." (Albrecht, Michael: *Kant's Antinomy of Practical Reason*, Hildesheim 1978, 152) But it does not only perfectly fit in; it is precisely the transition to the "critical resolution of the antinomy" (KpV, AA 05: 114.11) and the basis for this resolution.

³³ En passant I would like to recommend its reading to all those who still peddle the miserable claim that Kant was a bad writer. Even in Kleist, they will not easily find anything better.

³⁴ KU, AA 05: 452f.

³⁵ Brandt, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit bei Kant* (see fn. 31), 37.

³⁶ KU, AA 05: 452 (m/it; partly m/tr).

³⁷ KU, AA 05: 451 (partly m/tr). Just before that, it says with the utmost clarity: "This proof [...] is not meant to say that it is just as necessary to assume the existence of God as it is to acknowledge the validity of the moral law." (KU, AA 05: 450f.; see further KpV, AA 05: 125f.; RGV, AA 06: 07.09-20; Refl 6432, AA 18: 714). – It should be explicitly stated that the references in this paper to Kant's estate and to lecture transcripts are not intended to serve as evidence, but are merely meant as explanations and further clarifications of the presented considerations and are sometimes used for their appropriate formulation. This also applies to references to writings published after the first *Critique*, insofar as the text of this *Critique* is concerned.

³⁸ See KU, AA 05: 451.03; and then especially Log, AA 09: 68f.

alone Kant also speaks, namely to pursue to the best of his ability the achievement of the highest good, he has to give up.³⁹ Exclusively under the condition of his moral disposition, his assumed atheism brings him at all into this situation contrary to reason: he should (and can) continue to promote the highest good by being virtuous and at the same time he has to give up all hope related to this good – or else his atheism. Thus, only under the condition of the *unconditionally* valid and commanding moral law, which doesn't show any consideration for ends, even not for the final end,⁴⁰ is he confronted with the choice between hopeful belief and hopeless atheism.

The obligatory validity of the moral law is so much independent of the existence of God and the belief in it,⁴¹ that such a belief rather can be practically established only through that validity;⁴² and the doubt about that existence and thus about the realizability of the highest good does not alter in the least⁴³ that validity "with respect to the first element of the highest good"⁴⁴. Only because and insofar as man stands with apodictic practical certainty under the moral law, the postulates of freedom on the one hand and God and immortality on the other hand are justified at all.⁴⁵ The assertion that it is only through belief in God that the moral law acquires binding force, inverts the relationship between condition and conditioned; it overlooks the fact that there is only *one* possible reason for such belief, namely the moral law with its binding force based on pure practical reason.⁴⁶

From the application of the moral law to the *conditio humana*, follows, as a rationally necessary end to be (co-)effected by freedom (in moral action), the highest good and from this the practically conditioned necessity of the assumption of the existence of God. Now, since the falsity of the consequence proves the falsity of the ground, the falsity of the moral law demanding the pursuit of the final end would follow from the non-existence of God, – but only in 'transcendental retrospect', as it were. For that conclusion presupposes the assertion concerning the falsity of the consequence as a true one; but the only true assertion that can be made directly in this connection, concerns the ground; only from this assertion, and only in practical respect, follows then the possibility of an assertion of truth with regard to the consequence.⁴⁷

³⁹ Cf. KpV, AA 05: 04: 11-13; 05: 04.16-18.

⁴⁰ Cf. KrV A 807 / B 835 (AA 03: 524.08-13).

⁴¹ Cf. RGV, AA 06: 03; VT, AA 08: 397.26-30.

⁴² Cf. KpV, AA 05: 04; 05: 132.09-18; 05: 142f.; KU, AA 05: 471; VT, AA 08: 397.38-42.

⁴³ Cf. GMS, AA 04: 439.01-03.

⁴⁴ KpV, AA 05: 144.

⁴⁵ By a postulate of pure practical reason Kant understands "a *theoretical* proposition, though one not demonstrable as such, insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid *practical law*" (KpV, AA 05: 122). Therefore, the answer to the third, practical and at the same time theoretical question (see KrV A 805 / B 833) consists in postulates. Cf. also KpV, AA 05: 11.

⁴⁶ Cf. KpV, AA 05: 125f.; RGV, AA 06: 03.

⁴⁷ The Spinoza as presented by Kant has absolutely no proof for the non-existence of God. He *knows* nothing about it; he only (groundlessly) does not *believe* in it. Therefore, as a consequence of his unbelief, he has to give up as meaningless "the *aim* of realizing the final end in the world [...] by conformity to the moral law" (KU, AA 05: 451). But virtuousness as the fulfilment of the "duties in the world" (RGV, AA 06: 07) is by the moral law, which in no way takes purposes and thus consequences into account, still mandated and possible. Cf. GMS, AA 04: 438.32-439.03; KU, AA 05: 471; Log, AA 09: 68.19-20.

The postulate of God's existence is for Kant nowhere a "transcendental precondition of the obligatory nature of the moral law"⁴⁸, not even of the obligatory nature of the promotion of the highest good, but only, moral obligation *presupposed*, of the *possibility* of the highest good.⁴⁹ The postulate becomes necessary only when and insofar as from the moral law follows the necessity to set oneself a final end (and to promote it within the scope of human possibilities). When Kant nevertheless occasionally speaks of the moral law having no power without the presupposition of God's existence,⁵⁰ this concerns the powerlessness of the moral incentive as a consequence of the futility and senselessness of moral action necessarily resulting from unbelief. A strengthening of *this* very incentive through belief⁵¹ is therefore quite possible.⁵² But also this power flowing from the belief in God and in the realizability of the highest good made possible by him, has its last source in moral disposition,⁵³ just as also this belief is first only the belief in a world of distributive justice⁵⁴ and thus in the *effectiveness of the moral laws*⁵⁵ – a belief which directly does not at all consider one's own future fate.

With respect to both the first and second *Critique*, Brandt considers it Kant's view that without the existence of God, morality would be a chimera, and he then continues *mutatis mutandis*: *Lest* morality remains a mere chimera, the existence of God would have to be postulated.⁵⁶ With just this very 'argument' Kant would base himself on something of which he now really cannot possibly know, whether it is not in turn a chimera, namely that existence.⁵⁷ Kant's actual argument,⁵⁸ however, is as follows: Since a moral way of life, i.e. a way of life worthy of happiness, is commanded by pure practical reason, and since the promotion of a world of proportioned and thus morally conditioned universal happiness is therefore a duty, according to that reason happiness corresponding to worthiness, and consequently also the condition necessary for this, the existence of God, must be possible. It

⁴⁸ So Wimmer, Reiner: *Kants kritische Religionsphilosophie*, Berlin / New York 1990, 74.

⁴⁹ Cf. KpV, AA 05: 125f.; KU, AA 05: 485.04-06; FM, AA 20: 298.34-35.

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. Refl 6110, AA 18: 458.

⁵¹ Nicely put by Karl Heinrich Heydenreich (*System des Naturrechts nach kritischen Prinzipien*, Leipzig 1794, 141: "Belief in God arises through recognition of the lawgiving of pure reason, and acts then on the human will to give it for the execution of the recognition the greatest possible strength."

⁵² "But in order to give to this conviction [with regard to the "possibility of a system of all ends"] weight and emphasis on my heart, I have need of a God" (V-Th/Pölitz, AA 28: 1117 [m/tr; the CE-translation by Allen W. Wood turns Kant's text into the following nonsense: "But in order to provide my heart with conviction, weight and emphasis, I have need of a God"). It is not a matter of *another* incentive taking the place of respect for the law, but of *strengthening* the moral incentive (cf. RGV, AA 06: 183.16). According to experience, this gains strength with the belief in the attainability of the end of our acting.

⁵³ See more below p. 18f.

⁵⁴ See RGV, AA 06: 05.34 ff.

⁵⁵ See more below p. 22ff.

⁵⁶ Kant – so already Cohen with reference to KpV, AA 05: 143 – makes with his doctrine of the highest good the mistake "instead of reinforcing the reality of the moral law [...] to question it [the reality] inevitably and blatantly by considerations about the conditions of its [the highest good's] physical or metaphysical possibility." (Cohen, Hermann: *Kants Begründung der Ethik nebst ihren Anwendungen auf Recht, Religion und Geschichte*, 2. Aufl. Berlin 1910, 359f.)

⁵⁷ Cf. KrV A 819 / B 847 (AA 03: 531.06-08); Refl 6432, AA 18: 714 (m/tr): "If the moral law, in order to bind us, needed God and a future life, it would be inconsistent to base on such a need the belief in the reality of that which can satisfy that need"

⁵⁸ Succinct and clear in KrV A 633 / B 661f. (AA 03: 421.27-422.01); see further KrV A 811 / B 839 (AA 03: 526.27-30).

is morality – and only morality – which guarantees this, admittedly only in practical respect.⁵⁹ The (purely morally conditioned) assumption of the existence of God and his Kingdom (as the reality of the highest good)⁶⁰ "is a practical-necessary hypothesis of reason", "for otherwise it would be a mere chimera to strive for the highest good."⁶¹ Brandt does not recognize that Kant's talk of 'empty figments of the brain'⁶², of 'fantastic and false'⁶³ only serves to justify this assumption on the basis of the unconditionally valid moral law – and is just not to be understood with reference to a bindingness of this law, a bindingness still to be created.⁶⁴ It is the consciousness of this law's apodictically certain bindingness that allows and demands the conclusion to the existence of the conditions of the possibility of what is commanded – not, to be sure, in theoretical, but in practical respect.⁶⁵ Thus, not *so that* the moral law *becomes* binding, but *because* it *is* binding, the postulate of the existence of God arises. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant gets to the heart of the matter with extreme clarity:

"This moral argument is not meant to provide any *objectively* valid proof of the existence of God, nor meant to prove to the doubter that there is a God; rather, it is meant to prove that if his moral thinking is to be consistent, he *must include* the assumption of this proposition among the maxims of his practical reason. – It is also not meant to say that it is necessary *for morality* to assume the happiness of all rational beings in the world in accordance with their morality, but rather that it is necessary *through morality*. Hence it is a *subjective* argument, sufficient for moral beings."⁶⁶

In the *Dialectic of the Critique of Practical Reason* it is by no means about a possible non-bindingness of the moral law, i.e. about the re-questioning of a result sufficiently

⁵⁹ "So in the categorical imperative of the *materially* practical reason, which tells man: I will that your actions be concordant with the final end of all things, there is therefore *already simultaneously thought the presupposition of a law-giving will*, which contains all power (of the divine), and has no need of being specially imposed." (VT, AA 08: 397 [m/it])

⁶⁰ Kant speaks of *the highest good* "in the world" (KpV, AA 05: 122; 05: 125; KU, AA 05: 435; 05: 450; 05: 469; RGV, AA 06: 05-07; TP, AA 08: 279), of "a world" (A 814 / B 842 [AA 03: 528.15]; KpV, AA 05: 129.31; 05: 134.18), of "a possible world" (KpV, AA 05: 110.35), of "a world in general" (MpVT, AA 08: 263.26) and of "an intelligible world" (KpV, AA 05: 133.21), but never of "this world", because he cannot say it. For the ideal of a realm of God or realm of grace, distinguished from the realm of nature, is in fact based precisely on the antinomy that arises from the idea of a necessary connection between virtue and happiness. (see KpV, AA 05: 113f.). If the highest good as "a consequence of our conduct in the sensible world" is possible, then only in another world "that is future for us". (KrV A 811 / B 839) That's why Klaus Reich (Kant und die Ethik der Griechen, Tübingen 1935, 46) rightly calls, what Kant brings into play in the third special formula of Kant's categorical imperative, namely the realm of ends as a *realm of nature* (GMS, AA 04: 436) a myth.. – By the way, the CE version of Kant's *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason* by George Di Giovanni even says several times "in this world" where the original says "in the world" or "in a world" (see RGV, AA 06: 07.31; 06: 104.09; 06: 196.26).

⁶¹ V-MP-K2/Heinze, AA 28: 793.

⁶² See KrV A 811 / B 839.

⁶³ See KpV, AA 05: 114.

⁶⁴ "and since [the final end], so far as it is attainable, is also a duty, and conversely, if it is a duty, must also be attainable [...]" (VNAEF, AA 08: 418). "This duty is based on something that is indeed quite independent of [the postulates], and of itself apodictically certain, namely the moral law". (KpV, AA 05: 142).

⁶⁵ The assertion: "he who does not believe in God, cannot be moral either." is to be replaced by the completely different one: "whoever is moral, has no reason not to believe in God as well."

⁶⁶ KU, AA 05: 450f. note. In the CE, Kant's "through morality" ("durch sie [= morality]") becomes "through *their*", where "their" refers to "all rational beings in the world". This completely misses Kant's argument.

proved⁶⁷ in the *Analytic*, but solely about the proof of the practical rationality of the moral belief.⁶⁸ Brandt obviously overlooked Kant's warning regarding the link between morality and the hope for happiness,⁶⁹ that the "order of concepts of the determination of the will must not be lost sight of".⁷⁰ That's why Brandt's assertion that man cannot be a moral person unless he thinks of himself as a citizen of the kingdom of grace has to be reversed to make it a correct one: Man cannot think of himself as such a citizen if he is not a moral person; and it is not his morality that depends on belief in God,⁷¹ but this depends on that.⁷² Only for hope does he need religion.⁷³

One must never disregard that Kant's conclusions concerning morality and religion *invariably* run in one direction, namely from the unconditionally moral to the conditionally religious.⁷⁴ Therefore, not a single doubt concerning religious matters establishes a doubt concerning the binding nature of moral claims.⁷⁵ Thus, Oelmüller is, similarly to Brandt, mistaken when he says that for Kant "no seriously binding morality is possible without the concept of a holy and just God"⁷⁶. Rather, its possibility is unconditionally certain for Kant, and only now and from this follows the entitlement to understand in purely practical respect

⁶⁷ Cf. KpV, AA 05: 125.37f.

⁶⁸ Similar to Brandt, Wood argues that to remain moral and not become a scoundrel, one must believe in the conditions of the possibility of the highest good. By no means: to remain moral one is *unconditionally* obliged, whether one believes or not. But in order not to be a fool at the same time, one is in a morally conditioned way compelled (admittedly not also obliged!) to have that belief. Therefore, one can also not say with Wood, "if I do not pursue the highest good, then I cannot act in obedience to the moral law." (Wood, Allen W.: *Kant's Moral Religion*, Ithaca / London 1970, 29; see further 100 ff.) One can very well be and remain virtuous and a fool at the same time. One only does not think then "morally consistent" (KU, AA 05: 451 note). – Also Beck's position is similar: "[...] Kant argues that [a given practical proposition] can be valid, even for practice, only if a theoretical proposition is assumed [...]." (Beck, Lewis W.: *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, Chicago 1960, 261) But Kant's train of thought is – as shown – different: A certain practical proposition would not be valid even for practice if a certain theoretical proposition were not valid. Now, however, the practical proposition is valid. So one must – in practical respect – also assume the theoretical one to be valid. Thus, Beck's further assertion is also false: "It is, he [Kant] says, a belief that I cannot renounce and at the same time maintain my allegiance to moral law" (op. cit. 262). In fact, Kant says the opposite (see KU, AA 05: 450f.).

⁶⁹ See Brandt, Reinhard: *Gerechtigkeit bei Kant* (see fn. 31), 29.

⁷⁰ KpV, AA 05: 110 (m/it.). Sala *finds fault* with the fact that, according to Kant, "the law is obligatory independently of the realizability of the highest good." Apparently, he does not see that the assumption of this realizability is at all justified only on the basis of the bindingness of the law. (See Sala, Giovanni B.: *Der moralische Gottesbeweis: Entwicklung und Spannungen in der kantischen Fassung*; in: *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongresses in Mainz 1990, Bonn 1991*, vol. II 2, 301.)

⁷¹ See i.e. RGV, AA 06: 3.03-07; 06: 07.15-20.

⁷² Cf. especially RGV, AA 06: 183.05-19.

⁷³ See KpV, AA 05: 130.22-28.

⁷⁴ For this the particularly striking remark in *Doctrine of Virtue*: "since belief in a future life does not, properly speaking, come first, so as to let the effect of criminal justice upon it be seen; but rather on the contrary, it is from the necessity of punishment that the inference to a future life is drawn." (TL, AA 06: 490) Beck is quite mistaken in his assertion that at this point in the *Doctrine of Virtue* the postulate of the immortality of the soul »disappears in deserved oblivion«." (Beck, Lewis W.: *A Commentary* [see fn. 68], 267). What Kant says here, he could just as well have said in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. He merely points out that the idea of an (intelligible) world of distributive justice, which is necessarily connected with the moral law, is the reason for the belief in a future life.

⁷⁵ The famous and notorious 'Declaration of Independence' in Grotius' *Prolegomena* ("etiamsi daremus [...] non esse Deum") could also – and with stronger reasons and referring equally to right and ethics – have come from Kant's pen.

⁷⁶ Oelmüller, Willi: *Die unbefriedigte Aufklärung. Beiträge zu einer Theorie der Moderne von Lessing, Kant und Hegel*, Frankfurt 1979 (1969), 137.

the moral commands as ("tanquam"⁷⁷) commands of God, that is: according to the idea of God.

For Spinoza, who serves as Kant's example, moral action is by no means impossible,⁷⁸ and the moral law is and remains binding for him as well,⁷⁹ but his action becomes altogether futile and thus literally hopeless, and he cannot associate any meaning with the duty to promote the highest good.⁸⁰ As "a righteous man"⁸¹, he would have to do his duty without the intention and without the consciousness of thereby promoting the highest good as the final end of all moral action. Of course, it is by no means impossible that somebody who acts morally sees in his very action an end in itself, which then with the action as such is also achieved.

The unalterably fixed starting and end point of the doctrine of the highest good and of the doctrine of the postulates resulting from it is always the one and the same: the moral law showing itself in the moral consciousness as a fact of reason. From this point all steps are taken, and to it all return. Sala⁸² misjudges this when he turns Kant's "presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation that pure reason imposes on us"⁸³ into "presuppositions of the obligation of the moral law." Apart from the fact that at the point of reference it is not a question of the obligation of the moral law itself, but of that of the final end commanded by it, God and a future life are presuppositions that cannot be separated from *this* duty only insofar as it is certain in its unconditional obligation. Thus, they are not presuppositions in the sense that their assumption only produces the obligation. Rather, it is the (already existing) obligation that compels one to assume God and a future life as presuppositions for achieving the final end. "The assumption is as necessary as the moral law, in relation to which alone it is valid."⁸⁴ And the 'claim to ought' does not at all, as Sala asserts with reference to the Spinoza passage, "amount to nothingness", because its *obligation* would not be "maintained" by the assumption of God's existence.⁸⁵ Rather, it is about the self-preservation of reason, for the sake of which reason feels necessitated (and, of course, also entitled⁸⁶) to postulate the presuppositions to be assumed for the

⁷⁷ Refl 8104, AA 19: 646.

⁷⁸ Cf. Log, AA 09: 68.19-20; 09: 69.19-20.

⁷⁹ Cf. RGV, AA 06: 07.09-15.

⁸⁰ See for this Buhle, Johann Gottlieb: Ideen zur Rechtswissenschaft, Moral und Politik, Göttingen 1799, 224 ff.; Ebbinghaus, Julius: Über die Idee der Toleranz. Eine staatsrechtliche und religionsphilosophische Untersuchung; in: Archiv für Philosophie, 4 (1950) 1-34; reprint in: Id., Gesammelte Schriften, vol. I: Sittlichkeit und Recht, Bonn 1986, 299-332; here: 318f.

⁸¹ KU, AA 05: 452.

⁸² Sala, Giovanni B.: Kant über die menschliche Vernunft. Die Kritik der reinen Vernunft und die Erkennbarkeit Gottes durch die praktische Vernunft, Weilheim-Bierbrunn 1993, 95 ff. – Sala differs from the other authors criticized here in that he cannot do without massive use of hermeneutic violence, with the help of which he succeeds in making Kant fail in all areas – in favour of a Christian 'Weltanschauung'.

⁸³ KrV A 811 / B 839.

⁸⁴ KpV, AA 05: 144. This thesis does not contradict the one quoted above in fn. 37 from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The necessity of belief does not mean an objective moral necessitation (duty), but only a subjective necessity for practical reason for the purpose of (possible) avoidance of a self-caused dilemma.

⁸⁵ Sala, Giovanni B.: Kant über die menschliche Vernunft (see fn. 82), 106.

⁸⁶ The secret of Kantian philosophy is by no means, as Adorno maintains, the *unthinkability* of despair, but this very entitlement: There is a ground, stemming from pure reason itself, not to despair. See Adorno, Theodor W.: Negative Dialektik, 7. Aufl. Frankfurt/M. 1992, 378.

maintenance of its unity. Sala draws his conclusion from the Spinoza passage even more sharply: according to Kant, it would be "quite possible for man to be taken up absolutely toward nothingness!"⁸⁷ Well, for Kant this is with moral certainty not the case! For, as practically certain as is the obligatory nature of the moral law and of the final end of all fulfilment of duty resulting therefrom, it is just as practically certain that the presuppositions necessary for the realization of the final end exist. Nevertheless, Sala arrives at the strange opinion that in the Spinoza passage Kant himself acknowledged the failure of his effort "to establish morality 'etsi Deus non daretur'."⁸⁸ This opinion has its reason, as in Brandt's case, in a misinterpretation of the function of the passage in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, according to which the impossibility of the highest good results in the falsity of the moral law. In fact, however, it does not require belief in God *so that* the moral law gets binding force, but *because* it has it, such belief is possible; and without this binding force of the moral law the belief in God would be groundless.

But, as said, the one who does not have that belief can by no means "judge himself to be free from the obligations of the [moral law]. No! All that would have to be surrendered in that case would be the *aim* of realizing the *final end* in the world [...] by conformity to the moral law."⁸⁹ The assumption of the objective practical reality of the highest good is thus, as already said, not in the least necessary *for morality*; rather, it presupposes it and becomes itself necessary only *through it*.⁹⁰ This (morally conditioned) necessity does not mean that that assumption is a duty, but only that it is a "necessity, as a need [of pure practical reason⁹¹], connected with duty [the promotion of the highest good]"⁹². And it's also not the case, that reason has this need "to derive from this assumption the binding authority of moral laws or the incentive to observe them"⁹³ [...]; but rather only in order to give *objective reality* to the concept of the highest good,⁹⁴ i.e., to prevent it, along with morality as a whole, from being taken only as a mere ideal [...]"⁹⁵; in short, "in order not to contradict itself"⁹⁶ and thus

⁸⁷ Sala, Giovanni B.: Kant über die menschliche Vernunft (see fn. 82), 108.

⁸⁸ Sala, Giovanni B.: Kant über die menschliche Vernunft (see fn. 82), 106.

⁸⁹ KU, AA 05: 451 (second emphasis mine).

⁹⁰ Cf. also KrV A 812f. / B 840f. (AA 03: 527.21-26); KpV, AA 05: 04.

⁹¹ With a touch of generosity, Beck critically notes, "that Kant's usual high-quality workmanship is not much in evidence in the discussion of the antinomy" (Beck, Lewis W.: Commentary [see fn. 68], 246). Beck claims that the need (of which Kant speaks in his reply to Wizenmann [KpV, AA 05: 144]) is not a "need of pure reason" but "of the all-too-human reason". (op. cit., 254) As a reason for his strange assertion he gives, incidentally without citing the source: "because of inescapable human limitations". Kant does indeed speak of this once, admittedly in a completely different place, in a completely different context and with a completely different meaning. There it is about the human peculiarity "to be concerned in every action with its result" (RGV, AA 06: 07 note). This leads to the idea of the highest good. That need of pure practical reason, however, has by no means its origin in the limited human nature, but in the moral law that necessarily obliges all rational beings, and it leads to the assumption of the existence of the necessary conditions of the highest good. This assumption has the ground of its (subjective) necessity in the need of pure practical reason to avoid the self-contradiction into which it would inevitably fall with regard to the law given by itself, in case of refusing the assumption.

⁹² KpV, AA 05: 125. Also in KrV A 811 / B 839 (AA 03: 526.28-30) it is about God and immortality not as presuppositions of morality, but only as necessary assumptions *in view of* the obligation to promote the highest good.

⁹³ "for the law of reason is already in itself objectively adequate to this" (VT, AA 08: 397; cf. RGV, AA 06: 03).

⁹⁴ "only in order to be able to think of an intended effect [the highest good] as possible" (KU, AA 05: 456).

⁹⁵ WDO, AA 08: 139 (m/it; partly m/tr); cf. TP, AA 08: 279.25-29; KU, AA 05: 446.28-37.

⁹⁶ KU, AA 05: 471 note.

to have to accept at the same time a weakening of its *own* moving force as incentive. Yet, the apodictic certainty of the validity of the moral law and its (that validity's) complete independence from the assumption of the attainability of the highest good is beyond question;⁹⁷ and it is just that certainty alone, which makes this assumption (practically) possible (and necessary). The "inner moral worth" of the actions, subordinated to the "principle of universal validity"⁹⁸, is completely independent "from the possibility or unrealizability of the ends [set by the moral law and aimed at by the actions]."⁹⁹ However, in that our moral actions and omissions are given meaning only by the setting of a final end, at the same time the "moral incentive in our own lawgiving reason"¹⁰⁰ undergoes a strengthening¹⁰¹ (to a greater or lesser extent) through the hope for a moral world of distributive justice.¹⁰²

IV.

Let us now turn to the *Canon* itself, after some of its passages have already been referred to in the notes. Actually, in order to dispute also the assertion¹⁰³ that Kant holds in the first *Critique* moral-philosophically a 'pre-critical' doctrine with regard to incentives, it should again suffice what Kant himself said about it at the beginning of the *Second Section* of the *Canon*:

"The practical law from the motive of *happiness* I call pragmatic (rule of prudence); but that, if such law exists,¹⁰⁴ which has for its motive nothing but the *worthiness to be happy*, I call moral (moral law)."¹⁰⁵

Already many decades before it became the 'prevailing opinion'¹⁰⁶ to use the above¹⁰⁷ quoted passage as proof of that assertion, corresponding statements can be found even with

⁹⁷ Cf. KrV A 807 / B 835; KpV, AA 05: 125f.; RGV, AA 06: 07.09-15; TP, AA 08: 280.05-08.

⁹⁸ Lacking in the CE.

⁹⁹ KU, AA 05: 471.

¹⁰⁰ TL, AA 06: 487.

¹⁰¹ Kant talks about this again and again, also and especially after the *Critique of Pure Reason*; see e.g. GMS, AA 04: 439.15-16; WDO, AA 08: 146.12-16; KpV, AA 05: 118.10-11; 05: 146.03; 05; KU, AA 05: 446.13-15; 05: 446.35-37; 05: 452.32-37; RGV, AA 06: 05.18; 06: 44.28-29; 06: 69.08-11; 06: 183.16; V-MS/Vigil, AA 27: 530f.; 27: 545; 27: 724; TL, AA 06: 487; SF, AA 07: 36.24-26; 07: 68.23; Päd, AA 09: 494.14; FM, AA 20: 299.05.

¹⁰² Just as, by the way, the "ever-cheerful heart", so praised by Kant (TL, AA 06: 485; KpV, AA 05: 115; Päd, AA 09: 485), is not only the consequence of righteousness, but at the same time, as a "counterbalance" (KpV, AA 05: 88), a means of strengthening the will to virtue.

¹⁰³ For the dispute about the claim that the *Canon* is about moral philosophy at all, see above p. 3 ff..

¹⁰⁴ The next paragraph then states: "I assume that there are really pure moral laws". (KrV A 807 / B 835) The CE translation ignores this.

¹⁰⁵ KrV A 806 / B 834 (m/tr); see further KrV A 813 / B 841 (AA 03: 528.07-09).

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Düsing, Klaus: Das Problem des höchsten Gutes in Kants Praktischer Philosophie, in: Kant-Studien, 62 (1971), 15; Guérout, Martial: Canon de la raison pure et critique de la raison pratique, in: Revue Internationale de Philosophie, 8 (1954) 331-357; Henrich, Dieter: Der Begriff der sittlichen Einsicht und Kants Lehre vom Faktum der Vernunft, in: Henrich, Dieter et al. (Eds.), Die Gegenwart der Griechen im neueren Denken, Tübingen 1960, 107; Albrecht, Michael: Kants Antinomie der praktischen Vernunft, Hildesheim 1978, 18, 93, 137, 153; Allison, Henry E.: The Concept of Freedom in Kant's 'Semi-Critical' Ethics, in: Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie, 68 (1986) 96-115; Ibid.: Kant's Theory of Freedom, Cambridge 1990, 54-70; Schmitz, Hermann: Was wollte Kant?, Bonn 1989, 81-124; Forschner, Maximilian: Das Ideal des moralischen Glaubens. Religionsphilosophie in Kants Reflexionen, in: Ricken, Friedo / Marty, Francois (Ed.): Kant über Religion, Stuttgart etc. 1992, 83-99; Ibid., Freiheit als Schlüsselstein eines Systems der reinen Vernunft. Transzendente und

Julius Ebbinghaus in his short paper of 1927 on Luther and Kant. Not, to be sure, throughout, but in some concise passages in it, Kant seems to even have held the view, that for Kant in general, that is, not only in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the hope for proportioned happiness was a necessary condition for the impetus to moral action. Thus he speaks of the "justification of religious belief as such"¹⁰⁸ with its opaque connection of morality and happiness, already given in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in its approach traceable considerably further back,¹⁰⁹ and of the reasons why man can have the moral law "only as a command of the Almighty as the supreme subjective principle of his action"; and of the fact that the unconditional assumption of this law would be "only possible as obedience to the commands of the Almighty Creator of the world"; and of Kant's "proof that *under the condition* of the principle of the determination of the will given by the moral law, the character of this law as the law of the will of the omnipotent being becomes an inescapable *condition of the possibility* of the subjective submission of the human will to this law."¹¹⁰ Finally, he declares it impossible "that man *could take the resolution* to subordinate to such a law the whole extent of his possible decisions of will [...], if he had to assume that moral disposition as such would have no influence at all on the happiness of the people living in these dispositions"¹¹¹ However, in his own copy of that essay, which is now in the Ebbinghaus Archive (currently at the University of Trier), Ebbinghaus later wrote with his characteristic bluntness in the margin of the last quoted passage: "Nonsense".¹¹² However, he did not leave it at that, but gave at least a short hint in two other places of the essay,¹¹³ how he now thought about the answer to the question provoked by the quoted passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The following considerations try to give shape to the answer subsequent to this hint.

praktische Freiheit, in: Fischer, Norbert (Ed.): *Kants Metaphysik und Religionsphilosophie*, Hamburg 2004, 131-159; Förster, Eckart: "Was darf ich hoffen?" Zum Problem der Vereinbarkeit von theoretischer und praktischer Vernunft bei Immanuel Kant, in: *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 46 (1992) 172 ff.; *Ibid.*: Die Wandlungen in Kants Gotteslehre, in: *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 52 (1998) 344 ff.; Schulz, Eberhard Günter (Ed.): *Immanuel Kant, Vorreden*, München 1996, 140, 146; Milz, Bernhard: Zur Analytizität und Synthetizität der Grundlegung, in: *Kant-Studien*, 89 (1998) 201; Bojanowski, Jochen: *Kants Theorie der Freiheit. Rekonstruktion und Rehabilitierung*, Berlin / New York 2006, 185-208; Ludwig, Bernd: "Positive und negative Freiheit" bei Kant? – Wie begriffliche Konfusion auf philosophi(e)historische Abwege führt, in: *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik*, 21 (2013) 277; 283, Fn. 18; *Ibid.*: Recht ohne Personen? Oder: Wieviel Metaphysik braucht die (kantische) Rechtslehre?, in: Dörflinger, Bernd et al. (Eds.): *Das Verhältnis von Recht und Ethik in Kants praktischer Philosophie*, Hildesheim / Zürich / New York 2017, 193; *Ibid.*: Über drei Deduktionen in Kants Moralphilosophie – und über eine vierte, die man dort vergeblich sucht. Zur Rehabilitierung von Grundlegung III, in: *Kant-Studien*, 109 (2018) 67; Kohl, Markus: Transcendental and Practical Freedom in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in: *Kant-Studien*, 105 (2014) 332; Timmermann, Jens: Emerging Autonomy: Dealing with the Inadequacies of the "Canon" of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), in: Bacin, Stefano / Sensen, Oliver (Eds.): *The emergence of autonomy in Kant's moral philosophy*, Cambridge 2019, 115. – It is striking how extensively for confirmation use is made of indeed 'pre-critical' estate and lecture material from the 1770s.

¹⁰⁷ See above on p. 2 the quote from KrV A 813 / B 841 (AA 03: 527.26-30).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. e.g. Kant's letters to Lavater from 1775 (Br, AA 10: 175 ff.). For this Weil: „Tout, ou presque, de la philosophie de la religion kantienne est présent dans ces textes.“ (Weil, Eric: *Problèmes kantien*s, 2. Aufl., Paris 1982, 146)

¹⁰⁹ Ebbinghaus, Julius: *Luther und Kant*; in: *Jahrbuch der Luthergesellschaft*, 9 (1927) 119-155; reprint in: *Id.*: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. III: *Interpretation und Kritik*, Bonn 1990, 39-75; here: 40 (m/it).

¹¹⁰ Ebbinghaus, Julius: *Luther und Kant* (see fn. 109), 52f. (last emphasis mine).

¹¹¹ Ebbinghaus, Julius: *Luther und Kant* (see fn. 109), 57.

¹¹² Also the other passages quoted here are negatively marked by him there (by a question mark or by "wrong").

¹¹³ Ebbinghaus, Julius: *Luther und Kant* (see fn. 109), 61 and 65.

The fundamental law of morality refers only to the form of the will, disregarding all possible matter of it. Accordingly, before all concrete volition directed to whatever ends, man has the duty to make as the supreme maxim of all his volition the fitness of his maxims for universal law-giving and the subordination of all the incentives of inclination (in the inevitable pursuit of happiness) to the incentive of respect for the law (in the commanded pursuit of virtue).¹¹⁴ Just as this "intelligible deed" "precedes every [empirical] deed,"¹¹⁵ so the unconditional moral obligation of man precedes every possible setting of ends. The duty to moral disposition as the readiness to let all his willing and acting be determined first and foremost by the law of reason, man already has as a person without having any ends. Only then does the element come into play to which Ebbinghaus' hint refers: the human being as having and as setting ends. The answer to the question to what end then one fulfills all one's duties of right and virtue and what lawful consequences (through freedom and its own causality) the whole submission to the law of morality has, Kant gives with his doctrine of the highest good as the state of happiness in proportion to morality as worthiness to be happy.¹¹⁶ If someone now denies the attainability of the highest good as the final end of all moral action, then even his whole morality as active respect for the moral law cannot have, *in relation to what he again and again intends and carries out* ("resolve and realization"¹¹⁷), the force of an incentive. As Ebbinghaus alludes to in the hint mentioned above: The state¹¹⁸ to be attained by complying with the moral law (in contrast to the moral law itself) can then, because it is in principle unattainable for him, have no attraction for him. Man would "strive for the object of a concept that would be, at bottom, empty and without an object".¹¹⁹ The "necessary success" of the "moral laws" "would have to disappear". Reason would be compelled to "regard the moral laws as empty figments of the brain"¹²⁰ because they require something contradictory, namely an ineffective cause, the causation of something which cannot be caused.

In support of his view that the *Critique of Pure Reason* differs decisively from the *Critique of Practical Reason* with respect to the theory of incentives, Albrecht points¹²¹ to a passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

"Since there are practical laws [NB plural] that are absolutely necessary (the moral laws), then *if* these necessarily presuppose any existence as the condition of the possibility of their *binding* force, this existence has to be *postulated*, because the conditioned from which the inference to this determinate condition proceeds is itself cognized a priori as absolutely necessary. In the future¹²² we will show about the

¹¹⁴ Cf. KrV A 807 / B 835 (AA 03: 524.08-13); A 813 / B 841 (AA 03: 528.07-09; KpV, AA 05: 72 ff.

¹¹⁵ RGV, AA 06: 31.

¹¹⁶ See KrV A 810 / B 838.

¹¹⁷ KrV A 813 / B 841.

¹¹⁸ Cf. KpV, AA 05: 130.11-16.

¹¹⁹ KpV, AA 05: 143. Still in a lecture from 1793/94 it says: "for should it be impossible, by fulfilment of virtuous duties, to obtain any enjoyment, his endeavours would be pointless, and virtue an empty delusion." V-MS/Vigil, AA 27: 483.

¹²⁰ KrV A 811 / B 839.

¹²¹ Albrecht, Michael: *Kants Antinomie der praktischen Vernunft*, Hildesheim 1978, 165.

¹²² With this, Kant probably alludes to the topic of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which is still set aside here. In 1783/84 Kant noted: "But we have subjective grounds, both of the [...] speculative and the practical use of our reason, to presuppose such an existence, because without it we find no satisfaction for our reason, also no

moral laws that they not only presuppose the existence of a highest being ["a single supreme will, which comprehends all these laws in itself"¹²³], but also, since in a different respect they are absolutely necessary, they postulate this existence rightfully but, of course, only practically; for now we will set aside this kind of inference."¹²⁴

But here, by way of announcement, the 'case' is present which Kant discusses later: namely, that the existence of God must be postulated as the condition of the possibility of the highest good, because otherwise the command of the moral law to pursue the promotion of this good, "itself cognized a priori as absolutely necessary," would indeed be without binding and a fortiori without moving force for lack of objective reality of its object. Also, the second passage to which Albrecht points:

"But since the moral precept is thus at the same time my maxim (as reason commands that it ought to be), I will inexorably believe in an existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make this belief unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted."¹²⁵,

by no means implies, as he thinks, a "strict interdependence between 'highest good' and 'moral law'"; on the contrary: the validity of the moral law, completely independent of the realizability of the highest good and of the belief in God's existence, is and remains, once more, a self-evident presupposition.¹²⁶ Why else, if one renounced the moral principles (which here can only mean: if one refrained from complying with them [for lack of motivation, for instance]), would one be "contemptible" in one's own eyes. What is meant here, too, is that with the disbelief regarding the realizability of the final end and through the resulting futility of moral action, "my moral principles themselves [...] would thereby be subverted," namely, in that they would become literally without any end.

A few pages after the passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason*¹²⁷ that caused so much confusion, there is a warning concluding the entire *Second Section* of the *Canon*, which not only precisely confirms the reading presented here, but even contains it, if one does not want to blame it along with Förster for a "petitio principii", which Kant himself allegedly recognized as such only in his argument with Garve.¹²⁸ Kant first warns (at the beginning of the last paragraph of this section) against undertaking to "derive the moral laws themselves" from the "concept of a single original being as the highest [original] good". What he then gives as

consistent unity of it possible. First and foremost, the practical laws, which are objectively necessary after all, have no subjective force without that presupposition. So we have enough for a rational belief, even to it as a necessary presupposition; for in speculative philosophy it is not necessary that I try to explain the origin of nature (It is not objectively necessary to speculate, but certainly to obey the moral law); but moral laws I must recognize, consequently also, as an unavoidable hypothesis, the presupposition, without which moral laws would have no binding force for rational beings." (Refl 6110, AA 18: 458 [m/tr]; see also AA 18: 519.23-25; 18: 547.19-24 [1785-88])

¹²³ KrV A 815 / B 843.

¹²⁴ KrV A 633f. / B 661f. (first emphasis mine).

¹²⁵ KrV A 828 / B 856 (partly m/tr).

¹²⁶ Cf. KrV A 810 / B 838 (AA 03: 526.03-14); KrV A 632 / B 660 (AA 03: 421.34-35).

¹²⁷ KrV A 813 / B 841 (AA 03: 527.24-30).

¹²⁸ See Förster, Eckart: 'Was darf ich hoffen?'. Zum Problem der Vereinbarkeit von theoretischer und praktischer Vernunft bei Immanuel Kant; in: Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung, 46 (1992) 175.

reasoning reads as if taken from the two later *Critiques*. It would be just "these laws alone whose *inner* practical necessity led us to the presupposition of a self-sufficient cause or a wise world-regent, in order to give *effect* to these [binding] laws".¹²⁹ In particular, these laws could not be regarded as derived "from a will of which we would have had no concept at all had we not formed it in accordance with [them]."¹³⁰ So far as practical reason has the right to lead us, we will not hold actions to be obligatory because they are God's commands, but will rather regard them as divine commands because we are internally obligated to them."¹³¹

The reason for the morally conditioned necessity to understand and to obey the duties, imposed by the law of one's own reason, at the same time as divine commands lies solely in the fact that we can expect from God alone the "effect" *determined by law*, which we are by the law obliged to (co-)cause by virtuousness as a necessary condition of the possibility of the highest good.¹³²

Only under the condition that the moral laws are binding, is "the standpoint of moral unity as a necessary law of the world"¹³³ (i.e. of the systematic unity of all ends, determined according to laws of freedom, in a moral [intelligible] world) possible at all. And only from this standpoint, in turn, it is possible to speak of God as a "moral author of the world"¹³⁴ and the enabler of an "appropriate effect" of a "law of the world" and its "thus obligating force also for us" (with regard to the pursuit of the moral final end).¹³⁵

It is not the moral laws, but it is the "law of the world" conditioning the moral unity of ends, of which Kant says that it would acquire obligating force for us only under the condition of the existence of God (as the highest original good). And with the "majestic ideas of morality" of which Kant had spoken before, again not the moral laws are meant, but the ideas

¹²⁹ KrV A 818 / B 846 (second emphasis mine); "a consequence in accordance with the principles of a moral lawgiving" (KpV, AA 05: 37); cf. also KrV A 808 / B 836 (AA 03: 524.32-34).

¹³⁰ See for this also Heydenreich, Karl Heinrich: *System des Naturrechts nach kritischen Prinzipien*, Leipzig 1794, 128; 140f.

¹³¹ KrV A 819 / B 847; cf. also KrV A 632 / B 660 (AA 03: 421.34-35); TL, AA 06: 437ff. – Incidentally, Kant later noted on a loose note in his own copy of the second *Critique*: "One can never regard the duty as [...] determining the will without *at the same time* connecting the hope of immortality with it. [...] Here [...] again, the [...] expectation of another world is not the reason for the consciousness of duty, but the other way round, so, however, that this duty cannot be binding without carrying the position of immortality with it at the same time". (Lehmann, Gerhard: *Kants Bemerkungen im Handexemplar der Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*; in: *Kant-Studien*, 72 (1981) 138f. [m/tr])

¹³² Cf. Refl 6317, AA 18: 626. In the *Dialectic* of the first *Critique*, Kant explains that if we were to have obligations "that were entirely correct in the idea of reason, but would have no real application to us, i.e., would be without any incentive, if a highest being were not presupposed who could give effect and emphasis to the practical laws; then we would also have an obligation to follow those concepts, that even though they may not be objectively sufficient, are still preponderant in accordance with the measure of our reason, and in comparison with which we recognize nothing better or more convincing." (KrV A 589 / B 617) In his own copy of the second *Critique*, just mentioned, Kant noted: "The moral reason for considering [duties as divine commands] is the impossibility of imagining them, the object of our [...] will obeying the moral laws, the highest good, as possible by our will alone, although one part of the good conduct is incumbent on us to perform, and without God, who attaches the other part [...] to the moral law, the highest good would be an empty idea" (137f. [m/tr; m/it]).

¹³³ The CE contains a serious error.

¹³⁴ KU 05: 470.

¹³⁵ Siehe KrV A 815 / B 843 (partly m/tr). To distinguish "obligating (binding) force" ("verbindende Kraft", "Verbindlichkeit") and "moving force", "incentive" ("bewegende Kraft", "Triebfeder") compare e.g. on the one hand KrV A 634 / B 662; A 815 / B 843; WDO, AA 08: 139; TP, AA 08: 306; Refl 6110, AA 18: 458; Refl. 7862, AA 19: 538; Refl 1874, AA 19: 602; VAZeF, AA 23: 167 and on the other hand KpV, AA 05: 88; 05: 152; 05: 156; 05: 158; WDO, AA 08: 139. The moral law acquires binding force (subjective validity) in moral consciousness as a fact of reason. It becomes a moving force (incentive) in acting out of respect for the law.

of the "*judgment* of morality concerning [first] its purity and [second] its consequences",¹³⁶ thus, the idea of worthiness to be happy¹³⁷ and the idea of happiness "distributed precisely in accordance with morality"¹³⁸ as the two "elements of the highest derived good"¹³⁹

It is pure reason in its practical use – and exclusively pure reason – which, beyond the moral law, generates those "majestic ideas" for the realization of which a God and an "invisible but hoped-for world" are needed,¹⁴⁰ while for the obligating force of the moral law neither a God nor another world are necessary.

It should be noted, however, that also the incentives, that arise from belief and whose mention in the *Canon* allegedly indicates Kant's pre-critical position, are *moral* incentives. For belief, after all, refers to the necessary conditions of the possibility of the highest good, that is, of happiness as a function of worthiness to be happy. One believes not because of one's interest in happiness, but because of one's interest in the meaningfulness and purposefulness of one's moral acting; one believes, then, that this acting has a corresponding 'effect' *according to the moral law*. Motivation based on the hope, that my (unconditional) moral acting is not meaningless and futile, is quite different from motivation based on and for the sake of inclinations including fear of punishment or hope of reward. Worthiness to be happy as a condition of *proportioned* happiness absolutely excludes the desire for happiness as a *reason* for compliance with the moral law; and the commanded promotion of the highest good means primarily the promotion of the realization of an (intelligible) moral world and (only implied in it) also the promotion of one's own proportioned happiness.

The clearest and most precise explanation about this is given by Kant in the *Common Saying*-essay: First he says with reference to belief:

"It is not as if the universal concept of duty first gets »support and stability« only on the presupposition of both [a moral ruler of the world and a future life], that is, gets a sure basis and the requisite strength of an *incentive*, but in order that only in that ideal of pure reason does it also get an *object*."¹⁴¹

At the end of a long note referring to this, Kant concludes:

"With the human being too, accordingly, the incentive which is present in the idea of the highest good possible in the world by his cooperation is not his own happiness thereby intended but only this idea as end in itself, and hence compliance with it as duty. For it contains no prospect of happiness absolutely, but only of a proportion

¹³⁶ KrV A 812 / B 840.

¹³⁷ "that quality of a person, based upon the subject's own will, such that a reason giving universal laws (for nature as well as for free will) would harmonize with all the ends of this person." (TP, AA 08: 278); "unremitting effort" (KrV A 810 / B 838); "our entire course of life" (KrV A 812 / B 840).

¹³⁸ KrV A 811 / B 839.

¹³⁹ KrV A 811 / B 839. To promote the highest good could not be duty, and the ideas themselves could therefore not be "incentives for the [corresponding] resolve and execution" (KrV A 813 / B 841 [m/tr]), if the realization would be impossible. Now, however, the promotion is obligatory. So it is allowed to postulate the necessary conditions of the possibility of this promotion. Cf. also KrV A 817 / B 845 (AA 03: 530.18-19). – Later, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant speaks of the "noble ideal of a universal kingdom of *ends in themselves* (of rational beings)." (GMS, AA 04: 462)

¹⁴⁰ See KrV A 813 / B 841.

¹⁴¹ TP AA 08: 279 (partly m/tr; instead of "in order that" the CE says "rather that").

between happiness and the worthiness of a subject, whoever this may be. A determination of will, however, which limits itself and its aim of belonging to such a whole to this condition is *not selfish*."¹⁴²

The highest good as a moral final end is the result of restricting the pursuit of inclination-based ends (of self-love) to the conditions of the moral law. This law can therefore – as the law of freedom for man as an intelligible being in relation to man as a sensible being, who is inevitably under laws of nature – very well (also) be understood as the law of the conditions under which man may pursue his happiness.¹⁴³ And it is through the fulfillment of these conditions that he attains the "worthiness to be happy"¹⁴⁴.

If we now look again at the *Second Section* of the *Canon*, the same kind of argument as in the *Dialectic* of the second *Critique* appears there. Also in the context of the *Canon*-question about the correct use of practical reason, it has the same purpose, namely, to serve as a basis for the justification of postulates. Moral laws are said here to be "empty figments of the brain"¹⁴⁵ without God and an intelligible (hoped for) world.

For – as one could now continue with the *Critique of Practical Reason* –, since the promotion of the highest good

"is an a priori necessary object of our will and inseparably bound up with the moral law, the impossibility of the first must also prove the falsity of the second. If, therefore, the highest good is impossible in accordance with practical rules, then also the moral law, which commands us to promote it, must be fantastic and directed to empty imaginary ends and must therefore in itself be false."¹⁴⁶

And in both texts, a strict rejection of an 'eudaemonistic' position then follows:

"Even reason free from all private aims¹⁴⁷ cannot judge otherwise if, without taking into account an interest of its own, it puts itself in the place of a being who would have to distribute all happiness to others; for in the practical idea both elements are essentially combined, though in such a way *that the moral disposition*¹⁴⁸, *as a condition, first makes partaking in happiness possible, rather than the prospect of happiness first making possible the moral disposition*. For in the latter case the disposition would not be moral and would therefore also not be worthy of complete

¹⁴² TP, AA 08: 280 (partly m/tr). Similarly, it is already stated in the *Critique of Practical Reason*: "although in the concept of the highest good, as that of a whole in which the greatest happiness is represented as connected in the most exact proportion with the greatest degree of moral perfection (possible in creatures), *my own happiness* is included, this is nevertheless not the determining ground of the will that is directed to promote the highest good; it is instead the moral law (which, on the contrary, limits by strict conditions my unbounded craving for happiness)." (KpV, AA 05: 129f.; see also KpV, AA 05: 109.34-110.04) And in the *Preisschrift* Kant speaks of the fact that "the effect [...] upon the subjective principles of morality and their reinforcement, and thus upon action and omission themselves, is again *by intention of a moral kind*" (FM, AA 20: 299 [m/it]).

¹⁴³ Cf. KpV, AA 05: 73.14-18.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. KrV A 810 / B 838; A 813 / B 841.

¹⁴⁵ KrV A 811 / B 839. Only here and in the *Dialectic* of the second *Critique* (KpV, AA 05: 114) such talk makes sense.

¹⁴⁶ KpV, AA 05: 114; cf. also KpV, AA 05: 143.04-09; KU, AA 05: 471.23-28; WDO, AA 08: 139.28-32.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. KpV, AA 05: 110.26.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. for this also KpV, AA 05: 116.25-26.

happiness, which knows no other limitation before reason except that which is derived from our own immoral conduct."¹⁴⁹

"[T]he *supreme* good (as the first condition of the highest good) is morality, whereas happiness constitutes its second element but in such a way that it is only the morally conditioned yet still *necessary* result of the former."¹⁵⁰

For this reason, Kant, when he speaks in *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason* about a law "through which our reason commands us compellingly, *without however either promising or threatening anything thereby*"¹⁵¹, by no means corrects what he said in the *Critique of Pure Reason* about moral laws, which could not be *commands* "if they did not connect appropriate consequences with their rule a priori, and thus [in this respect] carry with them *promises* and *threats*."¹⁵² Our reason commands unconditionally, without promise or threat. Since, though, its commands cannot be thought without "appropriate consequences", linked to their rule (of "morally good conduct"¹⁵³) and, depending on the degree of worthiness to be happy, to be hoped for or feared, they necessarily carry *with them* promises and threats. However, it is not because of the promises and threats they carry with them, that moral laws are commands; but because and insofar as they are commands, they carry with them promises and threats determined by them.¹⁵⁴ The 'promise of the moral law', of which Kant speaks, by the way, not only in the *Critique of Pure Reason* but also later,¹⁵⁵ is not contained in the law itself,¹⁵⁶ but put into it by us "for morally sufficient reason [for the purpose of avoiding a morally conditioned dilemma]"¹⁵⁷. Here, too, one must not lose sight of the "*order* of concepts of the determination of the will".¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁹ KrV A 813f. / B 841f. (m/it). KrV A 829 / B 857: "the belief in a God and another world is so interwoven with my moral disposition that I am in as little danger of ever surrendering the former as I am worried that the latter can ever be torn away from me. The only reservation that is to be found here is that this rational belief is grounded on the presupposition of moral dispositions. If we depart from that, and assume someone who would be entirely indifferent in regard to moral questions, then the question that is propounded by reason becomes merely a problem for speculation". In *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason*, Kant distinguishes between "moral disposition in following [the Ten Commandments]" and solely "external observance". (RGV, AA 06: 126 [without Kant's italics])

¹⁵⁰ KpV, AA 05: 119 (second emphasis mine).

¹⁵¹ RGV, AA 06: 49 (m/it); see also KpV, AA 05: 128.16-19.

¹⁵² KrV A 811 / B 839.

¹⁵³ KrV A 813 / B 841.

¹⁵⁴ Reference is made again to TL, AA 06: 490.34-37 (see fn. 74).

¹⁵⁵ See e.g. KU, AA 05: 471; RGV, AA 06: 144; EaD, AA 08: 339; VARGV, AA 23: 122.

¹⁵⁶ Directly commanded by the moral law is only virtuousness; and only in the light of the command to promote the final end, this also means to be *worthy* of a proportioned happiness. This command, however, does not imply the 'promise' that one will also *partake* of such happiness.

¹⁵⁷ KU, AA 05: 471 /m/tr); cf. also KpV, AA 05: 128.16-19; 05: 147.30-34; RGV, AA 06: 49.

¹⁵⁸ KpV, AA 05: 110 (m/it). Ludwig completely disregards the systematic context of the *Canon* by saying that the "imperative character" of moral laws, according to the *Canon*, "indispensably" presupposes "some or other" promises and threats; which (mis-)leads him to conclude: "In the systematic context of the *critical philosophy* of 1781, categorical imperatives are definitely *not* possible (and it is probably no accident that such [imperatives] do not even appear in the *Critique*)." (Ludwig, Bernd: *Drei Deduktionen* [see fn. 106], 67f.) That – as he even states himself – the possibility of such imperatives is explicitly presupposed in the *Canon* (KrV A 800 / B 828; A 807 / B 835) leaves him unconcerned. – Schmitz, on the other hand, believes he can detect a contrast in the *Canon* between the "acknowledged unconditionality of the moral law" and the "business-like estimating behavior towards it when it is necessary to act according to it," and forges from this his verdict: "cynical eudaemonism". (Schmitz, Hermann: *Was wollte Kant*, Bonn 1989, 90; 94)

Kant's train of thought is misunderstood if one does not note that it is completely analogous to that in the *Dialectic* of the second *Critique*. According to the (considered as valid) moral law,¹⁵⁹ I *ought to* promote the realization of the highest good; so I *can* promote it and thus consider its realization possible; and therefore I am entitled¹⁶⁰ and subjectively compelled to assume the existence of the necessary conditions of the realization; because if I would deny the existence of these conditions, then I would get, through my reason, into the dilemma to regard the moral law given by it as valid and *at the same time* as an 'empty figment of the brain'.¹⁶¹

Similarly, Kant writes in 1786:

"Now reason needs to assume such a dependent highest good and for the sake of it a supreme intelligence as the highest independent good: not, of course, to derive from this assumption the binding authority of the moral laws or the incentive to observe them (for they would have no moral worth if their motive were derived from anything but the law alone, which is of itself apodictically certain), but rather only in order to give objective reality to the concept of the highest good, i.e. to prevent it, along with the entire morality, from being taken merely as a mere ideal, if that should not exist anywhere, the idea of which accompanies morality inseparably."¹⁶²

Allison sees moral-philosophically a "contrast" between first and second *Critique*: "in the *Critique of Pure Reason* the postulates of God and immortality are introduced as props for the moral law itself, not merely as necessary conditions for the attainment of an end commanded by that law." Referring to the alleged role of the "majestic ideas of morality," he then comes to the conclusion: "Kant does not yet draw a sharp distinction between the incentive to be moral and the desire for happiness."¹⁶³ In fact, however, Kant (several pages before the passages cited by Allison) did not subsequently change anything about the assumption he made as a prerequisite for his reflections, namely, the assumption of the existence of categorically commanding moral laws that are completely independent of the postulates.¹⁶⁴ On the contrary, he first makes it clear that the answer to the second, *moral* question of what we ought to do would be already given and would go: "Do that through which you will become worthy to be happy."¹⁶⁵ In the next but one paragraph he says that the answer to the (third) question of what we may hope for, is only possible "if a *highest reason*, which commands according to moral laws, is at the same time taken as the cause of nature."¹⁶⁶ So, again, the existence of such laws is presupposed. A few lines later Kant concludes: "Thus only in the ideal of the highest *original* good can pure reason find the ground of the practically necessary connection of both elements of the highest derived good, namely of an intelligible, i.e., *moral* world."¹⁶⁷ There is no mention of God as a "prop for the

¹⁵⁹ See KrV A 807f. / B 835f.; KpV, AA 05: 47.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. KU, AA 05: 471.38-39.

¹⁶¹ See for this also V-MP/Volckmann, AA 28: 385f.

¹⁶² WDO, AA 08: 139 (partly m/tr); the CE contains various errors, one (see the first two lines) quite serious.

¹⁶³ Allison, Henry E.: Kant's Theory of Freedom [see fn. 106], 67.

¹⁶⁴ See KrV A 807 / 835 - A 811 / B 839; cf. also KrV A 801 / B 829 (AA 03: 520.13).

¹⁶⁵ KrV A 808f. / B 836f. (without Kant's italics)

¹⁶⁶ KrV A 810 / B 838 (m/tr).

¹⁶⁷ KrV A 810f. / B 838f.

moral law itself". Rather, the first, decisive element, namely worthiness resulting from the observance of the law, is necessarily presupposed. And when, still *before* Allison's passages of evidence, it says: "Thus God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation, imposed on us by pure reason,¹⁶⁸ in accordance with principles of that very same reason."¹⁶⁹, then this means: we are bound by the moral law of pure reason to strive for the highest good, and we can do this only under the two mentioned presuppositions, which also follow from principles of pure reason.

Now, it is probably Kant's very talk of promises and threats, that so easily leads one to misunderstand the infamous *Canon* passage. Therefore, in conclusion, an attempt will be made to make it understandable from a systematic-principled point of view.

V.

The decisive basis for the discussions in the *Second Section* of the *Canon* is the assumption, "that there are really pure moral laws which determine completely a priori [...] the use of freedom of a rational being in general"¹⁷⁰. That brings us to the keyword without which the context cannot be understood: law. More precisely, it is a law of causality, but not a law of natural causality, but a law of causality through or from freedom, or, as Kant says in the *First Section* of the *Canon*, of the "causality of reason in the determination of the will"¹⁷¹.

A causal relation is a special ground-consequence relation, namely the relation between causes and effects that follow them with lawful necessity. In the morally relevant case of a causality through freedom, the cause is "our entire course of life [subordinated or not subordinated to moral maxims]"¹⁷², i.e. virtue as worthiness to be happy resp. vice as its opposite. The 'effect' is the consequence, connected by (moral) *law*¹⁷³ with the ground, in the form of a corresponding (general) granting or non-granting of what by nature human volition by its matter is directed to: happiness. Not that its measure depends on the discretion of the divine will. Rather, it follows *necessarily from the law* which every free will gives itself for itself.¹⁷⁴

"[T]o need happiness, to be also worthy of it, and yet not to participate in it can by no means be consistent with the perfect volition of a rational being that would at the same time have all power, even if we think of such a being only for the sake of the experiment."¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ The CE is ambiguous, if not wrong, for lack of punctuation.

¹⁶⁹ KrV A 811 / B 839.

¹⁷⁰ KrV A 807 / B 835.

¹⁷¹ KrV A 803 / B 831.

¹⁷² KrV A 812 / B 840.

¹⁷³ Yovel, on the other hand, speaks of „extraneous moralistic considerations [...] deriving probably from a vague feeling of justice, but not rooted in Kant's basic ethics“. (Yovel, Yirmiahu: Kant and the Philosophy of History, Princeton 1980, 63)

¹⁷⁴ Cf. for this KpV, AA 05: 37f.; also Oberer, Hariolf: Gerechtigkeit und Strafe bei Kant; in: Id. (Ed): Kant. Analysen – Probleme – Kritik, vol. III, Würzburg 1997, 194-197; Id.: Über einige Begründungsaspekte der Kantischen Strafrechtslehre; in: Brandt, Reinhard (Ed.): Rechtsphilosophie der Aufklärung, Symposium Wolfenbüttel 1981, Berlin 1982, 401 ff.

¹⁷⁵ KpV, AA 05: 110.

The realization of the highest good means the state of distributed justice and the "beginning of the (blessed or cursed) eternity, in which the lot that has fallen to each remains just as it was granted to him in the moment of its pronouncement (of the sentence)".¹⁷⁶

The idea of that perfect volition corresponds to the fact that

"Every upright man has this belief; he cannot possibly be upright, without hoping at the same time, *on the analogy of the physical world*, that such righteousness must also be rewarded. From the very same ground on which he believes in virtue [worthiness to be happy], he also believes in reward."¹⁷⁷

The world of this belief is a "moral world"¹⁷⁸, ordered "in accordance with the necessary [causal] laws of *morality*", in which, analogous to the physical world, "appropriate consequences" are lawfully "connected" with the actions from freedom. In this connection lies what Kant calls "promises and threats".¹⁷⁹ They exclusively mean the certainty that a certain conduct as cause will result in an a priori determined effect: if and only if you obey the law of morality without doing it for the sake of your happiness, this will be granted to you appropriately. Therein, and only therein, lies the 'promise'. In this respect Kant can also say that "the moral law carries with it a *natural* promise" and that happiness is "a *natural* consequence" of morality.¹⁸⁰ For¹⁸¹ in the idea of the highest good, "virtue and happiness are thought as *necessarily combined*".¹⁸²

In his lectures on moral philosophy, Kant, following Baumgarten, distinguishes "praemia pragmatica" or "impelling rewards" from "praemia moralia" or "repaying rewards." These reward (repay) actions that are not done out of hope for reward. They should not be thought of as grounds of motivation,

"but as grounds of confirmation of the correctness and truth of the moral laws. Even the most virtuous person, if he were in a world where the more virtuous he was, the more unhappy he would be, would not lack grounds of motivation, but he would lack grounds of confirmation. [...] Morality needs also confirmation and we have to be able to think of rewards at least as possible. – Otherwise, my morality would be nothing but a chimera if I would not have reason to think and hope for a reward. [...] One must not build on rewards, but first have well founded the moral laws. [...] The rewards must, namely, serve to confirm that morality truly has reality and is not a mere chimera."¹⁸³

In his late essay on *The End of All Things*, Kant says of the punishments announced by the teacher of Christianity, that they are not to be understood,

¹⁷⁶ EaD, AA 08: 328; cf. also KU, AA 05: 443.23-28.

¹⁷⁷ V-Mo/Collins, AA 27: 285 (m/it); likewise V-Mo/Mron, AA 27: 1435.

¹⁷⁸ KrV A 808 / B 836.

¹⁷⁹ KrV A 811 / B 839.

¹⁸⁰ V-Mo/Collins, AA 27: 304 (m/it); see also 308f.

¹⁸¹ "*Natural* (formaliter) means what follows necessarily according to laws of a certain order of whatever sort, hence also the moral order (hence not always merely the physical order)." (EaD, AA 08: 333 note)

¹⁸² KpV, AA 05: 113 (m/it); "the proportion between well-being and acting well, which *reason unavoidably* holds before him" (KpV, AA 05: 61 [m/it]).

¹⁸³ V-Mo/Mron II, AA 29: 636-639 (m/tr). This lecture transcript, unlike most other transcripts also dated to the 1780s, almost certainly reflects Kant's position in 1784/85 rather than that of the 1770s.

"as though these should become the incentives for performing what follows from its commands; for to that extent it would cease to be worthy of love. Rather, one may interpret this only as a loving warning, arising out of the beneficence of the lawgiver, of preventing the harm that would have to arise *inevitably* from the transgression of the *law* [...] because not Christianity as a freely assumed maxim of life, but the law threatens here, which, as *an order lying unchangingly in the nature of things*, is not left up to even the creator's discretion to decide its consequence thus or otherwise. [...] Thus one must not take that promise in the sense, as if the rewards are to be taken for the incentives of the actions."¹⁸⁴

This almost reads as if Kant wrote it with the misunderstandings regarding the *Canon* of the first *Critique* in mind.

I intentionally spoke of granting and non-granting,¹⁸⁵ not of reward and punishment.¹⁸⁶ "The nature of duty does not allow of being coupled with the idea of reward."¹⁸⁷ A course of life worthy of happiness just consists precisely in being led for the sake of the moral law and therefore for the sake of worthiness to be happy. The idea of a reward comes into play only on a detour, so to speak, namely via the primary idea, resulting from the *causality* through freedom, which is to be presupposed with the moral law, that the course of life worthy of happiness must have an *effect* corresponding to it (determined by the law of freedom); admittedly not in this world,¹⁸⁸ but in another, thought of, "world that is future for us"¹⁸⁹, in the world of the highest good. The idea of the latter does not play the slightest role for the moral law and for virtue, but rather presupposes them for itself as a necessary condition.

When Kant speaks of "appropriate consequences", which are "promised" or "threatened" to us by the moral laws as "commands",¹⁹⁰ then he has in mind exclusively the rule (being under the condition of causality through freedom) of connecting morality and happiness in a "mundus intelligibilis", and not the "success"¹⁹¹ (expected by us regarding our conduct) as the supreme (heteronomous) determining ground of our maxims.¹⁹² It is about nothing other than a relation of ground and consequence, determined by the law of freedom.¹⁹³ The objection that Kant here brings back into morality the very element (happiness) that he had previously

¹⁸⁴ EaD, AA 08: 338f. (partly m/tr; m/it).

¹⁸⁵ See above p. 23.

¹⁸⁶ Perhaps the prevailing opinion about the *Second Section* of the *Canon* would in no way have arisen if Kant had not spoken there of "promises and threats" but, as in the *Dialectic*, of "effect and emphasis." See KrV A 589 / B 617.

¹⁸⁷ V-MS/Vigil, AA 27: 549.

¹⁸⁸ See for this fn. 60.

¹⁸⁹ KrV A 811 / B 839.

¹⁹⁰ See KrV A 811f. / B 839f.

¹⁹¹ The success Kant speaks of in this context is, without any reference to our inclinations, a success linked by reason to its own laws and therefore necessary, which can present itself *to us* as a promise or threat conditioned by our respective behaviour. See KrV A 811f. / B 839f.

¹⁹² Therefore "[e]ven reason *free from all private aims* cannot judge otherwise if, without taking into account an interest of *its own*, it puts itself in the place of a being who would have to distribute all happiness to others". (KrV A 813 / B 841 [m/it])

¹⁹³ Ludwig misses this crucial idea when he speaks of "any" promises and threats as if their content depended on divine will and was not determined according to the moral law. See Ludwig, Bernd: *Drei Deduktionen* (see fn. 106) 67.

removed from it, does not take into account the decisive difference between happiness as *determining ground* of the moral will and (proportioned) happiness as its *object*¹⁹⁴ (end).

Still, in one of Kant's lectures, probably from the 1790s, there are remarks confirming that Kant, when speaking in the *Canon* of promises and threats as appropriate consequences and of ideas of morality as incentives, does not contradict his 'critical' moral philosophy:

"The idea of the highest good in man is practical but not as a law of prudence (technical-practical rule), but as a moral law (moral-practical rule). The question is not: is it useful? One does not look here at the wellbeing or not-wellbeing. [...] If we had certainty of the existence of God, we would have to have direct intuition of God, then we would not have freedom in the fulfilment of our duties; for we would act for the sake of gaining certain *advantages* to endear ourselves to him, and then *no pure moral action* would take place anymore. [...] But if I have belief [to attain the highest good], then this is the *incentive for me to promote [this good]*. [...] The assumption of a supreme intelligence, which is itself a moral being and has all happiness in its power, is therefore necessary, because otherwise it would be a mere *chimera* to strive for the highest good, if we do not assume a being that has power to make us happy, since we cannot do this ourselves, although we can make ourselves worthy of happiness. The assumption of a supreme intelligence as a moral being is a practical-necessary hypothesis of reason."¹⁹⁵

VI.

As in the *Dialectic* of the second *Critique*, also in the *Second Section* of the *Canon* it is not about morally commanded acting and its possible incentive, i.e. about moral philosophy, but – on the basis of the answer to the "second question" assumed to be already given elsewhere – about an answer to the "third question, namely: if I now do what I should, what may I then hope?". It is practical only with respect to its "guiding thread", but with respect to its answer it is theoretical and, "in its highest form", speculative".¹⁹⁶ It is, as, after all, Kant himself says,¹⁹⁷ about *moral theology*.

¹⁹⁴ "[...] we need the assumption of a supreme wisdom as the object of our moral will, toward which, apart from the mere rightness of our actions, we cannot avoid directing our ends. Although this would *objectively* not be a necessary relation of our choice: the highest good is nevertheless *subjectively* necessarily the object of a good (even human) will [...] I can therefore only say: I see myself compelled by my end according to laws of freedom to assume a highest good in the world as possible [...]". (Log, AA 09: 68f. [m/tr])

¹⁹⁵ V-MP-K2/Heintze, AA 28: 791-793 m/tr; m/it); likewise 28: 800.12-21.

¹⁹⁶ See KrV A 805 / B 833.

¹⁹⁷ See KrV A 814 / B 842.