# Kant's Treasure Hard-to-Attain

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## I

Kant assigns one task in particular which is easy for philosophers to consider in abstraction but hard to put into practice. In various ways and contexts, Kant asserts that the business of the philosopher is to think clearly and precisely about the same important moral issues that engage the attention of the ordinary person. But in addition, the philosopher is to do so without the ordinary person's confusions (though Kant also recognizes that the philosopher may introduce some confusions of his own which the ordinary person escapes). In short, every human being possesses a measure of "common rational knowledge" (*Foundations,* 1785: 6/390)[1] which the abstract thinker ignores only at his peril.

The persistence with which Kant marshalls the support of the so-called man-in-the-street should occasion some reflection. It is particularly, though not exclusively, relevant to Kant's practical philosophy, and it is the latter context with which this essay will be concerned. This is an aspect of Kant's method of philosophizing that is relatively neglected. Beck does indeed build an account of a "metaphysical deduction" of the moral law around it (see his *Commentary,* 1960: 110), an account in which the object is one of Socratic discovery and exposition not justification. But Beck's provocative suggestion in this case is ignored as much as Kant's own explicit appeal to what is "plainly intelligible to the commonest understanding".

Part of the reason for the relative lack of attention to this aspect of Kant's method is its very pervasiveness. Since Kant applies it to so many topics, achieving a thematic treatment is not possible where space is limited. Another more important part of the reason, however, may be that we have forgotten how Kant's allusions to the ordinary person's understanding of morality are echoes of the pietism and deeply ethical character of his parent's family life. Although never an advocate of pietist orthodoxy like his early teacher Schultz of the *Collegium Fridericianum,* Kant regarded the ordinary person's comprehension of morals as reaching beyond questions of worldly wisdom and prudence to encompass ultimate ends and values.

That we should now need to be reminded of this is not without its irony. In his own day at least one critic reproached Kant with not being enough of an innovator, with being content to give merely a new formulation of traditionally accepted moral views. Kant's answer is a now famous rhetorical question:

> "Who would want to introduce a new principle of morality and, as it were, be its inventor, as if the world had hitherto been ignorant of what is duty or had been thoroughly wrong about it?" (*Critique of Practical Reason,* 1788: 8ftnt./8ftnt.)

A parallel remark can be found in the first *Critique* where, in support of the supposition of a categorical imperative, Kant says he "can appeal not only to the proofs employed by the most enlightened moralists but to the judgement of everyman" (*Critique of Pure Reason,* 1787: 637/B 835). Examples of Kant's respect for even *den gemeinsten Verstand* might be multiplied. However, a third example, relevant to this essay, must suffice. After asserting that the commonest intelligence can see what is required by the moral law, he adds that this is in contrast with what is required to attain happiness: "... What duty is, is plain of itself to everyone, but what is to bring true, lasting advantage to our whole existence is veiled in impenetrable obscurity ..." (1788: 38/36). The way to happiness is harder to find than is the way to duty.

An immediate question, to which the answer is by no means so obvious, is what kind of an argument Kant is making in turning for support to the testimony of "ordinary reason" and "common understanding" (1785: 21/404). Is he just paying lip service to common opinion as he cross-examines the "popular verdict of sound human reason" (*Critique of Judgement,* Part II: 109/443)? Or is he formalizing, giving a rational reconstruction of, what is universally intelligible "to the most untutored reason" (1790, II: 129/458)? A direct, unambiguous solution does not seem to be available anywhere at the level of the manifest text. Still, an answer may be possible *en passant* if a preliminary problem can be engaged and resolved. The problem is how do we obtain access to an unadulterated, pure case of the results of the operation of the above-cited *unangebauteste Vernunft* when, almost by definition (see, 1785: 6/390), it is alloyed with confusions and misconceptions? Presumably, scholars (such as myself) have long ago incurred the risk of clouding their common rational knowledge of morals with theoretic speculations. But if we can document the existence of coherent instances of ethical thinking in a generally accessible context appropriate to the level of untutored reason, this will imply a rehabilitation of ordinary reason, which may indeed be possessed of a kind of sophistication and complexity that resists abstract conceptualization.

This issue can be engaged most effectively here by narrowing the scope of the discussion to one particular philosophic idea, namely, that of the highest good. The choice of

[1] References to Kant's texts are indexed and abbreviated according to the date of publication of the relevant edition. I have made use of the following readily available translations, first citing the page number of the English and then of the corresponding *Akademie* edition: 1785, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. L. W. Beck, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959); 1787, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. N. K. Smith, (New York: Macmillan, 1968); 1788, *Critique of Practical Reason,* trans. L. W. Beck, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956); 1790, *Critique of Judgement,* trans. J. C. Meredith, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), – the pagination of this edition is not continuous, and I have distinguished between the First and Second Parts (i. e., the *Critique of Aesthetic and Teleological Judgement,* respectively); 1793, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone,* trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960); 1797, *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View,* trans. M. J. Gregor, (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974). I have also consulted numerous articles, which shall be noted as they arise, including: L. W. Beck, *A Commentary of Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

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this rational idea is not arbitrary or accidental, but is motivated by a consideration of its role in effecting a transition from the common understanding of morals to practical philosophy proper. The dialectical concept of the highest good is employed by Kant in the *Foundations* when he wants to show why the innocence of ordinary reason needs to be tempered with philosophy. In a rare and barely disguised use of sarcasm Kant actually gives preference to the common understanding and ordinary reason over the philosopher:

> "But the most remarkable thing about ordinary reason in its practical concern is that it may have as much hope as any philosopher of hitting the mark. In fact, it is almost more certain to do so than the philosopher, because he has no principle which the common understanding lacks, while his judgement is easily confused by a mass of irrelevant considerations . . ." (1785: 21/404).

The point is that the philosopher cannot pretend to have privileged access to a kind of wisdom that everyone else lacks. Nevertheless a qualifiaction is necessary. Even common human reason is forced to call on the assistance of practical philosophy to escape from a paradox deeply embedded in human nature as "a natural dialectic arises" (1785: 21/405) between duty and our wishes and inclinations.

Textual evidence is available (see Section III, p. 436 below) that Kant regarded the dialectical concept of the highest good as the possession of the ordinary person's reason (1790, II: 128–9/458). Indeed, in this case, saying that the ordinary person contradicts himself in confusion is not necessarily a reproach from which the philosopher escapes. In dealing with such an idea even the philosopher cannot help but do that (though he may also know the illusion is an artifact of the limits of his reason). Even the philosopher must advance from practical philosophy to what amounts to a doctrine of wisdom if he is to come to terms with the dialectic that results from an exposition of the idea of the highest good. Kant's definition of wisdom is worth citing now, though discussion of it must be postponed until Section III of this essay. ". . . Wisdom, theoretically regarded, means the knowledge of the highest good and, practically, the suitability of the will to the highest good . . ." (1788: 135/130–1); there is a definite continuity between the last three paragraphs of Section I of the *Foundations* and the "Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason" (1788, Book II) as Kant refers us to "natural dialectic" and "wisdom" in both passages, compare, 1788: 112/108 and 1785: 21–2/405; also see, 1790, II: 128/457; 133/462).

In the next section of this essay two narrative documents will be presented that are prime candidates for being regarded as products of the voice of humanity's untutored reason. Citing the stories of the fall from paradise as told in the third chapter of *Genesis* and the *Märchen* (folk story) "the White Snake" will serve symbolically to present aspects of the rational idea of the highest good. Our treatment of them will help to answer the question of how we get access to the testimony of ordinary reason without falling prey either to the ordinary man's confusions or to the irrelevant considerations of the philosopher. To avoid the latter I must resist the temptation to narrate the episodes in question, which would become quite tedious. Accordingly, I must suppose the reader has access to the details of the texts in question. (In fact, the ideal way to proceed would be to read these stories now before continuing, and, then, to reread them once this analysis is completed.) Of course, both narratives are the precipitate of a long oral tradition with



roots in pre-literate communities. Without engaging in a digression (available in some of the literature cited below) as to historical antecedents, it suffices to say that these stories represent the condensation and residue of generations of human experience. The myth of the fall as related in *Genesis 3* was transcribed some millenia ago by the unknown editors of the Pentateuch; while our *Märchen*, which is also a narrative of the fall in its own way, was transcribed from its anonymous oral heritage under the editorial supervision of the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (largely as a by-product of their philological research)[2]. Taking this step outside the explicit framework of Kant's practical philosophy is a radical move, but, I submit, a necessary one if we are to make sense of Kant's appeal to untutored reason.

However, before proceeding at least three misunderstandings of what follows must be canvassed. In all three cases the error serves to illuminate an aspect of what Kant's attitude might have been toward a use of narratives as employed here, but misinterprets a conceivable and an autonomous function of story-telling. No one can deny that many reasons are available for telling tales. These include entertainment, instruction, literary criticism, and others. Now Kant himself calls attention to the first of these in a section of the Third *Critique* on "The Empirical Interest in the Beautiful" (1790: Part I: 154/296). The fact that man is a social animal means he has tendencies to communicate his pleasures to others. Kant's examples include dressing-up in finery and the way primitive peoples adorn themselves, but invites extension to other more verbal forms of social interaction. Presumably, man also communicates his pleasures by being gregarious in conversation (including the after-dinner jokes and stories for which Kant was known). But Kant does not comment on whether an autonomous function of story-telling exists according to which narration would be an end in itself. Can we conceive of narration as occasioning an

[2] *The White Snake* is story seventeen of the collection of anonymous tales edited by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, originally published in 1812, *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*, trans. M. Hunt and J. Stern, (New York: Random House, 1972). Throughout this essay the term "*Märchen*" will be retained as being the least misleading of the available choices, for "fairy tale" is actually a misnomer – there being much magic and even an occasional water-nixie, but absolutely no fairies in these tales.
Of the extensive secondary literature on folk stories, the following have been helpful in the preparation of this essay: Johannes Bolte and Georg Polivka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, Vol. I, (Leipzig, 1912); Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1976); C. G. Jung, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales*, 1948, in *Four Archetypes*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) – my thanks to T. David Brent for this one, from which the title of this essay is drawn; Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Structural Study of Myth*, 1955, in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1967); and Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 1928, trans. L. Scott, (Austin: University of Texas, 1968) – it is a "coincidence" worth noting that though Propp's work was written with specific reference to certain Russian folktales, the terms of his analysis apply almost without qualifiaction to the collection edited by the Brothers Grimm. Kant makes at least one reference to a *Märchen* in his *Anthropology*, 1797: 33/154. His rather limited purpose in this text is not central to this essay. That the tale he mentions is of a type resembling the fourth in the complete Grimm's edition is evident from the idioms surrounding "*Gräuseln*" and "*es gruselt mir.*"

entirely disinterested pleasure and having the form of purposiveness without purpose? It is a further issue that when the narratives were of anonymous composition over many generations they would be beautiful symbols that fit into neither of Kant's categories of beautiful nature or artworks as the product of the intention of an individual man of genius[3]. I can cite no evidence that Kant seriously considered any of these possibilities, but also maintain that Kant's remarks on sociability in Section 41 of the Third *Critique* do not exhaust the matter. If necessary, I will dispute Kant's example that a man abandoned on a desert island would neither adorn his hut nor enjoy the beauty of flowers (1790, I: 155/297). However, such a dispute may not be needed if Kant was merely noting that such a man, being all alone in fact, would lose any empirical interest in the beautiful, but that his *a priori* faculty of taste would be unimpaired. Disinterested pleasures would be virtually the only ones available to such a person. Assuming that the monologue is capable of arousing such pleasures, although the empirical sociability of such a person would atrophy, his tendency to soliloquize might actually be augmented. This argument is meant to open up the hypothesis that story-telling can occasion that harmonious play of our cognitive faculties in which the experience of the beautiful is presented. I have tried to show that nothing that Kant says in Section 41 contradicts the possibility of narration functioning in this case.

Furthermore, what follows cannot be taken as supporting the application of principles of Kantian aesthetics to literary criticism. As attractive as such a thesis might *prima facia* be for this essay, it is rejected in favor of the more controversial hypothesis that narration functions autonomously in humanity, perhaps in a way that complements metaphysics as a natural disposition (1787: 56/B22). (That is, the tendency to symbolize might be aroused by the emergence of basic metaphysical questions about God, freedom, and immortality.) In any case, the possibility of a Kantian style of literary criticism (which would be a theoretic discipline) conflicts with Kant's explicit exclusion of an objective principle of taste (1790, I: 141/285; also see his remarks about the fate of critics and cooks in the same section).

Finally, just because the narratives arouse hope or humility in depicting virtue being rewarded or disobedience punished, that does *not* mean we are abstracting the idea of the highest good by a generalization from empirical examples (that the stories have definite marks according to which they are subsumable under a concept). In the case of the feelings occasioned by the highest good the problem of deciding whether the affect precedes or coincides with the determining ground of the action (i. e., impure or pure motives) is no less, but also no more, serious than the case of respect for the moral law. Doubt is in principle always possible as to whether our motive is identical with respect for duty, with the hope of promoting the highest good and humility at being unable to attain it through our own finite abilities. But we still have a rough-and-ready way of differentiating the moral worth of motives, which, as Kant notes, even children are capable of perceiving:

> "For the commonest observation shows that if we imagine an act of honesty performed with a steadfast soul and sundered from all view to any advantage in this or another world and even under the greatest temptations of need or allurement, it far surpasses and eclipses any similar action which was affected in the least by any foreign incentive; it elevates and arouses the wish to be able to act in this way. Even moderately young children feel this impression, and one should never represent duties to them in any other way" (1785: 27ftnt./411ftnt)[4].

This note can profitably be extended to the condition under which a person has made himself worthy of attaining the highest good, nor should it be restricted to just children. Thus, saying that mere hope is all that remains to the virtuous after he has sacrificed his self-interest to duty is a distortion in which the prospect of satisfying one's desire is the source of the hope. The kind of hope which is occasioned by our duty to promote the highest good (and, indeed, may be represented as identical with it) is the hope that man has the power to do his duty without suffering injustice. We do indeed come to recognize the presence of the highest good when we feel a hope of being able to further it and a certain humility at being unable to attain it. But these feelings arise from the highest good without thereby being its cause.

Regarding the sequel as an exercise in philosophical anthropology alone (though aspects of that may also be present) would reduce the inquiry to an empirical correlate of ethics (1785: 4/388), useful for purposes of instruction but without *a priori* content or implications. Alternatively, if a Kantian idiom for our method is required, it might be said that the rational concept of the highest good is being analytically extracted, disentangled, from the narratives parallel to the way a table of categories can be unfolded from a table of judgements. The method is that of a modified "metaphysical deduction". A metaphysical deduction, unlike a transcendental one, does not have to demonstrate the *a priori* objective validity of the concept. Rather the enterprise is one of inquiry and discovery, not *de jure* demonstration. In light of Kant's division of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* into an exposition and a deduction (see, 1790, I: 117/266) there is warrant for saying that a "metaphysical deduction" corresponds more to the former than the latter. Further, the method is a "modified" metaphysical exposition due to the fact that we are dealing, not with discursive judgements, but with a set of symbolic uses of language. We will have to take some pains to prune away a luxuriant growth of symbols from our narratives in order to expose, embedded within them, the very same dialectical concept that Kant attributes to mankind's emergent sense of right and wrong. If successful, the inquiry will have exhibited the idea of the highest good as being clearly an *a priori* one. This should retrospec-

[3] Numerous problems emerge at this point. They deserve a more careful and sustained treatment than can be given in the limited space of one article. It is particularly important to realize that the symbolization of morality through beauty does not involve the evaluative use of a moral concept as the determining ground of aesthetic approval. Further, if such a moral concept turns out to be an idea, then such a dialectical concept is apparently a part of any rational idea corresponding to the aesthetic idea through which the idea is presented in symbols. Likewise, further work is needed to establish whether and in what sense *Märchen* are artworks, even though not the product of the genius of any one individual. I would like to refer the reader to two articles that serve to amplify the context of discussion and that may supply some of the basic terms for answering these questions. They are: Ted Cohen, *The Formal Basis of Kant's Claim that Beauty is the Symbol of Morality* (in a forthcoming anthology) and Paul Guyer, *Formalism and the Theory of Expression in Kant's Aesthetics,* Kant-Studien, Jahrgang 68, Heft 1, 1977.

[4] I am grateful to Ted Cohen for calling this provocative text to my attention.

tively substantiate the choice of terms used to describe the method being applied in "exposing" the idea in the context of two narrative documents of untutored reason.

## II

The next step is to gain a perspective on the main narrative elements that make our two tales differing variations on one and the same theme. Though we will argue in detail that such is the case, it is not at all obvious from the surface structure of the stories that they share a common subtext.

One of the best ways to show that they are alternative translations of the idea of the highest good into different sets of symbolic images and attributes is to lay out a context of parallels and correlations. In some cases, the correspondence between the two tales is direct. The contents of the tales are simple allusions to one another. Othertimes, the relation is more complex. The parallelism between the tales may display the kinds of reversals characteristic of images that are mirrorlike translations of one another. Reversals in the order of events or the consequences of actions occur. We will now see what this means in terms of the details of the narratives. In the following, the narrative of "the White Snake" is designated as "$N_1$", that of *Genesis* 3, as "$N_2$".

1. Both narratives display an initial contrast between ignorance and a certain kind of knowledge. The king in $N_1$ gains his wisdom from eating something brought to him in a covered dish by his servant (the protagonist). Likewise, Adam and Eve, though not engaged in any active service, are ignorant of the distinction between good and evil until they taste of the fruit of the Tree of knowledge. Here "ignorance" is another name for "innocence". The two tales are clearly parallel in that their surface structures present their protagonists as being in a state of innocence from which they are shortly displaced.

2. In both cases the transition from ignorance to moral understanding (wisdom) is facilitated or mediated by a serpent. The difference is that in $N_2$ the snake in question is active, while in $N_1$ he is passive. That is, the snake in the Garden of Eden talks (a form of activity). He offers Eve the fruit, telling her (what is in fact the case) that she will gain a measure of divinity if she eats it. In contrast, the snake in $N_1$ is the object, not the initiator, of the action. He is the one who is tasted by the king (and eventually by the servant). He is the forbidden fruit himself. The fact that the snake in $N_1$ is white is perhaps satan's punishment for having beguiled Eve[5]. He is condemned to wear the color of innocence, a color calculated to be most hateful to him, as an ironic sequel to the role he played in the Garden.

[5] I owe this idea to a former student, Michael Palumbo. He also suggested a very imaginative way of representing the relation between the two narratives, focusing on the serpent as antagonist. If *Genesis* 3 were made into a movie, then our *Märchen* would constitute a sequel in the same series. If the first one were entitled "The Guile of the Serpent", the second would have to be "The Return of the Serpent" or perhaps (keeping movie titles in mind) "The Son of Serpent". Of course, the essential point is that the appearance of the white snake sets up an immediate echo with the serpent's role in the Garden of Eden.



3. In $N_2$ Adam and Eve hide themselves *after* they have tasted the forbidden fruit. In $N_1$ however the servant *first* hides himself (locking himself in his room) and then tastes the forbidden fruit. This parallel involves a reversal of order in the events of the tales that seems to be independent of how one wishes to interpret the meaning of "hiding" (say as is traditionally done when referring to an awareness of nakedness or shame). The point is just to note the order of the sequence of events in $N_2$ is manipulated and transformed by $N_1$. That there is order is essential; what the order is, is to a degree alterable.

4. Both tales contain an injunction against tasting. The violation of the injunction leads to certain complications involving obtaining a new kind of understanding and corresponding disadvantages. In $N_2$ the violation leads to the situation of present-day humanity. Due to the disobedience of our mythical ancestors we do indeed have knowledge of good and evil. But we are also cursed with pain (the paradigm of which is childbirth), earning our bread by the sweat of our brows (work), and the inevitable uncertainty of the time of death. However, the servant's disobedience in $N_1$ confers on him a gift which is, even to us today, extra-human. He is able to understand the language of animals. This shift presents a reversal from above to below. How? A *prima facie* contrast between learning a "higher" and learning a "lower" language is presented by $N_2$ and $N_1$ respectively. Tasting the Tree of Knowledge teaches our ancestors the language of God. As the serpent says, they will "be as gods knowing good and evil" (*Genesis* 3: 5; King James Version). But tasting the white snake teaches the servant the language of animals. He is able to understand birds, fish, and even ants – i. e., creatures of the air, sea, and land. The power conferred by the white snake is over-determined. But both violations, when taken as literally laid out in the text, lead to the acquisition of a source of wisdom. However, one source is from "above", the other, from "below".

Now along with the gift of moral understanding Adam and Eve gain something negative as well – the curses of pain, work, and death. Where is the corresponding curse in $N_1$? Acutally only one of the curses is reflected in $N_1$. But this, I submit, is enough to maintain the parallelism between the narratives. In short, no sooner does the servant in $N_1$ taste the "forbidden fruit" than something happens that results in his being condemned to death. He is accused of stealing the queen's favorite ring of gold, and he is enjoined to find the ring or be executed as the thief.

This raises a nice point. The servant is actually guilty of violating an injunction, but not the one of which he is in fact accused. He is falsely accused of knowing who has the ring, but he is not accused of tasting the white snake. Of course, he is actually innocent in the first case and guilty in the second. He commits one crime, while he is simultaneously accused of another he does not commit. This reflects the paradoxical state of humanity, according to which we are held responsible for Adam's sin without having individually committed it. The individual is thrown into a world in which there is already evil. As a species man is represented as bringing evil upon himself; but as an individual he is neither innately evil nor innocent. Thus, the servant who tastes the white snake is the mythical ancestor, Adam, and the servant who does *not* steal the ring is his descendent upon whom the sin of the father is visited.

Still, the servant's initial transgression turns out to be a *felix culpa,* through which he is able to escape the penalty of death. Thanks to his new faculty of understanding, he overhears a duck in the courtyard complaining that as she was eating in haste she swallowed a ring that lay under the queen's window. The servant seizes the "culprit" and takes her to the cook. The missing ring is discovered, and the servant escapes from death.

Embedded in the pitiful end of the duck is the warning that remaining fixed and attached to one's inclinations (in this case gluttony) is an animal mode of existence that can lead to the destruction of the self. The duck suffers a fate quite appropriate to its level of existence. In accordance with the primitive morality of the *lex talionis,* all the duck does is eat, so it is, in turn, eaten. In this instance, understanding the language of animals suggests an acquaintance with the ways of instinctual greed. In Kantian terms, this is the basis of the tendency to reverse the order of maxims and make lower incentives supreme among maxims (1793: 38/46). As Kant says, the rational origin of this tendency remains "inscrutable", but is re-enacted every time we make an exception in the moral law for ourselves.

5. Although the king offers the servant any position in the court he might desire as recompense for the false accusation, the servant declines the generous offer. Instead, he asks for the means to undertake what amounts to a self-imposed exile[6]. The next part of $N_1$ consists in the servant's journeying into the world and exercising his moral judgement. In this sequence the gift of understanding the language of animals represents the ability to understand the demands that suffering, finite humanity makes on the servant's respect and love. Some work will be required to make sense of this sequence.

Thanks to his understanding of the language of animals the servant is able to hear the distress calls of the following animals: three fish caught in the reeds and suffocating; a colony of ants being trampled by his horse; and three baby ravens, who have been evicted from their nest and are starving. In brief, the servant frees the fish from entanglement; he recognizes the ant's distress and turns his horse aside to let them pass; and he sacrifices his horse (killing it) to provide food for the ravens.

A first reading of $N_1$ seems to suggest the view that all life, including animal and insect life, is sacred or has moral worth. In a way, this recalls the Indian philosophy of life, Jainism. Wherever a Jaina ascetic goes, he sweeps the way before his feet with a little broom, so that no living thing will be crushed by his heel[7]. Transferring such a view to our *Märchen* would be bearable if only there were not two loose ends. The duck and the horse are included among living things, but they are slaughtered without hesitation. Does the servant perhaps only understand the languages of fish, ants, and ravens, but not ducks and horses?

This objection is possible only if an important distinction, on which the *Märchen* plays, is ignored or overlooked. The duck and horse are *domestic* animals, which either live alongside man in a subordinate position or serve man's needs for transportation. The fish, ants, and ravens are *wild* animals, which either live distant and apart from man or actually compete with him (as when ravens try to steal grain from a farmer). This binary opposition between domestic and wild animals may seem strange, but it is of the utmost import. Domestic animals form a part of human society, but do so in an asocial manner. They are instruments subordinate to our ends. For the very reason that they are so close to us (as agriculturalists), they are unsuitable images onto which to project our struggling and emerging humanity. Since they are treated as instruments everyday, our familiarity with them breeds a certain contempt.

On the one hand, when we want to insult someone, we are likely to compare them with domestic animals. Although I am not familiar with any examples directly relating to ducks or horses, other domestic fowl and beasts of burden come to mind: "silly as a goose", "lazy as an ox", "stubborn as a mule", "dumm ox". "Chicken" suggests the person is a coward, and "turkey" – which is a relatively recent addition – suggests someone is a fool or sucker. Likewise, when we call someone a "bird brain" we are usually thinking of a pigeon or a duck, not an eagle or hawk. (I will leave it to the reader to collect reminders of how comparison with wild animals connotes respect or admiration.)

On the other hand, wild animals can be permitted to represent aspects of our humanity that are worthy of respect for the very reason that the animals are so different and so physically separated from human society. Since they are so distant, they are a suitable attribute onto which to project aspects of humanity's finitude, not excluding our most limiting – and perhaps most humbling – weaknesses. But, although these weaknesses may be humbling, it is not considered an insult to call attention to them.

It is not that the horse and duck are regarded as belonging to the same category as the fish, ants, and ravens and that the latter are arbitrarily deemed to be more valuable and worthy of respect. Rather the horse and the ravens belong to distinct categories – domestic versus wild – to which the difference between instrumental and human attributes has been assimilated.

Therefore, the sequence in $N_1$ that depicts the servant coming to the rescue of the fish, etc. need *not* be understood as an instance of his respect for the moral worth of all living things (for not all living things have moral worth). Instead, what the servant recognizes in these creatures are aspects of his own finite humanity.

These wild animals are not to be taken literally as animals, but rather as symbols for something else which cannot be directly presented. The fish, ants, and ravens set up an echo with the *origin* of the most pervasive consequences of the fall in $N_2$: birth, work, and death. It is important not to get carried away and assign more to this interpretation than is really there. Basically, an alternative is being presented to the thesis that asserts that $N_1$ advances the view that all life has moral worth. The alternative is that the fish present humanity's finitude in the face of birth. It is no accident that the fish in $N_1$ are suffocating. The new-born child's first task is to take a breath of air and fill his lungs with life-giving oxygen. Asphixiation is the first terror faced by the neonate. Likewise, the colony of ants presents the image of the anonymous crowd, whose individuality is lost in lives of silent struggle. Further, the ants are proverbial hard workers. Like the ants, hu-

[6] Once more we have a reversal from active to passive. The servant in $N_1$ actively embraces a fate, exile, that is imposed on Adam and Eve as passive recipients.

[7] Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India,* ed. J. Campbell, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), see, p. 255.

manity must earn its livelihood by the sweat of the brow. The industry of the ants as well as their lack of individuality expresses the ordinary man's situation in the time between birth and death. He must labor in order to harvest. Finally, the ravens are well-suited to play the role of funeral bird due to the fact that they wear the color of mourning. They also feed on the flesh of the dead horse. This is humanity's fate when the available time is spent – to become carrion. So the image of the ravens communicates mankind's finitude before death.

Kant may actually be able to provide us with a technical term for the function of these animal images. In Section 49 of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* he cites the function of "aesthetic attributes" (1790, I: 177/315) in providing an indirect presentation for ideas of reason that cannot otherwise be adequately exhibited in intuition. (Kant's examples include the eagle and peacock as emblems of the king and queen of heaven – Jupiter and Juno – respectively.) If the important qualification is added that the *Märchen* is not concerned with giving empirical examples of birth, work, etc. – which in no way form a part of the surface structure of the story anyway – but rather with the "rational origin" of these aspects of humanity, then their resistance to formulation in determinate concepts or examples subsumed under them should be no surprise. The attributes "fish", "ants", and "ravens" are meant to provoke more reflection than could be occasioned by the substitution of empirical examples of particular persons in need of help. In virtue of these limits of pain, work, and death human beings have need of one another's cooperation and collaboration if we are to further the highest good. Although we share these "curses" with many animal species, only we humans are capable of showing that they are not meaningless evils. Although these limits make us "human all-too-human", they also offer opportunities for promoting our self-perfection in furthering the welfare of others. So in spite of a luxuriant growth of aesthetic attributes here, the point is the servant's recognition of the impossibility of consistently willing a phenomenal nature in which absolutely independent beings would refuse to help one another[8]. This recognition, in turn, forms the supreme condition of the servant's own worthiness to be happy, the addition of the latter forming the highest good *qua bonum consummatum* (1788: 114/110). This leads to the sixth interconnection between the two narratives and to the role of the highest good.

6. Now the relation between the two narratives (which, I am arguing, are intricately interrelated) and the dialectical concept of the highest good can best be captured in Kantian terms as the relation between an aesthetic and a rational idea. The former is mobilized to present symbolically an idea of reason that is otherwise incapable of being adequately given in either an empirical intuition or *a priori* schema (in the technical sense)[9].

In general, $N_2$ presents the highest good as an instance of disobedience punished. The curses inflicted upon Adam and Eve cannot be reversed, though under a Christian in-

[8] A complete discussion of Kant's views on the possibility of conceiving and the impossibility of willing a world without active benificence cannot be furnished here. A contradiction arises in the latter case from my wanting help from others to promote my happiness but my not being willing to help them to further their own happiness.

[9] I realize that my interpretation of aesthetic ideas as myths is controversial. That some of the terms Levi-Strauss applies to myths (in his "Structural Study of Myth") are similar to those used by Kant



terpretation of the Old Testament they are able to be redeemed. In $N_1$ the servant is given a chance to redeem his initial disobedience (and to become the master of his new source of moral understanding) by undertaking what amounts to an educational apprenticeship in ethical judgement. His exile from his homeland (which unlike the exile from the Garden in $N_2$ is self-imposed) actually leads to his subsequent virtue being rewarded. This transpires in the climactic sequence of the *Märchen* in which the servant receives help (without asking for it and as if by "coincidence") from those he had rescued.

But before proceeding a preliminary casuistical question arises. Does the servant's rescue of the fish, ants, and ravens show that he is a man of good will or does it rather merely show that he is prudent? If his motive for lending assistance is the thought that he may someday need the help of others in order to promote his own welfare, then the moral worth of his motive is doubtful. Now although one can never be certain that a person is acting solely from a good will – for that would require that his action have no material consequences, which can never be the case in the phenomenal world – we are not completely adrift when faced with questions of motivation. As many of Kant's paradigms indicate (e.g., 1785: 13–5/397–99), in volition from duty the renunciation of self-interest is the specific mark of the will's being determined by respect for the moral law. While a skeptic may perhaps raise doubts in principle whether the servant has a good will, the way in which he sacrifices his own self-interest in helping the hungry (killing his horse for food and going forward on foot) is suggestive of his action being based on the spirit and not only the letter of the law. Furthermore, the fact that we are dependent on the cooperation of our fellows in attempting to further our own individual happiness tends to become irrelevant when the issue is not merely promoting one's happiness but actually attaining it[10]. This is where a *Märchen*'s symbolic presentation has an advantage over any empirical examples of alleged virtue that might be collected. In order to attain what amounts to perfect happiness (an admittedly undefinable concept) the servant must confront three tasks which we cannot even imagine his accomplishing through the exercise of his finite, human capacities. He succeeds only through his participation in a faculty of reason surpassing every finite standard of sensibility. That is, even the complete cooperation of his fellow humans is insufficient for his attaining success. The reader of the *Märchen* is required to go beyond the context of interdependent humanity and posit an underlying moral order of the universe in order to render the outcome at all conceivable. Within this casuistical framework, the *Märchen*'s depiction of the servant's succeeding in attaining his treasured reward implies that he is a man of good will.

To win the hand of the princess in marriage and a share of the royal kingdom, the servant must do the following: retrieve a small golden ring thrown into the vastness of the

in defining aesthetic ideas is suggestive. Both are committed to the "inexhaustibility" of the symbolic images in question through the use of conceptual language.
Although he does not discuss myths, the details of a more complete account of the process of symbolization, including relevant quotations, are available in John Silber's article, *Der Schematismus der Praktischen Vernunft,* Kant-Studien, Jahrgang 56, Heft 3–4, 1966.

[10] We are dependent on the cooperation of our equals to further a kingdom of ends, but we are dependent on the moral author of the world to attain the highest good.

sea; collect ten sacks of tiny millet seeds by hand in the darkness of only one night (and not one seed can be missing); and fetch an apple from the Tree of Life. If he fails in either of the first two tasks, he must die immediately. The third task entails a sentence of wandering around the world until he either succeeds, gives up hope, or perishes. The stakes are indeed high. For a lowly servant, the hand of the princess and a part of the kingdom are truly "the treasure hard-to-attain". In addition to attaining happiness in a close relation with the beautiful princess, the servant is challenged to attain a condition in which he is the ruler instead of the ruled. No reader of *Märchen* believes he can become ruler over any kingdom other than the realm of his own existence. I do not think lengthy argument is needed that the goal sought in this case is to become a self-ruler, an autonomous person. The narrative presents this two-fold treasure – autonomy and happiness in proportion to moral worth – as being accessible to the man of good will (though not through the exercise of any of his own finite abilities).

Without repeating all the details, it suffices to mention that in all three tasks the servant is assisted by the same fish, ants, and ravens whom he had rescued. (It is also important to note that the story contains no mention of the servant's in any way either asking or expecting to be helped by them in spite of his ability to communicate with animals.)

Another casuistical question worth considering is whether the timely arrival of the fish and ants is random chance and coincidence or whether their coming points towards the moral author of the universe. Naturally, their assistance would have been impossible if the servant had not initially rescued them, but their arrival is not strictly caused by his exercise of good will on their behalf. In order to account for the sufficiently determined character of the success – the fact that his moral worth is brought into harmony with his self-interest – one is invited to postulate the influence of a moral author of the universe acting on his behalf. This "invitation" is repeated three times – one coincidence is perhaps imaginable, but three in a row begins to form a pattern. Although the servant is more of a doer than a thinker, Hamlet's words apply to him: "Our indiscretion sometime serves us well/When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us/There's a divinity that shapes our ends,/Rough-hew them how we will " (V, ii: 8–11). The arrivals of the fish and ants in the nick-of-time are not empirical examples of morality, but are meant to evoke symbolically the idea that there is, as Hamlet says, a "divinity that shapes our ends", whose influence is needed if rewards are to be fairly distributed in relation to moral worth. The third task faced by the servant, though equally "impossible", is somewhat different from the other two. The princess assigns the servant the task of fetching an apple from the Tree of Life. The ravens fly to the end of the world and get the apple for him. When the couple share this treasure, the princess, who had previously been proud, is filled with love for the hero. So the scale is balanced for a third time. The servant is the recipient of an unanticipated but appropriate reward that harmonizes with his earlier display of moral worth.

What is the significance that the servant and the princess in $N_1$ actually succeed in doing something that is denied to Adam and Eve in $N_2$ – i. e., eating of the Tree of Life? Recall how, according to the text of $N_2$, the couple are expelled from the Garden to prevent





them from eating of this Tree, which has the property of conferring immortality on the one who tastes of it[11].

This is virtually the only point where an item from the verbatim account of *Genesis* 3 appears in the surface text of the *Märchen* (excluding the white snake itself, which is a *very* well-disguised Garden-serpent). A literal reading of the *Märchen* indicates that the kind of immortality attained by the couple is that provided by falling in love, having a family, and (presumably) producing offspring. But a deeper level of significance is also sounded by the property possessed by the Tree of Life in *Genesis* 3, namely, the power of conferring an unlimited and divine sort of immortality. We should not forget that this *Märchen* is a secularization of a basically Christian reading of the myth of the fall. Thus, it should not be surprising that the tale ends by making an allusion to the hope for eternal life which is fundamental to the Christian faith. If this is plausible, then we find that both of the postulates that Kant finds necessary for an intelligible exposition of the idea of the highest good are symbolically presented in $N_1$ (1788: 126–39/121–35). In order to make sense of the possibility of the servant being rescued by the fish and ants one must posit the existence of a moral author who is orchestrating the servant's timely reward. Now we find an allusion to the first postulate of practical reason embedded in the third rescue by the ravens. The appearance of the Tree of Life is the attribute which symbolically presents the postulate of immortality. Before turning in Section III to further philosophical issues, one concluding remark is in order.

The symbol of the white snake was characterized above (see, p. 429) as a highly over-determined one. One such determination was actually given – that it represents a source of understanding of the instincts and inclinations (a "lower" language of sensibility). Two further determinations – corresponding, in Kantian terms, to the faculties of judgment and reason – also deserve to be mentioned. The power conferred by tasting the white snake involves a capacity to make moral judgements. The servant exercises this faculty of judgement in the sequence in which he is faced with the appeals for help from the wild animals. Like the parable of the Good Samaritan (*Luke* 10: 25 ff.), this episode is not only about the need for charity, but also about the definition of what makes a human community. (It is also worth nothing that the context of this parable is what one must do to inherit eternal life.) After saying one's duty is to "love God totally, and thy neighbor as thy self", a lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers, in effect, that neighbors are members of the same community (which may embrace the whole of humanity). Both a priest and a Levite ignore the plight of a fellow citizen from Jerusalem, who has been robbed and assaulted. In contrast, a Samaritan stops to help the man. Jesus' concluding question receives a response in every heart: "Who then of these three, thinkest thou, was

[11] See, *Genesis* 3: 22–3: "And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever:/"Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden . . ." Thus, man's exile was intended to prevent a further transgression, not to punish him. Presumably, man's failure to taste this second fruit explains (in the manner of a "just-so story") his intermediate status between animals and divinity. He would have escaped and, so to speak, "reversed" the curse attached to the Tree of Knowledge if could have tasted of the Tree of Life.

neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?" Like the Samaritan, the servant recognized himself in the person in need. He judged that his self-respect would suffer if he passed-by without lending a hand. And like the figure of Jesus, the servant becomes the personification, the archetype, of one who is morally well-pleasing to God – an idea, which, as Kant says, "is already present in our reason" (1793: 56/77).

Finally, tasting the white snake infuses the servant with "a faculty of mind surpassing every standard of sense" (1790, I: 98/250). It is indeed the sequence in which the servant must retrieve the ring, collect the millet, and find the Tree of Life that does the most violence the reader's imagination. We cannot conceive of his succeeding through the exercise of any of his finite faculties. If any sublime moments are embedded in this *Märchen,* then they are the servant's confrontations with the depths of the sea, the veritable infinity of tiny millet seeds, and the vast, humanly untraversable distance to the Tree of Life. Although nature is great and mighty, it does not have dominion over man thanks to his susceptibility to moral ideas. Still, "reason exercises a dominion over sensibility with a view to extending it to the requirements of its own realm (the practical) and letting it look out beyond itself into the infinite which for it is an abyss" (1790, I: 115/265: translation slightly modified). Even the most terrible aspects of nature are inadequate as a schema for man's supersensible, moral ideas. From the standpoint of sensibility, the imagination is exhausted in attempting to accomplish an infinite task in a limited context of space and time; but from the perspective of reason, man's awareness of moral ideas lends him hope of overcoming the limits of his self-understanding[12]. The symbols of $N_1$ and $N_2$ become a source of moral reflection as they give rise to an awareness of the highest good. Though ordinary reason may leave us untutored at times, we are still capable of being richly instructed by a sensitive sounding of its symbolic complexities.

## III

Now two previous promises must be fulfilled, and some loose ends pulled together. This will lead back into the details of Kant-interpretation. I must discharge my obligation to discuss the textual evidence that Kant regarded the highest good as an idea germane to ordinary reason. I must also discuss what kind of an argument Kant is making in turning to the testimony of the latter. But as the second promise was to be fulfilled only *en passant* the scope of the question will be narrowed to what kind of an argument is Kant's

[12] The servant's confrontation with these three tasks, though not involving an actual descent, has the overall form of a rite of passage, an initiatory ordeal, in which his supersensible destination emerges in the context of moral struggle. As Kant writes in *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue,* 1797a, trans. J. Ellington, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 104/441: "Moral self-knowledge, which tries to fathom the scarcely penetrable depths of the heart, is the beginning of all human wisdom. For this wisdom, which consists in the accord of one's will with his ultimate end [*summum bonum*], requires a man first and foremost to remove the internal hindrances (of a bad will seated within him), and then to try and develop his inalienable original predisposition of a good will. Only descent into the hell of self-knowledge prepares the way for godliness."



formulation of the moral proof of the existence of God (1790, II: 114 ff./447 ff.). The latter is no mean task, and it must include a discussion of whether and in what sense this proof is an artifact of ordinary, untutored reason. Discharging the first promise, which is relatively straight-forward, will lead naturally to the second issue. Some connections with Section II will also be elaborated.

Two main texts are available – one supportive, the other contentious – in which Kant comments on whether the highest good is "universally comprehensible to the most untutored reason"[13]. In the first text, the "lurking notion, however obscure" *("dunkle Vorstellung")* to which Kant refers is evidently the ordinary person's apprehension of the *summum bonum:*

> "The moment mankind began to reflect upon right and wrong ... one inevitable judgement must have forced itself upon them. It could never be that the issue is all alike, whether a man has acted fairly or falsely, with equity or with violence, though up to his life's end, as far at least as human eye can see, his virtues have brought him no reward, his transgressions no punishment. It seems as though they perceived a voice within them say it must make a difference. So there must have been a lurking notion, however obscure, of something after which they felt themselves bound to strive ..." (1790, II: 128–9/458).

Although the human eye witnesses frequent counter-examples to the highest good, "a voice within" flies in the face of experience. Now what is important for this essay is whether the very same voice responsible for hesitantly saying "it must make a difference" is also responsible, in its more articulate moments through the ages, for presenting that "dark representation" of the *summum bonum* in the symbolic matrix dissected in Section II. Engaging this question requires elucidating Kant's figure of speech (for I take the "voice within" to be a symbol for moral reflection) even further. Could it be that this is the voice to which the servant's ears are opened when he tastes the white snake? That our two narratives can, upon examination, turn our to have a Kantian account of the highest good as their logical infra-structure (their "deep structure" to invoke an admittedly non-Kantian term) suggests an affirmative response.

While the above is very supportive of our exposition of the highest good as a possession of untutored reason, Kant also provides another, more recalcitrant text for discussion. The following text is a problematic one for our thesis, for it may seem to contradict the view that the ordinary man is at all justified in hoping to promote, much less attain, the highest good. Kant writes the following about a virtuous person:

> "Deceit, violence, and envy will always be rife around him, although he himself is honest, peaceable, and benevolent; and the other righteous men [*Rechtschaffenen*] that he meets in the world, no matter how deserving they may be of happiness, will be subjected by nature, which takes no heed of such deserts, to all the evils of want, disease, and untimely death, just as are the other animals on the earth. And so it will continue to be until one wide grave engulfs them all – just and unjust, there is no distinction in the grave – and hurls them back into the abyss of the aimless chaos of matter from which they were taken – they that were able to believe themselves the final end of creation" (1790, II: 121/452).

[13] See, 1790, II: 129, lines 26–7/458, bottom; "... gemein faßlich ist" may also mean "commonly graspable".

This text is certainly consistent with the view that the attainment of the highest good is not constitutive of morality. However, unless the passage is put in context it may prove to be misleading, supporting the view that the highest good is not even regulative of morality. In this passage Kant was in fact engaging in a *reductio ad absurdum* of a certain caricature of pantheism. He was explicitly referring to a man who, like Spinoza (under Kant's interpretation of him), did not believe in God but was still "righteous". Such an individual is overwhelmed with despair in contemplating the evils of life. The total denial of hope makes this text uncharacteristic of Kant's thought. It may be that what Kant is doing is giving a description of the affective fate of the fool who denies there is a God. His fate is a melancholy reminder, more reminiscent of the condition of Adam (or perhaps Job) than of the servant, that life is no fairy tale. Virtues often bring no reward and transgressions no punishment.

This brings us to the crux of the problem of what kind of an argument Kant needs to furnish to supplement the ordinary man's conflicting hunches ("intuitions" in the non-technical sense) about the highest good. The fact that we feel so constrained to promote the highest good (the voice of reason asserts "it must make a difference") in spite of its being so monumentally difficult to attain leaves us dangling precariously above that abyss of the "aimless" *("zwecklosen")* chaos of matter. While it would certainly be more convenient to avoid the whole issue of the relation between the highest good and the postulates of practical reason (in particular the second one), even the most primitive reflection on the former leads in the direction of the nature of a moral proof of the existence of God. Warrant for asserting the latter is the case is at hand in the following remark:

"This moral proof is not in any sense a newly discovered argument, but at the most only an old one in a new form. For its earliest germ was lying in the mind of man when his reason first quickened into life, and it only grew and ever developed with the progressive culture of that faculty." (1790, II: 128/458; the text continues as the quote from 1790, II: 128–9/458 cited above.)

Kant's remark is almost perfectly parallel to the rhetorical question cited on p. 423 (i. e., 1788: 8ftnt./8ftnt.) about Kant's "new" principle of morality. Thus, the answer to the question whether Kant's argument is available to untutored reason is a qualified "yes". It is available as an obscure representation of the highest good, for that is what the expression "earliest germ" proceeds to encompass. The highest good is the logical seed, the germ, from which the postulates of practical reason grow and develop.

Of the two texts in question ("The moment mankind . . ." and "Deceit, violence, and envy . . .") it seems to me that any tension between them is no more absolute than the distinction between our *Märchen* ($N_1$) and *Genesis* 3 ($N_2$), respectively. This is especially apparent if one focuses on their overall affective tone. That is, the message of the first tends to be optimistic, inspiring hope; while the second plays on a certain despair that there is evil in the world, to which we must reconcile ourselves. So like our narratives, the texts from Kant highlight two aspects of one and the same dialectical concept. Although both these texts as well as our narratives are reflections on the highest good, which, in turn, directs us to the postulates of practical reason, at this late point I do not propose to enter into a digression on the "ought implies can" thesis, which usually accompanies



scholarly treatment of the postulates. My contribution will have a different and, I hope, original focus, which outflanks this thesis, which, in any case, has received exhaustive and superior treatment in the literature[14].

Kant's best shot at a concise representation of the relation between the highest good and the postulates of practical reason seems to go beyond the scope of arguments available to untutored reason (including the "ought implies can" thesis). In another context, entirely unrelated to any explicit remarks about the highest good, Kant assets that the relation between freedom and the moral law has the following form:

" . . . When I say that freedom is the condition of the moral law and later assert that the moral law is the only condition under which freedom can be known, I will only remind the reader that, although freedom is certainly the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the latter is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. For had not the law already been distinctly thought in our reason, we would never have been justified in assuming anything like freedom, even though it is not self-contradictory. But if there were no freedom, the moral law would never have been encountered in us" (1788: 4ft./4ftnt.).

As far as I know, Kant nowhere even suggests that the terms of this relation can be applied elsewhere. However, the hypothesis that such a relation also obtains in the case of the highest good and the postulates of practical reason is definitely worth exploring. Reflection on the idea of the highest good leads to an antinomy from which reason can extract itself by conceiving of the possibility that a person's own self-perfection and happiness in harmony with moral worth can be fully attained only through the supposition of a horizon of infinite progress (immortality) and a moral author of the world capable of redressing life's frequent injustices. The endeavor to think consistently about and reconcile the terms of the highest good leads to the recognition of the postulates of practical reason. We become aware of these postulates in reflecting on the highest good. Thus, the highest good is the *ratio cognoscendi* of the existence of God and the immortal soul. This does not imply that the highest good is causally efficacious in producing these postulates. The order of our cognition does indeed reflect the order of being, but proceeds in the opposite direction. The postulates of God and the immortal soul are, in their turn, the *ratio essendi* of the highest good. If no God exists, then neither does the highest good exist; and, if immortality is unavailable to us, self-perfection *(das oberste Gut)* is also an illusion. This reciprocal relation between the postulates and the highest good lends the argument

[14] Further bibliographical data can be found in John Silber's *Kant's Conception of the Highest Good as Immanent and Transcendent,* The Philosophical Review, Vol. 68, No. 4, Oct. 1959. This article also contains a useful treatment of the issue of whether and in what sense the highest good is a duty. Silber cites the text about Spinoza as evidence that Kant held the highest good to be impossible of complete attainment for a finite creature. I do not see any reason to disagree with his conclusion (and I rely on it in this essay) that the attainment of the highest good is regulative of morality, while the furthering or promotion of the highest good is constitutive. Silber's article has my use of the *ratio essendi-cognoscendi* distinction within reach, but he neither explicitly nor suggestively applies its terms to the *summum bonum.* Personally, I have some doubts (which are not central to the argument of my paper) that it is *not* the case that the highest good like freedom "is an exception to the rule that ideas of pure reason cannot be embodied or have objects as actual matters of fact" (ibid., p. 470). Also see, Silber, *The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant's Ethics,* Ethics, Vol. 73, No. 3, April 1963, pp. 179–97, especially p. 183.

the appearance of one pulling itself up by its own boot straps. That is why – restricting the discussion to the second postulate – Kant admits how limited is the force of his proof:

> "This moral argument is not intended to supply an *objectively* valid proof of the existence of God. It is not meant to demonstrate to the skeptic that there is a God, but that he must adopt the assumption of this proposition as a maxim of practical reason, if he wishes to think in a manner consistent with morality" (1790, II: 119ftnt./450ftnt.).

With this qualification in mind – that the issue is evidently not one of an objective argument adequate for theoretic knowledge – the obvious question is, "What kind of knowledge or cognition is entailed by this argument?"

Kant has no less than three answers to this question, which will now be discussed in an approximate order of their increasing importance. First, in treating the type of assurance provided by a proof of God, he distinguishes proofs κατ' ἀλήθειαν from ones κατ' ἄνθρωπον (1790), II: 134/463). He exhaustively canvasses the four types of "alethic" proofs in so far as they support theoretic conviction, dismissing them in turn. He does not comment further on an anthroponic proof in this passage except to say that he is "taking the latter word in the broad sense of man in the abstract". Whatever Kant is trying to capture by this distinction, he makes it clear that an "anthroponic proof" is different than "anthropomorphism". The latter is an invalid type of theoretic argument, in which no ground is available in intuition for transferring the marks of a concept between terms of an analogy (as when we attribute human understanding or volition to God). Kant does not say anything that might be taken as elucidating the nature or use of anthroponic proofs until the next section (91). Even then the term is not explicitly mentioned again, and one must read between the lines.

Kant begins section 91 (1790, II: 140/467) by referring to what can be an object of knowledge "for us". He furnishes a further clue as to what is meant by providing a proof anthroponically by referring to "the subjective nature of our powers of representation" (1790, II: 140/467; third line). Presumably such a proof is limited in application to human beings and would not be valid for all rational creatures if their faculties of representation did not include those of desire and sensibility. Kant further suggests that such a proof informs one about the self-involvement of our concepts with their corresponding faculties of cognition, but not about the comparison between the concepts and their objects. One major result of such self-involvement of concepts with their corresponding facultative capacities is a growth in the complexity of the content of knowledge. Indeed, one might accuse Kant of playing fast and loose with the meaning of "knowledge" when – in the same passage – he says that "things knowable" *("Erkennbare Dinge")* include "matters of faith" (ibid, line 12). But that he does so is as undeniable as it is problematic. Still, the burden of this usage must be shouldered if the highest good is to make sense as the *ratio cognoscendi* of the existence of God.

This leads to Kant's third answer, which may initially complicate things further, but is ultimately his most satisfying solution to what kind of knowledge is contained in recognizing god through the *summum bonum.* Kant's twofold definition of wisdom as "knowledge of the highest good" and "the suitability of the will to the highest good" was



cited on p. 424 of this essay. Kant distinguishes both theoretic and practical aspects in this text (1788: 135/130–1). Yet, later on he remarks that "all our knowledge of God is merely symbolic" (1790, I: 223/353); and the only corresponding perceptible content is a feeling of "confidence" (1790, II: 146/472). However, Kant makes clear that he is speaking informally and relating his own thought to a way of life and a tradition that cannot be adequately captured without more grandiose claims than a modest man would make. Kant advances a system of knowledge devoted to the furthering of the highest good, before which scholarship is humbled. Perhaps because it is such a long text, the following passage has been neglected:

> "To define this idea [of the *sumum bonum*] practically, i. e., sufficiently for the maxims of our rational conduct, is the task of the doctrine of wisdom, which, as a science, is philosophy in the sense in which the ancients understood the word, for whom it meant instruction in the concept wherein the highest good was to be placed and in the conduct by which it was to be obtained. *It would be well if we left this word with its old meaning, as a doctrine of the highest good so far as reason strives to bring it to the level of science.* For, on the one hand, the qualifying condition would be suitable to the Greek expression (which means love of wisdom), and yet entirely adequate to comprehend under the name of philosophy the love of *science* ... For to be a teacher of wisdom would mean something more than to be a scholar who has not yet progressed far enough to conduct himself, and even less anyone else, to so high an end; it would mean to be a master of the knowledge of wisdom, which says more than a modest man would presume to claim. Philosophy as well as wisdom itself would always remain an ideal, which objectively is represented completely only in reason and which subjectively is only the goal for the person's unceasing endeavors" (1788: 112–3/108–9; first italics by L.A.).

Two details, relevant to this essay, should be emphasized. First, when untutored reason is developed, unfolded, tenderly cultivated, the result is a system of wisdom, not scholarship. The apprenticeship for the former is life experience, and, accordingly, the ordinary man (if such an ideal type is regarded as admissible) has as much chance of hitting the mark as the academic expert. Second, the "knowledge" that is transmitted in presenting the highest good as the *ratio cognoscendi* of the existence of God corresponds to this broad use of "doctrine of wisdom". As such, no *a priori* reason exists for excluding theoretic results in so far as they can be adapted to furthering the highest good. (That is the service theory performs when it allows men to master disease and forecast the approach of hurricanes or other natural catastrophes. The question of whether these evils are necessary or contingent seems to be no more answerable than why space and time are the only *a priori* forms of intuition in man.) Yet, it is clear that the theoretic-practical dichotomy is inadequate to articulate the many symbolic components of such a way of conducting philosophy. Thus, when Kant remarks that "all our knowledge of God is merely symbolic" he is referring to a form of presentation of such a system of wisdom, to which story-telling as a symbolic use of language would belong. In conclusion take a moment to recall that the exposition of myth and *Märchen* as presented by this essay forms a contribution to scholarship. Then consider how the telling of stories as by Protagoras to Socrates or by Goethe's mother to her son constitutes a way of practicing philosophy[15].

[15] Let me express thanks to John R. Silber (Boston University) for his penetrating remarks and extensive written comments on two previous drafts of this essay.

## *Appendix*

### *The White Snake*[16]

A long time ago there lived a king who was famed for his wisdom through all the land. Nothing was hidden from him, and it seemed as if news of the most secret things was brought to him through the air. But he had a strange custom; every day after dinner, when the table was cleared, and no one else was present, a trusty servant had to bring him one more dish. It was covered, however, and even the servant did not know what was in it, neither did anyone know, for the King never took off the cover to eat of it until he was quite alone.

This had gone on for a long time, when one day the servant, who took away the dish, was overcome with such curiosity that he could not help carrying the dish into his room. When he had carefully locked the door, he lifted up the cover, and saw a white snake lying on the dish. But when he saw it he could not deny himself the pleasure of tasting it, so he cut off a little bit and put it into his mouth. No sooner had it touched his tongue than he heard a strange whispering of little voices outside his window. He went and listened, and then noticed that it was the sparrows who were chattering together, and telling one another of all kinds of things which they had seen in the fields and woods. Eating the snake had given him power of understanding the language of animals.

Now it so happened that on this very day the Queen lost her most beautiful ring, and suspicion of having stolen it fell upon this trusty servant, who was allowed to go everywhere. The King ordered the man to be brought before him, and threatened with angry words that unless he could before the morrow point out the thief, he himself should be looked upon as guilty and executed. In vain he declared his innocence; he was dismissed with no better answer.

In his trouble and fear he went down into the courtyard and took thought how to help himself out of his trouble. Now some ducks were sitting together quietly by a brook and taking their rest; and, whilst they were making their feathers smooth with their bills, they were having a confidential conversation together. The servant stood by and listened. They were telling one another of all the places where they had been waddling about all the morning, and what good food they had found; and one said in a pitiful tone: "Something lies heavy on my stomach; as I was eating in haste I swallowed a ring which lay under the Queen's window." The servant at once seized her by the neck, carried her to the kitchen, and said to the cook: "Here is a fine duck; pray, kill her." "Yes," said the cook, and weighed her in his hand; "she has spared no trouble to fatten herself, and has been waiting to be roasted long enough." So he cut off her head, and as she was being dressed for the spit, the Queen's ring was found inside her.

The servant could now easily prove his innocence; and the King, to make amends for the wrong, allowed him to ask a favor, and promised him the best place in the court that he could wish for. The servant refused everything, and only asked for a horse and some money for traveling, as he had a mind to see the world and go about a little. When his request was granted he set out on his way, and one day came to a pond, where he saw three fishes caught in the reeds and gasping for water. Now, though it is said that fishes are dumb, he heard them lamenting that they must perish so miserably, and, as he had a kind heart, he got off his horse and put the three prisoners back into the water. They leapt with delight, put out their heads, and cried to him: "We will remember you and repay you for saving us!"

He rode on, and after a while it seemed to him that he heard a voice in the sand at his feet. He listened, and heard an ant-king complain: "Why cannot folks, with their clumsy beasts, keep off our bodies? That stupid horse, with his heavy hoofs, has been treading down my people without mercy!" So he turned on to a side path and the ant-king cried out to him: "We will remember you – one good turn deserves another!"

[16] From: *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales,* trans. M. Hunt & J. Stern, New York: Random House, 1972.



The path led him into a wood, and there he saw two old ravens standing by their nest, and throwing out their young ones. "Out with you, you idle, good-for-nothing creatures!" cried they; "we cannot find food for you any longer; you are big enough, and can provide for yourselves." But the poor young ravens lay upon the ground, flapping their wings, and crying: "Oh, what helpless chicks we are! We must shift for ourselves, and yet we cannot fly! What can we do, but lie here and starve?" So the good young fellow alighted and killed his horse with his sword, and gave it to them for food. Then they came hopping up to it, satisfied their hunger, and cried: "We will remember you – one good turn deserves another!"

And now he had to use his own legs, and when he had walked a long way, he came to a large city. There was a great noise and crowd in the streets, and a man rode up on horseback, crying aloud: "The King's daughter wants a husband; but whoever seeks her hand must perform a hard task, and if he does not succeed he will forfeit his life." Many had already made the attempt, but in vain; nevertheless when the youth saw the King's daughter he was so overcome by her great beauty that he forgot all danger, went before the King, and declared himself a suitor.

So he was led out to the sea, and a gold ring was thrown into it, before his eyes; then the King ordered him to fetch this ring up from the bottom of the sea, and added: "If you come up again without it you will be thrown in again and again until you perish amid the waves." All the people grieved for the handsome youth; then they went away, leaving him alone by the sea.

He stood on the shore and considered what he should do, when suddenly he saw three fishes come swimming towards him, and they were the very fishes whose lives he had saved. The one in the middle held a mussel in its mouth, which it laid on the shore at the youth's feet, and when he had taken it up and opened it, there lay the gold ring in the shell. Full of joy he took it to the King, and expected that he would grant him the promised reward.

But when the proud princess perceived that he was not her equal in birth, she scorned him, and required him first to perform another task. She went down into the garden and strewed with her own hands ten sacks-full of millet-seed on the grass; then the said: "Tomorrow morning before sunrise these must be picked up, and not a single grain be wanting."

The youth sat down in the garden and considered how it might be possible to perform this task, but he could think of nothing, and there he sat sorrowfully awaiting the break of day, when he should be led to death. But as soon as the first rays of the sun shone into the garden he saw all the ten sacks standing side by side, quite full, and not a single grain was missing. The ant-king had come in the night with thousands and thousands of ants, and the grateful creatures had by great industry picked up all the millet-seed and gathered them into the sacks.

Presently the King's daughter herself came down into the garden, and was amazed to see that the young man had done the task she had given him. But she could not yet conquer her proud heart, and said: "Although he has performed both the tasks, he shall not be my husband until he has brought me an apple from the Tree of Life." The youth did not know where the Tree of Life stood, but he set out, and would have gone on for ever, as long as his legs would carry him, though he had no hope of finding it. After he had wandered through three kingdoms, he came one evening to a wood, and lay down under a tree to sleep. But he heard a rustling in the branches, and a golden apple fell into his hand. At the same time three ravens flew down to him, perched themselves upon his knee, and said: "We are the three young ravens whom you saved from starving; when we had grown big, and heard that you were seeking the Golden Apple, we flew over the sea to the end of the world, where the Tree of Life stands, and have brought you the apple." The youth, full of joy, set out homewards, and took the Golden Apple to the King's beautiful daughter, who had now no more excuses left to make. They cut the Apple of Life in two and ate it together; and then her heart became full of love for him, and they lived in undisturbed happiness to a great age.

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