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Classical German Philosophy*

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and Barbara Santini

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Giulia Bernard and Barbara Santini

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ESSAYS

JOB'S LONELINESS. THEODICY AND ITS FAILURE IN KANT'S THOUGHT

by Luca Fonnesu*

Abstract. *The article considers the failure of the Kantian project of a rational theodicy based on practical, i.e. moral, reason. The analysis, starting from the difficulties encountered by Kant with the concept of the highest good as the first attempt to solve the problem of theodicy, illustrates how in the essay dedicated precisely to the failure of rational theodicies (1791) the figure of Job represents the definitive crisis of the initial Kantian project and its outcome in Job's solitude and his sincerity with himself.*

Keywords. *Kant; Highest Good; Faith; Religion; Theodicy*

1. Kant on Theodicy

Kant¹ is in many ways a problematic thinker, particularly with regard to certain problems that lie, as it were, on the borderline of the scope of his inquiry, that is, on or beyond the limits of 'possible experience'. Here, moreover, is also rooted the distinction between the theoretical, or cognitive, and the practical, or moral, point of view. It is precisely on the latter terrain that all questions related to faith and religion are located. In this field, Kant has many

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¹ Kant's works are cited throughout the text according to the *Akademie-Ausgabe* – I. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (ed. by) Bd. 1-22 Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bd. 23 Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, from Bd. 24 Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Berlin, 1900ff – with an indication of the volume and page number, with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (KrV, A and B). For English translations, reference is made to *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

oscillations, aware of the difficulties that his philosophical attitude encounters in going beyond the limits of experience and thus in dealing with the objects or *quasi-objects*² of the metaphysical tradition, particularly those of the so-called *metaphysica specialis*. Even in this direction, Kantian attempts at solutions are characterised by their originality in confrontation with the tradition, but the originality does not always imply their success.

In at least one case, in fact, we witness Kant publicly declaring the failure of an attempt, pursued for a long time and never completely abandoned. It is the case of the ancient question of theodicy, discussed in Germany with particular intensity after the publication of the Leibnizian book that inaugurated the word ‘theodicy’ and gave rise to a huge discussion.

The failure of rationalist theodicy was in fact announced by Bayle. With Leibniz’s *Essais de Théodicée* begins the reaction to Bayle’s criticism, but most thinkers of the 18th Century rework Bayle’s arguments against a rational solution of the question of evil. One need only to think of Voltaire, Hume, D’Holbach. The (usual) exception is Rousseau, that looks for new ways anticipating the interest for the theory of society which will be the main character of philosophical inquiry of the following century. Germany is in many regards a special case, because the most important philosophical parties do consist on the one hand in the followers of Leibniz and of the Leibnizian Wolff, on the other in Leibniz’s critics, that base their criticism of the *mundus optimus* on the ‘Spinozistic’ risk of Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy and on Leibniz’s underestimation of the problems of evil and sin³.

It is difficult not to be struck by the way Kant seems to dismiss the problem already in the title of his only text thematically dedicated to the problem of theodicy: *Ueber das Misslingen aller*

² This interesting expression is introduced by Karin de Boer in the book *Kant’s Reform of Metaphysics. The Critique of Pure Reason Reconsidered*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

³ Cf. S. Lorenz, *De mundo optimo. Studien zu Leibniz’ Theodizee und ihrer Rezeption in Deutschland (1710-1791)*, «Studia Leibnitiana. Supplementa», XXXI, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997; L. Fonesu, *Der Optimismus und seine Kritiker im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, «Studia leibnitiana», XXVI, 1994, pp. 131-162.

philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizée (1791)⁴. There are at least two words that have to be underlined. The first one is *Misslingen*, unsuccess, failure, miscarriage, which does sound as a net and final judgment. The second one is *philosophisch*, which does have here at least two connected meanings. The word can be understood in the meaning of 'philosophical' in the proper sense, so that Kant's title goes in the direction of a denounce of the impossibility, for a philosophical theory, to face in an adequate way, not to mention to solve, the problem of theodicy. The second meaning, a connected but wider one, is 'rational', with the declaration of the unsuccess of reason itself dealing with metaphysical objects due to its own limits. In the latter sense, this diagnosis of the limits of reason can be understood as a natural, almost obvious implication of a central thesis of the Enlightenment which plays a grounding role in Kant's philosophy, as Giorgio Tonelli did show in a brilliant way many years ago, i.e. the idea of the limits or of the 'weakness' of human reason⁵. However, this would be only a part of the answer, because Kant looks for long time for a different solution grounded upon a specific *moral* and *rational* view of the problem of theodicy, that of *justice* in a metaphysical sense or, in Kant's perspective: the retribution of morality with a proportioned happiness. This is the meaning and the role of Kant's concept of the highest good.

2. *The Need of Reason*

That Kant's introduction of the concept of the highest good has to do with the problem of theodicy – the question of God's justice – does not emerge only because the concept itself as a kind of *maximum* is the *moral* translation of Leibniz's best possible

⁴ For a general reconstruction of the question in Kant's thought cf. G. Huxford, *Kant on Theodicy. A Search for an Answer to the Problem of Evil*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2020. Of a special importance here: S. Landucci, *L'ultimo Kant: la svolta del 1791*, «Rivista di filosofia», CVIII, 2017, pp. 281-308.

⁵ Cf. G. Tonelli, *The "Weakness" of Reason in the Age of Enlightenment*, «Diderot-Studies», XIV, 1971, pp. 217-244.

world⁶. A convincing answer to the question asked in the first *Critique* – *what may I hope?* – includes in fact different points of view, such as the existential question asked by the just man himself and the impartial judgment of an external reason. Both in the cases of the concerned person and of the external observer, there is at the same time the perception of the injustice and the impossibility to realize the ideal of justice and of a just retribution. The situation is different in the case of «the perfect volition of a rational being that would at the same time have all power»⁷, God. Kant's idea is that the postulates of God's existence and of the immortality of the soul can be justified through the perspective of an otherwise unattainable justice which is demanded by practical reason appealing to moral reasons. God and immortality are the conditions of justice. This appeal or demand as an appeal of reason is called by Kant for the first time in the writing on orientation in thinking (1786) and then in the *Critique of Practical Reason* a need (*Bedürfnis*).

It has to be recalled that there is a 'need' of reason even in the theoretical sense, because of the teleology of nature already outlined in the first *Critique*, and explicitly declared as a need in 1786, but the need of practical reason is «far more important»⁸ both from

⁶ This derivation is explained with many details and with references also to Kant's lectures by G. Cunico, *Da Lessing a Kant*, Genova, Marietti, 1992, pp. 133-215.

⁷ I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Eng. trans. and ed. by M. Gregor, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 90 (KpV, AA 05: 110).

⁸ «Far more important is the need of reason in its practical use, because it is unconditioned, and we are necessitated to presuppose the existence of God not only if we *want* to judge, but because we *have to judge*. For the pure practical use of reason consists in the precepts of moral laws. They all lead, however, to the idea of the *highest good* possible in the world insofar as it is possible only through *freedom: morality*; from the other side, these precepts lead to what depends not merely on human freedom but also on *nature*, which is the greatest *happiness*, insofar as it is apportioned according to the first. Now reason *needs* to assume, for the sake of such a *dependent* highest good, a supreme intelligence as the highest *independent* good; not, of course, to derive from this assumption the binding authority of moral precepts or the incentives 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

the epistemological and from the axiological point of view. The moral point of view plays for Kant a double role. It offers to human reason an access to objects which are not objects of possible experience and – at the same time – opens the space for a solution to the problem of moral justice, a just retribution of morality through happiness, the highest good.

In the second *Critique* the need of reason does play the role of a justification for the propositional attitude of moral faith, as we find in the title of one of the last sections of the *Dialectic of pure practical reason: Of the Holding-to-be-true⁹ from a Need of Pure Reason* (KpV, AA 05: 142). It is the *need* which justifies the adoption of a certain propositional attitude, a *Fürwahrhalten* as a *Glauben* concerning God's existence and the immortality of the soul. In this way, Kant tries to connect the discussion of faith in the second *Critique*, with the analysis of the *Fürwahrhalten* developed in the section of the *Canon* of the *Critique of Pure Reason* dedicated – not by chance – to *Meinen, Wissen und Glauben*¹⁰. And it is well known that in German *Glauben* can mean both belief and faith, an ambiguity which does play a role in the first *Critique*.

The concept of the highest good is presented in the three *Critiques* with the meaning of a retribution of morality through happiness. It is nevertheless curious that in every work Kant does in fact offer not a new meaning, but a new *justification* of it. Even the fact that in every *Critique* Kant does look for a new way of justification of the concept and consequently of the attempt to give a

objective reality to the concept of the highest good, i.e. to prevent it, along with morality, from being taken merely as a mere ideal, as it would be if that whose idea inseparably accompanies morality' should not exist anywhere» (I. Kant, *What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, Eng. trans. and ed. by A.W. Wood and G. di Giovanni, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 12; WDO, AA 08: 139).

⁹ Throughout the text I translate the Kantian *Fürwahrhalten* with *Holding-to-be-true*, thus departing from the English translations.

¹⁰ On the *Fürwahrhalten* see now the historical reconstruction of L. Miletì Nardo, *Forme della certezza*, Pisa, Ets, 2021.

rational root to faith seems to be a sign of the difficulties¹¹. Some remarks.

First, the history of *Glauben* itself in Kant's thought up to the third *Critique* shows that the distance between faith and reason, understood as the gap between faith and knowing – *Glauben* and *Wissen* – or between faith and every form of belief which does not consist in moral faith, becomes ever greater. This is so true, that the final form of *Glauben* – in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* – excludes every form of belief and the *Glaubenssachen* are only those concerning the highest good, God's existence and the immortality of the soul. The space of *Glauben* is now only the space of faith:

This commanded effect [the highest good] *together with the sole conditions of its possibility that are conceivable for us*, namely the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, are *matters of faith (res fidei)*, and are indeed the only ones among all objects that can be so designated¹².

Contrary to the first *Critique*, *Glauben* as moral faith is now qualitatively different from every form of belief which is not faith. The latter can either be a kind of opinion (*Meinen*), or it has been in fact a knowing for somebody (as in the case of 'historical' belief), or, again, could become a knowing, while the main character of moral faith is that it can *never* become knowing, due to its special or better *unique* nature itself¹³.

Second, the status of the highest good and of its implications is highly problematic, because, as Thomas Wizenmann, the intelligent

¹¹ Cf. on this question P. Kleingeld, *Fortschritt und Vernunft. Zur Geschichtsphilosophie Kants*, Würzburg, Königshausen u. Neumann, 1995; D. Tafani, *Virtù e felicità in Kant*, Firenze, Olschki, 2006; H. Höwing (ed.), *The Highest Good in Kant's Philosophy*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2016; L. Fonesu, *The Highest Good and Its Crisis in Kant's Thought*, «Journal of Transcendental Philosophy», III (3), 2022, pp. 369-384.

¹² I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Eng. trans. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 333 (KU, AA 05: 469).

¹³ Cf. *Ibidem*.

interlocutor of Kant during the so-called *Pantheismusstreit*¹⁴, does not fail to point out in a very clear way. Among the positions of the dispute, Wizenmann does defend the most orthodox view, grounded upon the historical revelation and consequently the historical faith or *fides historica*, but this conservative position does not at all imply a lack of philosophical sharpness. Kant replies to Mendelssohn, Jacobi and Wizenmann in 1786, with the writing *Was heisst, sich im Denken orientieren?*, but Wizenmann replies to Kant's criticism in the journal *Deutsches Museum* in February 1787¹⁵, with a remarkably intelligent essay containing a critical examination of Kant's conception of faith, including the notion of 'need'. As Fredrick Beiser has excellently shown¹⁶, the echo of Wizenmann's critical remarks is well present in Kant's *Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason*, where the in the meanwhile passed away young theologian is explicitly mentioned by Kant in a long footnote, recognizing his value and replying to his criticism. After the defense of his own position as a position independent of Jacobi, Wizenmann raises several serious objections to Kant, including that concerning the concept and still more the role of a 'need'. As Beiser remarks: «if Wizenmann's self-defense fails, his counterattack on Kant is more successful. He goes on the offensive against Kant by throwing the charge of *Schwärmerei* back in his face»¹⁷.

Among several relevant objections, the objection that concerns exactly the idea of a 'need of reason' seems significant in a special way because, remarks Wizenmann, from a need, or from a wish, it is not possible to infer an existence. This kind of inference

¹⁴ «Along with the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in May 1781, the most significant intellectual event in late eighteenth-century Germany was the so-called pantheism controversy between F.H. Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn» (A.F. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge Mass.-London, Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 44). Cf. also L. Fonnesu, *El Pantheismusstreit*, in M. Hernandez Marcos and Héctor Del Estal Sanchez (eds.), *Conceptos en Disputa, Disputas sobre Conceptos*, Madrid, Dykinson 2022, pp. 99-113.

¹⁵ T. Wizenmann, *An den Herrn Professor Kant von dem Verfasser der Resultate Jacobischer und Mendelssohnscher Philosophie*, «Deutsches Museum», I, 1787, pp. 116-156.

¹⁶ Cf. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 118 ff.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 119.

could lead to all sort of *Schwärmerei*¹⁸. Kant is certainly aware of the difficulties, because he himself sometimes hints at the dangers of wishful thinking, though never connecting it explicitly with faith, while significantly linking it, nevertheless, with forms of belief. Wizenmann does not mention the word, but the risk here seems to consist, in Kant's own analysis of propositional attitudes, in the *persuasion*, i.e. a form of deceitful holding-to-be-true analysed by Kant in the first *Critique*: «Persuasion is a mere semblance, since the ground of the judgment, which lies solely in the subject, is held to be objective»¹⁹. However, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* his answer to Wizenmann distinguishes a mere wish, or a need which is rooted in sensible inclination, and the need *of reason*, defending the rights of the latter and going so far, as mentioned above, as to equate the satisfaction of the need of reason with the fulfilment of the moral law:

In the *Deutsches Museum*, February 1787, there is a treatise by a very subtle and clearheaded man, the late Wizenmann, whose early death is to be lamented, in which he disputes the authorization to conclude from a need to the objective reality of its object and illustrates the point by the example

¹⁸ Wizenmann, *An den Herrn Professor Kant*, pp. 134 ff. Cf. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 119-21.

¹⁹ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure reason*, Eng. trans. and ed. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 684 (KrV, A 820/B 848). Persuasion is opposed to *conviction*: the latter is grounded upon reason. «Holding-to-be-true is an occurrence in our understanding [...]. If it is valid for everyone merely as long as he has reason, then its ground is objectively sufficient, and in that case holding-to-be-true is called conviction. If it has its ground only in the particular constitution of the subject, then it is called *persuasion*» (Ivi, pp. 684-685; KrV, A 820/B 848). Persuasion can be a mere wishful thinking: «[...] frequently we take something to be certain merely because it pleases us, and we take something to be uncertain merely because it displeases or annoy us. This certainty or uncertainty is not objective, however, but instead subjective» (I. Kant, *Lectures on logic*, Eng. trans. and ed. by J.M. Young, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 157; V-Lo/Blomberg, AA 24: 198); «Who is persuaded most easily? Children. For their judgments are merely subjective. They believe what they wish» (ivi, p. 306; V-Lo/Wiener, AA 24: 854). Cf. L. Fonesu, *Kant on Private Faith and Public Knowledge*, «Rivista di filosofia», CVI, 2015, pp. 361-390.

of a *man in love*, who, having fooled himself into an idea of beauty that is merely a chimera of his own brain, would like to conclude that such an object really exists somewhere. I grant that he is perfectly correct in this, in all cases where the need is based upon *inclination*, which cannot necessarily postulate the existence of its object even for the one affected by it, much less can it contain a requirement valid for everyone, and therefore it is a *merely subjective* ground of the wish. But in the present case it is a *need of reason* arising from an *objective* determining ground of the will, namely the moral law, which necessarily binds every rational being and therefore justifies him a priori in presupposing in nature the conditions befitting it and makes the latter inseparable from the complete practical use of reason. It is a duty to realize the highest good to the utmost of our capacity; therefore it must be possible; hence it is also unavoidable for every rational being in the world to assume what is necessary for its objective possibility. The assumption is as necessary as the moral law, in relation to which alone it is valid²⁰.

In fact, Kant returns immediately to the point, emphasising just here that the idea of a commanded faith is an *Unding* (KpV, AA 05: 144) and distantiating immediately faith and moral duty, but the oscillation, which is not the only one in these pages, is significant, and a sign of the difficulty that is also not new.

With the concept of the highest good, Kant tries to offer a new rationalist proposal, based on a moral point of view, to the problem of theodicy. This concept plays a relevant role in the three *Critiques* and does emerge with a fundamental systematic function in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. After the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, its systematical role seems to be lost. The expression 'highest good' itself occurs in that years rarely in Kant's writing, and in the last important work on moral philosophy, the system of duties of the *Metaphysics of morals* (1797), the only occurrence of the expression is that of the *highest political good* (a just society) while the

²⁰ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 115n (KpV, AA 05: 143n).

perspective of an adequate proportion of happiness and morality is neither the starting point of a moral ‘proof’, nor even designed as a ‘highest good’, but just object of a very general hope, mentioned only at the end of the work.

It is in the framework just outlined that we have to consider Kant’s writing of 1791 with the radical title dedicated to the failure, unsuccess, miscarriage of all ‘philosophical’ attempts in theodicy.

3. *The Failure of All Theodicies*

It is well known how much Kant did appreciate the analogy between philosophical and juridical ‘justification’. This is so true, that even one of the most relevant concepts of his philosophy, that of ‘deduction’, does have a juridical origin. In the same sense, one could mention the Kantian idea of a ‘court of reason’, an expression that has the ambition to designate the whole enterprise of critical philosophy.

The juridical metaphor does play a great role in the essay of 1791 already in the presentation of the question and in the definition itself of the problem of theodicy: «By ‘theodicy’ we understand the defense of the highest wisdom of the creator against the charge which reason brings against it for whatever is counterpurposive [*zweckwidrig*] in the world. – We call this ‘the defending of God’s cause’»²¹. That this kind of process is legitimate is explicitly stated by Kant:

The author of a theodicy agrees, therefore, that this juridical process be instituted before the tribunal of reason; he further consents to represent the accused side as advocate through the formal refutation of all the plaintiff’s complaints; he is not therefore allowed to dismiss the latter in

²¹ Id., *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, Eng. trans. and ed. by A.W. Wood and G. di Giovanni, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 24 (MpVT, AA 08: 255).

the course of the process of law through a decree of incompetency of the tribunal of human reason (*exceptio fori*)²².

In doing so, it has to be said, Kant recalls the position already declared in a clear way in the Preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, at the beginning of the critical enterprise:

Our age is the age of genuine *criticism*, to which everything must submit. *Religion* through its *holiness* and *legislation* through its *majesty* commonly seek to exempt themselves from it. But in this way they excite a just suspicion against themselves, and cannot lay claim to that unfeigned respect²³.

Even for the concept itself of highest good, the writing on theodicy does present at least a further problem which has to be mentioned. We did discuss above shortly Kant's concept presenting it as an answer to the problem of theodicy, that is a question of retribution or justice, in a special way of God's justice: this is the starting point of the introduction of the highest good in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where the problem is faced with a special attention because it is here that Kant does propose in a (relatively) clear way the doctrine of postulates. This is also the framework of the third *Critique*, when Kant stresses the limits of Spinoza's morality. The classical figure of the 'honest atheist', Spinoza, is used by Kant to illustrate the limits of moral action that cannot refer to a perspective in which he is rewarded:

We can thus assume a righteous man (like Spinoza) who takes himself to be firmly convinced that there is no God and (since with regard to the object of morality it has a similar consequence) there is also no future life: how would he judge his own inner purposive determination by the moral law, which he actively honors? He does not demand any

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Id.*, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 110-111n (KrV, A xi).

advantage for himself from his conformity to this law, whether in this or in another world; rather, he would merely unselfishly establish the good to which that holy law directs all his powers. But his effort is limited²⁴.

The human being's expectations, exactly as her need grounded upon practical reason, concerns justice. But in 1791 Kant suggests once more another perspective, stressing much more, as regards justice, punishment than reward. Of course the question of justice is the central one, but with a different meaning if compared with the connection of morality with happiness:

It is remarkable that of all the difficulties in reconciling the course of world events with the divinity of their creator, none imposes itself on the mind as starkly as that of the semblance in them of a lack of *justice*. If it comes about (although it seldom happens) that an unjust, especially violent, villain does not escape unpunished from the world, then the impartial spectator rejoices, now reconciled with heaven. No purposiveness of nature will so excite him in admiration of it and, as it were, make him detect God's hand in it. Why? Because nature is here moral, solely of the kind we seldom can hope to perceive in the world²⁵.

Kant's passage could express only the other side of his position concerning justice, i.e. the retribution of morality with happiness, but now it is not so. The highest good as reward cannot have to do with justice, but rather with God's *goodness*. There is no reward for the honest man, that only does his duty:

[...] also the lament over the lack of justice shown in the wrongs which are the lot of human beings here on earth is directed not at the *well-being* which does not befall the good, but at the *ill* which does not befall the evil (although, if well-

²⁴ Id., *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 317 (KU, AA 05: 452).

²⁵ Id., *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 28n (MpVI, AA 08: 260n).

being occurs to the evil, then the contrast makes the offence all the greater). For under divine rule even the best of human beings cannot found his wish to fare well on divine justice but must found it on God's beneficence, for one who only does what he owes can have no rightful claim on God's benevolence²⁶.

The Kantian argument, however, traces all the divine predicates – holiness, goodness and justice – showing how against each of them reason has the possibility – and the right – to raise significant objections that are not adequately answered, i.e. justified. Nor do answers that might have some affinity with the Kantian thesis of the highest good, for example by referring to a future life, have a better fate in this context. The conclusion is that

the outcome of this juridical process before the forum of philosophy is this: Every previous theodicy has not performed what it promised, namely the vindication of the moral wisdom of the world-government against the doubts raised against it on the basis of what the experience of this world teaches²⁷.

Rationalist theodicies cannot but fail. The most striking novelty, however, is the distinction between a *doctrinal* theodicy – rationalistic, the term seems to imply, although in a pejorative sense – and what Kant calls an *authentic* theodicy, whose representative and, we might suggest, whose hero is Job.

The reference to Job is not as such a novelty. In fact, we find it already many years earlier, in a letter to Lavater of 28th April 1775, in which Kant answered to the Swiss theologian about Lavater's writing of 1774 concerning faith and prayer:

You ask me for an opinion on your treatise on faith and prayer. But do you know who you are addressing? To a man

²⁶ Ivi, p. 26 (MpVT, AA 08: 258n).

²⁷ Ivi, p. 30 (MpVT, AA 08: 263).

who knows no other means of preserving his validity intact in the last moment of life than the purest sincerity of the heart's innermost intentions; to a man who, like Job, considers it a crime to flatter God and to make inner admissions that are perhaps dictated by fear and to which the soul cannot assent with a pure act of faith²⁸.

Job's meaning is nevertheless very different in 1791. Job is now the hero of an *authentic* theodicy. There is a curious opposition between a rational, doctrinal theodicy, and the theodicy which does simply accept God's decision, the authentic one. Even Kant's terminology is interesting:

Now every interpretation of the declared will of a legislator is either *doctrinal* or *authentic*. The first is a rational inference of that will from the utterances of which the law-giver has made use, in conjunction with his otherwise recognized purposes; the second is made by the law-giver himself²⁹.

'Rational inference' is the translation of *herausvernünfteln*, with a verb, *vernünfteln*, which occurs again few lines later and does have some kind of negative meaning, something like a use of reason which is not legitimate from the circumstances and is in itself not an – as it were – *authentic* use of reason, but the ambition to a use of reason in fields in which reason cannot play a role. This would of course be the case for theoretical reason – that cannot go beyond its limits – but what about *practical* reason, the reason of the moral law which had offered a new, moral image of God? The impossibility to give an explanation and to open a space of hope for the honest man, in the introductory chapter of the *Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason*, was not compatible with the idea of God's existence: «to need happiness, to be also worthy of it, and yet not to participate in it cannot be consistent with the perfect volition of a

²⁸ Id., *Correspondence*, Eng. trans. by A. Zweig, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 152 (AA 10: 175).

²⁹ Id., *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 31 (MpVI, AA 08: 264).

rational being that would at the same time have all power»³⁰. In the second *Critique*, as it is well known, this was the starting point for the doctrine of postulates of God's existence and soul's immortality. A rational argument, although of practical, moral nature, did support what Kant did call the *faith of reason* grounded upon, as we have seen, its *need of justice* and the justification of the highest good and of a just retribution of morality. Job's conclusion seems to go exactly in the opposite direction, i.e. in the direction of a divine voluntarism: «Job declares himself for the system of *unconditional divine decision*. 'He has decided,' Job says, 'He does as he wills'»³¹. The failure of philosophical, rational theodicy declared in the title of the essay, seems to involve even Kant's own rationalistic theodicy of the highest good. Kant's attempt too is failed.

There is nevertheless a further aspect of Job's condition in the essay which is interesting for its understanding and for the understanding of the question. This last aspect can be found in the important *Schlussbemerkung* at the end of the essay.

4. *Job: Loneliness and Sincerity*

One of the most interesting aspects of the *Schlussbemerkung* is the re-emergence of the holding-to-be-true, *Fürwahrhalten*, and thus of the epistemic status of faith, on this occasion connected with the new horizon that emerged in the course of the writing, on the one hand, and with a genuinely moral dimension, on the other.

The opening of the section is the reaffirmation of the distinction and of the distance between faith on the one side and science or knowing on the other:

Theodicy, as has been shown here, does not have as much to do with a task in the interest of science as, rather, with a matter of faith. From the authentic theodicy we saw that in

³⁰ Id., *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 89-90 (KpV, AA 05: 110).

³¹ Id., *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 32 (MpVT, AA 08: 265).

these matters, less depends on subtle reasoning [*vernünffteln*] than on sincerity in taking notice of the impotence of our reason, and on honesty in not distorting our thoughts in what we say, however pious our intention³².

Kant's ambition of a faith of reason came into tension with a character of reason that already in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and later in manuscript notes and lectures seemed to contrast with rationality: its incommunicability³³, communicability being the specific characteristic, yes of knowledge, but in principle also of reason. The problem now seems to explode in Kant's hands.

Job's condition is a lonely one, so much so that it is entirely consistent with his attitude towards his friends a condition of genuine incommunicability. Job is alone with himself (and with God). Kant's thesis is now: not knowing but authentic faith, not *vernünffteln* but sincerity. The very way of looking at sincerity, however, is of a special kind, because it has to do above all with sincerity with oneself, a relationship that becomes, in fact, the decisive one, as regards the faith. This is a very important 'moral' turn of the epistemic status of faith. The important passage, in this direction, is that from *truth* to *truthfulness* in the holding-to-be-true:

One cannot always stand by the *truth* of what one says to oneself or to another (for one can be mistaken); however, one can and must stand by the *truthfulness* [*Wahrhaftigkeit*] of one's declaration or confession, because one has immediate consciousness of this. For in the first instance we compare what we say with the object in a logical judgment (through the understanding), whereas in the second instance, where

³² Ivi, p. 34 (MpVT, AA 08: 267).

³³ «The touchstone of whether holding-to-be-true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore, externally, the possibility of communicating it and finding the holding-to-be-true to be valid for the reason of every human being» (Id., *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 685; KrV, A820/B849). Cf. Fonesu, *Private Faith and Public Knowledge*.

we declare what we hold as true, we compare what we say with the subject (before conscience)³⁴.

One can say, therefore, that while truth is an epistemological notion (and value), truthfulness is a moral notion (and value), which has to do with the sincerity with ourselves. The effort of sincerity with ourselves is what Kant calls *formal conscientiousness* (*Gewissenhaftigkeit*):

the formal conscientiousness which is the ground of truthfulness consists precisely in the care in becoming conscious of this belief (or unbelief) [*Glauben oder Nichtglauben*] and not pretending to hold anything as true we are not conscious of holding as true. Hence, if someone says to himself (or – what is one and the same in religious professions – before God) that *he believes*, without perhaps casting even a single glimpse into himself – whether he is in fact conscious of this holding-to-be-true or at least of holding it to some degree – then such a person *lies*³⁵.

Here too we do find the connection with the chapter on *Meinen, Wissen und Glauben* of the first *Critique*, where Kant gives different criteria for the distinction between conviction and persuasion. The first is communicability, but the second is exactly a kind of introspection with which it is possible to understand if the reasons of the holding-to-be-true are only subjective and private or can have a wider validity: «one can unfold the subjective *causes* of the judgment, which we take to be objective *grounds* for it, and thus explain taking something to be true deceptively as an occurrence in our mind [...] then we expose the illusion and are no longer taken in by it»³⁶.

³⁴ Kant, *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 34 (MpVT, AA 08: 267).

³⁵ Ivi, pp. 34-35 (MpVT, AA 08: 268).

³⁶ Id., *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 685 (KrV, A 821/B849).

In the last page of the essay with its long footnote, the epistemic criteria of the first *Critique* receive a moral meaning, with the awareness that «human beings [...] also feign conviction [*Überzeugung*] – which is at least not of the kind, or in the degree, as they pretend – even in their inner profession»³⁷. Lack of sincerity can produce «actual persuasion»³⁸, on the borderline between epistemic and moral guilt, and on the same borderline is the third criterion for distinguishing genuine conviction from self-deception and persuasion, namely *betting*³⁹:

Do you now, by everything which is dear and holy to you, venture to guarantee the truth of that important proposition of faith or of some other equally so held? At such an unreasonable demand conscience would be startled, because of the danger to which one is exposed of pretending more than one can assert with certainty⁴⁰.

With the analysis of sincerity and conscientiousness, the Kantian essay closes as it does close at least one important chapter of modern philosophical theodicy. As always, Kant does not explicitly

³⁷ Id., *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 35n (MpVT, AA 08: 268n).

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ «The usual touchstone of whether what someone asserts is mere persuasion or at least subjective conviction, i.e., firm belief, is *betting*» (Id., *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 687; KrV, A 824/B 852). This touchstone plays a role also in the context of the inquisitor's example in the *Religion* (cf. Id., *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason*, in *Religion and Ration Theology*, Eng. trans. and ed. by A.W. Wood and G. di Giovanni, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 203; RGv, AA, 06: 186) and will be used also by Fichte, mentioning Kant, in the *System of Ethics* (cf. J.G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. by R. Lauth et al., Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, frommann-holzboog, 1962 ff., I.5, pp. 156-157). For the figure of the inquisitor see the remarks of C. La Rocca, *Verità, coscienza morale, convinzione religiosa. A partire da un esempio di Kant*, in *Verità, esperienza religiosa e filosofia*, ed. by D. Venturèlli, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2013, pp. 137-163.

⁴⁰ Kant, *On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 35n (MpVT, AA 08: 269n).

retract his earlier positions, nor does the theme of the highest good that he had proposed as his own rational solution to theodicy and which proved insufficient disappear from his pages altogether. It is lost, nevertheless, its systematical role. But not all evil comes to harm. The definitive privatisation of the epistemic experience of faith motivated Kant to allow further aspects of it to emerge, deepening questions that he had begun to investigate ten years earlier. Another sign of Kant's extraordinary ability to rethink and rework his own philosophical positions.