

The Dialectic of Suffering: Kant's Authentic Theodicy in the Book Job

Shterna S. Friedman

Department of Government, Harvard University, USA  

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ENG Abstract: How does reason develop in the face of suffering? Kant's essay on theodicy addresses this by showing how doubt about the world's justice can push morally faithful reason, even without formal training in critical philosophy, toward self-critique. In certain kinds of first-person experiences, such as that of senseless suffering, reason often confuses its practical and theoretical uses. Intensifying this confusion can provoke reflection on why a world that once seemed just now seems unjust. Because theoretical reason can assess the world's justice contingently, its limits compel the moral believer to seek firmer grounds for both faith and the world's justice. Recognizing these limits reveals the role of practical reason: not to demonstrate justice, but to postulate it as necessary for moral life. Suffering can thus become the occasion for re-establishing faith by envisioning nature itself as moral.

Keywords: authentic theodicy; critical philosophy; highest good; injustice; Kant; Job; justice; *Machtspruch*; practical reason; suffering; theodicy; theoretical reason.

Summary: Introduction. 1. What Is A Theodicy? 2. A Doctrinal Theodicy. 3. Elements of an Authentic Theodicy. 3.1. The Legal Agent: Practical Reason. 3.2. The Legal Procedure: A *Machtspruch*. 4. Job's Learning Process. Bibliographical References.

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“Before one thinks methodically, one must
always think tumultuously too, ramble around,
seek out everything that occurs to one.”
(V-Lo/Dohna AA 24:781)¹

Introduction

Making sense of the rationality of the world in the face of evil, suffering, and injustice may be a project as old as humanity. We can avert our gaze from the suffering of others, but in the grips of our own suffering, the need for intelligibility becomes ever more demanding. Witnessing third-person suffering or injustice, we face a *theoretical* problem. We seek rational insight into the nature of the operation of the world. In the face of first-person suffering, we also face a highly *personal, practical* problem. We do not merely ask, with Augustine, “whence evil?” but, more urgently, “why *us*?” How can we carry on in a world that seems not just indifferent to human concerns, but antithetical to them? Doctrines and theories that may have felt compelling in surveying the sufferings of others often feel insufficient in making sense of our suffering. Something *else* feels needed: a principle or orientation for our individual, unique configuration of troubles.

These are among the issues taken up in Kant's “On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy [*Über das Misslingen aller Philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee*]” (1791). The specific context is that of a theodicy: making sense not merely of suffering that feels senseless, but of a God that permits it. More particularly, the question *religious believers* must confront concerns the *morality* of a God that would create a world that includes various kinds of suffering.

Kant presents two distinct theodicies: 1. a “doctrinal” or “philosophical” theodicy—a failed theodicy; and 2. an “authentic” theodicy—a successful theodicy.² Kant's terms suggest two distinct orientations akin to the

¹ All citations to Kant's work are to the *Akademie Ausgabe* (AA), following the *Kant-Studien* style of abbreviations: the title of the work in abbreviation is followed by the *Akademie* volume and (after a colon), page numbers. The translations are from the Cambridge Edition of Kant's works (which I occasionally modify).

² As Lawrence Pasternack (2023) has noted, Kant adopts this distinction from Gottfried Achenwall's *Jus Naturale*.

third- and first-person perspective. A doctrinal [*doktrinal*] theodicy begins from *docta*: doctrines that are *taught*, and which have a merely theoretical status: we hold them second-hand, as if from the third-person. In contrast, an *authentic* [*authentisch*] theodicy is, literally, undertaken by the *agent* himself, from the first-person. It thus has a practical status.³

The terms Kant uses to designate each type of theodicy gives us a glimpse of his strategy in the essay. Yet “the allusions Kant makes to this so-called authentic theodicy are so vague that it is hard to establish anything substantial from them” (Galbraith 1996, 33). Thus, readers have come to widely different conclusions about what Kant takes to be the nature of an authentic theodicy. It has been described as both an “anti-theodicy” (Kivistö and Pihlström 2016) and a “non-theodicy” (Palmquist 2000, 457); as a “holding fast to a philosophical theodicy” albeit on a new footing (Brachtendorff 2002, 83); as a “philosophical *defense* of moral theism,” rather than as a “philosophical *theodicy*” (Dieringer 2009, 123); as concluding that “faith itself is the only theodicy” (Galbraith 1996, 187); as consisting in sincerity (Fonnesu 2023, 16); as Kant’s attempt “to challenge aspects of his own critical system” (Ferguson 2023); and as a rejection or, at least fundamental modification, of Kant’s prior theodicies (e.g., Dieringer 2009, 98; Duncan 2012; Galbraith 1996, 34f.; Muchnik 2023).

The generativity of scholarly interpretations points to the enigmatic nature of Kant’s essay. Its perplexities include its relationship to Kant’s earlier treatments of theodicy; its basic structure; and its details. With regard to its structure, the first half presents the attempt and the failure of a “doctrinal” (or “philosophical”) theodicy, which is the kind of theodicy undertaken by theoretical reason. The second half presents an allegorical reading of the Book of Job in order to present an “authentic” theodicy, which is undertaken by practical reason. A concluding remark offers cryptic remarks about the nature of faith, sincerity, conscience, and the distinction between truth and truthfulness. How do these parts fit together? Why present a failed theodicy? What is the relationship between a doctrinal and authentic theodicy? What *is* an authentic theodicy? Kant provides no less than three definitions of it, without specifying how they relate to each other. One definition is an “authentic interpretation” of nature. But instead of spelling out precisely what that means, Kant “find[s] such an authentic interpretation expressed allegorically in an ancient holy book” (MpVT, AA 08:264). Kant’s reading of that ancient book, the Book of Job, is perhaps *the* central mystery of the essay.

Job has long been the biblical archetype of senseless or unjustified suffering.⁴ In *Job*, God allows Satan to test Job’s faith by destroying his children and his worldly possession. Job and his friends then try to make sense of how God, if just, could let Job suffer. *Job* ends with God appearing to Job from out a whirlwind, offering him a vision of the natural world that displays God’s might and power. For many readers, God appears as a bully, and his thundering vision certainly doesn’t seem to render Job’s suffering intelligible. If *Job* is written in allegory (as Kant thought), then it is certainly difficult to decipher—as the many commentaries to it over the centuries indicate (see, e.g., the excerpts in Larrimore 2001). Likewise, Kant’s reading of that allegory is difficult to decipher.

To cope with these interpretive difficulties, I will read Kant’s essay against the background of his critical philosophy as a whole. I will argue for four interpretive claims.

The most general claim is that Kant believes that, to a sincere, moral agent, certain kinds of first-person experience are likely to function as critique. I mean to claim that Kant allows (at least) two major *pathways* for arriving at not only some of the major *conclusions* of his philosophical system, but also their *grounds*. The path for those who have the learning and inclination is the philosophical study of the three Critiques. But another pathway is available through some kinds of first-person experiences. I’ll focus on the experience of senseless suffering for this captures Job’s experience in undertaking a theodicy. Making sense of his suffering requires critique: disentangling the uses of practical and theoretical reason by recognizing their legitimate domains, limits, and powers.

To make that argument plausible, I will argue that, second, Kant’s overarching category of theodicy is an interpretation of *nature*. This claim is not controversial (see, e.g., Schilling 2009, 76), but it is frequently overlooked. Scholars commonly emphasize the *goal* of a theodicy (defending God; defending faith), rather than its basic method (interpreting nature).

Third, I shall argue that authentic theodicy must be preceded by *inauthentic* or doctrinal theodicy. As a historically factual matter, formulations of doctrinal theodicies preceded Kant’s authentic theodicy.⁵ But I wish to contend, more strongly, that it is *necessary* for doctrinal theodicies to precede authentic theodicies, such that if authentic theodicy is necessary, then so too is doctrinal theodicy. This claim runs against a scholarly assumption—so widespread that no one has seen the need to argue for it—that Kant *rejects* doctrinal theodicy and *endorses* authentic theodicy. But Kant is rather *depicting* a doctrinal theodicy as a *failure*; and is endorsing that failure as a crucial step to undertaking a successful theodicy. A failed doctrinal theodicy is necessary, albeit not sufficient, to the success of an authentic theodicy.

Finally, and most conjecturally, I shall argue that God’s thundering vision to Job is, in Kant’s reading, a vision of the highest good: a just world where desert is proportionate to moral worthiness. This claim is also like to be controversial since Kant did not use the term “highest good” in relation to Job. Indeed, one scholar recently pointed to Kant’s rendition of Job as the moment in which “the theme of the highest good ... lost ... its

³ Kant uses the Greek-Latinized form of the term, *authentisch* (αὐθένης), which is an act perpetrated by the agent himself. A *doktrinal* theodicy relies on a *teaching* (*doceo*, *docere*).

⁴ For the reception history of the Book of Job, see Larrimore 2013 and 2020; and the essays collected in Perdue and Gilpin 1992.

⁵ For interest in the Book of Job during Kant’s life, see Sheehan 2005, esp. 162f.

⁵ I thank an anonymous reviewer for noting this point.

systematical role” in Kant’s thought (Fonnesu 2023, 19). But I hope to defend this claim by reading Kant’s *Job* from the perspective of Kant’s critical system.

I proceed as follows. Section 1 argues that Kant’s generic category of theodicy is an interpretation of *nature*. Section 2 argues that the first half of *Misslingen*, which depicts a doctrinal theodicy, dramatizes the *confusions* into which reason falls when it indiscriminately uses theoretical reason to undertake tasks that lie in the domain of practical reason. Sections 3 to 4 argue that Kant’s reading of *Job* depicts a sincere moral believer who, by virtue of his suffering, undertakes a critique of reason.

1. What Is A Theodicy?

The first sentence of *Misslingen* defines a theodicy as the *defense* of God (as moral).

- A. “By ‘theodicy’ one understands the defense of the highest wisdom of the creator against the charge which reason brings against it for whatever is counterpurposive in the world” (MpVt, AA 08:255).

But in the second half of *Misslingen*, three more distinct definitions of theodicy arrive on the scene in quick succession:

- B. “All theodicy should properly be an interpretation of nature insofar as God announces his will through it” (MpVt, AA 08:264).
 C. “Theodicy proper” or a “doctrinal theodicy” (MpVt, AA 08:264) is a “rational inference of that [divine] will from the utterances of which the law-giver has made use, in conjunction with his otherwise-recognized purposes.” This is an “interpretation [*Auslegung*] of a *ratiocinating* (speculative) reason [*vernünftelnden (spekulativen) Vernunft*]” (MpVt, AA 08:264).
 D. Yet we “cannot deny the name of ‘theodicy’ also to the mere dismissal [*Abfertigung*] of all objections against divine wisdom, if this dismissal is a *divine decree* [*Machtspruch*]” (MpVt, AA 08:264). This is what Kant calls an “authentic theodicy,” and identifies with an “authentic interpretation” of nature, in contrast to a doctrinal interpretation (*ibid.*).

Kant’s quotation marks around ‘theodicy’ in A suggest that he is clarifying how the task of theodicy is generally understood: defending God against counterpurposiveness in the world. Kant appears to be speaking in his own voice in B, indicating that all theodicy is *properly* an interpretation of nature insofar as God’s will is manifest in it (see also Schilling 2009, 76).

Each of the other categories include some interpretation of nature. Type-A theodicy defends God against what is deemed “counterpurposive in the world” (MpVt, AA 08:255), where the world designates the sensible natural, empirical world. C and D refer to two distinct modes for interpreting nature: respectively, doctrinal and authentic. Type-C redescribes type-A theodicy, which interprets the divine will indirectly, by interpreting “the world” as “an object of experience” (MpVt, AA 08:264). In type-D theodicy, nature is interpreted authentically. The nature at issue is “creation,” and it is authentically interpreted when the creator—the lawgiver of nature—directly declares his will (*ibid.*).

Type-B theodicy, then, designates the generic category of theodicy, which concerns less its goal (defending God or faith) than its method: an interpretation of *nature*.⁶ This rules out some interpretations of what Kant means by an authentic theodicy. Since Kant discusses the Book of *Job* when discussing an authentic theodicy; and since he praises *Job* for his sincerity and faith, it is natural to consider authentic theodicy a matter of sincerity (Fonnesu 2023, 16) or of faith (e.g., Galbraith 2006, 187; Dieringer 2009, 120–23). Yet it is not clear how these are interpretations of nature.

It is important to recognize that, according to Kant, “nature” has two senses. In its “material” sense, nature is the sum total of appearance (the sensible world), while in its “formal” sense, nature is the inner principle of its existence (e.g., MAN, AA 04:467; see also KrV A418–19/B446). In the formal sense, God is understood as the author of the lawful *form* of nature, that is, the cause of the “the connection of determinations of a thing in accordance with an inner principle of causality” (KrV A418–19/B446). To be the cause of the formal structure of nature is to be the cause of its supersensible ground (KU, AA 05:176; see also KpV, AA 05:102).

In what follows, I will argue that the kind of nature present in the first half of *Misslingen*, which depicts type-A/C theodicy, is nature in its material sense: the world of sensible appearance. In the second half of Kant’s essay, depicting type-D (authentic) theodicy, Kant is concerned with the formal sense of nature, whereby practical reason gives sense to nature just as God gives “sense to his creation” (MpVt, AA 08:264): giving it *moral* sense.

2. A Doctrinal Theodicy

The first half of *Misslingen* presents a doctrinal theodicy in the form of a trial against God.⁷ In this section, I wish to argue that the trial depicts the confusions that common reason easily falls into when it fails to draw the proper distinction between theoretical and practical reason.⁸

⁶ Scholarship on Kant’s early work suggests that Kant’s long-standing interest in the natural sciences was, at least in part, an attempt to see divine justice in the workings of nature (see Huxford 2018 and 2019; and see Galbraith 1996, ch. 1, which describes Kant’s shifting attitudes to a physico-theology).

⁷ On the historical precedents for Kant’s use of the form of a *causa dei*, see Loades 1985, 75–76.

⁸ By “common reason” I include any form of reason untutored in the critical system.

Unlike in some traditional theodicies, which treat God's power or knowledge as on a par with his goodness, Kant subjects only God's moral properties to scrutiny. They, in turn, are precisely three: holiness, goodness, and justice. Each moral property designates a specific moral relationship between the divine and the world: As holy, God is the world's "lawgiver" and "creator." As good, he is the world's "preserver" and "ruler." As just, he is the world's "judge" (MpVt, AA 08:257).⁹

In a doctrinal theodicy, theoretical reason seeks to defend God against charges brought against each of these attributes. It seeks to defend

1. God's *holiness as lawgiver/creator* against the phenomenon of *moral evil*: the "absolutely counterpurposive" (MpVt, AA 08:257).
2. God's *goodness* against the phenomenon of *physical pain*: the "conditionally counterpurposive" (ibid.).
3. God's *justice* against the phenomenon of *injustice*: the "kind of counterpurposiveness [that] must be thinkable in the world" is "the disproportion between crimes and penalties in the world" (ibid.).¹⁰

In a doctrinal theodicy, theoretical reason interprets nature in its material sense. It appeals to sensible phenomena both to prosecute and defend divine morality. In its adversarial mode, it observes the presence of moral evil and physical suffering, and considers injustice *thinkable* because the world often *appears* unjust. In its defensive mode, it also relies (albeit not exclusively) on sensible observations, which legitimately fall under the domain of theoretical reason. The problem is that it is "absolutely incapable" of inferring anything from the phenomenal world to the nature of a moral God (MpVt, AA 08:263).¹¹ Theoretical reason can arrive at the idea of a supreme *cause* of the world, but not at the idea of a "living" God as the *moral author* of the world.¹² Only the practical use of reason can derive that idea. This takes place by way of Kant's ethicotheological or "moral argument," in which the concept of the highest good places a dominant role.

The moral argument has three steps, all of which take place on the domain of practical reason.

First, practical reason—i.e., the reasoning of a moral agent—is convinced of the absolute value of the moral law, and thus of the necessary obligation to strive to obey it.

Second, practical reason seeks to determine the conditions of possibility for the absolute value of morality—and thus the conditions of possibility for its own moral legislation. It determines that the moral law has binding power only if it is possible to fulfill it.¹³ This requires, at a minimum, that our will has a moral object: the promotion of the "highest good." The highest good is a world that forms a purposive unity of the system of sensible nature with the system of moral freedom. Such a world would be *just* because happiness, the highest end of the system of nature, would be distributed only in accordance with virtue or moral worth, which is the highest end of the system of moral freedom.

Third, practical reason examines the conditions of possibility for the highest good. This requires postulating the existence of moral God: for a just world is possible only if God is holy, good, and just.¹⁴ Practical reason thus arrives at a conception of rational religion.

The moral argument thus depicts how the conditions of possibility for morality leads to religion *by way of* the concept of the highest good. In the moral argument, a moral God is postulated only by means of practical reason, i.e., by the demands of moral agency.

The fact that a *moral* God stands accused in a theodicial trial indicates that the trial begins from *within* the domain of practical reason. Practical reason, in turn, is already operating within the domain of rational religion: the trial of a moral God proceeds as it does *only because* practical reason already understands God as moral. The theodicial trial is thus not one conducted by an atheist, but rather by a believer—but a believer with doubts. The believer errs, however, in turning to theoretical rather than practical reason to strengthen its doubts. The doubter is confusing the proper functions of each use of reason, which necessitates that the trial will end in failure: for the doubter is asking theoretical reason to take on a task that rightfully belongs only to practical reason. Thus, Kant concludes the end of the first half of *Misslingen* by declaring the failure of a doctrinal theodicy: "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 the world teaches" (MpVt, AA 08:263). For theoretical reason lacks the competence to establish divine morality.

Yet we may establish its lack of competence: "It must yet be proven that at least a negative wisdom is within our reach, namely insight into the necessary limitation of what we may presume with respect to that which is too high for us—and this may well be done" (ibid.). Thus, to "bring this trial [*Prozeß*] to an end *once and for all*" requires "establishing with certainty that our reason is absolutely incapable of insight into the *relationship in which a world such as we may ever become acquainted with through experience stands with respect of the highest wisdom*. For in this latter case all further attempts [*Versuche*] by a putative human wisdom to gain

⁹ For the significance of Kant's depiction of the triadic internal structure of a moral God, see Friedman 2022.

¹⁰ Kant frames this type of counterpurposiveness as unpunished crime, *not* unrewarded virtue.

¹¹ See also, e.g., KrV A632-33/B660-61.

¹² E.g., KrV A632-33/B660-61.

¹³ E.g., KrV A633-34/B661-62: "Since there are practical laws that are absolutely necessary (the moral laws), then if these necessarily presuppose any existence as the condition of the possibility of their *binding* force, this existence has to be *postulated*, because the conditioned from which the inference to this determinate condition proceeds is itself cognized *a priori* as absolutely necessary."

¹⁴ Immortality is the other precondition for the possibility of the highest good, but I focus on God's morality here since, in the theodicy essay, that is what is put in doubt.

insight into the ways of the divine wisdom are fully dismissed [*völlig abgewiesen*]” (ibid.). The trial is dismissed by proving that theoretical reason lacks the legal standing to prosecute or defend God. The failure of the trial thus concludes with precisely the philosophical lesson Kant’s readers would have expected from his critical system.

The first half of *Misslingen*, then, depicts a doctrinal theodicy. This is not the exclusive use of theoretical reason, but its inappropriate use on the domain of practical reason: the entanglement of the theoretical and practical uses of reason. In the following sections, I will argue that the second half of Kant’s essay (Kant’s reading of *Job*) illustrates the *learning* process of disentangling these two uses of reason from one another.

3. Elements of an Authentic Theodicy

I have suggested that, for Kant, an interpretation of nature (in some sense) constitutes the *generic* aspect of any type of theodicy. We have seen that a doctrinal theodicy interprets nature in its material sense, seeking to infer the nature of divine morality from sensible experience. An authentic theodicy, by contrast, would have to interpret nature in its formal, rather than in its material sense. This is an “authentic interpretation” of nature, and Kant “finds such an authentic interpretation expressed allegorically in an old, holy book” (MpVt, AA 08:264). This is the Book of Job. Yet while Kant says much about Job’s sincerity, he says seemingly little about *nature*. To take up this issue, it is necessary to get a grip on the elements of an *authentic* theodicy.

Kant lists many different components. An authentic theodicy is “the mere dismissal [*Abfertigung*] of all objections against divine wisdom, if this dismissal is a *divine decree* [*Machtspruch*] a pronouncement of the same reason through which we form our concept of God” (ibid.). It is an “authentic interpretation” of nature “made by the law-giver himself” (ibid.). That is “not the interpretation of a *ratiocinating* (speculative) reason, but of a *powerful* [*machthabend*] practical reason” (ibid.). As a powerful lawgiver that interprets nature, practical reason “can be considered as the unmediated explanation [*Erklärung*] and voice of God through which he gives meaning [*Sinn*] to the letter of his creation” (ibid.). This practical reason is “the same reason through which we form our concept of God—necessarily and prior to all experience—as a moral and wise being. For through our reason God then becomes himself the interpreter of his will as announced through creation; and we can call this interpretation an *authentic* theodicy” (ibid.).

As I reconstruct it, an authentic theodicy includes, at the very least, the following elements:

Legal Agent: Practical reason in its lawgiving capacity, which determines God as moral

Legal Procedure: a *Machtspruch*/decree

Legal Tasks: (i) dismiss objections against God; (ii) provide an authentic interpretation of nature

Precondition: sincerity

I will discuss the first two elements in this section and the final two in the next.

3.1. The Legal Agent: Practical Reason

Kant describes practical reason as the agent that undertakes an authentic theodicy. Kant writes that “the *law-giver* himself” (MpVt, AA 08:264) makes an authentic interpretation of nature. A “powerful [*machthabend*] practical reason” legislates to nature: “just as in in legislating it commands absolutely without further grounds, so it can be considered as the unmediated explanation and voice of God through which he gives meaning [*Sinn*] to the letter of his creation” (ibid.). Indeed, “through our reason God then becomes himself interpreter of his will as announced through creation” (ibid.).

In analogizing between practical reason and a moral God, Kant emphasizes God’s legislative function. God is the “the author of the world, as *lawgiver* (creator)” in his capacity as *holy* (MpVt, AA 08:257). Kant is here bracketing divine goodness and justice—God’s rule and judgment of the world (ibid.). As the legislator, God provides a holy, *form* to nature, giving it a purposive *moral* order. (This is the *formal* sense of nature I mentioned above).¹⁵ Analogously, human practical reason begins with the *legislative* function of the will: the lawful *form* of the will that respects the moral law for its own sake.

It is important to note that practical reason has several functions that correspond to the steps of the moral argument (sec. 2). Not only does practical reason legislate the moral law by recognizing the absolute value of morality (step 1 of the moral argument); but, in determining the world as just, it arrives at the idea of the highest good (step 2); and, thereby determines God as moral, arriving at rational religion (step 3). As we will see, each of these functions are aspects or results of an authentic theodicy. The legal agent is practical reason in its legislative function (step 1), which is to determine God as moral (step 3). To do so, it will need to undertake step 2: to arrive at the concept of the highest good. This is how an authentic theodicy functions as an interpretation of nature. To go from step 1 to step 3, practical reason will need to envision nature as just. It will interpret nature in its formal sense: as conforming to the moral law.

3.2. The Legal Procedure: A *Machtspruch*

The legislative aspect of practical reason, then, is what issues a *Machtspruch*. If so, we can expect that a *Machtspruch* (decree) represents autonomy by virtue of the kind of command it declares. Just as God as a legislator commands *absolutely*, so too does practical reason command the moral law: “as in legislating, it

¹⁵ Kant denies that God is a “creator of appearances” (KpV, AA 05:102), i.e., of nature understood in its material sense. When Kant says that a holy God is the creator, it is God as creator of nature in its *formal* sense.

commands absolutely without further grounds [*Gründe*]” (MpVt, AA 08:264). This divine command is *not* the “unconditional” command of the voluntarist God of divine command theory. A voluntarist God commands without *any* ground or reason. But a holy God has the moral law as the ground of His will. He needs no “*further* grounds” than those *internal* to His own nature as holy. His holy will is autonomous: He requires no *further* reasons than the *nomos* of his nature, i.e., his reasons are not *external* to its nature.¹⁶ A *Machtspruch* thus refers, at least in part, to the autonomous determination for oneself of a moral law that obligates absolutely.

Equally important is the meaning the term *Machtspruch* had in Kant’s time. In a judicial context it signified an extraordinary sovereign decree (Fenves 2003, 33-35; Shell 2023, 15-16). It stood in contrast to a *Rechtspruch*, a normal juridical procedure, such as the juridical procedure depicted in the first half of *Misslingen*. As the transcendent source of law, the sovereign can temporarily pause or even reverse the immanent or ordinary workings of law. Thus, as both Peter Fenves (2003, 33-35) and Susan Shell (2023, 13) point out, Kant characterizes the sovereign’s right to pardon as a *Machtspruch* (MdS, AA 06:334). A *Machtspruch*, then, is not the sovereign’s initial institution of a system of *Rechtsprüche*, but an extraordinary intrusion from outside that system. It is extraordinary and extra-legal in some senses, yet it retains a legal status: its interference with ordinary legal proceedings is *legitimate*.

Sensitivity to this terminology has profound implications for our reading of Kant’s essay. A *Machtspruch* annuls ordinary legal procedure. This implies that a legal procedure has already been initiated. A *Machtspruch*, then, is issued only if a prior *Rechtspruch*, a trial or legal procedure, has been undertaken. For if a *Machtspruch* is opposed to a *Rechtspruch*, it is an opposition that nevertheless seems to require a *Rechtspruch* as its ground. If this logic is correct, the terminology of a *Machtspruch* would suggest that an authentic theodicy (a *Machtspruch*) must be preceded by a doctrinal theodicy (a *Rechtspruch*). This would suggest, in turn, that rather than rejecting the undertaking of a doctrinal theodicy tout court, Kant is rejecting treating a doctrinal theodicy as the *final word* or as a legitimate *conclusion* of theodicy in general.

Kant’s invocation of the legal terminology for an extraordinary legal sovereign procedure (a term that he uses infrequently in his corpus) thus raises the possibility not merely that a doctrinal theodicy not only factually *does* but *must* precede an authentic one. In the next section I will provide textual reasons for thinking that only by experiencing the *failures* of a doctrinal theodicy to strengthen faith can one then *dismiss* it by the power of practical reason. I shall also argue that Kant takes God’s thundering vision to Job to be an allegory for the *Machtspruch* of practical reason. In that vision, we shall also see the way a *Machtspruch* undertakes its two legal tasks: positively, it interprets nature as moral by legislating that nature in its formal sense is moral; and negatively, it dismisses the objections of counterpurposiveness raised against God’s morality.

4. Job’s Learning Process

To see a *Machtspruch* in action, let us turn to Kant’s Job. Kant’s account is extremely condensed, so I will use his critical system to reconstruct how he is likely to have envisioned the main lineaments of Job’s story. Kant’s Job may be seen as the archetype of doubting faith: a faith that doubts because it confuses the domains of theoretical and practical reason. I divide Job’s story into five stages that, together, represent Job’s learning to disentangle the theoretical and practical uses of reason.

Stage 1: Unreflective Acceptance of the Convergence of Nature and Morality

Before his ordeals, Job was “a man whose enjoyment of life included everything which anyone might imagine it as making it complete. He was healthy, well-to-do, free, master over others whom he can make happy, surrounded by a happy family, among beloved friends—and on top of all this (what is most important) at peace with himself in a good conscience” (MpVt, AA 08:265, describing *Job* ch. 1:1-5). Job is both upright and prosperous. In the context of Kant’s critical system, virtue is the highest end of the moral domain, and happiness is the highest end of the domain of the natural sensible world. Thus, the story begins with Job blessed in the supreme goods of the systems of nature and morality.

Initially, he would have held the following propositions:

1. The moral realm is inherently *purposive* to human ends.
2. The sensible natural realm is inherently *purposive* to human ends.
3. The unity between the moral and natural realms is *purposive*, forming a just world: the highest good, where desert is apportioned to merit.
4. The God that exists is *moral* (holy, good, and just).

Untutored in critical philosophy, his reasoning is likely to be tumultuous, haphazard, most likely unconscious. Without reflection on the *reasons* for his beliefs, Job would likely have treated his good fortune as proof of the validity of 2. Without awareness of the distinction between the practical and theoretical uses of reason, he would have been prone to using theoretical reason speculatively. Knowing that he is moral and prosperous, he would have taken his good fortune as the deserved outcome of his moral merit. With this proportion between merit and desert, the sensible world would have *appeared* just. At this stage, the *appearance* of justice *is* justice. Job thus makes no distinction between appearances and things in themselves. He would simply have held 3: the world *is* just. Since the world is just, it would seem to prove that its divine creator

¹⁶ As an “unconditioned causality,” it is, as Kant put it in the third antinomy, the “faculty of beginning a series of successive things or states *from itself*” (KrV A448/B476).

is moral. Implicitly, his *proof* for 2, 3, and 4 would rest on his *sensible* experience, i.e., theoretical reason. He may also have assumed, at this stage, that his proof for 1, his own morality, rests on 4, divine morality.

In this first stage of the story, Job holds some conclusions of Kant's critical system (1, 3, 4), but they are not grounded in critical insight.

Stage 2: The Divergence of Nature from Morality: Job is Virtuous; Unhappy; Doubtful

In the first unreflective stage of innocence, Job is faithful. But his faith, untested, may be weak. In Stage 2, "a harsh fate [is] imposed in order to test him" (MpVt, AA 08:265). This reverses his empirical fortunes—he loses his children, his worldly possessions, his body is afflicted with boils, etc. He and his friends dispute the reasons for his condition and the nature of God. In this stage, Job remains virtuous, retaining proposition 1 (morality is purposive to human ends). But the change in his empirical fortune entails the negation of proposition 2: sensible nature no longer seems inherently purposive to human happiness.

Job scours his conscience but "his conscience has nothing to reproach him for in his whole life" (MpVt, AA 08:265). Therefore, his suffering seems unjustified. The world, too, now appears unjust. He thus experiences the negation of proposition 3: the unity between nature and morality no longer seem purposive but *counter-purposive*. And since Job still conflates seemings with reality, the fact that the unity between nature and morality *seems* counterpurposive means that it *is* counterpurposive. The negation of 3, in turn, directly contradicts 4, for a just God would not create an unjust world.

Job is now faced with a dilemma: he can (i) accept the negation of 3 and reject 4, or (ii) reject the negation of 3 and accept 4. Job's friends choose the second option: they deny the appearance of worldly counterpurposiveness, acquitting God of the charge of immorality. But for Job to choose ii, he would have to deny that he experiences his suffering as undeserved. And that would be to go against his conscience, to say what he does not believe is true. But to be true to his experience, he cannot affirm divine morality.

He thus appeals to divine voluntarism: unable to defend divine morality, he defends divine power. As Kant writes, Job "declares himself for the system of *unconditional divine decision*. 'He has decided,' Job says, 'He does as he wills [er ist einig ... er macht's wie er will]'" (MpVt, AA 08:265, quoting Luther's *Job* 23:13).¹⁷

It is common to assume that Job's friends engage in a doctrinal theodicy while Job engages in an authentic theodicy. But Kant writes "there is little worthy of note in the subtle or hypersubtle reasonings [*vernünfteln oder übervernünfteln*] of the two sides"—that is, of Job and his three friends (MpVt, AA 08:265). A *vernünftelnde* (*spekulative*) *Vernunft* is reason that engages in *doctrinal* theodicy. It would appear, then, that at this point, *both* Job and his friends are engaging in a doctrinal theodicy by using theoretical reason speculatively (see Schilling 2009, 79). For theoretical reason lacks the legal standing to determine divine morality *or* immorality. In Job's doctrinal theodicy, he professes ignorance in the face of a powerful God who need not have a moral ground for his willing. At the end of the story, Kant's Job accepts a different kind of ignorance: *critical* ignorance of how his suffering is compatible with a *moral* God. But at this point in the narrative, in prioritizing divine power over divine morality, Job is using theoretical reason via a doctrinal, *vernünftelnde* theodicy.

At stage 2, Job continues to hold proposition 1, but negates propositions 2, 3, and 4. This indicates that, as, in stage 1, he uses theoretical reason to infer God's *morality* from his *good* fate, in stage 2, he continues to rely on theoretical reason to infer God's *immorality* from his own *bad* fortune.

But while Job and his friends both engage in a doctrinal theodicy, they do so differently. Kant adds that what "merit[s] ... attention" is the "character [*Charakter*]" in which they each speak: "Job speaks as he thinks" while his friends "speak as if they were being secretly listened to by the mighty one, over whose cause they are passing judgment, and as if gaining his favor through their judgment were closer to their heart than the truth" (MpVt, AA 08:265). As Kant explains, a few pages later, "sincerity ... is the principal requirement in matters of faith" (MpVt, AA 08:267). At this stage, what distinguishes Job from his interlocutors, then, is *not* his manner of *reasoning* but his *sincerity*.

Precondition for Moving from Stage 2 to Future Stages: Sincerity

Some scholars treat an authentic interpretation as consisting in sincerity (Fonnesu 2023, 16). But since Job acts sincerely, yet nevertheless engages in a doctrinal theodicy, sincerity does not constitute, nor is it *sufficient* for, an authentic theodicy. But it is *necessary* if he is not to despair in his attempt to orient himself to his suffering.¹⁸ Sincerity, then, is a precondition for moving from a doctrinal theodicy to an authentic theodicy.

Job's sincerity lies in being true to his thoughts about his experience. His experience falls within the phenomenal world, the domain of appearance. A sincere use of *theoretical* reason would accept the appearance of injustice as legitimate; and a sincere use of *practical* reason would not externally profess what one did not inwardly believe. Job's friends speak insincerely in not countenancing the appearance (injustice) even as an appearance. Job, experiencing his suffering as unjustified, affirms, with his thoughts and with his words, the appearance of injustice. But untutored in critical philosophy, he equates appearance with things in themselves. He makes an epistemic mistake, albeit not a *moral* one. Thus, Kant writes that at the end of the story, God convicts Job of speaking not "*wanton*ly," but only "*unwisely*" (MpVt, AA 08:266). Despite his suffering, the form of Job's will remains virtuous and morally worthy.

¹⁷ I take Job's assertion of divine *power* to reflect his inability to affirm divine *morality*, but see Dieringer 2009, 120; Muchnik 2023; and Velkley 1978, 59.

¹⁸ But see Galbraith 1996, 39–40

Stage 3: Certainty about the Necessity of the Moral Law and Consciousness of his Use of Heterogeneous Principles

In stage 3, Job recognizes that throughout his ordeals he has *not* doubted proposition 1: morality is inherently purposive for human beings. As Kant writes, quoting from Luther's translation, Job declares that "until my end comes, I will not deviate from my piety [*Frömmigkeit*]." Kant replaces a crucial term, substituting, for Luther's term, *Unschuld* (innocence), the term *Frömmigkeit*.¹⁹ This emphasizes not Job's past will and actions, but his present and future orientation: he will continue to act piously.

Kant's Job is certain in his need to continue to act morally: he treats his respect for the moral law as absolutely unconditioned. His empirical fortune changes, but his morality is unaffected. His faith in divine morality changes, yet his own morality is unaffected. If divine morality can be challenged, but Job's morality cannot be, this provides an anchor amidst changes in his fortune and beliefs. As Jacqueline Mariña (2023) has argued, his respect for the moral law grounds his sincerity.²⁰ Reorienting himself to his own certainty in the moral law thus provides him with the means for reflecting on the *grounds* for his current and previous beliefs.

If, in stage 1, Job assumed that his own morality was grounded in divine morality, he now realizes that this cannot be the case, for it were, his conviction in the moral law would have faltered when his faith in divine morality faltered. He may now consciously recognize that he had been confusing two heterogeneous principles: theoretical reason, to obtain knowledge of sensible reality; and practical reason, to determine how he should act. He can now examine what grounds his conviction in proposition 1: it is a sincere use of practical reason, which sees morality as inherently purposive to our vocation as rational beings. And a sincere use of theoretical reason can lead him to recognize that theoretical reason grounds the negation of 2: the sensible world is *not* inherently purposive to human happiness, or else he would not suffer as he does.

Job is now ready to face the question of which of the two heterogeneous principles—theoretical or practical reason—should legitimately ground the determination of the relationship between the natural and moral realms; and the determination of divine morality. The question is whether theoretical or practical reason should be sovereign in matters of faith.

Stage 4: Authentic Theodicy—the Primacy of Practical Reason

In the fourth stage, Job learns of the power of practical reason over theoretical reason in matters of faith. This is what occurs in the *Machtspruch* of an authentic theodicy.

Kant recounts the allegory in chapters 38 to 41 of the Book of Job, where God speaks to Job from the whirlwind. Allegorically, this is the speaking of power—a *Spruch der Macht*. I wish to suggest that God's speech, de-allegorized, is the speech of practical reason becoming a *visible* power. It asserts its legitimate sovereign authority over the mere *Rechtspruch* of theoretical reason.

Kant's compact rendition of Job's vision contains three components:

- A. the "beautiful side of creation, where ends [are] comprehensible to the human being";
- B. a "horrible" side, "among which also harmful and fearsome things, each of which appears indeed to be purposively arranged for its own sake and that of its species, yet, with respect to other things and to human beings themselves, as destructive, counterpurposive, and incompatible with a universal plan established with goodness and wisdom."

"God *thereby* demonstrates" ...

- C. "an order and a maintenance of the whole which proclaims a wise creator, even though his ways, inscrutable to us, must at the same time remain hidden—indeed already in the physical order of things, and how much more in the connection of the latter with the moral order (which is all the more impenetrable to our reason" (MpVt, AA 08:266).

The reference to the horrible, in B, may recall Kant's view of the way the sublime makes us aware of our moral vocation. This may lead us to treat B as the most important part of the allegory. Yet, allegorically, the *Gottesrede* as a whole is a *Machtspruch* about the natural world. De-allegorized, Job's vision as a whole must provide an interpretation of nature, while dismissing the three objections against God. Recall that Kant frames the three main objections against divine morality in terms of counterpurposiveness: absolute counterpurposiveness, conditional counterpurposiveness, and counterpurposiveness between merit and desert. This would suggest that an authentic theodicy that dismisses those objections would have to be framed in terms of purposiveness

I propose de-allegorizing the vision as follows:

- A. Allegorically, God shows Job the beautiful side of creation. De-allegorized, it represents that which is most holy: *absolute purposiveness*. This is the moral law. We can take this to affirm proposition 1: morality *is* inherently purposive to human beings as rational. This affirmation does not dismiss moral evil as real, but dismisses it as a valid *objection* against divine holiness. For if morality is absolutely purposive for us, then it requires that we have freedom. And that freedom requires the possibility of willing evil. Thus, the presence of

¹⁹ Luther's translation of Job 27:5: "bis daß mein Ende kommt, will ich nicht weichen von meiner Unschuld."

²⁰ In contrast to Mariña, however, I emphasize that Job's sincerity extends to *all* his uses of reason.

absolute purposiveness (morality) necessitates its opposite (in finite creatures): the presence of absolute counterpurposiveness.

B. Allegorically, God shows Job horrible side of creation. De-allegorized, this affirms the presence of conditional counterpurposiveness (physical pain and suffering). It thus affirms the negation of proposition 2: the sensible or material aspect of nature appears (and *is* thus) inherently *counterpurposive* to our happiness, even though, in a more formal sense, it may also be, as the third critique showed, *purposive* in itself. This affirmation does not dismiss the reality of suffering, but rather dismisses it as an *objection* against divine goodness. For divine goodness does not require that happiness is *inherent* to the world, but only that it is *conditional*, i.e., possible.

Let me pause briefly to address a potential concern: does Kant really think that an authentic theodicy includes an *affirmation* of the presence (as opposed to the desirability) of moral evil and physical suffering? Richard Velkley (1978, 35) has argued that the starting point for a theodicy is “the experience of unpurposiveness.” This would mean that an authentic theodicy cannot be one that denies this experience. And it is worth noting that, for Kant, the most objectionable of the many objections we might raise against God is the flourishing of the wicked; and when they are punished, “the impartial spectator rejoices, now reconciled with heaven” (MpVt, AA 08:260). Punishing the wicked exhibits both absolute and conditional counterpurposiveness: moral evil and physical suffering. Yet far from intensifying our doubts about divine morality, their conjunction reconciles us to God by making us feel that the world is *just*. This would suggest that much of the work of an authentic theodicy rests on the third part of Job’s vision.

C. Allegorically, these two sides (the beautiful and the horrible) provide a demonstration of order of whole. De-allegorized, this affirms proposition 3, and denies its negation: the unity of absolute and conditional purposiveness—morality and nature (in its material sense)—*is* purposive. This does not deny that the morality-nature unity may *appear* counterpurposive to theoretical reason. But the unity of morality and nature is now envisioned from the perspective of practical reason in its ability to legislate the moral form of the natural law. This ability to legislate that the formal substrate of nature is moral follows directly from the need of practical reason: if morality is to have any meaning, the laws of nature must conform to the moral law. But this means a just world, the highest good, must be possible. This legislation to nature is, effectively, how practical reason provides an *interpretation* of nature. And by envisioning the highest good, it dismisses as an objection that injustice is “thinkable in the world” (MpVt, AA 08:257).

Overall, then, God’s revelation to Job represents a *Machtspruch* of practical reason, declaring itself sovereign over theoretical reason in matters of faith. As sovereign, it displays its power by dismissing not the content of the objections, but their *effects* on the believer. Substantively, the objections remain—there really is moral evil, physical pain, and the thinkability of injustice. But they lose their legal force. This dismissal is one of the prime tasks of practical reason in an authentic theodicy. It occurs *by* interpreting nature as having a lawful, moral *form*, even while acknowledging that its sensible appearance may be counterpurposive to human happiness. At the same time, a dismissal of another kind occurs. As practical reason declares its power to interpret nature from a moral perspective, it also dismisses theoretical reason as having any power in that respect. The doubting believer, having seen that theoretical reason lacked the power to demonstrate the purposive connection between nature and morality, now attains *certainty* into its inability to *ever* do so: it attains critical insight, the “negative wisdom,” that that connection will always be inscrutable to theoretical reason.²¹

Some scholars are likely to find controversial my claim that Job’s vision, for Kant, includes a vision of the highest good, especially since Kant did not use the term “highest good” in relation to Job.²² Moreover, Luca Fonnenu (2023, 19) has argued that in Kant’s reading of Job “the theme of the highest good ... lost ... its systematical role” in Kant’s thought.²³ But one virtue of my hypothesis is that it explains how Kant’s interpretation of the Book of Job fits into the overall structure of Kant’s critical system. A further virtue is that it does not neglect any of the elements of an authentic theodicy that I listed in section 4. To see an authentic theodicy as including a vision of the highest good helps make sense of, precisely, how a *Machtspruch* of practical reason both interprets nature and dismisses the objections against God.

Stage 5: Effect of an Authentic Theodicy

There is a further advantage to interpreting Kant’s Job’s vision as including a vision of the highest good: it helps explain Kant’s analysis of Job’s state of mind at the *end* of the story. As we saw, in the moral argument, the highest good is a bridge that leads from the need of practical reason to obey the moral law to rational religion and faith in a moral God. It is thus reasonable to suppose that once Job uses practical reason to envision the world as just, the effect would be that it *resolves* his doubts and strengthens his faith in a moral God. Thus, at this stage, he would return to proposition 4. But now his grounds for 4 would no longer be speculative but practical reason.

This is what Kant tells us is the result of Job’s vision:

²¹ Kant refers to two distinct dismissals: the doctrinal *trial* is “fully dismissed [*vollig abgewiesen*]” when we “prove” that we have the “negative wisdom” to declare the legal agents legally incompetent (8:263); and a *Machtspruch* is the “dismissal [*Abfertigung*] of all objections [*Einwürfe*] raised against divine wisdom” (8:264).

²² I thank Pablo Muchnik for raising this point. Lawrence Pasternack 2023 points out how puzzling it is that, in discussing Job, Kant does not mention his doctrine of the highest good, a concept that is so crucial to Kant’s philosophy.

²³ In contrast, see the interpretation in Schilling 2009 (76–81), which emphasizes the concept of the highest good throughout *Misslingen* (but with a different interpretation of Job’s vision).

The faith ... which sprang in him for such a vexing resolution of his doubts—namely merely being convicted of ignorance—could only arise in the soul of a man who, in the midst of his strongest doubts could yet say (Job 27:5-6): ‘Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me, etc.’ For with this disposition he proved that he did not found his morality on faith, but his faith on morality: in such a case, however weak this faith might be, yet it alone is of a pure and true kind, i.e. the kind of faith that founds not a religion of supplication, but a religion of good life conduct. (MpVt, AA 08:267)

We can infer that, at the end of the story, Job holds the following beliefs, and on the following grounds:

1. The moral realm is inherently *purposive* to rational human ends.

This belief never changed: but now it is consciously grounded in practical reason.

2. The sensible natural realm appears *purposive* in itself, yet *counterpurposive* to sensible human ends.

This belief is grounded in a sincere and legitimate use of theoretical reason.

3. The unity between the moral and natural realms is *purposive*, forming a just world (i.e., the highest good).

Job believed this proposition in stage 1, but it is now grounded in practical reason. And now its modal form shifts. Job affirms that it is possible that there is a unity between nature and morality.

In holding 3, Job does not thereby deny that a sincere use of theoretical reason would suggest that the world does indeed often *appear* unjust. But now Job knows the limits of theoretical reason; he does not hypostasize appearances as reality. He thus now holds a corollary to 3 about the relationship between the moral and natural worlds:

- 3'. The unity between the moral and natural realms may *appear* counterpurposive.²⁴

This proposition is now grounded in a sincere and legitimate use of theoretical reason. In its hypostasized form, this proposition had seemed to be an objection to divine morality, but having recognized the legitimate domain and limit of theoretical reason, Job can now dismiss the mere appearance of injustice as an *objection* to divine morality.

Finally, Job now returns to the proposition he held in the first stage of his learning process:

4. The God that exists is *moral* (holy, good, and just).

But Job no longer grounds divine morality in theoretical reason but in practical reason—that is, in 1 by way of 3.

In effect, then, Job has arrived at the moral argument by undertaking a critique of reason. He has discovered the proper domain and limits of theoretical reason; and the sovereignty of practical reason over theoretical in matters of faith. He discovered this not by virtue of a study of the faculty of cognition, but through the experience of first-person suffering. That experience led him to undertake, first, an inauthentic, doctrinal theodicy—and to experience for himself that it *failed* to strengthen his faith. His continued conviction in morality then led him to disentangle the two uses of reason. Job rambled around, and *learned* from his rambling. We might be tempted to see this as a resuscitation of some traditional theodicies that justify suffering by the goods that comes from it. Yet the good that has come from Job's suffering (his strengthened faith) does not *justify* his suffering. The good is an *effect* of the suffering, not its *reason*.

Having undertaken a critique of reason, Job now experiences conviction in the highest good and, thus, in divine justice. But it is important to note an abstruse element of Kant's account of divine justice: it is, strictly speaking, punitive, rather than remunerative (see Rosen 2022, 57f.; Friedman 2022). As Kant writes, “the claim that divine *justice* makes upon us . . . is that of *punitive* justice. There is no place for *reward* (*praemium*, *remuneratio gratuita*) in justice toward beings who have only duties and no rights in relation to another” (MdS, AA 06:489). That is, that “even if we unceasingly observe all moral laws, we can never do more than is our duty; hence we can never expect rewards from God's justice” (V-Phil-Th/Pölit, AA 28:1085; V-Th/Mron AA 28:1292-93). If we merit no reward for simply doing our duty, this means that Job's suffering was not, strictly speaking, undeserved, just like his initial happiness was not, strictly speaking, deserved. It is not clear to me that common reason, if it is to strengthen its faith, needs to recognize that subtle point. Regardless, common reason can *hope* for happiness that would stem from the overflow of divine goodness, rather than from divine justice (see Friedman 2022).

* * *

I have argued that we can make sense of Kant's seemingly fragmentary 1791 essay if we interpret it as an illustration of a path by which common reason may reach not only some of the essential conclusions of critical philosophy, but also their critical *grounds*. I have also suggested that this path remains open even for

²⁴ As Lawrence Pasternack (2023) has argued, an authentic theodicy would have to allow that there really does *seem* to be injustice in the world.

those who have not undertaken a methodical study of critical philosophy. Rather, certain kinds of first-person experiences can function as a type of learning process whereby an untutored moral believer comes to understand that *either* theoretical reason *or* practical reason must reign as the supreme principle; and that only the latter can be supreme in matters of faith.

I have focused on the experience of unjustified suffering. I have presented a *dialectic* of suffering in both the Kantian and Hegelian resonances of the term. In the Kantian dialectic, theoretical reason inevitably strays beyond its proper boundaries before it undertakes a critique of reason (stages 1 and 2 of Job's learning process). In the Hegelian dialectic, reason goes through a laborious learning process filled with failures and reversals. Reason makes a circle: at the end of the process it returns to most of the positions it held at the beginning. But it now holds them for rational reasons, by explicitly grasping their grounds (all the stages of Job's learning process).

To use the example of suffering does not mean that suffering is an ineliminable component of an authentic theodicy. The experience of senseless suffering may indeed be the greatest first-person *challenge* to a moral believer (who may not recognize that, according to Kant, we are not "owed" a reward for doing our duty). But more important, an authentic theodicy cannot be performed in an objective posture, but is conducted *from within*. In a doctrinal theodicy we turn to *docta* (doctrines that are *taught*), holding our inherited beliefs as passive spectators, without examining their grounds for ourselves. This is a third-person theodicy, undertaken in the spectatorial mode, relying on theoretical (i.e., *observational*) reason. But an authentic theodicy adopts the standpoint of a moral agent—necessarily, a first-person standpoint.

A more general takeaway, then, may lie in the idea that *making sense* of our experiences is best seen *not* as a theoretical project, but as a *practical* one. We may be unable to attain theoretical insight into the nature and sources of injustice, yet we may need to nonetheless believe it is possible to strive for justice. We may be unable to understand the nature of a world that often seems actively counterpurposive to human happiness, yet as long as we are here, we need to continue determining how we should act in such a world.

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