Hope in Kant

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Kant famously states in the Canon of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that "What may I hope?" (A805/B833) is one of the fundamental questions of reason.[1] However, it is not easy to pin down Kant's full answer to the question. One puzzle concerns the question of what hope is: Kant does not explicitly discuss the nature of hope, which may explain in part why interpreters have often conflated hope and faith (e.g. Flikschuh 2010). Another difficulty is that Kant talks about hope in a number of different writings, and it is not immediately clear

[1] Kant's works are cited using volume and page numbers (volume:page) of the standard Academy edition of Kant's writings (Berlin. 1900–), except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The latter is cited using the A- and B-editions (A/B). I use the following translations: *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor, in: Mary Gregor (ed.): *Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 133–271. *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. *On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, but It Is of No Use in Practice* and *Toward Perpetual Peace* in: Mary Gregor (ed.): *Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* and *The Contest of the Faculties* in: H.S. Reiss (ed.): *Kant. Political Writings*, second Edition, 1991. *Lectures on Ethics*, Peter Heath and J.B. Schneewind (ed.), trans. Peter Heath, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

whether there is a unified account of hope in the background. In this contribution, I want to shed light on these issues. In section 1, I sketch a framework for understanding what hope is, according to Kant, and for understanding what makes it rational. I then show how this abstract picture helps to describe the role of hope in different writings: in the first and second *Critiques*, in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and in the historical and political writings. Finally, I briefly discuss the role of hope in moral motivation.

1. A Framework for Kant's Account of Hope

In order to better understand what hope is, it is helpful to distinguish it from wishing. The following passage from the *Doctrine of Virtue* gives a valuable hint. This passage is taken from the "Doctrine of the Method of Ethics," where Kant is concerned with how to teach the doctrine of virtue. One way is through what he calls "moral catechism," in which the "teacher elicits from his pupil's reason, by questioning, what he wants to teach him" (6:480). If the teacher does not correct the pupil's answer, we can assume that Kant regards it as the correct one.

> Teacher: But even if we are conscious of such a good and active will in us, by virtue of which we consider ourselves worthy […] of happiness, can we base on this a sure hope of sharing in happiness?
>
> Pupil: No, not on this alone. For it is *not always within our power* to provide ourselves with happiness, and the course of nature does not of itself conform with merit. Our good fortune in life […] depends, rather, on circumstances that are far from all being in our control. So our happiness always *remains a wish that cannot become a hope, unless some other power is added*. (6:482, my emphasis)

I will discuss central elements of this passage in the next section. Here, I want to emphasize that Kant draws attention to the limitations of our power: Absent further assumptions, we cannot have "sure hope" of becoming as happy as we deserve to be because it is "not always within our power" to bring this about. This does not mean that we can only have hope if it is

in our own power; rather, hope for happiness requires the addition of some *other* power. Hence, hope presupposes the idea that our own powers do not (or might not) suffice regarding the realization of the hoped-for outcome.[2] This presupposition may serve on the one hand to distinguish hope from choice [*Willkür*], which is accompanied by "one's consciousness of the ability to bring about the object by one's action" (6:213). On the other hand, it reveals a similarity between hope and wishing, where the latter "is not joined with this consciousness" (6:213). Like wishing, hope is characterized by a lack of consciousness of the ability to bring about the object by one's action.

In order to see the difference between hope and wishing, consider Kant's claim that a wish may *become sure hope* if "some other power is added." In line with his account in the *Critiques* (section 2), Kant identifies this other power with god in the lines following the quote above (6:482). Thus, in contrast to wishing, hope requires a *ground*, namely a power that is able to bring about the hoped-for object.

Kant's question "What may I hope?" is a question about the rationality of hope. As we will see, the rationality of hope depends on the question of whether we may rationally assume its grounds.[3] In all cases of hope that Kant considers, our epistemic situation regarding the

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[2] It is plausible that the assumption of some degree of powerlessness applies not only to hope for deserved happiness, but to hope in general. Rachel Zuckert also emphasizes that Kant assumes that we hope for outcomes "over which we do not have (total) control" (Zuckert 2018, 247). In the contemporary debate, see Han-Pile (2017) for the thesis that hope presupposes some degree of powerlessness.

[3] Günther Zöller (2013, 254), who refers to Grimm's Dictionary, points out that "may" [*dürfen*], in Kant's time, was used not only in the sense of permission but also in the sense of "need" [*bedürfen*], or "having grounds" [*Grund haben*]. In line with the latter meaning, I understand the question as "What do I have grounds to hope for?".

grounds is that we *lack knowledge* about it. How can it still be rational to assume the grounds of hope? This is where Kant's conception of faith or "moral Belief" [*moralischer Glaube*] (A828/B856) comes in.[4] Another term that is closely linked to faith and Belief in Kant's account is *trust*: As Allen Wood points out, Kant often characterizes faith or moral Belief in terms of trust (Wood 1970, 162). A succinct formulation can be found in the *Lectures on Ethics*, in a section entitled "Trust in God under the Concept of Faith": "So faith means the confidence that, so long as we have done everything possible to us, God will supply what does not lie in our power." (27:320 f.)[5] As I will describe in the next section, Kant argues that we can assume that the grounds of hope obtain and can hence have moral Belief or trust in them if this assumption is empirically undecidable and a necessary presupposition of a practical necessity, i.e. connected to the moral law.

In sum, hoping, like wishing, presupposes lack of certainty regarding one's own powers to realize the object in question; unlike wishing, however, it also requires the

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[4] In the third section of the *Canon* in the first *Critique*, Kant describes faith [*Glaube*] as a special kind of assent or "*Fürwahrhalten*," which literally means "taking-to-be-true." Translating the term *Glaube* into English is difficult; I will call it "faith" or, following Andrew Chignell (2013), "Belief" with a capital "B."

[5] Both "trust" and "confidence" are translations of the German "Zutraun", which is perhaps closer to "trust" (The German original reads: "Vom Zutraun auf Gott unter dem Begriff des Glaubens. […] Der Glaube bedeutet also das Zutraun, daß Gott das, was nicht in unsrer Gewalt stehet, wenn wir auch alles, was uns möglich ist, warden gethan haben, ersetzen werde."). In cases of hope that Kant discusses in the *Religion*, it becomes apparent that the assumption of some *external* power is not strictly necessary for hope. What is necessary is the assumption of grounds of which we lack knowledge but in which we are still entitled to trust, and these grounds may be one's *own* powers.

assumption of grounds – typically another power that is necessary for realizing the object, in addition to one's powers.[6] We may hope for something if we can rationally assume that those grounds exist. The grounds for rational hope are such that we lack knowledge, although we may have an attitude of moral Belief or trust towards them. This framework also sheds light on the question of why Kant considers "What may I hope" to be necessary, in addition to "What should I do" and "What can I know": Hope enters the picture in light of the *limitations* of what we can do (it presupposes an awareness of the limits of our powers) and of what we can know (it presupposes grounds that we cannot know to exist).

2. Hope in the First and Second *Critiques*

Kant's starting point for answering the normative question concerning what we may hope is a descriptive claim about what we *de facto* hope for: "all hope concerns happiness" (A805/B833). Kant's focus on hope for *happiness* suggests that he starts from a hope that every human being already naturally has, since "happiness is an end that every human being has (by virtue of the impulses of his nature)" (6:386). Happiness fulfills the presupposition of being partly beyond our powers, as its future realization comprises aspects that are not within our control.

Subsequently, Kant presents a second version of the hope question: "If I do what I should, what may I then hope?" (A805/B833). The antecedent points to the fact that Kant is concerned with hope that human beings have insofar as they are moral beings. A first step towards an answer must take into account the fact that Kant maintains that there is a conceptual connection between moral behavior and *worthiness* to be happy: The moral law

[6] In cases of hope that Kant discusses in the *Religion*, it becomes apparent that the assumption of some *external* power is not strictly necessary for hope. In cases where one *doubts* whether one's own powers suffice, what is necessary is the assumption of grounds (one's own powers) of which we lack knowledge but in which we are still entitled to trust.

"commands how we should behave in order […] to be worthy of happiness" (A806/B834). If we need to make ourselves worthy of happiness, it is plausible that we may also only hope for morally deserved happiness.

A full answer to the specification of the morally appropriate object of hope leads to Kant's account of the highest good.[7] According to Kant, the answer to the hope question hinges on "whether the principles of pure reason that prescribe the law a priori also necessarily connect this hope with it" (A809/B837). Even though Kant has not yet presented his mature moral philosophy in the first *Critique*, he leaves no doubt that the "law a priori" to which he refers is the moral law (A807/B835). Thus, hope for happiness must be necessarily bound up with the moral law. Kant claims (without further argument) that our hope for happiness must assume a certain form, namely "hope for happiness in the same measure as he has made himself worthy of it in his conduct" (A809/B837). Kant calls this conjunction of morality and happiness for everyone the "highest good" (A814/B842). This suggests that the object of rational hope is the highest good. While this is a legitimate way of putting it, note that, strictly speaking, it is still one's *own happiness* that is the object of one's hope. This becomes especially clear when Kant speaks of the "*hope* of being happy" and the "*effort* to

[7] "Morally appropriate" is ambiguous between "morally permitted" and "required." Surely, the highest good is a *permitted* object of hope. One might even think that it is a required object of hope, not least since the highest good turns out to be the object of a duty (in the second *Critique*). However, this does not make it a required object of hope, or, in other words, this does not require us to hope for it. Kant nowhere claims that hope can be required, and I think that his rejection of a duty to *Believe* (in god) (5:125) amounts to a rejection of a duty to hope. Rather, Kant seems to assume that insofar as we are rational and sensible beings, we hope for our own happiness, and insofar as we are moral, we hope and strive for the highest good.

make oneself *worthy* of happiness" (A810/B838, my emphasis) as the two elements that come together in the highest good. In sum, Kant's position thus far is that insofar as we are moral, we hope for our own happiness as part of the highest good.

Whereas this answers the question of what the appropriate object of hope is according to *moral* standards, the third version of the hope question turns to the question of *theoretical* standards for rational hope, i.e. how we may hope for the *attainment* of happiness: "Now if I behave so as not to be unworthy of happiness, *how* may I hope thereby to partake of it?" (A809/B837, my emphasis). For Kant, the "how may I hope" question concerns the *grounds* of our hope: He assumes that we need to have an account of the "ground of the practically necessary connection of both elements [i.e. happiness and morality, CB] of the highest […] good" (A810/B839f.). The question of the grounds of hope is pressing because it is questionable whether the highest good is possible at all: The necessary connection between happiness and morality can neither be ensured by us nor be due to mere nature (A810/B838).

According to Kant, the *only* answer to the question of the grounds is that we need to assume god as the cause of nature. Further, we need to assume a "future life" because the sensible world "does not offer such a connection [i.e. of happiness and morality] to us" (A811/B839). Here, I am not concerned with the precise form and persuasiveness of Kant's specific arguments for god and a future life. Instead, let us look at his conclusion:

> Thus God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation that pure reason imposes on us in accordance with principles of that very same reason. (A811/B839)

Perhaps surprisingly, this conclusion does not present god and a future life as presuppositions of *hope*. However, as mentioned above, Kant holds that there is a necessary connection between moral obligation and hope for the highest good. Thus, if god and a future life are presuppositions of moral obligation, they are also presuppositions of hope.

In the third section of the Canon, "On having an opinion, knowing, and believing," Kant develops the general theoretical framework for seeing how the assumptions of god and a future life can be rational. In a nutshell, Kant's idea is that even if the assumptions of god and a future life cannot be backed up by sufficient evidence and thus never amount to knowledge, we have *practical* reasons for these assumptions, such that we may rationally assume god and a future life as objects of faith or "moral Belief" (A828/B856). The following passage contains Kant's argument:

> [In the case of moral Belief], it is absolutely necessary that something must happen, namely, that I fulfill the moral law in all points. The end here is inseparably fixed, and according to all my insight there is possible only a single condition under which this end is consistent with all ends together and thereby has practical validity, namely, that there be a God and a future world […]. But since the moral precept is thus at the same time my maxim (as reason commands that it ought to be), I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life. (A828/B856)

The point here is that if an end is practically necessary, it is rational to believe that the conditions necessary for the "practical validity" of the end obtain. Kant claims that the end that is "inseparably fixed" is that "I fulfill the moral law in all points", and that this end is only "consistent with all ends together" (i.e. constitutes the highest good) if we assume god's existence and a future world.

Kant's reasoning seems problematic on the assumption that he wants to establish either the rationality of hope or the rationality of moral Belief independently of each other. On this reading, the argument is circular: On the one hand, in the passage of the Canon, he argues that the assumptions of god's existence and a future life are rational because they are necessary presuppositions of the highest good. The highest good is presented as a necessary end, and so the rationality of *hope* for the highest good seems to be presupposed in this argument. On the other hand, in answering the question "What may I hope?", it seems that we

may rationally hope for the highest good *only if* we may assume god and a future life – where the rationality of hope is established only if we may presuppose the rationality of these assumptions. However, an alternative reading is that we should not expect either (hope for) the highest good or the assumptions of god and a future life to be rational independent of each other. Rather, Kant presents a picture in which the rationality of hope for the highest good and the rationality of moral Belief reciprocally imply each other; they stand and fall together. What seems to be an open question is whether there is really a rational necessity for moral beings to hope for the highest good.

Kant's new assumption in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is that it is a "duty for us to promote the highest good" (5:125). In light of the preceding discussion, this might be seen as an attempt to put the justification of the assumptions of god and immortality on more solid grounds: The assumptions are not presented primarily as presuppositions of hope, but of a duty, and this clarifies the connection between the moral law and the highest good. One difficulty is that Kant does not address the question of why the promotion of the highest good is a duty.[8] However, let us assume for the sake of argument that Kant can legitimately claim such a duty. From "ought-implies-can," he then infers that the highest good must be practically possible (see 5:125). As in the first *Critique*, Kant draws attention to the fact that the possibility of the highest good is questionable if one restricts oneself to the empirical realm.[9] Kant argues that we can indeed think of the highest good as possible, albeit only if we

[8] Whereas some interpreters are skeptical about whether Kant has the resources to successfully justify the duty, there have been attempts to help him on that point. See especially Marwede 2018, 210–223.

[9] In the second *Critique*, Kant makes this point in the form of an antinomy. See Watkins (2010, 152) for a formally valid reconstruction of the antinomy.

consider the "supersensible relation of things" (5:119). As in the first *Critique*, Kant wants to give an account of the "grounds of that possibility" (5:119).

Kant introduces a distinction that is not explicit in the first *Critique*: the distinction between the grounds of possibility insofar as they are "within our power" and insofar as they are "not in our power" (5:119). What *is* in our power is our own moral behavior. It is precisely with regard to those aspects that are *not* within our power that an account of the grounds of possibility leads to faith in god and immortality; in the second *Critique*, Kant presents this in the framework of the postulates. Kant defines a "postulate of pure practical reason" as "a *theoretical* proposition, though one not demonstrable as a such, insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid *practical* law" (5:122), which is obviously the moral law. It is not difficult to see the similarity to Kant's account of moral Belief in the first *Critique*: Moral Belief and the postulates concern theoretically undecidable objects or propositions, which are presuppositions of a practical law (and in this sense practically necessary).[10]

One aspect beyond our power, familiar from the first *Critique*, is the necessary relationship between happiness and morality, which leads to the postulate of god's existence (5:125). Further, in contrast to the conception of the highest good in the first *Critique*, Kant requires "holiness" (5:122) as part of the highest good. This requirement leads to the assumption of infinite progress and thus to the postulate of immortality.

Only after introducing the postulates does Kant mention hope: One object of hope is one's own happiness (to the extent that one is virtuous) (5:130). Further, the realization of the highest good is itself an object of hope (5:129), along with one's own moral progress (5:123, 5:128) and the stability of one's moral disposition (5:123, fn.). The feature that unites these

[10] I borrow the terminology "theoretical undecidability" and "practical necessity" from Willaschek 2010, 169.

objects is that they are all aspects of the highest good that are not within our power (or the highest good itself in virtue of those aspects).[11]

In the second *Critique*, Kant characterizes our attitude towards the highest good in terms of both duty and hope. This adds up to a coherent picture if we understand duty and hope as referring to complementary aspects of the highest good. Kant typically specifies the content of the duty as *promotion* of the highest good in accordance with our powers (see e.g. 5:143f. note). Thus duty, strictly speaking, refers only to those aspects that are within our power, while hope, strictly speaking, refers only to aspects that are not under our control.

On this picture, it becomes apparent that the assumption of a duty (instead of hope) as the basis for the justification of god and immortality has its own problems: It seems that we can rationally obey the duty to *promote* the highest good without assuming that another power will help us, because there is nothing in the demand of the duty that goes beyond our powers. To be sure, the duty to *realize* the highest good would motivate the need for divine assistance because the realization is beyond our powers – but it is then unclear how there can be a duty for us that we are unable to fulfill. What needs to be shown is that in order to promote the highest good (i.e. to approximate it), we also need to believe in its realizability or hope for it. However, what would seem to be relevant to our ability to promote a goal is not our believing in its realizability, but rather our *not* believing in its *impossibility* (see Willaschek 2016, 232).This attitude may involve "hope" (in some sense) that the goal can be realized, but this

[11] Just how Kant conceives of the element of powerlessness regarding one's own moral progress and the stability of one's good disposition only becomes fully clear in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (see e.g. 6:71 and section 3 in this text).

hope would not imply an (even implicit) assumption of the existence of grounds that are necessary to realize it. Hence, it would not be rational hope in the Kantian sense.[12]

3. Hope in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793/94)

Kant discusses hope in all three parts of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. In the first part, Kant treats hope in the "General remark concerning the restoration to its power of the original predisposition to the good" (6:44). The central problem concerns individual moral improvement, which requires that one change one's fundamental maxim from a bad one to a good one. A person with a good fundamental maxim will prioritize the moral law before all maxims of self-love; a person with a bad fundamental maxim will obey the moral law only if it does not contradict maxims of self-love. The problem with moral improvement is the following: On the one hand, there is a "command that we *ought* to become better human beings […], consequently, we must also be capable of it" (6:45). On the other hand, "if a human being is corrupt in the very ground of his maxims, how can he possibly bring about this revolution by his own forces […]?" (6:47). The thesis of fundamental corruption corresponds to Kant's thesis that the human being is "radically evil": There is a propensity in human nature to reverse "the moral order of his incentives in incorporating them into his maxims" (6:36). This evil is "radical, since it corrupts the ground of all maxims," and "it is also not to be extirpated through human forces, for this could only happen through good maxims – something that cannot take place if the subjective supreme ground of all maxims is presupposed to be corrupted" (6:37).

Kant distinguishes between the "possibility" of moral improvement and the "comprehensibility" of this possibility (6:50). On the basis of "ought-implies-can," the possibility of moral improvement is not put into question. However, "*[h]ow* it is possible […]

[12] Chignell argues in detail that Kant operates with a stronger condition on (rational) hope than that which results from "armchair analysis" (Chignell 2013, 209).

surpasses every concept of ours" (6:44f., my emphasis). In this situation of lack of insight into the possibility of a morally required end, hope becomes relevant. Kant draws attention to two hopes with different objects. The first is as follows:

> [H]e must be able to *hope* that, by the exertion of *his own* power, he will attain to the road that leads in that direction, as indicated to him by a fundamentally improved disposition. For he ought to become a good human being yet cannot be judged *morally* good except on the basis of what can be imputed to him as done by him (6:51).

Kant sums up the object of this hope as "expectation[13] of self-improvement" (6:51), which incites reason "under the pretext of natural impotence" to come up with various religious ideas. Kant introduces the second kind of hope as a kind of religious hope. He distinguishes between "religion of rogation (of mere cult)" and "moral religion, i.e. the religion of good life-conduct" (6:51). The latter implies a kind of hope:

> [T]o become a better human being, everyone must do as much as it is in his powers to do; and only then, […] if he has made use of the original predisposition to the good in order to become a better human being, can he hope that what does not lie in his power will be made good by cooperation from above. (6:52)

The crucial difference between the religious hope that Kant seems to approve of and the "mere wishing" of a religion of "mere cult" is that hope requires doing "as much as it is in [one's] powers to do."

Kant does not present the first kind of hope – the hope to improve things by using one's own power – as irrational. However, would this be a hope without grounds? It seems that the ground of the hope is *one's own powers*. Still, it fits the framework presented in section 1, since we lack certainty regarding our powers (in light of radical evil). It is promising to give an argument in analogy to the postulates: Even though we cannot *know* that

[13] A better translation of the German "Zumutung" would be "imposition."

our own powers suffice, we are entitled to have (moral) Belief or trust in them, since they are a necessary means for a required end: moral self-improvement. We encounter a similar thought in the second book of the *Religion*.

If the first kind of hope is rationally possible, this means that the second kind of hope – hope for divine assistance – is not rationally necessary.[14] Why, then, does Kant present this religious hope? He seems to admit that the "expectation of self-improvement" might strike some (even reason itself!) as too ambitious; that human beings perhaps suffer from a "natural impotence" cannot be ruled out. Calling this a "pretext," however, devalues the following line of reasoning, at least to a certain degree. Still, Kant's aim could be to show that *if* one finds oneself hoping for divine assistance, this hope is legitimate as long as one does everything in one's power to become a morally better person.

In the second section of the *Religion*, Kant presents an "idea" that "resides in our morally-legislative reason" (6:62) and that is a "universal human duty" (6:61): "to *elevate* ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i.e. to the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity" (6:61). Kant equates this ideal of moral perfection with the idea of a "human being, alone pleasing to God" (6:60), following the example of the "Son of God" (6:62). Kant leaves no doubt that it follows from the principle "ought-implies-can" that this idea refers to a really possible object (see 6:62). However, just as in the case of the highest good (the antinomy of practical reason) and moral improvement (radical evil), there are "difficulties that stand in the way of the reality of this idea" (6:66). I will focus here on the second difficulty: Due to epistemic limitations, we cannot be "conscious of [our] moral disposition" and therefore do not seem to be entitled to "self-assuredly trust" that we are and will be following

[14] Here I disagree with Chignell (2013), who claims that "throughout *Religion* Kant says that we may and even must hope for external assistance in this task [i.e. moral improvement]" (Chignell 2013, 210).

our moral ideal: "[W]e cannot base this confidence [in the perseverance and stability of our disposition] upon an immediate consciousness of the immutability of our disposition, since we cannot see through to the latter" (6:71).

Kant thinks that absolute assurance about one's own disposition is impossible, but he also assumes that we cannot act on mere ignorance and uncertainty about the quality of our disposition: "[W]ithout *any* [trust][15] in the disposition once acquired, perseverance in it would hardly be possible" (6:68). This suggests an argument along the lines of the postulates: We cannot *know* our disposition, but it is practically necessary to assume that it is good; therefore, we are entitled to postulate or trust that it is good. This line of argument is in the background, but there is an important disanalogy to the postulates of god and immortality. God and immortality are transcendent objects that cannot be objects of experience. One's own disposition, by contrast, manifests itself in experience. Therefore, empirical evidence cannot be entirely ignored when assessing one's own disposition. Kant acknowledges this point by emphasizing that we take into account a person's actions. On this basis, Kant distinguishes between reasonable and unreasonable hope:

> [Take] a human being who, from the time of his adoption of the principles of the good and throughout a sufficiently long life henceforth, has *perceived* the efficacy of these principles on what he does, i.e. on the conduct of his life as it steadily improves, and from that has cause to *infer, but only by way of conjecture*, a fundamental improvement in his disposition: [he] *can yet also reasonably hope* that in this life he will no longer forsake his present course but will rather press in it with ever greater courage […]. […] By contrast, one who has always found himself unable to stand fast by his often

[15] I changed the translation from "confidence" to "trust" because this better corresponds to the German "Vertrauen." Further, it highlights the point made in section 1: Kant sometimes uses "trust" to describe our attitude towards the grounds of hope.

repeated resolutions to be good but has always relapsed into evil, or who has been forced to acknowledge that in the course of his life he has gone from bad to worse […]: [such a one] *can reasonably entertain no hope of improving* […]. (6:68, my emphasis).

Kant says here that on the basis of empirically observable behavior, we can have *reasonable hope* that our disposition to approach the moral ideal will be stable. Here, the *ground* of hope is our own disposition (which we cannot know), and our hope is reasonable if we can reasonably assume such a ground *in accordance with* (even though not conclusively proven by) empirical evidence. Those who do not take into account empirical evidence in such cases succumb to "the sweetness or the anxiety of enthusiasm" (6:68). Note that although hope and trust go hand in hand and have similar objects, they are distinct attitudes: Hope refers to the *future*, i.e. its object is our future moral development, whereas trust refers to the quality of the already-adopted disposition. This trust is the ground of hope as an attitude towards the future.

In the third section of the *Religion*, Kant is concerned with the founding of an "ethical community," which is an "association of human beings merely under the laws of virtue" (6:94). Kant also calls this the "highest good as a good common to all" (6:97), claiming in addition that there is a duty to promote it (ibid.).[16] Even though the ethical community does not involve proportionate happiness, Kant argues that the duty to establish an ethical community presupposes the idea of god. A central point again turns on the limitations of our powers:

> [S]ince this highest moral good will not be brought about solely through the striving of one individual person for his own moral perfection but requires rather a union of such persons into a whole toward that very end, […] yet the idea of such a whole, as a

[16] Wimmer identifies three reasons for this duty: 1) living in community leads to vices); 2) we have to exit the ethical state of nature just as we have to exit the juridical state of nature; and 3) we have to realize the highest good (Wimmer 1990, 187–193).

> universal republic based on the laws of virtue, differs entirely from all moral laws (which concern what we *know to reside within our power*), for it is the idea of working toward a whole of which *we cannot know whether as a whole it is also in our power*: so the duty in question differs from all others in kind and in principle. – We can already anticipate that this duty will need the presupposition of another idea, namely, of a higher moral being through whose universal organization the forces of single individuals, *insufficient on their own*, are united for a common effect. (6:97f., my emphasis)

As in the case of one's own moral improvement, it is ambiguous whether we *cannot be sure* whether it is beyond our power to realize the required end (i.e. that we might be able to realize it alone) or whether we definitely *need* the presupposition of a divine power that complements our insufficient powers. For our practical life, however, we do not need to decide between the two options: As in all cases of hope that require the cooperation of human agency with external powers, Kant emphasizes that one condition of rational hope is that we do our part to *promote* it: "Each must [...] so conduct himself as if everything depended on him. Only on this condition may he hope that a higher wisdom will provide the fulfillment of his well-intentioned effort" (6:101).

4. Hope in Kant's Political Philosophy

In Kant's writings on history and politics, the object of hope is moral (and legal) progress:[17] In the *Idea for a Universal History* (1784), Kant envisages a "steadily advancing but slow development of man's original capacities" (8:17); in *On the Common Saying* (1793), Kant

[17] Kant suggests that there is an intimate connection between legal and moral (or ethical) progress. In *Theory and Practice*, Kant describes "the foundation of a right of nations as a condition in which alone the predispositions belonging to humanity that make our species worthy of love can be developed" (8:307n.).

asks whether "the race will always progress towards what is better" (8:307) and defends "hope for better times." In *Perpetual Peace* (1795), he closes by affirming "grounds for hoping that we succeed" to "bring about in reality a state of public right (albeit by an infinite process of gradual approximation)" (8:386), and in *The Contest of the Faculties* (1798) he asks under which conditions "we can expect man's hopes of progress to be fulfilled" (7:93). Since the ultimate future goal of all progress is perpetual peace, the "highest political good" (6:355), it is fitting to say that political hope, for Kant, is hope for perpetual peace.

Invoking the notion of the highest political good suggests that we ought to look for parallels with Kant's account of hope for the highest good in the *Critiques*. Indeed, the key features of Kant's account of hope described thus far apply to the political context as well: Hope is understood, first, as a response to (partial) powerlessness and, second, as requiring *grounds* in order to amount to more than a wish. The ground of hope for progress, according to Kant, is nature (understood as a teleological order) or providence (see e.g. 8:361). Third, we lack knowledge of whether this ground really exists. Still, it is rational to assume such a ground, and hence we may hope for progress and peace.

Kant explicitly claims that progress is (partly) beyond our powers only in *Theory and Practice* (8.311f.), while he seems to assume it implicitly in the other political writings. One problem that I can only mention briefly is that Kant introduces the idea that nature pursues its *own* goals and (inevitably) brings about progress. In *Perpetual Peace*, for example, Kant claims that nature 'guarantees' perpetual peace (see 8:360), "whether we are willing or not" (8:365). There is a tension between viewing progress as a *moral* end and viewing progress as the end of nature, brought about without the contribution of intentional human actions. Kant tries to mitigate this tension by claiming that human reason and freedom are themselves part of the teleological order of nature (see 8:19 and 8:313).

What is the rational status of the claim that providence is necessary to bring about

progress?[18] Throughout his historical and political writings, Kant seems to regard the assumption of providence as a presupposition of progress and the realization of peace.[19] Thus, the assumption of providence is a candidate for moral Belief: A necessary assumption for a moral end, which cannot be known (but also cannot be proven impossible) on the basis of empirical evidence. As we saw in section 1, Kant closely connects moral Belief and *trust* in the case of god. Thus, Kant's expression of "*trust* […] in the nature of things, which constrains one to go where one does not want to go" (8:313, my emphasis), is further support for the parallel between the assumption of god and a teleological order of nature.

In order to show that the assumption of providence is an object of moral Belief, it must be shown that it cannot be proven or falsified by empirical evidence. Providence is the ground for hope for the highest political good, just as god is the ground for hope for the highest good. However, there is an important disanalogy, which we encountered earlier with regard to one's disposition in the *Religion*. Whereas there cannot be any empirical evidence for god's

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[18] To be sure, Kant offers a detailed framework for the status of a teleological view of nature in the third *Critique*. In §83, he takes up the philosophy of history, arguing that the assumption that nature has a teleological order is a principle "for the reflecting power of judgment, that […] is regulative and not constitutive, and that by its means we acquire only a guideline for considering things in nature" (5:379). That is, in line with my interpretation offered in the main text, Kant clearly denies *knowledge* with regard to the assumption of a teleological order.

[19] In *Perpetual Peace*, for example, Kant claims that "we can *and must* supply it [the agency of nature] mentally" (8:362, my emphasis) and that "while this idea is indeed far-fetched in *theory*, it does possess dogmatic validity and has a very real foundation in *practice*, as with the concept of *perpetual peace*, which makes it our duty to promote it by using the natural mechanism described above" (ibid.).

existence, moral progress towards peace is to be realized in *this* world; therefore, empirical evidence cannot be entirely ignored in assessing whether there has been such progress, and hence whether we may hope for progress in the future. Kant never directly justifies the assumption of *providence* as an object of moral Belief, but he shows that the possibility of *progress* cannot be proven or falsified by empirical evidence. If this is so, the assumption of a teleological order of nature as the "motor" of such progress is also immune to empirical evidence. With regard to progress, Kant says in the *Contest* that the reason why progress cannot be *proven* is that "we are dealing with freely acting beings […] of whom one cannot *predict* what they actually *will* do" and who are endowed with a "mixture of evil and goodness in unknown proportions" (7:83), such that both change for the better and change for the worse are always possible. It remains to be shown that evidence (from the past) does not show that moral progress is *impossible*. One serious obstacle against affirming progress is the existence of war. Kant, however, gives an interpretation of war that aims to show how it can even *contribute* to progress: Wars "and the resultant distress […] – these are the means by which nature drives nations to […] take the step which reason could have suggested to them even without so many sad experiences – that of […] entering a federation of peoples" (8:24f.). Let us assume for the sake of argument that Kant succeeds in giving a convincing interpretation of the function of wars. If so, he has removed the main obstacle to believing that progress is possible. Hence, progress and the assumption of a teleological order of nature as what drives it can be objects of moral Belief.

In order to further clarify the relation between Belief in providence, hope for progress and peace, and the duty to promote it, it is helpful to look at the *Doctrine of Right*, where Kant does not invoke the assumption of providence at all. He states that perpetual peace is a moral end "even if there is not the slightest theoretical likelihood that it can be realized" (6:354). What matters is the "continual approximation to the highest political good" (6:355). In order to acknowledge this duty to *promote* and thereby *approximate* perpetual peace, Kant claims

that it suffices to assume that its "impossibility cannot be demonstrated" (6:354). We do not need to believe in a providence that complements our limited powers. This is because the duty to *promote* an end requires nothing beyond our powers. Note that in this passage of the *Doctrine of Right*, not only does Kant omit the invocation of providence, but he does not mention hope at all. Hope for peace requires more than the duty to promote peace. Hope for peace requires grounds, namely an assumption of powers that complement our own. In the *Doctrine of Right*, Kant confirms this reading by saying that "even if the complete realization of this objective [realizing peace] […] always remains a pious *wish*, still we are certainly not deceiving ourselves in adopting the maxim of working incessantly towards it" (6:354, my emphasis). Without the assumption of providence, the *realization* of peace can only be a wish, not a hope.

If this picture is accurate, there is a problem analogous to the problem in the second *Critique*: The assumption of providence is only justified if it is a necessary presupposition of a practical necessity. The duty to promote peace is a practical necessity, but it does not necessarily presuppose providence. The hope for the *attainment* of peace presupposes providence (because hope presupposes grounds), but it is not clear that this hope is a practical necessity.

5. Hope and Moral Motivation

Many interpreters have discussed the question of whether, on Kant's view, hope is relevant to moral motivation (e.g. Wood 1970, Ebels-Duggan 2016, Insole 2008). To be sure, if hope turned out to be a sensible incentive that is *necessary* for moral motivation, this would threaten Kant's thesis that pure reason can be practical, i.e. that we can be motivated to act morally out of duty, merely out of respect for the moral law.[20] In light of this, some

[20] In the first *Critique*, Kant does make several remarks that suggest that hope and Belief in god and immortality are necessary for moral motivation (e.g. A813/B841). He later clearly

interpreters attribute to Kant the view that hope *can* be supportive of our moral motivation, without being necessary for it.[21]

Andrew Chignell holds that understanding the role of hope requires attributing to Kant a "consequence-dependent moral psychology" (Chignell 2018, 299). Kant is sensitive to the empirical fact that human beings can be demoralized by "perceived inefficacy" (ibid.): "a morally good person will reasonably care about the goodness of the consequences of her actions" (Chignell 2018, 300), and losing hope that the intended goal will eventually be realized can slowly undermine our resolve. Chignell bases his interpretation on a passage in the third *Critique*, where Kant describes the case of a "righteous man (like Spinoza)" (5:452) who does not believe in god. Kant sees two options for Spinoza in light of the evils of the world: Either he will give up the end (the highest good) and "weaken the respect, by which the moral law immediately influences him to obedience, by the nullity of the only idealistic final end [the highest good, CB]" or "assume the existence of a moral author of the world, i.e., of god, from a practical point of view, i.e., in order to form a concept of at least the possibility of the final end that is prescribed to him by morality."

It is worth noting that Kant does not talk about hope in this passage. Kant's claim is that Spinoza's moral resolve would be weaker if there were no ultimate moral *end*. It is the assumption of a *final purpose* that is described as necessary for full moral resolve. A passage in the *Religion* confirms this reading:

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retracts this position, e.g. when he emphasizes that through the moral law "our reason commands us compellingly, without however either promising or threatening anything thereby" (6:49).

[21] This suggestion leads Zuckert to call the role of hope "quasi-motivational" (Zuckert 2018, 255). Similarly, Insole (2008) holds that hope can have motivational influence but that moral motivation can exist independently of hope.

> This idea [of a highest good, CB] is not (practically considered) an empty one; for it meets our natural need, which would otherwise be a hindrance to moral resolve, to *think* for all our doings and nondoings taken as a whole some sort of *ultimate* end […]. (6:5, my emphasis)

Kant does not talk about hope in this passage, which points to the fact that it is the *thought* that some ultimate end is possible, and not specifically our hope for it, which fulfills a "natural need" that, if it were to remain unfulfilled, would be an obstacle to moral resolve. Thus there are questions that, although I cannot address them here, must be considered more fully: First, in what sense do we have a "natural need" to conceive of an ultimate end? Second, what is the role of hope regarding this ultimate end?

As to the first question, a problem with Chignell's interpretation is that a concern for the *efficacy* of my actions normally does not imply concern for an ultimate end or final purpose of "all our doings and nondoings taken as a whole." The problem is one of efficacy only if we describe our actions as having the goal to promote the highest good. That is a possible description, but not the typical one in everyday life. Normally, we describe the goal of our actions in a less encompassing way, e.g. as "helping this person in need" or "charging the stranger a fair price." In my view, the "natural need" that Kant talks about in the *Religion* should be described not as the need for the efficacy of individual actions (which normally concerns success in their *particular* ends) but as a need for rational *meaning* or for an encompassing moral *sense* of our life as a whole, and perhaps even the life of the species (i.e. contribution to some *ultimate* end). Without hope that the highest good is attainable, we face the possibility that our moral actions may in fact fail to contribute to a larger, reasonable whole.

As to the second question, I want to close by merely pointing in a direction that I find worth exploring: Kantian hope might not be an extra motivational aid on the level of sensible incentives. Rather, it may perhaps be understood as a psychological mode in which we

represent the ultimate end, or the future where goodness is realized.[22] Just as respect is the way in which we relate to the moral law and are motivated by it, hope can perhaps be understood as the way in which we relate to the highest good and are motivated to promote it.

6. Conclusion

In this contribution, I offer an overview over all contexts that are relevant to Kant's answer to the question "What may I hope?". It turns out that Kant's different treatments of hope share a common structure. Hope, like wishing, presupposes an awareness of the (possible) limitations of our power to bring about the hoped-for end. In contrast to wishing, hope also presupposes trust (or moral Belief) in *grounds* that are necessary for the attainment of the end. Kant envisages hopes for *moral* objects, i.e. for states of affairs that are morally required, where even though we lack knowledge of the grounds, we are entitled to have moral Belief in them, and hence may hope. Hope for the highest good and the ethical community presupposes moral Belief in god (and the former also in immortality). Hope for one's own moral improvement is based on trust in one's own powers or in divine assistance, and hope for the stability of one's disposition is based on trust in one's disposition, if the evidence (one's life conduct) allows. Hope for progress toward perpetual peace presupposes trust in providence or in nature's plan. In all of these cases, hope anticipates a future in which moral goodness and happiness will eventually be realized. This view of the future fulfills our need to conceive of the world as a place that is hospitable to our most important ends.[23]

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[22] In the *Religion*, hope that one's disposition will exhibit stable goodness is not obviously hope for a final end, but still it is hope for a future state of affairs that will be (or remain) good and rational.

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