

# The Transition from Nature to Freedom in the *Critique of Judgment*

## Introduction

At the end of the published Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant announces that the power of judgment “provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical” (5: 196).<sup>1</sup> In doing so, the power of judgment apparently overcomes what Kant describes earlier in the Introduction as the “incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible” (5: 176).

The need to unify the theoretical and the practical is a theme that runs throughout Kant’s entire work. For example, in the first *Critique*, Kant writes:

Now the legislation of human reason (philosophy) has two objects, nature and freedom, and thus contains the natural law as well as the moral in two separate systems but ultimately in a single philosophical system. (A 840/B 868)

Kant’s claim in the third *Critique* that the power of judgment provides for a transition (*Übergang*) from the theoretical to the practical—what I will refer to as “the transition claim”—thus appears to be central to his systematic ambitions. But Kant’s account of the transition is a matter of considerable obscurity. It is unclear, first, what such a “transition” is supposed to be, or between what elements the sought-for transition is supposed to occur (it is unclear, for example, whether Kant is interested in a transition between the metaphysical realms of nature and freedom, or between theoretical principles and practical principles).

---

<sup>1</sup> All references to Kant are to the *Akademie* edition, except for references to the first *Critique*, which are to the A and B editions.

Additionally, it is difficult to determine how, on Kant's account, the power of judgment establishes the transition. Although the point is overlooked by most commentators, when Kant presents the transition claim in the Introduction, he cryptically mentions the power of judgment's "*a priori* principle for judging nature in accordance with possible particular laws for it" (5: 196). Kant defends this principle (what I will call the "transcendental principle purposiveness") in the introductions as part of his account of how the power of judgment—specifically, the power of judgment in its "reflecting" role—carries out its task of finding new empirical concepts and laws. The principle instructs us to make an assumption for the sake of inquiry: that empirical laws of nature exhibit the systematic unity that "they would have if an understanding (even if not ours) had likewise given them for the sake of our faculty of cognition" (5: 180). But the connection between this principle and the transition is opaque.

Furthermore, in the main body of the text, in which Kant characterizes two specific functions of the reflecting power of judgment—*aesthetic judging* and the *teleological judging of organisms*—he does not explicitly bring up the issue of the transition, although his presentation of the transition claim in the Introduction leads us to expect that both are relevant. It is consequently challenging to determine how the reflecting power of judgment in any of its roles—*seeking out empirical concepts and laws*, *aesthetic judging*, and *teleological judging*—establishes a transition from the theoretical to the practical, and moreover to offer a comprehensive interpretation that accounts for all three roles.

My goal in this paper is to offer an interpretation of the transition claim that focuses on two of these activities of the reflecting power of judgment: the *search for empirical laws*, as Kant characterizes it in the Introduction, and the *teleological judging of organisms*, as Kant presents it in the Critique of Teleological Judgment (CTJ). While I bracket the important topic of the role that *aesthetic*

judgment plays in establishing the transition, my account thus makes progress toward a comprehensive account of the transition.<sup>2</sup>

In both the Introduction and the CTJ, I will argue, the sought-for transition is supposed to establish a kind of unity between our theoretical principles and the postulates of practical reason—namely, the postulate of the existence of God. In the Introduction, Kant argues that the reflecting power of judgment contributes to the transition because its search for empirical laws requires that we assume the existence of God. Similarly, in the CTJ, he argues that the power of judgment’s activity of explaining organisms requires the assumption of God’s existence.

I begin by suggesting that the need for a “transition” concerns the need to unify theoretical principles with the postulates of practical reason (Section 1). As part of this discussion, I provide a brief exposition of Kant’s argument for the practical postulate of the existence of God. I then turn to the Introduction and the CTJ. Because the argument of the Introduction is quite compressed, I begin by getting clear on the account of the transition in the CTJ, and then use the results of this discussion to inform my reading of the Introduction claim. I first show how Kant argues that the judging of organisms leads to the reflecting power of judgment’s maxim that we must assume the existence of God (Section 2). Next, I clarify how this maxim contributes to the transition from the theoretical to the practical (Section 3). Bringing these results to bear on the Introduction, I then present Kant’s argument for the transcendental principle of purposiveness, which tells us to assume that God fashioned a systematic unity of laws for the sake of our cognition (Section 4). Finally, I consider the relevance of the principle to the transition, returning to examine the formulation of the transition claim cited at the beginning of the paper (Section 5).

---

<sup>2</sup> I argue in a longer version of this paper that my account can also accommodate the role of this function judgment in establishing the transition. See Düsing, Guyer (1990), and Rolf for further discussion of aesthetic judgment and the transition.

## 1. The Transition and the Postulate of God's Existence

### 1a. The Transition Question

As noted above, it is not clear what the sought-for transition between the theoretical and the practical, or between the “concept of nature” and the “concept of freedom,” is supposed to be, or between what entities it is supposed to occur. An initial possibility, suggested especially by Kant’s speaking of a transition from the “concept of nature” to the “concept of freedom,” is that Kant is concerned with the metaphysical compatibility of freedom and the deterministic natural world. However, Kant claimed to resolve this problem in the first *Critique*, namely in the resolution to the third Antinomy. Here he argued that transcendental idealism, by asserting the distinction between sensible appearances and supersensible things-in-themselves, allows for the possibility of supersensible freedom.<sup>3</sup>

Further, the way that Kant phrases the issue of the transition more strongly suggests that he is concerned with establishing the unity of our theoretical and practical principles. This focus is reflected in Section II of the Introduction, where Kant calls for something that “makes possible the transition from the manner of thinking in accordance with the principles of the one [the concept of nature] to that in accordance with the principles of the other [the concept of freedom]” (5: 176). By “concept of nature” and “concept of freedom,” Kant apparently just means the conception of appearances supplied by the understanding, and the conception of the supersensible supplied by practical reason, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

To understand what a transition between theoretical and principles could amount to for Kant, we should recall that based on the results of the first two *Critiques*, our theoretical and practical faculties supply cognitive access to different

---

<sup>3</sup> Kant clearly still maintains a commitment to this argument in the third *Critique*; see 5: 175.

<sup>4</sup> In the quote from 5: 196 which I began the paper, Kant refers to the “concepts” of nature, in the plural. This is puzzling, but he may use the plural to refer specifically to the pure concepts of the understanding, since these are the most basic concepts through which the understanding unifies the manifold into one orderly system of “nature” in the first place.

kinds of objects, giving us disconnected sets of principles about the nature of reality. As we learn in the Analytic of the first *Critique*, the understanding helps constitute appearances through its *a priori* principles and concepts—for example, the concept of causality and the corresponding principle that every event has a cause—by providing the form of appearances as objects of possible experience. But the understanding can provide no cognitive access to the supersensible; nor can theoretical reason, which, Kant argues in the Dialectic of the first *Critique*, can provide mere “ideas” of supersensible entities, which do not entitle us to make any knowledge claims about these objects. Meanwhile, as Kant describes in the second *Critique*, practical reason gives us three postulates which concern the supersensible: the postulates of freedom, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul. I characterize the postulate of God’s existence in greater detail below, but the basic idea is that practical reason allows for belief or faith (*Glaube*) in the postulates because taking them up is a condition on our acting from duty.<sup>5</sup> In this way, Kant holds that while we cannot acquire theoretical knowledge of the supersensible, reason provides a kind of practical access to the supersensible.

Based on this background, it is plausible that in calling for a transition, Kant is concerned with the issue of theoretical principles being unified with the postulates of practical reason.<sup>6</sup> But there also emerges an important point: based on the critical restrictions on the understanding (and theoretical reason), we know that the transition cannot involve any sort of theoretical principles that ground knowledge claims about the objects of the postulates.

This of course leaves us wondering what kind of theoretical principles could establish the transition. To anticipate, I will argue that Kant’s account of the

---

<sup>5</sup> For the sake of brevity, I here bracket the differences between Kant’s account of the postulates of God and immortality, on the one hand, and the postulate of freedom, on the other hand. For complicated reasons, he thinks we get an even stronger form of (practically grounded) assent to the existence of freedom.

<sup>6</sup> Kant makes this thought explicit in the second *Critique*, where he tells us that after accepting the postulates, theoretical reason should “try to compare and connect them with everything that it has within its power as theoretical reason” (5: 121). It is possible that Kant is also concerned with a unity with other practical principles, but I will focus on the postulates in this paper.

activity of the power of judgment and its relationship with the practical postulate of God's existence in particular will illuminate the kind of unity that theoretical considerations can establish. As I will show, the needs of theoretical inquiry lead the power of judgment to take up regulative principles or maxims that—while they cannot provide grounds for knowledge of the existence of God—tell us to assume the existence of God for the sake of theoretical inquiry.

Before moving on, I will briefly consider *why* Kant is interested in a unity of theoretical and practical principles. To answer this question, we should recall that, as reflected by the first *Critique* passage that I quoted in my introduction, Kant's call for a unification of theoretical and practical principles in the third *Critique* is not a new one. The same general demand is expressed by what is known as Kant's "unity of reason" thesis, which—to gloss a notoriously opaque Kantian claim—states that our faculty of reason is intrinsically interested in establishing the unity of its theoretical and practical principles.<sup>7</sup> There are important developments from Kant's "unity of reason" thesis to the demand for a transition in the third *Critique*—chief among them, that in the third *Critique*, Kant ascribes the power of judgment the role of establishing the transition. But it is plausible that Kant continues to hold that a "transition" from the theoretical to the practical is needed because it is an intrinsic interest of human reason that our theoretical and practical principles be unified.<sup>8</sup> With this overview of the issue of the transition in view, I will now present the practical postulate that I take Kant to be focused on in the Introduction and the CTJ: the postulate of God's existence.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> See Kleingeld for further discussion of various formulations of the unity of reason thesis throughout Kant's work.

<sup>8</sup> As I discuss below, Kant refers in the third *Critique* to "the maxim of pure reason to seek unity of principles as much as possible" (5: 456).

<sup>9</sup> Note that while I think that in the Introduction and the CTJ, Kant is focused on the postulate of God's existence, this leaves it open that part of the full transition story involves theoretical principles that assert the existence of freedom and the immortality of the soul. In fact, I think that all three objects of the postulates are at issue in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment.

### ***1b. The Postulate of God's Existence***

According to Kant's argument for the postulate of God's existence, attempting to act out of duty requires *Glaube*—that is, practically grounded belief or faith<sup>11</sup>—in an omniscient, omnipotent, and benevolent God who designs nature so as to make possible the realization of what Kant calls the “highest good.”

This argument begins with Kant's earlier result, which he establishes in the second *Critique* and which I take for granted here, that the highest good is the ultimate object of practical reason.<sup>12</sup> The highest good is “a whole in which the greatest happiness is represented as connected in the most exact proportion with the greatest degree of moral perfection” (5: 129). Kant holds that it is part of the concept of the highest good that the virtue and happiness of each agent in the world are *necessarily* connected (5:113, 5: 124). But there is a problem, Kant argues: it is impossible for us to think of the necessary accord between virtue and happiness if we think that the world is governed only by natural laws, for natural causality would not guarantee that happiness is distributed in proportion to virtue. This poses a major threat to our coherence as moral agents, for if the highest good were impossible to achieve, it would be practically irrational for us to pursue it.

The only way we can solve this problem, according to Kant, is to postulate an author of the world who creates nature so as to ensure that happiness is apportioned in accord with virtue:

Thus the concept of the practical necessity of such an end [the highest good], by means of the application of our own powers, is not congruent with the theoretical concept of the physical possibility of producing it if we do not connect our freedom with any other causality (as a means) than that of nature. Consequently, we must assume a moral cause of the world (an author of the world). (5: 450)<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> There is no satisfactory English translation of this term; I will henceforth use “Belief,” to distinguish it from the propositional attitude of belief in contemporary epistemology.

<sup>12</sup> See Engstrom, Korsgaard (106-32), and Wood (Chapters 2 and 3) for discussion of Kant's argument for this claim.

<sup>13</sup> See also 5: 124-132.

In other words, Kant says, we can only aim at the highest good if we postulate that God designed nature so as to ensure that happiness is distributed in proportion to virtue.<sup>15</sup> Kant further argues that the God in question—whom he often refers to as the “moral author of the world”—must be thought of as possessing a variety of the traditional divine attributes, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence (5: 444).<sup>16</sup> Moving forward, I will use the label “God<sub>M</sub>” to refer to God as the moral author of the world.

Much more could be said about this argument, but it will be most helpful for our purposes to consider Belief, the epistemic attitude that Kant argues we must take up toward the existence of God<sub>M</sub>. As Andrew Chignell has argued, according to Kant’s account in the Canon of the first *Critique*, Belief is an attitude for which a subject does not have sufficient “objective grounds” or evidence, but which she is rationally permitted to take up toward a proposition because holding it is a necessary condition on pursuing some aim (Chignell 354–356).<sup>17</sup> For example, Kant writes that a doctor is rationally permitted to take up Belief that a patient has a certain diagnosis, absent sufficient evidence that the diagnosis is correct, because assenting to the proposition is a necessary condition on the doctor pursuing her end to treat the patient (A 824/B 852).

In this example, the relevant Belief is a case of what Kant calls “pragmatic Belief,” which concerns hypothetical means-ends considerations (A 824/B 852). In contrast, our Belief that God<sub>M</sub> exists is an example of moral Belief: that is, a Belief that it is necessary for all moral agents to take up because doing so is a necessary

---

<sup>15</sup> One might here wonder if there is a tension between my earlier statement that according to the postulate, God “makes possible” the highest good, and my claim here that God “ensures” the distribution of happiness in accord with virtue. But this tension is merely apparent; recall that according to the conception of the highest good, it requires not just a proportionate distribution of happiness and virtue, but also the “greatest degree of moral perfection.” The latter can only be provided by the moral agents being virtuous. Thus, while God can ensure the proportionality of the distribution of happiness and virtue, he cannot ensure the highest good itself.

<sup>16</sup> See Wood (124-145) and Hare (Chapter 3) for further consideration of Kant’s argument for the postulate of God’s existence.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A 822/B 851. See also Hare (91-96), Willaschek (187-92), and Wood.



condition on our pursuit of an end required by the moral law. In the case of our Belief that God<sub>M</sub> exists, this end is the pursuit of the highest good (A 828/B 856).

Practical reason thus requires us to take up Belief that God<sub>M</sub> exists. I now turn to present Kant's account of the teleological power of judgment and how it imposes its own requirement that we assume the existence of God.

## **2. The Intelligent Design Maxim**

### ***2a. The Reflecting Power of Judgment***

In the Analytic and Dialectic of the CTJ, Kant argues that the reflecting power of judgment requires us to assume the existence of God for the sake of explaining organisms. Before examining the argument, I will make a few preliminary remarks about Kant's characterization of the faculty of judgment. In the third *Critique*, Kant distinguishes for the first time the determining and reflecting roles of judgment. Determining judgment subsumes intuitions under already-possessed concepts and laws (5: 179). Meanwhile, reflective judgment—the role of judgment that is the primary topic of the third *Critique*—is tasked with finding new empirical concepts and laws (5: 179). Kant explains this role for the reflecting power of judgment against the background of his account of the understanding in the first *Critique*. While the understanding gives us pure concepts and corresponding transcendental principles, it does not determine any specific empirical concepts or laws, leaving the reflecting power of judgment to find them (5: 179–180, 20: 211–213).

An important feature of the reflecting power of judgment is the nature of its principles. Unlike the understanding, the reflecting power of judgment does not give rise to so-called “constitutive” principles: that is, principles like “every event has a cause,” which provide the form of appearances as objects of possible experience. Rather, the reflecting power of judgment generates and employs “regulative” principles or maxims that govern its own activities (20: 225, 5: 180, 5:

186). More specifically, such principles instruct the reflecting power of judgment to make certain “assumptions” (*Annahmen*) or “presuppositions” (*Voraussetzungen*) about the way that the world is.<sup>18</sup> Kant suggests that this kind of assumption is not strictly a species of Belief, but it constitutes a similar type of assent: we are entitled to make such an assumption because doing so is a necessary condition on pursuing an end, namely the end of searching for empirical concepts and laws. Why Kant does not think this kind of assumption qualifies as a species of Belief is not entirely clear, but I will bracket further discussion of the issue and continue to speak of the “assumptions” that maxims of the power of judgment instruct us to make.<sup>19</sup>

### ***2b. The Argument for the Intelligent Design Maxim***

I will now explain Kant’s argument for the claim that it is a maxim of the reflecting power of judgment that we must assume the existence of God. There are many textual and philosophical issues that this argument raises; I here present only a brief overview.

First, Kant argues that the reflecting power of judgment encounters special difficulties when confronted with organisms. More specifically, organisms display a special kind of systematic unity that poses a problem to the reflecting power of judgment in its search for biological laws. For example, a bird has a variety of features that work together to promote its flourishing, including the hollowness of its bones and the placement of its wings for flight (5: 360). We cannot account for the systematic unity of the bird’s parts, Kant contends, merely by postulating an accidental convergence of efficient causes that explain why each part functions the

---

<sup>18</sup> Kant uses the language of “assumption” and “presupposition” throughout the text; see e.g. 20: 204, 5: 184, 5: 359, 5: 447 for instances of the former and 20: 214, 5: 185, and 5: 413 for instances of the latter. See Teufel for an illuminating discussion of the structure of the reflecting power of judgment’s maxims (Teufel 115-120).

<sup>19</sup> Part of the story may be that Kant is now using “Belief” to refer only to moral Belief, perhaps to emphasize the fact that moral Beliefs have a special epistemic status because they are conditions on pursuing an end that is necessitated by the moral law.

way it does and how the parts work in tandem with each other (5: 360). Rather, the whole organism seems to have some explanatory priority over its parts: that is, we cannot seem to fully account for why the bird has wings, why its bones are hollow, etc. without appealing to the whole bird and its functioning as the explanatory ground of the parts.

However, for reasons that are not entirely clear, Kant also maintains that it is a feature of our discursive understanding that we cannot think of a whole as prior to its parts (5: 407).<sup>21</sup> The only solution, he argues, is for us to think of the *concept* of a whole as prior to the whole's parts. That is, we may think of the concept of the whole organism in the mind of the designer as the explanatory ground of the organism. This allows us to explain the organism on analogy with how we explain an artifact: for example, we explain the coordinated functioning of the parts of a watch by appealing to the concept of the whole watch in the mind of the watchmaker. As Kant writes, if we wish to represent a whole grounding its parts,

this cannot come about by the whole being the ground of the possibility of the connection of the parts (which would be a contradiction in the discursive kind of cognition), but only by the representation of a whole containing the ground of the possibility of its form and of the connection of parts that belongs to that. (5: 407-408)

These considerations elucidate Kant's notion of "purposiveness" (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), which is crucial throughout the third *Critique* and will be important to my consideration of the transcendental principle of purposiveness later on. Kant defines purposiveness as "the causality of a concept with regard to its object" (5: 220). In other words, when an object exhibits purposiveness, it displays a kind of unity that can be grasped only if the concept of the object is thought of as the ground of the object.

---

<sup>21</sup>The notable exception to this is space, which Kant holds is not a composite of independently existing parts, but rather a whole in which particular regions exist only as limitations of the whole (A 25/B 39, A 438/B 466, 4: 409). There are several possible justifications for the claim that we cannot think of a whole as prior to its parts; see Breitenbach 2006 (707–708), Kreines 2005 (284–287), Watkins (204–208), and Zuckert 2007 (136) for further discussion.

For Kant, it is a quick step from the claim that we must think of each organism as if it were produced by a designer to the claim that we must think of all organisms as if they were produced by the same designer, God, who moreover created all of nature. Kant does not do much to motivate this step, but the most promising way to make sense of it is to appeal to Kant's view that theoretical reason seeks a unity of explanations. Positing a single God as creating all organisms, and furthermore all of nature, satisfies this need.<sup>22</sup>

Kant concludes that, in order to seek explanations of organisms, we must assume the existence of God as the creator of nature:

We cannot conceive of the purposiveness which must be made the basis even of our cognition of the internal possibility of many things in nature and make it comprehensible except by representing them and the world in general as a product of an intelligent cause (a God). (5: 400)

This assumption, he emphasizes, is made only by the reflecting power of judgment, and “absolutely cannot justify any objective assertion” (5: 395).

Now, it is important to note that the conception of God invoked in this maxim is not the same as that of God<sub>M</sub>. The argument, as I have presented it, requires only that we assume that God possesses an understanding and a will, and has the power to design all of nature. It doesn't imply, however, that we must think of God as omnipotent, omniscient, or benevolent, and it does not imply that we must think of God as concerned with the realization of the highest good. Moving forward, I will use “God<sub>A</sub>” to refer to God as the intelligent author of the world, and designate the principle that results from the judging of organisms as follows:

**Intelligent Design Maxim:** In order to pursue explanations of organisms, we must assume that God<sub>A</sub> exists.

---

<sup>22</sup> That reason has a role to play in the argument is suggested by Kant's observation that we are led to conceive of a divine author by “the combination of experience with the supreme principles of reason” (5: 399). Now, a general interpretive problem in the third *Critique* is that Kant does not clearly explain how reason and the reflecting power of judgment interact, and so it is unclear how each faculty is operative at this step of the argument. I think it is most plausible to think of reason as here constraining the power of judgment in its explanatory activities in some way.

In this way, Kant argues that it is a maxim of the reflecting power of judgment that we must assume the existence of God<sub>A</sub>—a maxim that, I will shortly argue, is crucial to the transition from the theoretical to the practical. However, before doing so, I will consider a potential objection to the reading that I have presented so far.

### ***2c. The Limits of “Physicotheology”***

My discussion of the Intelligent Design Maxim has been grounded in considerations that Kant puts forward in the main body of the CTJ. But in the lengthy Appendix to the CTJ, Kant continues to discuss the relationship between the teleological judging of nature and theology. One might argue that Kant’s discussion here, particularly in §82-84, is supposed to demonstrate that the needs of theoretical inquiry are sufficient to warrant the assumption that *God<sub>M</sub>* exists. Paul Guyer has advanced a detailed reading of §82-84 along these lines. To address this concern, I will provide a brief overview of these sections and present Guyer’s interpretation. I will then argue that the text does not support Guyer’s reading.

In the Appendix, Kant suggests that once we judge organisms as if they are designed by God (according to the Intelligent Design Maxim), we further take them to be externally purposive: that is, good for something (5: 425). This step seems to be motivated by the thought that if a thing *x* is designed, the designer must have some purpose in designing *x*, and so *x* must be good for something. Reason’s demand for the “unconditioned”—that is, for complete explanations—then quickly leads us to posit a final end (*Endzweck*) of nature: something such that it is its own source of value, and is God’s ultimate aim in creating nature (5: 426, 5: 435). Next—apparently importing a conclusion from his moral philosophy—Kant claims that human beings as moral agents are the only possible candidates for the final ends of nature, because human beings, as noumenal, practically rational agents, are the only things that are of unconditional value (5: 435). Based on his commitment to the claim that the highest good is the ultimate object of practical reason, Kant then concludes that moral agents together with the highest good are

the final end of nature (5: 435). Because Kant defines the final end as God's ultimate aim in creating nature, this conclusion is equivalent to the claim that God created nature so as to make possible the highest good: in other words, the claim that God<sub>M</sub> exists.

Guyer argues that in this discussion, Kant is concerned to show that "to conceive of nature as an intentional product of design also requires us to conceive of it as a system aimed at the highest good" (Guyer 2005, 334). In other words, Guyer holds that the needs of theoretical inquiry provide sufficient grounds to assume that God<sub>M</sub> exists.<sup>24</sup>

However, Kant's position on the matter is more complex. He goes on to argue, in discussing the limitations of "physicotheology" (which just refers to the attempt to infer to the existence and properties of God from consideration of nature), that the theoretical activities of the power of judgment on its own cannot establish the need to assume that God<sub>M</sub> exists. For example, he states:

Now I say that physicotheology, no matter how far it might be pushed, can reveal to us nothing about a final end of creation; for it does not even reach the question about such an end. It can thus certainly justify the concept of an intelligent world-cause, as a merely subjectively appropriate concept for the constitution of our cognitive faculty of the possibility of the things that we make intelligible to ourselves in accordance with ends; but it cannot determine this concept any further in either a theoretical or a practical respect. (5: 437)

Kant tells us that reflection on nature can yield the assumption of God<sub>A</sub> only; it cannot yield further properties that we may ascribe to God, even as a matter of mere assumption. He explains this by saying that physicotheology does not "reach the question" about a final end of creation. While Kant does not fully explain this claim, he arguably means that there are no features of nature whose explanation demands that we assume the existence of God<sub>M</sub> (or that we attribute any final end to God at all). God<sub>M</sub> and God<sub>A</sub> are on an explanatory par and can guide theoretical inquiry equally well, so we have no grounds rooted in the needs of inquiry for

---

<sup>24</sup> Jürg Freudiger advances a similar view (Freudiger 427ff).

assuming the existence of the more robustly conceived God<sub>M</sub>.<sup>25</sup>

Let's take stock. After first showing how practical reason requires us to take up Belief in God<sub>M</sub>, I have now explained the reflecting power of judgment's Intelligent Design Maxim, which tells us to assume the existence of God<sub>A</sub> for the sake of the explanation of organisms. With these pieces in place, we can turn to consider more directly the question of the transition.

### 3. The Intelligent Design Maxim and the Transition

Given the results established so far, it is fairly straightforward to see how the Intelligent Design Maxim contributes to a transition from the theoretical to the practical. As I explained in Section 1, in describing the need for a transition, Kant is concerned with the unity of theoretical principles and the postulates of practical reason. Within this framework, the Intelligent Design Maxim contributes to the transition just insofar as it instructs us to assume that God<sub>A</sub> exists, and so agrees with the postulate of God<sub>M</sub>'s existence.

I will present textual evidence for this picture below, but I will first explain what I mean by saying that the Intelligent Design Maxim “agrees” with the postulate of God<sub>M</sub>'s existence, and consider a related objection to Kant's account as I have presented it. It is difficult to adequately specify what this “agreeing” relationship amounts to, but I mean to capture the fact that both the Intelligent Design Maxim and the postulate of God<sub>M</sub>'s existence license us to assent to the existence of God, and—while they invoke different conceptions of God—these conceptions of God are importantly related to each other. The concept of God<sub>A</sub>

---

<sup>25</sup> See also 5: 438. Now, there are passages where Kant seems to suggest that the reflecting power of judgment takes us a bit farther than I have suggested: he says, for example, that teleological consideration of nature “suggests to us the idea of a final end,” and in so doing “makes palpable the need for a theology that can adequately determine the concept of God for the highest practical use of reason” (5: 484). The thought seems to be that while the reflecting power of judgment cannot on its own warrant us in assuming that there is a final end of nature, it leads us to think of the possibility of a final end. In the Appendix, however, Kant places greater emphasis on the limits of physicotheology described above, and not how it suggests the idea of a final end, so I bracket further consideration of this point.

contained in the Intelligent Design Maxim is less robust than the postulate's concept of God<sub>M</sub> in that the concept of God<sub>A</sub> does not include many of the attributes important to our concept of God<sub>M</sub>, including God's creating nature so as to make possible the realization of the highest good. But despite this discrepancy, the concept of God<sub>A</sub> is importantly related to the concept of God<sub>M</sub> in that all the attributes of God<sub>A</sub> are also features of God<sub>M</sub>. Moreover, several key features that God<sub>A</sub> shares with God<sub>M</sub>—namely, that God possesses an understanding and that God possesses a will—are conditions on the further distinctive features that God<sub>M</sub> possesses. For example, an understanding and a will are conditions on God's omniscience and omnipotence, respectively, and both an understanding and a will are conditions on God's being able to create nature with a specific purpose in mind (namely, ensuring the distribution of happiness in proportion with virtue). Thus, the way that the Intelligent Design Maxim "agrees" with the postulate of God<sub>M</sub>'s existence is that it tells us to assume the existence of God, who we conceive of as possessing features that are also included in the concept of God<sub>M</sub> and are important preconditions for further distinctive features of God<sub>M</sub>.

Textual evidence that Kant is concerned with this relationship between the concepts of God<sub>A</sub> and God<sub>M</sub> can be found in the Pölitz transcripts from his lectures on philosophical theology. Here Kant considers three progressively determinate conceptions of God: what he calls God as cause, author, and ruler of the world.<sup>26</sup> The concept of God as cause is merely that of an original being, which Kant calls the "deist's concept of God" (28: 1001-2). The latter two conceptions of God are those of God<sub>A</sub> and God<sub>M</sub>, respectively. In presenting the concept of God<sub>A</sub>, Kant emphasizes that God<sub>A</sub> possesses an understanding and a will: "he is thought of as a living being, a living God who has knowledge and free will" (28: 999). Kant's emphasis on these features of God<sub>A</sub> in the context of this progression from the most abstract concept of God to the most fully determined confirms that he views the

---

<sup>26</sup> A complementary distinction is drawn in the first *Critique*; see 631/B 659–A 633/B 661.



concept of God<sub>A</sub> to be importantly related to the fully robust concept of God<sub>M</sub> insofar as God<sub>A</sub> has both an understanding and a will.

Now, it might at this point be objected that because the power of judgment's maxim tells us to assume only the existence of God<sub>A</sub>, and not God<sub>M</sub>, this discrepancy undercuts Kant's claim to have really shown that any sort of transition from the theoretical to the practical is established by the power of judgment. On this view, a "transition" would require that the maxim tell us to assume the existence of God<sub>M</sub>. In response, we can note that it is plausible to think that Kant holds that a full unity of the theoretical and the practical is merely a regulative ideal, one that we can strive for but never fully complete. For example, Kant says of the postulates in the second *Critique* that theoretical reason should "try to compare and connect them with everything that it has *within its power* as theoretical reason" (5: 121, emphasis mine).<sup>27</sup> This suggests that there may be limits to the unity that can be established. Thus, it should not necessarily be taken to be a deficiency of Kant's account that the Intelligent Design Maxim invoke a less robust conception of God than that of God<sub>M</sub>, and we can allow Kant to hold that a "transition" is established even if full unity is not accomplished. (Of course, it would be nice if Kant gave us some indication of a standard for how much unity between the theoretical and the practical is sufficient for a transition to be accomplished. Unfortunately, such an indication is not forthcoming.)

The picture that we are left with is that according to the reflecting power of judgment's Intelligent Design Maxim, we must take up a view of nature and God that is complementary to the view that practical reason requires us to take up. That Kant has this overall picture in mind is suggested by the following claim that he makes in the Appendix:

if the cognition of those ends [organisms] is connected with that of the moral end, then the former, because of the maxim of pure reason to seek unity of

---

<sup>27</sup> See Kleingeld (317-321) for a more thorough defense of the claim that Kant views the unity of reason as a regulative ideal, although her discussion of this point focuses on the regulative ideal of the metaphysical unity of reason as a faculty, rather than the regulative ideal of a unity of theoretical and practical principles.

principles as far as is possible, is of great significance for assisting the practical reality of that idea [the idea of God as the moral author of the world]. (5: 456)

This passage is rather cryptic, especially because the question of what “practical reality” (*praktische Realität*) means is a complex one; I can here only propose an interpretation. By stating that the cognition of organisms assists the practical reality of the idea of God<sub>M</sub>, Kant suggests that when we view organisms as if they are designed by God<sub>A</sub>—following the Intelligent Design Maxim—our conception of God<sub>M</sub> in turn becomes more concrete. This is because we can now connect our conception of God<sub>M</sub> with specific sensible objects that seem to be designed by God.<sup>28</sup> Why it is significant that our concept of God<sub>M</sub> is rendered more concrete is a further question, but answering it is not crucial to our purposes.<sup>29</sup>

Rather, we should focus on the fact that Kant mentions “the maxim of pure reason to seek unity of principles as far as is possible” in this passage. He thus apparently refers to the unity of reason thesis.<sup>30</sup> This confirms that Kant considers the relationship between the teleological consideration of organisms and the idea of God<sub>M</sub> to be significant because it is in the interest of reason to seek the unity of the theoretical and the practical. Further, his claim that reason seeks unity “as much as possible” provides additional support for my claim that Kant takes the desired unity between the theoretical and the practical to be a regulative ideal. This quotation thus provides evidence for my overall interpretation of the transition claim in the CTJ: the teleological judging of organisms leads to the reflecting power of judgment’s Intelligent Design Maxim, which agrees with the postulate of God<sub>M</sub>’s

---

<sup>28</sup> This reading is further supported by a speculation that Kant makes that once human beings began attending to the apparent purposiveness of nature, this “would then have served admirably to strengthen that idea [of God<sub>M</sub>]” (5: 459). This description of our idea of God<sub>M</sub> being “strengthened” can also be interpreted to refer to the idea becoming more concrete.

<sup>29</sup> See Guyer (1990) for a defense of the claim that by the time of the third *Critique*, Kant has come to hold that “specific moral conceptions [...] stand in need of representation in a form that the senses, and creatures so dependent on the senses as us, can grasp” (Guyer 1990, 138).

<sup>30</sup> One might object that this reference to reason’s demand for unity refers to a more general demand of reason to unify its principles, and not specifically to the demand for a unity of theoretical and practical principles. However, in context it is most plausible that Kant is referring to the latter, as this passage occurs in a discussion of what we have grounds to assent to based on theoretical and practical grounds.

existence. And the accord between the principles constitutes an approximation of the full unity of the theoretical and the practical that Kant holds to be a regulative ideal.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. The Transcendental Principle of Purposiveness

With this reading of the account of the transition in the CTJ established, I will now consider the connection that Kant draws in the Introduction between the transition claim and the power of judgment's transcendental principle of purposiveness, which concerns the unity of nature's laws (5: 196). As I noted at the outset of the paper, most commentators have neglected to offer an account of how Kant makes the transition claim with respect to this principle.<sup>39</sup> But our consideration of the transition in the CTJ gives us the resources to make sense of this presentation of the transition claim in the Introduction, and in so doing to offer a unified account of the transition as established in the Introduction and the

---

<sup>31</sup> A further question that my interpretation of the CTJ raises is how Kant's account in the third *Critique* interacts with his argument for various regulative principles of *reason* pertaining to God in the Appendix to the Dialectic of the first *Critique*. For in that discussion, Kant establishes that theoretical reason, for the sake of pursuing theoretical inquiry, requires us to presuppose the regulative principle that God<sub>A</sub> exists (A 697/B 725). So it might seem that the transition from the theoretical to the practical, as I have presented it, is already accomplished by the end of the first *Critique*. And the same worry will apply to the account that I provide below of the transcendental principle of purposiveness. While addressing this issue is outside the scope of this paper, I suggest that we must appeal to the revisionary nature of the third *Critique*. Kant assigns the reflecting power of judgment many of the roles formerly attributed to theoretical reason, suggesting that he has come to think that reason on its own cannot accomplish everything that he attributed to it in the first *Critique*.

<sup>39</sup> This is true of the accounts offered by Guyer, Freudiger, Düsing, and Rolf. Two exceptions are Pauline Kleingeld and Henry Allison. In a broader discussion of Kant's unity of reason thesis, Kleingeld cites the transcendental principle of purposiveness, similarly emphasizing the significance of the fact that according to the argument, we must assume that God designed nature (Kleingeld 326). But her view differs from mine insofar as she argues that the unity between the theoretical and the practical is "achieved by the fact that practical reason leads to the assumption that nature is purposively organized by nature" (Kleingeld 333). This explanation of unity, in focusing on a result established by practical reason, does not make sense of Kant's claim that the *power of judgment* provides for the transition. Allison argues that through the assumption of the transcendental principle of purposiveness, we are licensed to assume that psychological and anthropological laws are such as to ground empirical characters that are suitable for attaining a variety of moral goals, but particularly perpetual peace (Allison 2012, 219-22). I do not see much textual evidence for Allison's reading, particularly the connection that he draws between the principle and the topic of perpetual peace.

CTJ. In this section, I will show that Kant argues in the Introduction that according to the transcendental principle of purposiveness, the search for empirical laws requires us to assume the existence of God<sub>A</sub>. In Section 5, I explain the relevance of the principle to the transition, returning to the main formulation of the transition claim with which I began the paper.

#### ***4a. Introducing the Principle***

Let's consider how Kant formulates the transcendental principle of purposiveness. Recall that the reflecting power of judgment is tasked with finding empirical concepts and laws of nature, which are not determined *a priori* by the understanding. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on the role of judgment in finding laws specifically (which, at least in the discussion of the transcendental principle of purposiveness in the published Introduction, is also Kant's focus).<sup>41</sup>

Kant introduces the transcendental principle of purposiveness in the course of explaining how the reflecting power of judgment seeks out empirical laws. Kant presents many, slightly different formulations of the principle throughout the introductions, but we can take the following quotation as our guiding formulation of it:

Since universal laws of nature have their ground in our understanding, which prescribes them to nature (although only in accordance with the universal concept of it as nature), the particular empirical laws, in regard to that which is left undetermined in them by the former, must be considered in terms of the sort of unity they would have if an understanding (even if not ours) had likewise given them for the sake of our faculty of cognition, in order to make possible a system of experience in accordance with particular laws of nature. (5: 180)

By referring to “what is left undetermined” in the empirical laws by the universal laws of nature prescribed by the understanding, Kant recapitulates the basic underdetermination problem, i.e., that the understanding does not determine

---

<sup>41</sup> See Ginsborg (1990, 190) on the relationship between Kant's discussion of concepts and laws in the introductions.

empirical concepts or laws. He then states the principle of purposiveness, which we can summarize as follows:

**The transcendental principle of purposiveness:** in order to seek new empirical laws, we must assume that:

- a) Empirical laws are unified into a system.
- b) This unity is such as an understanding would have designed it for the sake of our faculty of cognition.<sup>42</sup>

It is clear from the surrounding discussion that Kant wishes to establish, as he did with respect to the Intelligent Design Maxim, that the principle is merely a maxim of the reflecting power of judgment; it instructs us to make an assumption for the sake of theoretical inquiry, but it does not provide grounds for knowledge (5: 184). I will now sketch the argument for the principle, taking up a) and b) in turn.

#### ***4b. The Assumption of Systematic Unity***

To see the argument for the need to assume a), we should begin with the observation that, according to Kant's account of laws of nature, only if a regularity lays claim to necessity does it qualify as a law. For example, Kant states that an object "must...have its rule, which is a law, and hence brings necessity with it" (5: 183). I take this claim about causal laws to be established in the first *Critique*, and will not consider the argument for it here.<sup>43</sup>

Kant suggests that the only way that we could know that a lawlike regularity is necessary is if we could show that it belongs to a system of laws; as he puts it, the reflecting power of judgment must "ground the possibility of the systematic subordination of empirical principles under one another" (5: 180).<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Note that Kant does not always refer to this second assumption in every formulation of the transcendental principle of purposiveness. See, for example 20: 209 and 20: 215. But he includes it in his central formulation of the principle in the Introduction, and, as we will see, it is crucial to his account of the transition.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. A 91/B 124. See also 4: 468 in the *Metaphysical Foundations*.

<sup>44</sup> I will flag that there is considerable debate on the metaphysical question of what grounds a law's necessity; see Breitenbach 2018 for a helpful overview. Here I focus on the epistemological question of what grounds our *knowledge* of a law's necessity; I remain neutral on the metaphysical question.

What exactly this system would look like is a large question, but I follow Michael Friedman in thinking that the system would be anchored at the top by the transcendental principles of the understanding, from which “a sequence of progressively more concrete and empirical instantiations or realizations of the transcendental principles” can be thought to be framed (Friedman 185-186). Kant presents the beginnings of such a system in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, in which he shows how what he calls the “metaphysical” principles of pure natural science, including his three laws of mechanics, can be derived from the transcendental principles, and then demonstrates how the law of universal gravitation can in turn be subsumed *a priori* under the three laws of mechanics. This procedure demonstrates the necessity of both the metaphysical principles and the law of universal gravitation, thus allowing us to claim knowledge of them as laws.<sup>45</sup>

However, Kant maintains that the fact that we are able to ground the laws of the *Metaphysical Foundations* in the transcendental principles represents an exception, and not a rule. That is, he thinks that there are no further empirical laws that we are currently in a position to ground in the transcendental principles; even more strongly, he suggests that as far as the remaining laws go, the understanding “never can cognize their necessity” (5: 184). Explaining why Kant thinks it is impossible to ground most empirical laws in the transcendental principles in the same way that we can ground the laws of the *Metaphysical Foundations* would take us too far afield.<sup>46</sup> All that we need for our purposes is to recognize that Kant is committed to the position that the transcendental principles

---

<sup>45</sup> In more detail, the relevant procedure involves applying the transcendental principles to the empirical concept of matter to yield the metaphysical principles. These principles are in turn applied to empirical regularities obtained by induction to yield the law of universal gravitation. In both of these cases, while empirical content is involved in the procedure—in the case of the metaphysical principles, the empirical concept of matter, and in the case of the law of universal gravitation, inductively arrived-at regularities, the subsumption of the principles under the transcendental principles is *a priori*. (Friedman 175ff).

<sup>46</sup> See Kreines (2017, 333) for further discussion of why Kant holds the laws of the *Metaphysical Foundations* to be amenable to such transcendental grounding, in contrast to more specific empirical laws.

are compatible with a variety of alternative empirical laws, which, “as far as our insight goes,” are contingent (5: 183).

Consequently, Kant concludes that the best we can do in our search for empirical laws of nature is to *assume* that candidate laws are part of a system of laws and so hold with necessity. This allows us to regard regularities as if they are necessary, and so to regard them as laws, even though we cannot know that they are laws. Kant concludes: “the power of judgment must thus assume it as an *a priori* principle for its own use that what is contingent for human insight in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless contains a lawful unity, not fathomable by us but still thinkable” (5: 183).<sup>47</sup>

#### ***4c. The Assumption of God’s Existence***

We can now move on to consider step b). To repeat the main claim: Kant argues that we must assume that the laws exhibit the unity that they would have “if an understanding (even if not ours) had likewise given them for the sake of our faculty of cognition.” I will first explain the argument for the need for this assumption, before arguing that we should take “an understanding” to refer to God<sub>A</sub>.

There are two components of this assumption: that an understanding designed the systematic unity of laws, and that the understanding did so for the sake of our cognition; I consider each in turn, focusing on the first. Kant gives a very compressed argument that we must presuppose that an understanding designed the systematic unity of laws, but I suggest that we can understand his argument by recalling the argument for the Intelligent Design Maxim. There, we saw that in order to explain the systematic unity of an organism—specifically the

---

<sup>47</sup> My reconstruction of this argument is closest to that provided by Guyer (2003), insofar as we explain the need to assume the systematic unity of laws by appeal to the need to assume the necessity of lawlike regularities. However, Guyer doesn’t specify the relevant system as one unified under the transcendental principles of the understanding. See also Allison (2003), Ginsborg (2017), Teufel, and Zuckert (2017) for further discussion of the argument.

apparent whole-part priority—we had to think of the concept of the whole in the mind of a designer as the ground for the coordinated functioning and arrangement of the parts. Kant makes a similar suggestion in the Introduction: that due to the systematic unity displayed by the laws, the system of laws—the relevant whole—seems explanatorily prior to each of the individual laws, which can be thought of as parts of the whole. But because the nature of our discursivity prevents us from thinking of a whole as prior to its parts, the only way to think of a ground for such unity is to think of the concept of the whole system in the mind of a designer as grounding the arrangement of the laws.

This line of thought is suggested immediately after the 5: 180 formulation of the transcendental principle of purposiveness that we have been considering. Kant explains why accepting the principle amounts to accepting the presupposition that an understanding is the ground of the unity of the laws:

[S]ince the concept of an object insofar as it at the same time contains the ground of the reality of this object is called an end, and the correspondence of a thing with that constitution of things that is possible only in accordance with ends is called the purposiveness of its form, thus the principle of the power of judgment in regard to the form of things in nature under empirical laws in general is the purposiveness of nature in its multiplicity. I.e. nature is represented through this concept as if an understanding contained the ground of the unity of the manifold of its empirical laws (5: 181)

In this complicated passage, Kant begins by defining “end” (*Zweck*) and “purposiveness” (*Zweckmäßigkeit*). Kant says that an “end” is a concept of an object, where the concept grounds the “reality” (*Wirklichkeit*) of that object (which, I submit, we can take to refer to the metaphysical possibility of the object). According to this definition, for example, the concept of a watch would be called an end because the concept of the watch is considered to be the ground of the watch (or the possibility of the watch) itself.<sup>48</sup> In line with the definition of “purposiveness” that I considered in my discussion of the CTJ, Kant then goes on to define “purposiveness” as that quality of an object whose possibility is grounded by

---

<sup>48</sup> A key complication with this definition of “end” is that it conflicts with other passages where Kant states that it is the object, and not its concept, that should be called an end. See e.g. 5: 220.



an end—in other words, by the concept of the object.<sup>49</sup> According to this definition, a watch is purposive because its form and functioning are explained by appeal to the concept of the watch in the mind of a designer.

Kant then states that, following this definition of purposiveness, we deem the “form of things in nature under empirical laws”—which we can take to be equivalent to the “unity of the manifold of its empirical laws” mentioned in the final sentence—to be purposive because it seems to us as if a concept of the whole of nature is the explanatory ground of this unity. The final sentence tells us that assuming that the concept of nature is the ground of its unity amounts to representing nature as if an understanding contained the ground of this unity.

The passage thus suggests the following line of thought: to assume the unity of the laws, we must think of a concept of the whole system of laws as the ground of the system—that is, we must think of the system as purposive. And in thinking of the concept of the system as the system’s ground, we thereby think of the system as if it were designed by an understanding.

I will now explain why Kant holds that we must assume that an understanding designed the systematic unity of the laws “for the sake of our cognition.”<sup>50</sup> Kant apparently builds this element of the assumption directly into the “systematic unity” element. That is, in the initial assumption that nature’s laws are systematically unified, we are assuming that they are unified in a way that makes them conformable to our cognitive needs. Once we add the “designed by an understanding” component to the principle, we immediately achieve the result

---

<sup>49</sup> I here bracket important differences between Kant’s account of the purposiveness of organisms and the purposiveness of nature’s laws; he describes the former kind of purposiveness as both “real” and “objective,” in contrast with the latter, which is “formal” and “subjective” (Kant draws these distinctions rather inconsistently throughout the introductions and main text, but see e.g. §VIII of the Introduction for instances of all four terms). The account of purposiveness that I have offered is general enough to apply to both organisms and laws.

<sup>50</sup> This element of the assumption helps elucidate Kant’s notion of “subjective” or “formal” purposiveness, which he says characterizes something that exhibits “a correspondence of its form [...] with the faculties of cognition” (5: 192).

that we must think of nature as if designed by an understanding for the sake of our faculty of cognition.<sup>51</sup>

With the argument for the assumption in view, I will now defend the claim that we should take the relevant understanding to be God, and specifically God<sub>A</sub>. Kant does not make it as clear as one would like that by “an understanding” he is referring to God, but the intuitive thought is that because we are thinking of an understanding that designs all of nature and so stands outside of nature, we must be talking about God. And it is most plausible that the relevant conception of God invoked by the principle is that of God<sub>A</sub>. Kant does not offer any explicit consideration of which concept of God the principle invokes, but when he introduces the principle, he mentions only “an understanding” and does attribute any moral properties to it. This suggests that the concept of God<sub>A</sub>, not God<sub>M</sub>, is the relevant concept. Further, the considerations of the CTJ can help here. As we saw above, Kant argues that there is no need to assume the existence of God<sub>M</sub> for the sake of explaining organisms, and so the needs of theoretical inquiry alone do not warrant the assumption that God<sub>M</sub> exists. Similar considerations would apply in this context: there is no need to assume that God<sub>M</sub> exists to explain the unity of nature’s laws, and so the considerations that drive the transcendental principle of purposiveness warrant the assumption of God<sub>A</sub>’s existence only.

Thus, Kant argues that the reflecting power of judgment’s search for empirical laws of nature requires us to take up the assumption that God<sub>A</sub> exists. With this result in hand, we are now in a position to consider the direct relevance of the transcendental principle of purposiveness to the transition, as Kant presents it in the formulation of the transition claim in the Introduction.

---

<sup>51</sup> One might press here that it is open to say that Kant’s argument establishes the need to assume that an understanding designed the systematic unity of the laws, and that this systematic unity is suitable to our cognitive needs, but not that the understanding designed the laws expressly “for the sake of” our cognition. Kant would presumably reply that this would amount to assuming an objectionable brute fact or coincidence; reason could at this point demand a (hypothetical) explanation for why the understanding would design the laws in this way, and the best explanation would be that the understanding would do so *because* the systematic unity renders them suitable for our cognition.

## 5. The Transcendental Principle of Purposiveness and the Transition

Our consideration of the CTJ helps us to see why Kant claims in the Introduction that a transition from the theoretical to the practical is established in virtue of the transcendental principle of purposiveness. We can surmise that the basic point is the same: the principle tells us to assume that God<sub>A</sub> exists; the principle, in turn, contributes to the transition because it agrees with the practical postulate of God<sub>M</sub>'s existence, satisfying reason's interest in unity. As we saw above, Kant holds the conception of God<sub>A</sub> to be importantly related to the conception of God<sub>M</sub> insofar as God<sub>A</sub> is conceived to have an understanding and a will, which are preconditions for features unique to God<sub>M</sub>.

I will now show that we find Kant drawing such a connection between the transcendental principle of purposiveness and the idea of God<sub>M</sub> in the presentation of the transition claim with which I began the paper. In the full passage, Kant states that the power of judgment

provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter, in the concept of a purposiveness of nature; for thereby is the possibility of the final end, which can become actual only in nature and in accord with its laws, cognized. (5: 196)

This passage is quite dense, but the basic claim is as follows: the power of judgment makes possible the transition between the “purely theoretical” and the “purely practical,” and it does so through the concept of purposiveness, because through the concept of the purposiveness of nature, judgment allows for the cognition of “the possibility of the final end.”

Let's examine the claim that through the concept of the purposiveness of nature, judgment allows for the cognition of the possibility of the final end. First, we can recall that by “purposiveness,” Kant means the quality of an object which

seems to have its concept as its ground. Thus, in this passage, Kant is referring to the idea that we must view nature as if it were the product of a designer.

Second, I will now argue, by “the final end” Kant refers to the highest good, and by the “possibility of the final end” he alludes to God<sub>M</sub>. Recall that in the Appendix, we saw that Kant argues that the final end of creation is human beings as moral agents, together with the highest good. Relatedly, but slightly distinctly, he also speaks of the “final end” of human action, which he identifies as the highest good (5: 450, 5: 453).<sup>56</sup> Kant seems to be referring specifically to the highest good in this passage, for he says that the final end “can become actual only in nature and in accord with its laws,” which suggests the problem, central to the proof of the postulate of God<sub>M</sub>’s existence, of how the highest good can be realized in nature. Additionally, immediately preceding the passage under consideration, Kant defines the final end as “the effect in accordance with the concept of freedom” (5: 196). This language is echoed in §91 of the Appendix to the CTJ, where Kant defines the highest good—which he refers to as the “highest final end that is to be realized by us”—as “that effect of the lawful use of our freedom” (5: 470).<sup>57</sup>

Once we take “the final end” in the Introduction passage to refer to the highest good, it is most plausible to think that the “possibility of the final end” describes, albeit obliquely, God<sub>M</sub> as a condition on the possibility of the highest good. Kant often refers to God<sub>M</sub> and the immortality of the soul as the conditions for our conceiving of the possibility of the highest good (5: 469, 5: 470, 5: 43). We can further surmise that the focus in the Introduction is on God<sub>M</sub> and not on the immortality of the soul, because Kant’s reference to purposiveness suggests the idea of divine design. Thus, it is most plausible to take Kant’s reference to our cognizing the possibility of the highest good to mean our thinking of God<sub>M</sub>. Note that I do not read Kant as using “cognition” to mean the most restrictive sense of *Erkenntnis*, viz. a representation requiring both a concept and intuition, which is

---

<sup>56</sup> Allison also notes these two uses of “final end,” and similarly holds that Kant refers to the highest good in the Introduction (Allison 2012, 222).

<sup>57</sup> See also 5: 469 and 5: 43.

only possible to have of appearances. Rather, we can take him to mean “cognition” in the loose sense of a representation that bears some relation to an object.

More should be said about the conception of God under consideration. Kant must be referring to God<sub>M</sub>, and not God<sub>A</sub>, in this passage because he is speaking about the possibility of the highest good. However, I believe that a point about God<sub>A</sub> is also implicit in this discussion. But to make this clear, we should first consider how Kant cites the transcendental principle of purposiveness at this point. The 5: 196 passage continues:

The power of judgment, through its *a priori* principle for judging nature in accordance with possible particular laws for it, provides for its supersensible substratum (in us as well as outside us) determinability through the intellectual faculty. But reason provides determination for the same substratum through its practical law *a priori*; and thus the power of judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom. (5: 196)

Again, as in the preceding paragraph from 5: 196, Kant is explaining how the power of judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom. But what is most noteworthy in this paragraph is Kant’s emphasis on the power of judgment’s “*a priori* principle for judging nature in accordance with possible particular laws for it.” Kant’s mention of the “possible particular laws” of the power of judgment makes it clear that he is speaking about the transcendental principle of purposiveness.

He then says that this principle allows for the “determinability through the intellectual faculty” of the supersensible substratum, a claim that is echoed in the First Introduction (20: 246). Based on the content of the principle, along with Kant’s emphasis on purposiveness in the preceding part of 5: 196, it is most plausible to read Kant’s claim as referring specifically to the need to think of the supersensible as if it were designed by God—and so, to think of nature, which is grounded by the supersensible, as if it were designed by God.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> More should be said at this point about Kant’s specification that we are discussing the supersensible substratum “in us as well as outside us.” My reading makes sense of the idea of God

More specifically, though, we saw in the previous section that there are good reasons to think that the transcendental principle of purposiveness requires us to assume the existence of God<sub>A</sub> only, and not the existence of God<sub>M</sub>. Thus, when Kant claims both a) that the concept of purposiveness provides for the possibility of the cognition of the final end (in the first part of the passage), and b) that the principle allows for the determinability of the supersensible substratum (in the second part), he is most plausibly gesturing at how the transcendental principle of purposiveness requires us to assume the existence of God<sub>A</sub>, which in turn agrees with the postulate of God<sub>M</sub>'s existence.

The full picture suggested by this passage thus confirms the reading that I have been advancing: that through the transcendental principle of purposiveness, the reflecting power of judgment makes possible the transition from the theoretical to the practical by providing theoretical grounds for assuming that God<sub>A</sub> exists. Additionally, while I have argued that Kant's discussion in this passage is focused on the topic of empirical laws of nature, it also provides further evidence for my reading of the account of the transition in the CTJ, because it shows more generally that Kant links the transition claim with the assumption of God<sub>A</sub>'s existence.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have argued for a unified reading of two strands of Kant's account of the transition from the theoretical to the practical in the third *Critique*. I have focused on two arguments that exhibit the same general schema, according to which theoretical inquiry, as undertaken by the reflecting power of judgment, requires that we assume that God, understood as the author of the world, exists.

---

creating the supersensible outside us, viz. the supersensible as the ground of nature. Kant's reference to the supersensible "inside us" is more opaque. One possibility is that he is referring to the idea that the immortality of the soul is a condition for achieving the highest good. The suggestion may be that, because the transcendental principle of purposiveness generally helps us to think of God creating the supersensible so as to be suitable for our realizing the highest good, it helps us to think of God designing us to possess immortality.

More specifically, in the CTJ, Kant argues that our attempt to explain organisms leads to the reflecting power of judgment's Intelligent Design Maxim, which requires us to assume that God<sub>A</sub> exists. And in the Introduction, Kant argues that the power of judgment's search for empirical laws of nature leads to the transcendental principle of purposiveness, which similarly requires the assumption of God<sub>A</sub>'s existence. These principles contribute to the transition insofar as they agree with the practical postulate of the existence of God as a moral author, thereby more closely aligning the view of the world that theoretical considerations warrant with the view of the world demanded by practical reason.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Acknowledgments redacted for the sake of anonymity.

## References

- Allison, Henry. "The Gulf Between Nature and Freedom and Nature's Guarantee of Perpetual Peace," in *Essays on Kant*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 217–228.
- “Reflective Judgment and the Application of Logic to Nature: Kant's Deduction of the Principle of Purposiveness as an Answer to Hume” in *Strawson and Kant*, ed. Hans-Johann Glock. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 169-183.
- Breitenbach, Angela. "Mechanical Explanation of Nature and Its Limits in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Science* 37, 2006. 694–711.
- “Laws and Ideal Unity.” Forthcoming in *Laws of Nature*, ed. W. Ott and L. Patton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Chignell, Andrew. "Belief in Kant." *Philosophical Review*. 116 (3), 2007. 323–360.
- Düsing, Klaus. "Beauty as the Transition from Nature to Freedom in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*." *Noûs* 24 (1), 1990. 79-92.
- Engstrom, Stephen. "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant's Moral Theory." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (4), 1992. 747-780.
- Freudiger, Jürg. "Kants Schlussstein: Wie die Teleologie die Einheit der Vernunft stiftet." *Kant- Studien* 87 (4), 1996. 423-435.
- Ginsborg, Hannah. *The Role of Taste in Kant's Theory of Cognition*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1990.
- “Why Must We Presuppose the Systematicity of Nature?”, in *Kant and the Laws of Nature*, ed. M. Massimi and A. Breitenbach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Guyer, Paul. "Feeling and Freedom: Kant on Aesthetics and Morality." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 48 (2), 1990. 137–146.
- “Kant on the Systematicity of Nature: Two Puzzles.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 20, 2003. 277–295.
- *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom: "From Nature to Morality: Kant's New Argument in the 'Critique of Teleological Judgment'."* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 314–342.
- Hare, John. *The Moral Gap*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.



- *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*. Trans. Allen Wood and Gertrude M. Clark. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Trans. Michael Friedman. *Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*. Ed. Allison and Paul Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Kleingeld, Pauline. “Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason.” *Review of Metaphysics* 52 (2), 1998. 311–340.
- Korsgaard, Christine. *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Kreines, James. “The Inexplicability of Kant's *Naturzweck*: Kant on Teleology, Explanation and Biology.” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 87 (3), 2005. 270–311.
- “Kant on the Laws of Nature Restrictive Inflationism and Its Philosophical Advantages.” *The Monist*. 100, 2017. 326–341.
- Friedman, Michael. “Causal Laws and the Foundations of Natural Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. P. Guyer. Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Rolf, Michael. “The Transition from Nature to Freedom in Kant's Third *Critique*.” *Kant-Studien* 99 (3), 2008. 339-360.
- Teufel, Thomas. “Kant's Transcendental Principle of Purposiveness and the “Maxim of the Lawfulness of Empirical Laws” in *Kant and the Laws of Nature*, ed. M. Massimi and A. Breitenbach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 108-127.
- Watkins, Eric. “The Antinomy of Teleological Judgment.” *Kant Yearbook* 1, 2009. 197–222.
- Wood, Allen. *Kant's Moral Religion*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970.
- Zuckert, Rachel. *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- “Empirical Scientific Investigation and the Ideas of Reason.” in *Kant and the Laws of Nature*, ed. M. Massimi and A. Breitenbach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 108-127.