

The Transcendental and the Transcendent

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1. Introduction: the Kantian background

It is, as is well known, a feature of utmost importance to Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy that the concepts of the *transcendental* and of the *transcendent* are strictly kept separate.¹ The latter refers to something that lies beyond human experience and knowledge (such as things in themselves, or the unknowable objects of the "ideas of pure reason" critically analyzed in Kant's Transcendental Dialectic, i.e., the soul, freedom, and God), whereas the former denotes the limits and/or conditions of experience and knowledge, particularly the necessary conditions for the possibility of cognitive experience that Kant examines in his Transcendental Aesthetic (i.e., space and time as *Anschauungsformen*) and Transcendental Analytic (i.e., the pure concepts of understanding, or the categories).² One of Kant's most emphatic formulations of the distinction is the following:

Wir wollen die Grundsätze, deren Anwendung sich ganz und gar in den Schranken möglicher Erfahrung hält, *immanente*, diejenigen aber, welche diese Grenzen überfliegen sollen, *transzendente* Grundsätze nennen. Ich verstehe unter diesen nicht den *transzendentalen* Gebrauch oder Missbrauch der Kategorien, welcher ein blosser Fehler der nicht gehörig durch Kritik gezügelten Urteilskraft ist, die auf die Grenze des Bodens, worauf allein dem reine Verstande sein Spiel erlaubt ist, nicht genug achtthat; sondern wirkliche Grundsätze, die uns zumuten, alle jene

Grenzfähle niederzureissen und sich einen ganz neuen Boden, der überall keine Demarkation erkennt, anzumassen. Daher sind *transzendental* und *transzendent* nicht einerlei. Die Grundsätze des reinen Verstandes, die wir oben [i.e., in the Transcendental Analytic] vortrug, sollen bloss von empirischem und nicht von transzendentelem, d.i. über die Erfahrungsgrenze hinausreichendem Gebrauche sein. Ein Grundsatz aber, der diese Schranken wegnimmt, *ja gar sie zu überschreiten gebietet*, heisst *transzendent*.³

From the Kantian point of view, then, a transcendent principle more radically transgresses the boundaries of human experience than a transcendental one (or one transcendently and non-empirically employed); it not only (tries to) step outside the limits set for the empirical employment of the principles of understanding (or categories) but removes the very limitation itself, or at least seeks to do so. There are a number of other passages in the first *Critique* in which Kant tries to spell out what he means by the “transcendent”. For example, we are told that there is no adequate empirical employment for transcendent principles.⁴ Kant himself, however, may be claimed to, at least occasionally, obscure his terminology. The “pure concepts of reason” examined in the Dialectic are “transcendental ideas” (*transzendentalen Ideen*), while their employment is, typically, “transcendent”.⁵ Another passage, from the conclusion of the Antinomies, makes things somewhat clearer:

Solange wir mit unseren Vernunftbegriffen bloss die Totalität der Bedingungen in der Sinnenwelt, und was in Ansehung ihrer der Vernunft zu Diensten geschehen kann, zum Gegenstande haben; so sind unsere Ideen zwar transzendental, aber doch *kosmologisch*. Sobald wir aber das Unbedingte (um das es doch eigentlich zu tun ist) in demjenigen setzen, was ganz ausserhalb der Sinnenwelt, mithin ausser aller möglichen Erfahrung ist, so werden die Ideen *transzendent*; sie dienen nicht bloss zur Vollendung des empirischen Vernunftgebrauchs (der immer eine nie auszuführende, aber dennoch zu befolgende Idee bleibt), sondern sie trennen sich davon gänzlich, und machen sich selbst Gegenstände, deren Stoff nicht aus Erfahrung genommen, deren objektive Realität auch nicht auf der Vollendung der empirischen Reihe, sondern auf reinen Begriffen a priori beruht. Dergleichen transzendente Ideen haben einen bloss intelligiblen Gegenstand, welchen als ein

transzendentes Objekt, von dem man übrigens nichts weiss, zuzulassen, allerdings erlaubt ist, wozu aber, um es als ein durch seine unterscheidenden und inneren Prädikate bestimmtes Ding zu denken, wir weder Gründe der Möglichkeit (als unabhängig von allen Erfahrungsbegriffen), noch die mindeste Rechtfertigung, einen solchen Gegenstand anzunehmen, auf unserer Seite haben, und welches daher ein blosses Gedankending ist.⁶

The objects of transcendent ideas, or of ideas and principles whose employment is transcendent, thus remain “mere intelligible objects”, “mere thought-things” (*Gedankendinge*), comparable to Kant’s famous *noumena*. Roughly, Kant’s picture is that the transcendental ideas of soul, freedom, and God can be employed either immanently or, if they are taken to be concepts of real entities (if “sie für Begriffe von wirklichen Dingen genommen werden”), in a transcendent manner: “Denn nicht die Idee an sich selbst, sondern bloss ihr Gebrauch kann, entweder in Ansehung der gesamten möglichen Erfahrung *überfliegend* (transzendent), oder *einheimisch* (immanent) sein [...]”⁷ The transcendental ideas of the Dialectic may, moreover, have a legitimate *regulative* employment, but they can have no *constitutive* employment in the way in which the transcendental conditions of experience to be found in sensibility and understanding do; that is, they cannot be used to constitute a transcendent rationalist system of knowledge.⁸

I have quoted Kant extensively in order to provide some context for the reflections that follow, but my purpose in this essay is not to settle the historical question of what Kant meant by the two notions I am examining. The relation between the transcendental and the transcendent does deserve philosophical scrutiny even in our own time, however. Indeed, this distinction is all too often overlooked today. We easily find otherwise insightful and careful thinkers somewhat carelessly using these two terms more or less interchangeably, or at least without making clear what their meanings are. We also find philosophers deliberately blurring the distinction: for instance, A.W. Moore passes over Kant’s distinction “for the sake of simplicity”, while inaccurately claiming that transcendental idealism postulates a *transcendent* (non-empirical) dependence of “some aspects of the form of that to which our representations answer” on “some aspects of the representations.”⁹

In many cases, including perhaps Moore’s, using the word “transcendental” would suffice; the talk about transcendent entities or transcendence often leads to trouble.¹⁰ It

would, however, be too simple just to drop the transcendent and stick to the transcendental, because in some cases no adequate understanding of certain *specific* transcendental conditions is possible without reference to what is seen as transcending the limits set by those conditions. I shall, in the following, discuss cases in which a commitment to something that is taken as transcendent from the perspective of certain kind of experience, or form of life,¹¹ is a transcendental requirement for the intelligibility of that kind of experience or form of life. In Kantian terms, the question is whether the legitimate employment, or perhaps regulative employment, of a certain transcendent idea or principle can be transcendentially defended or vindicated. We will, thus, notice a puzzling but philosophically interesting interplay of the transcendental and the transcendent.

It should be noted that I am no semiotician; yet, given the interest in “transcendence” in recent “existential semiotics”,¹² my purely philosophical reflections may (I hope) be helpful in this context. In any event, it should be clear that the issue I will be examining concerns the conditions and limits of human representational capacities. Insofar as the nature of representation is relevant to semiotics, the distinction between the transcendent and the transcendental, as well as their “interplay”, should also be.¹³

2. Arguing transcendentially for transcendence?

As an obvious source of relevant examples of transcendental reasoning about the transcendent, I shall consider a particular language-game, or a group of language-games, namely, the religious one(s),¹⁴ and briefly examine two specific problems pertaining to religious language-use, namely, the problem of the existence of God (section 2.1) and the problem of evil (section 2.2).

I have chosen to focus (in section 2.1) on a transcendental argument for theism drawn from Charles Taylor’s work, instead of, say, the more explicitly transcendental “Martin – Frame Debate” on TAG (the transcendental argument for the existence of God) vs. TANG (the transcendental argument for the non-existence of God).¹⁵ The latter exchange of arguments is an exchange between a somewhat fundamentalist believer (John N. Frame) and a stubborn atheist (Michael Martin) about whether God’s existence is a necessary presupposition for logic, science, and morality (as Frame believes) or whether, rather, God’s non-existence can be seen as such a presupposition. Martin argues that God’s

existence would make logic dependent on God's will and thus contingent (which is absurd), would violate basic scientific principles (because science can admit no miracles), and would destroy objective morality (because the morally right, pretty much like the logically necessary, would be dependent on God's arbitrary judgment). Needless to say, a Christian believer like Frame contests these claims and argues, apologetically, that no logical or even meaningful thought, let alone science or morality, is possible in the absence of God. The exchange does contain interesting discussion of, e.g., the concept of a miracle and the concept of God's necessary existence, but it throws little light on the relation between the transcendental and the transcendent. Frame can be read as a thinker postulating a transcendent being as a transcendental condition of something we take for granted (logic, science, morality), but his argument is hardly sophisticated enough to deserve detailed philosophical attention from people not so strongly committed – either to Christian theism or to atheism *à la* Martin. In short, both Frame and Martin operate on a level of generality that hides rather than illuminates the key issues. Neither TAG nor TANG is helpful as an evaluation of a genuine religious believer's thinking. A more pragmatic and contextualized strategy, such as Taylor's, is worth exploring.¹⁶

2.1. Is there a transcendental argument for theism? As an example of a truly transcendental – and truly interesting – argument for theism, i.e., for the existence of God (and, specifically, God's grace) as an indispensable presupposition of our moral lives, we may take a look at Taylor's argument, as analyzed in a recent essay by D.P. Baker.¹⁷ First, however, some terminological issues must be settled. The notion of a transcendental *argument* (not only the modern notion of the “transcendental” as such) goes back to Kant, whose Transcendental Deduction of the categories is usually taken to be a model of transcendental arguments. In such arguments, something (such as the categories) is shown to be a necessary precondition for the possibility of something that we take as given or unproblematic (such as cognitive experience of objects). While these arguments, in Kant and in more recent writers, are often interpreted as intending to refute skepticism, e.g., Humean skepticism about causality, they do not stand or fall with this anti-skeptical project. They can be construed more broadly as arguments investigating *how* we are committed, in our lives and practices, to certain concepts, such as the concepts of causality (Kant) or rule-following (Wittgenstein), which may be seen as conditions for the possibility of cognitive experience or meaningful language, respectively. Thus, a *pragmatic*

reinterpretation of the transcendental strategy of argumentation is available, although mainstream discussions of these matters today still understand transcendental arguments as inherently epistemological and anti-skeptical.¹⁸

One more historical note is needed at this point, before we take a closer look at Taylor's (and Baker's) Kantian-like transcendental argument. While we may say that Kant invented transcendental arguments, he did not apply such arguments in theology.¹⁹ For Kant, transcendental arguments, such as the famous Deduction or the Refutation of Idealism, were designed to show how certain things are required as preconditions of humanly possible experience. God, if he exists, falls outside humanly possible experience. No argument, transcendental or otherwise, can entitle our belief in God in the way in which we are entitled to believe in causality, for instance, or in the forms of pure intuition, viz., space and time. According to Kant, we simply cannot know, either *a priori* or *a posteriori*, that God exists; God is neither an object of possible experience nor a transcendental presupposition of the possibility of experience. Yet, Kant famously wanted to restrict the scope of knowledge in order to make room for faith,²⁰ and regarded God's existence as a "postulate of practical reason" required in his moral philosophy.²¹ As Kant argues in his second *Critique*, morality requires that we aim at the Highest Good, or *summum bonum*, and thus pursue the happiness of those who obey the moral law – even though happiness itself can by no means be an ethical motive for our actions. Since such happiness and thus the Highest Good itself are not guaranteed for ethical persons in the empirical world of appearances, we need to "postulate" God's existence (along with freedom and the immortality of the soul) in order to account for our moral pursuit. God will, we are entitled to *hope*, ultimately reward those who act purely on the grounds of their respect for the moral law.

This might be labeled a transcendental argument, although in Kant's own terms it is not one. While God's existence is, in Kant's view, a condition for the possibility of moral life as we experience it, we cannot *know* that God exists. The argument for God's existence as a postulate of practical reason does not yield knowledge; its epistemic status is different from the conclusions of the transcendental arguments offered in Kant's theoretical philosophy, which are taken to be indubitable. As was pointed out in the introduction, Kant criticized the transcendent use of reason involved in all attempts to claim knowledge about God (or about the world as a totality). It is also worth noting that Kant explicitly urges us *not* to resort to transcendental arguments in theology. Now, it has been widely believed that

Kant himself never used the term “transcendental argument” – and that it is a much more recent coinage, introduced in the twentieth century, gaining wider usage in the literature only since P.F. Strawson’s seminal work, *Individuals*²² – but this is not true. There is one passage in the first *Critique* in which the term does occur,²³ and the context is interesting from the perspective of the philosophy of religion. In his attack on what he calls the “physico-theological” proof of God’s existence – that is, what is today labeled the “argument from design” – Kant says that the purposiveness and harmony of nature can only prove the contingency of the *form* of the world, not of the substance or *matter* of the world (and thus the need for a transcendent creator); in order to prove the latter we would have to prove “that the things in the world would not of themselves be capable of such order and harmony, in accordance with universal laws, if they were not *in their substance* the product of supreme wisdom”. But we can at most prove that there has been an “architect”, not that there has been a creator. This is insufficient for proving “an all-sufficient primordial being”. He concludes: “To prove the contingency of matter itself, we should have to resort to a transcendental argument, and this is precisely what we have here set out to avoid.”²⁴

The “transcendental argument” for the existence of God that Baker finds in Taylor’s defense of moral realism in *Sources of the Self* is, then, not strictly speaking Kantian, because for Kant such arguments are impossible in the theological case, but it does bear resemblance to the general model of transcendental argumentation we can adopt from Kant. Of course, Taylor is not arguing that God’s existence is a necessary presupposition for the possibility of cognitive experience; just like Kant’s, his theistic argument is restricted to the sphere of morality. In Kant’s terms, he does not *prove* God’s existence. This is hardly surprising: no one should today dream of the possibility of giving a deductive philosophical proof for theism in such a manner that atheists would become convinced and turn into believers. Kant’s and, before him, Hume’s arguments against ontological, cosmological and design proofs are so powerful that the prospects of infallibly demonstrating the existence of God look hopeless. Taylor’s argument, while transcendental, does not lead to an indubitable conclusion about God’s necessary existence. But it is, clearly, an argument trying to demonstrate our need to postulate God in order to account for our moral experience. Thus, it provides a case study of a transcendental argument which is not logically conclusive but may nevertheless illuminate important interconnections between some central concepts we use to structure our lives or “lifeworld”, including in particular concepts seeking to represent the transcendent.²⁵

In Baker's formulation, Taylor's argument can be reconstructed as follows:

1. We are essentially subjects.
2. It is essential to our manner of being as subjects that we perceive the world in moral terms.
3. It is essential to a moral outlook that it take a "hypergood perspective".
4. It is the nature of a hypergood that it orders and shapes other goods into a framework.
5. We are therefore beings whose experience is defined by a moral framework which is dominated by a hypergood.²⁶

In brief, then, Taylor (in Baker's view) argues that insofar as we are subjects or agents, which is something that we must take as given, we are inevitably committed to a moral framework in which one or another "hypergood" is operative. Such a commitment is, humanly speaking, inescapable. That this view is (though largely implicitly) based on a transcendental argument can clearly be seen, for instance, from the following statement by Taylor: "[D]oing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; [...] the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. [...] [L]iving within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, [...] stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood."²⁷ In brief, no humanly *meaningful* life – that is, life oriented toward certain goals or values found worth striving for – is possible without an overarching framework defined by one or another dominating "hypergood".

Baker suggests that this *general* transcendental argument must, according to Taylor, be further supported by a *specific* transcendental argument. Here we finally end up with the theistic proposal. For Taylor, according to Baker, theism provides the "best account" of the goods we find indispensable to our moral experience.²⁸ The general transcendental argument according to which a moral framework dominated by a "hypergood" is an inescapable feature of our moral experience relies on the following more specific argument:

1. It is indispensable to our moral framework that it include certain specific goods, which can be orientated to and described in differing ways (for example, 'grace' [...]).

2. It is the Best Account of these goods that they be understood as part of a theistic account. That is, once the [...] goods are clearly articulated, it is indispensable to a Best Account of those goods that they be described in theistic terms.²⁹

Thus, Taylor's "hypergood" is most naturally interpreted in a transcendent or transcendence-invoking manner. An overarching, dominating good structuring all the lower-level goods strongly valued in human life can only be grounded in, or can only result from, God and his grace.

However, Baker finds Taylor's argument wanting, because transcendental arguments ought to be *indubitable* and there is undeniably still room for doubt in the theistic indispensability claim. Taylor does not, it seems, provide us with a sufficient rational reason for believing in God, and hence his argument is not apodictically certain. The transcendental reasoning Taylor engages in simply fails to show that the existence of a hypergood (such as God's grace) is really indispensable to our moral experience. At best, Baker seems to be saying, Taylor may succeed in showing that we need to believe in God in order to account for the phenomenology of our moral experience; he cannot show that our belief must be true. It is obviously one thing to claim that we cannot help believing that *p* and another thing to claim that our belief that *p* accurately represents the facts, or the way the world is independently of our beliefs.³⁰

However, this inevitable circularity of transcendental argumentation need not worry us, if we construe these arguments in a *pragmatic* fashion, running together transcendental and *abductive* (pragmatically explanatory or elucidatory) arguments, as well as the *ontological* and *epistemic* status of transcendental arguments.³¹ In fact, transcendental arguments can only get going if we follow Kant in rejecting the split between the ontological and epistemic conclusions to be drawn from such arguments, or the corresponding split between arguments designed to establish the *truth* of their conclusion and those merely designed to establish our inescapable *need to believe* the conclusion. This is a truly pragmatist move: if it is humanly inescapable, say, as a precondition of moral experience or meaningfulness in life, to believe in God, then that belief is *ipso facto* pragmatically true for us.³² The notion of truth is, in pragmatism, "humanized": there is no higher perspective available for us regarding the truth or falsity of any belief than a perspective lying within the commitments of our best – most critical and self-reflective – practice.

Consequently, *if* Taylor succeeds in showing that we really *have to* believe in God's existence in order to account for the source of the "hypergoods" we find inevitable in our self-image as moral agents, then, if we are also prepared to follow pragmatists like William James, we cannot but regard God's existence as a pragmatically true postulate for us.³³ Endorsing this conditional claim is of course quite different from proving God's existence demonstratively, but Taylor's argument is hardly meant to be demonstrative in the sense in which the classical theistic proofs were. On the contrary, it is much closer to Kant's above-discussed way of deriving theism, as a postulate of practical reason, from the rationally binding nature of the moral imperative (rather than the other way around).

Indeed, if we synthesize pragmatic and transcendental arguments, as I am suggesting we should do, then Kant's own pragmatic argument, which turns theism into a presuppositional necessity from the point of view of morality (which we treat as given and undeniable, unless we are moral nihilists or skeptics),³⁴ will turn out to be a transcendental argument in this more flexibly construed sense. *Pace* Kant himself, transcendental arguments thus defined may have a legitimate use in theology, more specifically moral theology – following Kant's own example. But this redefinition of the notion of a transcendental argument requires that we soften the requirement of the indubitability of the conclusions of such arguments. The transcendental principles that can be established through transcendental reasoning are certain, indubitable, or apodictic only *contextually*, only, say, in a certain historical and cultural setting in which people find certain beliefs or the use of certain concepts inevitable. This amounts to something like a "relativized *a priori*", which has been a major topic in post-Kantian discussions of the nature of *a priori* principles, especially in the twentieth century.

It is important to see that pragmatically reconstructed and contextualized transcendental arguments are *not* intended as refutations of skepticism, either in the theistic case or more generally. As Baker's criticism of Taylor's transcendental argumentation shows, it is impossible to conclusively refute the skeptic in the theistic case. Transcendental arguments – Taylor's or indeed Kant's own – proceeding to the theistic conclusion *via* considerations of morality leave their conclusion inadequately supported from the point of view of the skeptic, who can, of course, *also* adopt moral skepticism, refusing to treat our moral orientation as inescapable and constitutive of our agency in the way in which Kant and Taylor treat it as such.³⁵ One may even point out that it is hopeless to overcome either moral or religious skepticism by means of a transcendental, or any, argument, because

morality, pretty much like religion, requires something like faith and is thus essentially fragile and vulnerable – something one can lose, though not usually as a result of an argument.³⁶

In this sense, transcendental arguments are *internal* to the practices the moral agent or the religious believer is already engaging in, i.e., internal to practices within which the skeptical threat does not arise at all. These arguments, non-skeptically rather than anti-skeptically reinterpreted, can only secure our need to maintain certain beliefs or to employ certain concepts (representing the transcendent) insofar as we go on engaging in the practices we actually do engage in, practices from which the arguments themselves begin and gain their significance, practices within which the kind of transcendence the arguments defend is naturally assumed.³⁷

I see, then, *some* hope for pragmatic-cum-transcendental arguments for a theistic world-view, construed as a presupposition of our moral lives in a pragmatist (primarily Jamesian) or Kantian-Taylorian manner, but such arguments must, as we have seen, be considered fallible and only contextually binding, as all pragmatic arguments must. There is, then, no point in trying to prove God's existence from a philosophical point of view lying outside religious life itself. Elaborating on this insight is where "Wittgensteinian" philosophers of religion, among others, have done a great job.³⁸ But if we end up endorsing their (e.g., Phillips's) views, do we have to subscribe to *fideism*, the thesis that religious belief needs no evidential (or, more generally, rational) defense or justification at all? Such questions will remain open here. We have at any rate come very close to the thesis that theism cannot be rationally demonstrated or even defended to an unbeliever or skeptic at all. Insofar as *any* arguments can be given here, their relevant audience will already have to be committed to theism. Thus, Baker is in a sense right. Taylor cannot succeed in proving God's existence by means of a transcendental argument drawn on the requirements of moral realism; nor can any other transcendental inquirer, even Kant himself. But I have pointed out that, in a more flexible, contextualized, and historically sensitive sense, transcendental arguments (for the transcendent or for any philosophical thesis) are not irrelevant, and contemporary philosophers of religion, as well as semioticians, ignore them at their own peril. Within a practice, field of commitments, or form of life, they may have an important role to play in an elucidation of the relations between the concepts employed and the commitments made, even concepts referring to the transcendent. For a certain kind of moral outlook, theism *may* turn out to be a necessary pragmatic precondition. This *may*

even be the case with our, modern Westerners', moral outlook – but it may not. Transcendental arguments, when pragmatized, must in any case be relativized to the practice-laden context in which they are understood as effective and relevant to human experience. Otherwise there is for them no practical work to do, neither in the postulation of transcendence nor in more mundane matters.

2.2. The problem of evil and the limits of language. I will now move on to my second, more specific example, also drawn from religious language(-games). While Taylor's argument, analyzed above, emphasizes the "hypergoods" dominating our ethical agency, it may be interesting to take up another religiously relevant notion, evil. The contrast to Taylor's views is clear, but similar transcendental issues about our ability to represent the transcendent arise.

The *problem of evil* is often presented as a simple argument which is supposed to be fatal to theism:

1. A benevolent, omniscient and omnipotent (etc.) God, the creator of the world, exists. (Theistic presupposition.)
2. If such a being exists, then s/he prevents all unnecessary evil. (Apparent necessary truth.)
3. However, there is plenty of unnecessary evil in the world, i.e., evil that an omnipotent being apparently could prevent or remove. (Empirical matter of fact.)
4. Therefore, God (as described in the first premise) cannot exist.

According to this argument, theism collapses, at least in its traditional forms, as the indisputable existence of evil is presented as a challenge to the believer. If God is good but cannot prevent or remove unnecessary evil, then s/he cannot be omnipotent. If there is some evil s/he does not know about, then s/he cannot be omniscient. And if God is both omniscient and omnipotent but does not remove the unnecessary evil there is, then s/he is not wholly good. The theist will have to give up one or another of the traditional attributes of God, or else s/he will have to give up theism altogether. Presented in this manner, the problem of evil has been used as an *atheological* argument, to demonstrate that the theist is confused in believing both in the existence of God and in the (empirical) reality of evil.

The problem of evil – like, presumably, any philosophical argument – can, however, never be neutrally formulated in a situation in which no world-views or "weltanschaulich"

commitments (e.g., religious or non-religious ones) are at work. On the contrary, its very formulation presupposes all kinds of things, and here a transcendental analysis may help us to view the situation accurately. Very simply, the problem of evil must be presented in language, or at least in signs or symbols of some kind; now, if we follow the Wittgensteinian line of thought (transcendentally interpreted) according to which there can be no meaning without there being habitual *use* of expressions within public human ways of acting, language-games, we should admit that the meanings of our linguistic expressions, including “evil” and “God”, are inextricably entangled with their use in language-games and thus in our practices (or forms of life).³⁹ Arguably, for a genuine believer who speaks about God in a religious way, belief in God’s existence is the background of any conceivable discursive treatment of evil. The plausibility of the premises of *any* argument, including the supposedly atheological problem of evil, will be evaluated against this background. One of the three premises might then be denied, or alternatively the religious person might contest human beings’ ability to argumentatively evaluate or reason about God’s volitions and actions, which, after all, must remain a great mystery for humans. This attitude may be both religiously and conceptually inevitable for someone playing a religious language-game. The believer may point out that it is *nonsensical* for a human being even to try to evaluate God’s works or to argue about them. God is, simply, sovereign; we humans are tiny, unimportant creatures.⁴⁰ *We* cannot ask whether God’s will or the world-order s/he has created is just or unjust. God is sovereignly beyond human understanding and standards of justice.

What does all this have to do with the transcendental and the transcendent? The crucial link is the question about the limits of language. One comes close to breaking the limits of meaningful discourse in examining the problem of evil atheologically. From the point of view of the religious person (within her/his language-game), the atheological arguer simply fails to use the word “God” religiously; the atheologian presents an abstract argument that breaks the rules of the religious language-game, or belongs to an entirely different language-game whose statements are only of limited relevance to religious life.⁴¹ If, following Wittgenstein, we hold that the meaning of our linguistic expressions is grounded in their use in language-games, we are forced to admit that the meanings of words such as “God” and “evil” – like the meanings of other religiously relevant expressions (such as “mercy” and “sin”) – may vary among language-games. In particular, the meanings of these terms may vary as one moves from religious discourse to secular

(atheist) discourse, or *vice versa*, from a certain kind of habitual employment of concepts and/or symbols to another.

If this analysis is correct, then the problem of evil cannot function as an atheological argument, because the one who presents the argument uses language differently from the (imagined) believer whose view is the object of the argument. It is right here that we encounter a limit of language, of what can and cannot be meaningfully said in a language-game. Conversely, a believer who tries to overcome the problem of evil through a “theodicy” likewise breaks the limits of religious language. What the Wittgensteinian considerations offered here refute, then, is not only atheological criticism of the theist’s conception of God but also the traditional theist’s attempt to provide a theodicy.⁴² Both the atheological charge of God’s injustice and the theodicist’s defense of God against such charges are, from the point of view of a genuinely religious trust in God, equally blasphemous and conceptually muddled. Accordingly, the truly religious person sees the problem of evil as a practical problem of how to live religiously in a world in which evil is an undeniable reality.⁴³

The religious discourse on evil is of special significance here, because what the religious language-user takes to be ineffable (i.e., the transcendent, or what transcends the bounds of sense) partly determines what can be meaningfully said in religious language. That something *is* viewed as transcendent functions as a transcendental precondition of the meaningfulness of expressions used within religious life. As Jeff Malpas correctly notes, Kant himself “seems occasionally to designate something as ‘*transcendental*’, even though it involves the positing of something ‘*transcendent*’, in virtue of the fact that the positing is itself a requirement of the structure of the possibility of knowledge”.⁴⁴ A conception of what lies *beyond* the expressive power of a language(-game), as codified in the (possibly changing) rules of the game, crucially affects what lies *within* the limits, i.e., what can be said and done in the language-game. In this case, a conception of God’s sovereignty as something that cannot be intelligibly expressed in language but is only possible, say, as an object of mystical admiration, along with the corresponding acknowledgment of the mysterious or even unconceptualizable reality of extreme evil, may decisively influence what can be said about evil (or, say, justice) in, or by means of, religious language. We cannot step outside the language-games in which our lives are most deeply based – this, if anything, is the fundamental idea of Wittgensteinian transcendental examination of the limits of language. But we can, “from within”, stare at the bounds of sense, just as the

believer stares at the transcendence s/he believes to exist while remaining bound to her/his earthly existence (from which evil can never be eliminated). The one who observes, from within a religious use of language, that there are (theodicist) “speculations we should not even contemplate”,⁴⁵ limits of ethically responsible human thought and language-use, is firmly rooted in a this-worldly, human, way of experiencing the world, but it is her/his somewhat other-worldly conception of transcendence that enables her/him to draw the limits of (ethically acceptable) language-use that s/he draws through her/his life and faith.

There is, of course, the possible reply – analogous to Hegel’s famous critique of Kant – that in order to draw a limit one will have to go beyond it, to already occupy a place “on the other side”. But the conception of transcendental philosophy put forward here is designed to meet this challenge by insisting on the possibility of examining transcendental limits (of experience, meaningfulness, and so on) “from within”. Hence the metaphor of “staring at” the limits, as contrasted to the one of drawing some definite limits which could only be drawn from a point of view lying beyond them. A pragmatically oriented transcendental philosophy admits that human ways of setting limits are never permanent but remain fallible and can always be contested.⁴⁶

In sum, we may say that the relevance of the problem of evil to the philosophy of language (and to transcendental philosophy and semiotics more inclusively) is at least twofold. First, we may ask whether (and in what sense) one can represent evil itself and what one actually represents when addressing this topic. Secondly, one may ask what representing evil entails, especially, what it requires from our use of other symbolic expressions, e.g., our employment of the notion of God. The problem framework of evil offers interesting material to illuminate the ways in which the meanings of our concepts become deformed, if one fails to recognize the specific features of the language-games (or, more generally, sign systems or symbolic frames of reference) one employs, scientific and religious ones included. In this case, there is a great difference between taking God’s existence (or the statement, “God exists”) to be an hypothesis to be tested in the light of evidence (in which case the empirically undeniable existence of evil would amount to counter-evidence) and taking it to be a genuinely religious statement. Arguably, for a truly religious person, *nothing* can count as evidence against God’s existence. For such a person, faith is simply not a matter of testing an hypothesis. Religious concepts and the statements one formulates by employing them simply play crucially different roles in the language-games of the believer and the atheologist. For a Wittgensteinian who ties meaning to use,

the meanings of these concepts and statements are, then, widely different in these two cases.

Accordingly, acknowledging (transcendentally) the bounds of sense, the limits of language, can orientate one's participation in a particular language-game – what one does or can do within the bounds of sense defining that particular language-game – in a significant way. This is what I have meant by claiming that a conception of something as transcendent from the point of view of a particular language-game can, on a transcendental level, function as a precondition of the meaningfulness of what is or can be said and done within the game, thus constituting the boundaries that the transcendent feature itself (*qua* transcendent) inevitably transgresses. One of the peculiarities of human language-use is, then, that the possibility of transgressing the limits of meaningful use of concepts is, in some cases at least, built into the very practice of language-use at issue.

The case we have considered is also one that throws some light on the relation between transcendental philosophy as a *methodology* and as a *metaphysics*.⁴⁷ In the case of the problem of evil, a metaphysical commitment to transcendence affects the legitimate methodology of examining the meaning of concepts and the justification of beliefs within the given (religious) language-game. A number of difficult philosophical issues will, undeniably, remain unsettled here, the gravest one among them being presumably the problem of *relativism*.⁴⁸ This, however, is a problem we must learn to live with (rather than imagining that it could be solved for good), at least insofar as we are willing to let our pragmatic basic convictions, the (possibly historically changing) certainties “in action” that provide the non-foundational “foundation” for whatever we are able to say or think in our language, affect our abilities to consider philosophical arguments sound or unsound, or relevant or irrelevant. There is no royal road to an overcoming of relativism, as long as the pragmatic contextuality of any form of humanly intelligible sign-use is taken seriously.

3. Ethics and value: the limits of language reconsidered

The discussion of religious language in the previous section was partly, though not explicitly, based on Wittgenstein's (and some of his followers') ideas. It is worth while to say a few more words on the relation between religious and ethical language, as conceived by Wittgenstein. This again leads us to the problem of the relation between the

transcendental and the transcendent. Perhaps we can say that *both* are present in Wittgenstein's views on ethics: the ethical thinker's commitment to *transcendent*, ineffable moral values (e.g., "the right way") is a *transcendental* condition for the possibility of serious ethical life and thinking. One might argue, again with a Wittgensteinian tone of voice, that unless ethical value is something transcendent and absolute, in comparison to our always relative and transitional human projects, it is not ethical in any deep sense. This, however, needs some elaboration.

In a couple of famous remarks toward the end of the *Tractatus*,⁴⁹ Wittgenstein tells us that ethics and aesthetics are one, that they are based on the will of the subject ("my will"), and that they are, like logic, "transcendental".⁵⁰ The 1929 "Lecture on Ethics" continues along similar lines. Having described ethics as an inquiry into what is valuable or really important or into the meaning of life or what makes life worth living, Wittgenstein says that these expressions can be used in a trivial and relative sense or in an absolute and ethical sense.⁵¹ The value judgments of ethics are absolute, not relative, and therefore they lie beyond what can be stated in language. The absolutely good or the absolutely valuable has no more literal sense than the experience of being "absolutely safe" has; thus, in ethics we necessarily misuse language.⁵² Ethical value, in short, is not on a par with worldly facts (which include relative values, means for certain ends). People who try to write about ethics or religion "run against the boundaries of language".⁵³ As the *Tractatus* puts it, there can be no ethical propositions (or sentences, *Sätze*), because nothing "higher" can be expressed in propositions or sentences; ethical value, or the "meaning" (*Sinn*) of the world, must lie "outside the world".⁵⁴ Ethics, then, is something sublime, otherworldly – transcendent. Or is it?

Dale Jacquette reads Wittgenstein as subscribing to the thesis that ethics "transcends the natural world".⁵⁵ This is so, because, according to Wittgenstein (in the *Tractatus*), the "metaphysical subject" is a necessary condition for any ethical value and this subject transcends the natural world.⁵⁶ The subject itself, as transcendent, is thus the source of the transcendence of ethics. The result is that ethics belongs to that which must be passed over into silence according to the famous final proposition of the *Tractatus*. There can be no (deep, interesting, or non-vulgar) talk about ethics or values at all – but only trivial, shallow, relativized value-talk. As Jacquette puts it, "there is only the transcendence of ethical attitude and practice that colours the world of objective fact with ethical-aesthetic value in subjective experience grounded by the world-transcendent metaphysical subject".⁵⁷

Jacquette's (and many other interpreters') way of speaking about the transcendence of ethics and about the subject as transcendent may, however, be subjected to critical scrutiny. Wittgenstein's statement that ethics (as well as aesthetics) is *transcendental* should be taken seriously;⁵⁸ given his Kantian-Schopenhauerian background and the generally extremely carefully constructed text of the *Tractatus*, it seems implausible to suppose that Wittgenstein would simply have ignored the Kantian distinction or have made a slip of pen here. Despite Wittgenstein's undeniably mystical bias, there is, arguably, a sense in which ethics does *not*, according to him, lie "outside" or "above" the world (and human life) in any literal sense of these words. It lies, rather, at the *limit* of the world, for ethics, like religion and aesthetics, provides for Wittgenstein a view to the world as a (limited) whole, as something valuable in a higher sense. In short, given Wittgenstein's discussion of the metaphysical subject as a "limit of the world" in the *Tractatus*,⁵⁹ one may say that ethics is essentially about the subject's perspective or attitude to the world and life, a perspective constituting a condition for the possibility of the world. This position is compatible with, or may even require, the "transcendental solipsism" one finds Wittgenstein developing in the *Tractatus*: the subject (as the limit of the world) sees her/his world as a whole under the aspect of ethical or aesthetic value, *sub specie aeternitatis*. There is no (at least not clearly) "transcendence" here – but only transcendentality.⁶⁰

I am not sure, however, whether this transcendental yet non-transcendent interpretation of ethical value and of the ethical (metaphysical) subject as conceived of by Wittgenstein can really be carried through. The above-cited formulations in the "Lecture on Ethics", in particular, seem to affirm a picture according to which ethics is a (desperate) attempt to speak about something that lies beyond the boundaries of language, steps over the legitimate limits within which meaning is found. One option might be to interpret Wittgenstein as offering a transcendental argument in favor of certain transcendent assumptions – analogously to the treatment of the problem of evil analyzed in section 2.2 above.

Perhaps the detailed recent interpretation of Wittgenstein's early views on ethics and ontology by Martin Stokhof may help us here.⁶¹ Referring to the discussion of the will in the *Tractatus*, Stokhof does speak about the "ineffability of value"⁶² and about the "transcendent nature of the will with regard to the world and the concomitant transcendent nature of ethics".⁶³ He immediately adds, however, that this transcendence is logical, not ontological: "All our acting takes place in the world and hence our will, our ethical

attitudes, are immanent at the same time.”⁶⁴ Values, although they do transcend the world, should not be sought in an “ontologically transcendent realm”, because the world is primarily a linguistic notion, rather than an ontological one.⁶⁵ True, the (ethically) good “in an absolute sense” can – or should, according to Wittgenstein – be seen as “an attribute of God’s Will”, but even here the transcendence involved is *not* absolute but is “tied to the world”, given Wittgenstein’s identification of God with “how things stand”.⁶⁶ Stokhof thus argues that the distinction between the individual, psychological subject and the metaphysical (willing, ethical) subject – a distinction between two different perspectives from which the world can be viewed – is not a distinction between two separate ontological realms, that is, between empirical reality and otherworldly transcendence.⁶⁷ Through Wittgenstein’s linguistic turn of the “Kantian program”, the notion of transcendence is transformed, rearticulated as an essentially linguistic (or, as one also might suggest, semiotic) notion:

So, ethics is transcendental not because values are outside the world, in some otherworldly, platonic realm, nor because they cannot be grasped in thought, but because ethics “cannot be said.” There are values and they are in the world, but not in the same way as contingent objects and situations are. And they are accessible, also for the individual subject, albeit not by means of its discursive powers of language and thought. [...] By placing ethics outside the realm of the meaningful, Wittgenstein tries to safeguard it from argumentation and disputes, dogmatism and feuds. There is absolute value, but it is not accessible for the discursive mind and the corresponding linguistic ways of interacting with the world.⁶⁸

According to Stokhof, Wittgenstein is saying that we can view the world from the point of view of logic and ontology, “from the midst of things”, but also *sub specie aeterni*, “as a limited whole, of which the limits are determined by the ethical will”. These, again, are not two different ontological spheres but two ways of viewing the same thing or two ways of interacting with the world.⁶⁹ As Stokhof further explains his conception of the peculiar sense of transcendence involved in Wittgenstein’s position:

Ethical value is in the world. It is an intrinsic aspect of our actions and our actions are clearly part of the world. In this sense the world has an ethical dimension and

value is immanent. But these intrinsic ethical properties cannot be expressed in language and hence in the world as it appears in our language, and hence in our thought, value is not to be found. In that sense value is transcendent. Immanence and transcendence are logical and not ontological categories, since the world and its limits is a logical and not an ontological notion. Only in this way can the *Tractatus* be read as a coherent whole.⁷⁰

Stokhof believes that his reading of Wittgenstein, with the qualified sense of ineffability and transcendence involved, may save a “down-to-earth”, practical way of dealing with moral problems, and that the value of the *Tractatus* may even lie in its invitation to lead a fundamentally ethically concerned everyday life.⁷¹ I am not sure whether his interpretation can secure such a result – although I do see major similarities between Wittgensteinian moral philosophy and (neo)pragmatism in ethics.⁷² Be that as it may, it seems to me clear that Stokhof’s reading is superior to Jacquette’s, which leaves the crucial concepts of the transcendental and the transcendent largely unexplained. Stokhof, thoroughly familiar with the Kantian context of transcendental philosophy from which Wittgenstein’s inquiries take their departure, succeeds in showing how Wittgenstein’s remarks on ethical value and the ethical (metaphysical) subject actually yield a rearticulated notion of the transcendent. Insofar as God is involved in Wittgenstein’s project as “fate” or the way the world really is (as seen *sub specie aeterni*), a crucial link between the concerns of the philosophy of religion (section 2 above) and moral philosophy (the present section) has been established. In both, a rearticulation of the traditional Kantian distinction between transcendental and transcendence is urgently needed.

The question remains whether, say, Taylor’s ethical argument for theism – for a transcendent source of the “hypergoods” structuring our normative orientation in the world – could be interpreted in a way analogous to Stokhof’s non-ontological treatment of Wittgenstein. I must leave this issue for another time. I doubt that Taylor himself, a Catholic believer, would be excited about this option, though.

4. Concluding remarks: a transcendentially constituted transcendence?

We have, through a study of a few closely related cases of religious and ethical language-use, ended up with the need to acknowledge, in addition to the transcendental limits of meaningful language, the transcendental role played (at least on some occasions) by the transcendent. We have reached this conclusion through relatively simple examples; yet, even these cases are sufficient to make the claim that a commitment to the transcendent *may* play a transcendental role in our linguistic practices. On the other hand, no alarming commitment to any pre-critical (non-Kantian) form of metaphysical idealism follows, because the transcendent, according to our pragmatic and Wittgensteinian view, is relativized to the transcendental limits of the particular language-game in question, such as the religious discourse on evil or the ethical discourse on values. In such a given language-game, conversely, the transcendental limits are partly set (through our changing practices) by something's being acknowledged, by the relevant participants in the practice, as transcendent. This is a circle, of course, but hardly any more disturbing than the reflexive circularity inherent in virtually any employment of a transcendental method.

We might at this point draw a distinction between *absolute* and *relative* notions of transcendence, suggesting that the former lies beyond *any* human limits (of sense, of cognition, etc.), while the latter remains relativized to some particular language-game and might not be transcendent from the point of view of some other language-game. This distinction becomes elusive, however, as soon as we note that it is only against the background of, or relative to, some particular practice or language-game that anything (even, say, divinity) can be said to transcend all human limits. Thus, the “absolutely transcendent” can be conceived as such only from the perspective of one or another relativizing practice. This is perhaps to say that a genuinely transcendental approach has no use for the notion of absolute transcendence, though it is able to – or indeed must, as I have suggested – accommodate relativized forms of transcendence.

If our commitments to the transcendent are, then, inevitably, humanly relativized and (as we might say) “perspectival” ones, the final question arises whether we, because of our (supposedly) transcendental need to postulate the transcendent, actually *construct* the transcendent. Does the transcendent, if real, depend *on us* for its reality – on our human, especially ethical or ethico-religious, perspectives, interests, needs, and perspectives? Could any humanly intelligible notion of transcendence be reinterpreted in such a relativized fashion, or is only an absolute transcendence transcendent enough?⁷³

I must admit that, through the discussion of my chosen examples, I have hardly found any final or general answers to the questions I have raised in this essay. But I hope that a pragmatic view of the role played by transcendental conditions in various areas of our lives, even by transcendently established commitments to transcendence, may offer some help in highlighting the specific nature of such conditions and commitments. Thus, pragmatist philosophy, whose very aim is to render abstract philosophizing relevant to human life, is not an enemy of, but actually needs, the concepts of the transcendental and the transcendent.⁷⁴

Notes

¹ This paper focuses on the concepts of the transcendental and the transcendent only in post-Kantian philosophy. Thus, I will set aside the medieval discussions of *transcendentalia*, that is, such concepts as Being, One, True, or Good, which were thought to apply to all beings.

² See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Raymund Schmidt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1990) (A = 1st ed., 1781; B = 2nd ed., 1787). I have also used the Norman Kemp Smith translation, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929). The famous Kemp Smith translation, unlike the more recent (and more reliable) one by Paul Guyer and Allan Wood (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), can also be found as a searchable electronic edition prepared by Stephen Palmquist: see <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Philosophy/Kant/cpr/>.

³ *Ibid.*, A295-296/B352-353. The passage is from the introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic.

⁴ *Ibid.*, A308/B365. For explicit uses of the term “transcendent” (*transzendent*) in relation to traditional metaphysics, see B427, A771/B799 on rational psychology (employing the transcendent concept of the soul), and A420/B447-448, A456/B484 on rational cosmology (employing the concept of the world, or transcendental ideas as *Weltbegriffe*).

⁵ *Ibid.*, A327/B383.

⁶ *Ibid.*, A565-566/B593-594.

⁷ *Ibid.*, A643/B671. In the *Methodenlehre*, Kant speaks about the “censorship” (*Zensur*) of reason which should lead to doubting the transcendent use of principles (A760-761/B788-789). Close to the conclusion of the entire *Critique*, in the section on the Architectonic of Pure Reason (a later section of the Doctrine of Method), Kant distinguishes between transcendental philosophy (also labeled “ontology”) and the “physiology of pure reason” as subdisciplines of metaphysics, describing the latter as a rational study of nature. He further elaborates on the divisions within this physiology: “Nun ist aber der Gebrauch der Vernunft in dieser rationalen Naturbetrachtung entweder physisch, oder hyperphysisch, oder besser, entweder *immanent* oder *transzendent*. Der erstere geht auf die Natur, so weit als ihre Erkenntnis in der Erfahrung (*in concreto*) kann angewandt werden, der zweite auf diejenige Verknüpfung der Gegenstände der Erfahrung, welche alle Erfahrung übersteigt. Diese *transzendente* Physiologie hat daher entweder eine *innere* Verknüpfung, oder *äussere*, die aber beide über mögliche Erfahrung hinausgehen, zu ihrem Gegenstande; jene ist die Physiologie der gesamten Natur, d.i. die *transzendente Welterkenntnis*, diese des Zusammenhanges der gesamten Natur mit einem Wesen über Natur, d.i. die *transzendente Gotteserkenntnis*.” (A845-846/B873-874.) See also A799/B827. We will in what follows be mostly interested in transcendent appeals to a world-external being, or God, thus on the “external” (*äussere*) part of transcendent (*hyperphysisch*) use of reason.

⁸ Cf. especially the closing of the Transcendental Dialectic: *ibid.*, A702-703/B730-731.

⁹ A.W. Moore, *Points of View* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 116, 122n8. See also Moore, “Human Finitude, Ineffability, Idealism, Contingency”, *Nous* 26 (1992), 427-446.

¹⁰ This criticism, of course, is not directed against those who carefully use the concepts of the transcendental and the transcendent in a manner related, but not identical, to Kant’s. An example of such a usage is provided

by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, in which the "transcendence" of external objects is part of the transcendental structure of the meaning-bestowing transcendental self, ego, or consciousness, to whom those transcendent objects are given in experience. Consciousness, for Husserl, is transcendental precisely because of its intentional relation to transcendent objects – and the same seems to hold for, e.g., Jean-Paul Sartre's reflections on the "transcendence of the ego". On Husserl's place in the "transcendental tradition" starting with Kant, see especially David Carr, *The Paradox of Subjectivity: The Self in the Transcendental Tradition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also, e.g., John D. Caputo, "Transcendence and the Transcendental in Husserl's Phenomenology", *Philosophy Today* 23 (1979), 205-216.

¹¹ I am deliberately using this Wittgensteinian expression. For some discussions of whether, and how, Wittgenstein's (later) philosophy should be interpreted as a form of transcendental inquiry, see Sami Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental: A Pragmatic View* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus/Humanity Books, 2003), ch. 2, and Pihlström, "Recent Reinterpretations of the Transcendental", *Inquiry* 47 (2004), 289-314.

¹² I am particularly indebted to Eero Tarasti's work here. See especially his recent book in Finnish, *Arvot ja merkit* ["Values and Signs"] (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2004), as well as his earlier *Existential Semiotics: Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

¹³ Whenever I speak about language, language-games, language-use, etc., in the following, my semiotically-minded readers may construe my claims broadly as being, *mutatis mutandis*, about any human employment of signs.

¹⁴ Speaking about "the religious language-game" is highly problematic, of course, and I make no claims about Wittgenstein's own views in the philosophy of religion.

¹⁵ This debate between Michael Martin and John N. Frame, with numerous responses by both authors (1996-1997), can be found at the "Internet Infidels" website, http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/michael_martin/martin-frame/, with links to Frame's statements at http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/martin/frame_contra_martin.html.

¹⁶ There are many more examples that might be considered but that I must leave aside here. For example, for an account of Paul Tillich's epistemology of religious belief as an attempt to legitimate the transcendent by appealing to the transcendental, see Dirk-Martin Grube, "A Critical Reconstruction of Paul Tillich's Epistemology", *Religious Studies* 33 (1997), 67-80.

¹⁷ See D.P. Baker, "Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*: A Transcendental Apologetic?", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 47 (2000), 155-174. Baker specifically discusses Taylor's highly influential work *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For an analysis of Taylor as a philosopher engaging in transcendental argumentation, see also Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental*, ch. 6, as well as Sami Pihlström, "Pragmatic and Transcendental Arguments for Theism: A Critical Examination", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 51 (2002), 195-213. Taylor's attitude to religion is also discussed in Michael L. Morgan, "Religion, History and Moral Discourse", in James Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 49-66. It should not be forgotten that while Taylor endorses theism, he believes that secularism is the "only available mode" for a modern democracy: see Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism", in Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 31-53.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Robert Stern (ed.), *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Robert Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism: Answering the Question of Justification* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); for a pragmatic criticism of this approach, cf. Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental*.

¹⁹ It may actually be historically incorrect to claim that Kant invented the transcendental form of argumentation, because a "hidden" transcendental argument for the existence of God has been found in Descartes (especially in his *Discourse*, part IV): see Rowland Stout, "Descartes's Hidden Argument for the Existence of God", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 6 (1998), 155-168. As Stout puts it, this argument "works by going backwards round the famous Cartesian Circle. It turns out when the method of doubt is applied that there are some propositions that survive the most radical sceptical doubts, namely, that I think and that I exist. However, no propositions, not even these, are certain beyond doubt unless there is a non-deceiving transcendent being – God – guaranteeing the truth of clear and distinct ideas. So God exists." (Ibid., p. 156.) If successful, such an argument would transcendently secure the existence of a transcendent God. The existence of God provides a "transcendental guarantee" for the general rule that every proposition clearly and distinctly perceived by the intellect is certainly true (ibid., pp. 158-159). Stout identifies several problems in Descartes's argumentation, among them the fact that it does not prove the existence of a benign God, i.e., a God with moral properties (ibid., p. 166). The argument we find in Taylor, as examined by Baker, is clearly different in this regard, although it may share the same transcendental structure. (For some

reflections on why argumentative structure alone is not sufficient for demarcating transcendental arguments from other kinds of argument, see Pihlström, “Recent Reinterpretations of the Transcendental”.)

²⁰ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Bxxx.

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel, in *Immanuel Kant: Werke*, vol. 6, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983; A=1788), A223.

²² P.F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1959/1993).

²³ As Paul Franks and Barry Stroud note in their contributions to Stern (ed.), *Transcendental Arguments*, this has been observed by David Bell.

²⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kemp Smith translation, A627/B655. The German original reads as follows: “Wollten wir die Zufälligkeit der Materie selbst beweisen, so müssten wir zu einem transzendentalen Argumente unsere Zuflucht nehmen, welches aber hier eben hat vermieden werden sollen.” So this clearly refutes the widespread belief that Kant himself never used the term “transcendental argument”, although it must be acknowledged that his usage is somewhat different from the modern one. He is, in effect, saying that transcendental arguments are *not* a solid part of transcendental philosophy. Perhaps he should here have used the term “transcendent”, referring to arguments that purport to show something about what falls beyond the reach of human experience and understanding. See, however, also Kant’s discussion of the methodological requirements of “transcendental proofs” (*Beweise*) at A782/B810 ff.

²⁵ In Stern’s terms (see his *Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism*, ch. 1), we may say that we are here dealing with a concept- or belief-directed (and thus relatively modest) transcendental argument, instead of a truth-directed (and thus immodest) one. However, Stern’s distinction, also employed by several contributors to his edited volume, *Transcendental Arguments*, trivializes the core of Kantian transcendental philosophy, because one of Kant’s key points is that the transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience are *ipso facto* conditions for the possibility of the *objects* of experience. It is this “transcendental idealism” that most recent authors pursuing transcendental arguments, like Stern, find mysterious and unacceptable. From the point of view of pragmatism (my favorite overall philosophical framework both in this essay and elsewhere), Kantian idealism can, however, receive a more naturalized interpretation which nevertheless leaves intact its central idea, the entanglement of our inescapable beliefs and concepts, on the one hand, and the structure of the world for us, on the other. I shall try to employ this strategy below, although no general reinterpretation of transcendental idealism in pragmatic terms is possible here.

²⁶ Baker, “Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*”, p. 163.

²⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 27. For Taylor’s account of the nature of transcendental arguments – including the indubitability of their conclusions, given that their premises are correct – see his paper, “The Validity of Transcendental Arguments” (1979), reprinted in Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), ch. 2.

²⁸ Baker, “Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*”, p. 166. I am not trying to determine whether this is correct as an interpretation of Taylor. I am interested in the argument itself.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171. Thus, Baker assumes – as Taylor himself seems to do, too, in “The Validity of Transcendental Arguments” – that a valid transcendental argument ought to be truth-directed in Stern’s above-described sense. But perhaps a belief-directed or concept-directed argument *is* sufficient, or at least all we can legitimately hope for, in such a problematic case as theism.

³¹ For such a suggestion in a different context, see Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental*, ch. 3.

³² This kind of a connection between William James’s “will to believe” doctrine and his pragmatist theory of truth is discussed in Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology: Understanding Our Human Life in a Human World* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), chs. 5-6. For James’s famous (or notorious) discussions of truth, see especially his *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (ed. by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1975; first published 1907), lecture VI. Even distinguished James scholars fail to pay attention to the Jamesian pragmatist’s *deliberate* blurring of the distinction between what is pragmatically needed and what is epistemically justified: see, e.g., Richard M. Gale, *The Philosophy of William James: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³³ On the tensions in James’s pragmatist philosophy of religion, see, e.g., the following recent contributions to James scholarship: Richard M. Gale, *The Divided Self of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Gale, *The Philosophy of William James*; Wayne Proudfoot (ed.), *William James and the Science of Religion: Re-experiencing the Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). It is also worth noting that Taylor has over the past few years worked on James’s philosophy of religion: see Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA and

London: Harvard University Press, 2002), as well as my review of Taylor's book in the *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 39:2 (2003).

³⁴ See Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatic Moral Realism: In Search for Ethical Seriousness* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, forthcoming 2005) for a statement of why we definitely should not be moral nihilists or skeptics.

³⁵ Here we should remember that *moral realism*, the view that there is something like objective rightness or wrongness when it comes to ethical evaluation, and that morality is not just a matter of personal (or cultural) taste, style, or arbitrary preference, is the goal of Taylor's general transcendental argument, as analyzed by Baker. For a more detailed investigation of the possibility of defending moral realism transcendentially, see Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental*, ch. 7, and *Pragmatic Moral Realism*, especially chs. 1-2.

³⁶ Cf., e.g., David Wisdo, *The Life of Irony and the Ethics of Belief* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

³⁷ What we have arrived at, I think, is a case study that shows the limitations of the purely epistemological, anti-skeptical treatments of transcendental arguments, to be found, e.g., in the two volumes by Robert Stern cited above. Alternatively, we may say that skepticism about God's existence is one *prima facie* legitimate area of application for transcendental arguments, if those arguments are taken to be inherently anti-skeptical, but since there will always be room for skepticism here, those arguments, thus construed, can (as we have seen Baker argue) achieve very little in that area. Fortunately, a broader construal is available – for pragmatists, at least.

³⁸ I am thinking about D.Z. Phillips's work, in particular, here, although I am not going to analyze in any detail the views of any particular Wittgensteinian philosopher. For an introductory text in the philosophy of religion with Wittgensteinian emphases, see B.R. Tilghman, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994).

³⁹ Cf., again, Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental*, ch. 2, and Pihlström, "Recent Reinterpretations of the Transcendental".

⁴⁰ At this point, the believer I have imagined might, for instance, appeal to the Book of Job. For a philosophically informed treatment, see John T. Wilcox, *The Bitterness of Job: A Philosophical Reading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

⁴¹ It is natural to think that this argument would be presented by a Wittgensteinian philosopher of religion (e.g., again, D.Z. Phillips), although I am not here attributing it to anyone in particular. For an exchange between Phillips and other well-known philosophers of religion (Richard Swinburne, John Hick) on the problem of evil, see Stuart C. Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), chs. 4-6. For other Wittgenstein-inspired treatments of the problem of evil, rejecting the supposed atheological force of this problem, see Wisdo, *The Life of Irony and the Ethics of Belief*, pp. 92-101; Stephen Mulhall, *Faith and Reason* (London: Duckworth, 1994); Tilghman, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, ch. 5.

⁴² We cannot say, of course, that the argumentation presented here would in any way harm atheism as such, because the atheist can refuse to "play" religious language-games. One simply need not engage in religious language-use at all. What the Wittgensteinian transcendental argumentation focusing on the limits of religious language may be said to refute, or at least seriously problematize, is "theodicism", whether theist or atheist. Theodicism is a view according to which a theodicy is required as a response to the problem of evil; if the theist fails to provide one, her/his position has been defeated.

⁴³ See Mulhall, *Faith and Reason*, pp. 19, 67-68; Tilghman, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 194; as well as Phillips, "The Problem of Evil", in Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion*, p. 119. This issue is discussed from the perspective of William James's pragmatism, with comparisons to the Wittgensteinian-cum-transcendental approach, in Sami Pihlström, "On the Reality of Evil: A Jamesian Investigation", *Streams of William James* 4:2 (2002), 12-21. Phillips notes, in a transcendental tone of voice (though without invoking such a vocabulary), that the theodist (such as Richard Swinburne) "distorts what we know or goes beyond the limits of what we are prepared to think"; indeed, "to ask of what use are the screams of the innocent [...] is to embark on a speculation we should not even contemplate. We have our reasons, final human reasons, for putting a moral full stop at many places." ("The Problem of Evil", pp. 103, 115.)

⁴⁴ Jeff Malpas, "Introduction", in Malpas (ed.), *From Kant to Davidson: Philosophy and the Idea of the Transcendental* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Cf. Phillips's paper cited above.

⁴⁶ In order to deal with this challenge adequately I would have to discuss Hegel's relation to Kant and present-day Hegelians' views on transcendental arguments. This task cannot be taken up here.

⁴⁷ See my discussion of this issue in Sami Pihlström, "Methodology without Metaphysics? A Pragmatic Critique", *Philosophy Today* 48 (2004), 188-215; also cf. Pihlström, "Recent Reinterpretations of the Transcendental".

⁴⁸ It is a standard charge against Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion that they end up with some sort of relativism or fideism, declaring that ultimately the religious person just plays a religious language-game whose meanings and normative commitments are not vulnerable to external critique. I cannot further discuss this problem here, although it is intimately related to the metaphilosophical questions surrounding transcendental philosophy.

⁴⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, 6.373 and especially 6.4 ff.

⁵⁰ “Ethics is transcendental.” (Ibid., 6.421.)

⁵¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics”, in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), pp. 37-44 (here p. 38). The lecture was originally published in *The Philosophical Review* 74 (1965), 3-12.

⁵² Ibid., p. 41.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.42 and 6.41. Note also the reference to the “metaphysical, transcendent” feature of happy and harmonious life in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, eds. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961; 2nd ed. 1979), entry on July 30, 1916 (cf. *Tractatus*, 6.43).

⁵⁵ Dale Jacquette, “Wittgenstein on the Transcendence of Ethics”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1997), 304-324 (here pp. 306-307).

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 313.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 320. Jacquette is careful to remind us that this by no means implies ethical nihilism but only a non-theoretical attitude to ethics and aesthetics (ibid., pp. 322-323).

⁵⁸ Cf. also Heinrich Watzka, *Sagen und Zeigen: Die Verschränkung von Metaphysik und Sprachkritik beim frühen und beim späten Wittgenstein* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), pp. 100-101.

⁵⁹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5.632.

⁶⁰ The reading of Wittgenstein’s transcendental solipsism upon which these thoughts are based is developed in Sami Pihlström, *Solipsism: History, Critique, and Relevance* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2004). In that book, I develop the connection between solipsism and ethics in ch. 5. (See Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, 5.6-5.641, for the extremely condensed line of thought culminating in the qualified endorsement of solipsism.) I have here learned a lot from Richard J. Brockhaus’s reading, according to which no otherworldliness (viz., transcendence in the standard sense) should be read into Wittgenstein’s views, ethical or any other views: see Brockhaus, *Pulling Up the Ladder: The Metaphysical Roots of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991). For a very different overall reading of Wittgenstein but for a similar rejection of transcendent otherworldliness (without rejecting the term “transcendental”), see Cora Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*” (1991), in Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 149-173. Even more misleadingly than Jacquette, Linhe Han assumes that Wittgenstein places ethics and the metaphysical subject in a transcendent, otherworldly “domain”: cf. his paper, “Philosophy as Experience, as Elucidation and as Profession: An Attempt to Reconstruct Early Wittgenstein’s Philosophy”, *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 51 (1996), 23-46; see here pp. 26, 40-42.

⁶¹ See Martin Stokhof, *World and Life as One: Ethics and Ontology in Wittgenstein’s Early Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), especially ch. 4. It may be worth pointing out that Stokhof generally reads Wittgenstein in a Kantian context, as examining, transcendently, the question of how meaning is possible. (Unfortunately, Stokhof does not comment on Jacquette’s 1997 paper, cited earlier in this section.)

⁶² Ibid., pp. 210-212.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 208. The crucial passage referred to is *Tractatus* 6.43: “If good or bad willing changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world, not the facts; not that which can be expressed by language.” (I am here quoting Stokhof’s own translation, which is slightly emended.)

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 209.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 238.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 215-216. (See Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, entry on August 1, 1916. Another notebook entry on July 8, 1916, identifies God with “fate” and with “the world” as independent of our will.)

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 235. See also p. 245.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 236.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 237. Stokhof’s “one-world” reading of the *Tractatus* could be compared to analogous one-world treatments of Kant’s distinction between appearances and the thing in itself, e.g., in Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University

Press, 1983). I discuss Allison's project, and related ones, in Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental*, as well as in Pihlström, "Methodology without Metaphysics?"

⁷⁰ Stokhof, *World and Life as One*, p. 238.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 245, 249.

⁷² This is a comparison I undertake in Pihlström, *Pragmatic Moral Realism*.

⁷³ Cf. here the discussion of William James's pragmatist philosophy of religion as a view committed to a kind of ontological constructivism in Pihlström, *Pragmatism and Philosophical Anthropology*, as well as several papers on James in Proudfoot (ed.), *William James and the Science of Religion*. Taylor's defense of theism can be claimed to face similar problems.

⁷⁴ I am grateful to Hanne Ahonen, Heikki Kannisto, Ted Schatzki, and Eero Tarasti for discussions of the relation between the transcendental and the transcendent that led to the idea of writing this paper. Some of the discussion in this article slightly overlaps with two earlier papers of mine: section 2.1 partly draws on "Pragmatic and Transcendental Arguments for Theism", while section 2.2 elaborates on and extends a few brief passages originally included in "Recent Reinterpretations of the Transcendental".