Part I Is There a Question?

I. Kant

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“To whom will you liken me? Who is my equal? With what can you compare me? Where is my like?”

Isaiah 46:5

I. the Problem

Our interest, in this book, is the de jure question: 1

1. For the contrast between de jure and de facto questions, see Preface, pp. vif.

is it rational, reasonable, justifiable, warranted to accept Christian belief—Christian belief as outlined in the preface? Or is there something epistemically unacceptable in so doing, something foolish, or silly, or foolhardy, or stupid, or unjustified, or unreasonable, or in some other way epistemically deplorable? But there is a prior question: is the very idea of Christian belief coherent? Can there really be such a thing as Christian belief? Well, why should that be a question? Isn’t it obvious that many people hold just those beliefs mentioned in the preface? Here is the problem. To accept Christian belief, I say, is to believe that there is an all-powerful, all-knowing, wholly good person (a person without a body) who has created us and our world, who loves us and was willing to send his son into the world to undergo suffering, humiliation, and death in order to redeem us. It is also to believe, of course, that no more than one being has these properties. And Christian belief involves not only that there is such a being but also that we are able to address him in prayer, refer to him, think and talk about him, and predicate properties of him. We have some kind of cognitive access to and grasp of him. We can refer to him, for example, as the all-powerful, all-knowing person who has created and upholds the world, and we can predicate of him such properties as being all-powerful, being all-knowing, and having created the world. We can use a definite description like this to refer to this being, to pick him out, to single him out for thought; and we can give a proper name to the being thus singled out. For example, we can use the term ‘God’ as his name.

Accordingly, Christians ordinarily take it for granted that it is possible to refer to God by such descriptions as ‘the all-powerful, all-knowing creator of the universe’, and possible, furthermore, to predicate properties (wisdom, goodness) of the being thus referred to. Of course, such a description succeeds in actually naming something only if there really is a being who is all-powerful and all-knowing and created the universe. Furthermore, it must be possible, if I can think about God and predicate properties of him, not only that there be such a being but also that my concepts apply to it. If not, then I am not in a position to assert or believe or even entertain any of the propositions mentioned above, if indeed there are any such propositions.

Now Christians also take it for granted that God is infinite, transcendent, and ultimate (however, precisely, we gloss those terms). And just here is the alleged problem. It seems many theologians and others believe that there is real difficulty with the idea that our concepts could apply to God—that is, could apply to a being with the properties of being infinite, transcendent, and ultimate. The idea is that if there is such a being, we couldn’t speak about it, couldn’t think and talk about it, couldn’t ascribe properties to it. If that is true, however, then, strictly speaking, Christian belief, at least as the Christian understands it, is impossible. For Christians believe that there is an infinite, transcendent, ultimate being about whom they hold beliefs; but if our concepts cannot apply to a being of that sort, then there cannot be beliefs about a being of that sort. This idea often sees the light of publication; it is even more heavily present in the oral tradition. In the spirit of interdisciplinary ecumenism, therefore, I want to begin by looking into this question.

Consider, for example, the theologian Gordon Kaufman:

The central problem of theological discourse, not shared with any other “language game” is the meaning of the term “God.” “God” raises special problems of meaning because it is a noun which by definition refers to a reality transcendent of, and thus not locatable within, experience.

In particular, it seems to be widely accepted, among theologians, that Kant showed that reference to or thought about such a being (even if there is one) is impossible or at least deeply problematic, 3

3. The whole medieval tradition of negative theology also finds reference to God problematic. The difference is that the medievals took it for granted that, of course, we can refer to God; the problem is to explain just how this can be accomplished. For the contemporaries I am thinking of, however, the difficulties (whether apparent or real) lead them to doubt that we can, in fact, refer to and talk about a being that is ultimate and transcendental.

or at any rate much more problematic than the idea that we can refer to and think about ourselves and other people, trees and mountains, planets and stars, and so on. Those theologians who think or suspect Kant showed this do not ordinarily develop the point in detail; 4

4. As we shall see in chapter 2, however, John Hick constitutes an exception.

they ordinarily content themselves with a ritual bow in his direction. They do not explain how they think these things were shown or what the arguments establishing them are; perhaps they think (quite properly) that that is the job of philosophers. Some of these theologians then go on to suggest that language ostensibly about a transcendent God isn’t what it looks like at all; it really serves some quite different purpose. Alternatively, perhaps, it really serves no useful purpose as it stands; what we have to do is find a useful purpose for it to serve. Perhaps it can be used, somehow, to further or promote human flourishing and humaneness, 5

5. As in Gordon Kaufman: see chapter 2, p. 41.

or religious tolerance, 6

6. As in John Hick: see chapter 2, p. 60.

or liberating praxis, or the rights of women, 7


or the fight against oppression.

But what is important for my present purposes is not an exploration of the ways in which religious language might be reconstrued or restructured, once we see (as we think) that it cannot function the way ordinary believers think it does; I want, instead, to examine the prior claim that, indeed, it cannot function as ordinary believers assume it does. Is there really something especially problematic about referring to or thinking about God? Did Kant show that if there were such a person as God, we couldn't refer to or think about him? Or if 'show' is too strong a word, did he give us powerful or even decent reason to believe that our concepts couldn't apply to God, if there is such a being? Or if he didn't do that, do some of his contemporaries—I am thinking of, however, the difficulties (whether apparent or real) lead them to doubt that we can, in fact, refer to and talk about a being that is ultimate and transcendental.

The claim in question—that our concepts don't apply to God—is a coherent one? (Or rather, is there a coherent claim somewhere in the nearby bushes?)

Initially, the answer seems to be no; one who makes the claim seems to set up a certain subject for predication—God—and then declare that our concepts do not apply to this being. But if this is so, then, presumably, at least one of our concepts—being such that our concepts don't apply to it—does apply to this being. Either those who attempt to make this claim succeed in making an assertion or not. If they don’t succeed, we have nothing to consider; if they do, however, they appear to be predicating a property of a being they have referred to, in which case at least some of our concepts do apply to it, contrary to the claim they make. So if they succeed in making a claim, they make a false claim.

Note how difficult it is, initially, to state the claim in question, the claim that if there is a being with the properties Christians ascribe to God, our concepts would not apply to that being. Consider the proposition

(1) If there were an infinite, transcendent, and ultimate being, our concepts could not apply to it.

But now suppose (1) were true. The idea, one takes it, is that we do have at least some grasp of the properties of an infinite, transcendent, and ultimate being (else we shouldn't be able to understand the sentence or grasp the proposition it expresses). An infinite being, we might say, is an unlimited being—unlimited, that is, with respect to certain properties. Among these properties might be power, knowledge, goodness, love, and the like. (A being is unlimited with respect to power and (propositional) knowledge, for example, if there is a maximal degree of power and...
knowledge, and the being in question enjoys that maximal degree of those properties. It might be hard to say precisely what the maximal degree of these properties is; with respect to knowledge, we might begin by saying that a being displays that maximal degree if it knows all true propositions and believes no false proposition.) Perhaps we can also give an explanation of what it is for a being to be transcendent: such a being transcends the created universe; and a being transcends the created universe if it is not identical with any being in that universe (if it is not created) and if it depends on nothing at all for its existence. So we do have the ideas of transcendence and being infinite (and if not, then (1) makes no sense). And the idea behind (1) is that if there is such a being (i.e., if there is an infinite and transcendent being), then none of our concepts could apply to it. In particular, then, the concepts being infinite and being transcendent could not apply to it. But how could that be? How could it be that there is a being that is infinite and transcendent (i.e., falls under our concepts infinity and transcendence) but is nevertheless such that the concepts infinity and transcendence do not apply to it? Is the idea, perhaps, that these concepts are impossible, incoherent, like the concept of a round square, a concept such that we can just see a priori that it couldn't apply to anything, that there couldn't be a thing to which it...
questions asked and answered by philosophers of religion in the English-speaking world were whether it is possible to refer to God at all and whether the sentences typically uttered by Christians and other believers in God really make sense or are, instead, nonsense, cognitively insignificant.  


Of course it doesn't follow that such meaningless sentences are altogether useless; perhaps they serve some other function. Rudolf Carnap, for example, wondered whether the meaningless sentences of metaphysics and theology might not really be a form of music.  

11. Perhaps metaphysics can have other aesthetic functions as well, as can Carnap's own work. Although, as far as I know, no one has ever used Carnap's writings as music (or even set them to music), in 1976 the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford displayed a page of Carnap's Logical Syntax of Language magnified about 20x and posted on the wall. No doubt a piece of metaphysics could serve the same purpose.

(It isn't known whether he expected them to supplant Mozart and Bach, or even Wagner. I myself doubt that metaphysics will ever replace Mozart, but perhaps we could see it as a peculiarly avant-garde form of rock.)

By now, logical positivism has retreated into the obscurity it so richly deserves.  

12. For an account of the harrowing vicissitudes of the Verifiability Criterion, see Carl Hempel, “Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning,” in Semantics and the Philosophy of Language, ed. Leonard Linsky (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), and my God and Other Minds (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), chapter 7. Something like it lingers on, not only among some theologians who propose to reconstrue religious language in such a way that it no longer refers to God but also in the Wittgensteinian fideism of D. Z. Phillips and others, which is a sort of continuation of positivism by other means. Although some of this work is eminently worth discussing, I will not discuss it here, referring the reader instead to Nicholas Wolterstorff's perceptive “Philosophy of Religion after Foundationalism: Wittgensteinian Fideism” (presently unpublished), to which I have little to add.

There still persists, however, the widespread impression that reference to God is problematic; it is time to turn explicitly to Kant, the main source of this idea. Does his work offer cause for concern to those who propose to think about, refer to, pray to, or worship a being described the way Christians describe God—as a personal being who is transcendent and infinite?

II. Kant

Immanuel Kant was a virtual titan of philosophy, with an absolutely enormous influence upon subsequent philosophy and theology. This is no doubt due to his great insight and raw philosophical power; it is perhaps also due to the grave hermeneutical difficulties that attend study of his work. The British philosopher David Hume writes with a certain surface clarity that disappointingly disappears on closer inspection. With Kant, there is good news and bad news: the good news is that we don't suffer that disappointment; the bad news is that it's because there isn't any surface clarity to begin with. We can't turn to a settled interpretation of Kant to see whether he showed or even held that our concepts don't apply to God; there is no settled interpretation.

The first thing to note, however, is that Kant often writes as if we can perfectly well refer to God. In the Critique of Practical Reason and elsewhere (Religion within the Boundaries of Pure Reason; Lectures on Philosophical Theology), Kant regularly seems to refer to God and clearly takes himself to be doing exactly that. Even in the Critique of Pure Reason, his work most heavily influential in this skeptical direction, Kant often seems to suggest that we can indeed refer to and think about God. He often seems to suggest that the problem is not that we can't think about God but that we can't come to speculative or metaphysical knowledge of God. His aim in this Critique, he says, is to curb knowledge in order to make room for faith.  

13. Critique of Pure Reason, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), Preface to second edition, Bxxx, p. 29: “I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” (Kant's emphasis).

The faith in question, presumably, is like that expressed in the Critique of Practical Reason and elsewhere; it would certainly involve referring to God and taking his existence and attributes as a postulate of practical reason, a presupposition of the reality and seriousness of the moral life. Indeed, some who understand him this way believe that Kant was himself a theist, holding that the things in themselves are just things as they appear to God, that is, things as they really are.  


Of course if this way of thinking about Kant is correct, then on his view it is perfectly possible to refer to God; if that is possible, it is also possible to ascribe properties and attributes to him; and if that is possible, then our concepts do, indeed, apply to him. For example, the negative concepts not being in space and time and not being dependent on human beings for...
his existence would thus apply to him. Further, on this understanding of

Kant, such positive concepts as having knowledge and having power would apply to God, as would having created the world. On this understanding, it would be an error to suppose that Kant showed that our concepts can't apply to God—unless one was prepared to hold that Kant showed this but failed to notice that he did, thus mistakenly taking himself to be referring to that to which he himself showed it was not possible to refer. This latter is, of course, a possibility, although it would require an unusually high level of absentmindedness.

Still, the idea that according to Kant our concepts couldn't apply to God is no mere fabrication, no merely thoughtless misunderstanding—or, more exactly, if it is a misunderstanding, it is one with considerable basis in the Kantian text. There is much in the Critique of Pure Reason to suggest this or something like it; at any rate, there is much to suggest that the categories of the understanding, which are concepts of the first importance, do not apply to the things in themselves (and thus not to God). For example:

If, therefore, we should attempt to apply the categories to objects which are not viewed as being appearances, we should have to postulate an intuition other than the sensible, and the object would thus be a noumenon in the positive sense. Since, however, such a type of intuition, intellectual intuition, forms no part whatsoever of our faculty of knowledge, it follows that the employment of the categories can never extend further than to the objects of experience. (A353, B309, Kant's emphasis)

Here and elsewhere, Kant suggests that the categories of the understanding do not apply beyond the realm of appearance, the world of phenomena. (“Suggests,” I say; these passages, like all the others, contain more than a hint of possible ambiguity.) But if those categories do not apply to the noumena, the Ding an sich, then perhaps the same goes for the rest of our concepts. And if our concepts do not apply beyond the world of experience, the world of appearance, then they do not apply to God, who, of course, would be a noumenon in excelsis. So the claim would be that Kant shows or believes (at any rate in the Critique of Pure Reason) that our concepts do not apply to God, in which case we cannot refer to or think about him.

A. Two Worlds or One?

What is to be said for this understanding of Kant? Hermeneutical obstacles of formidable proportions loom. First, how are we to think about this distinction between the noumena and the phenomena, the things in themselves and the things for us? Unfortunately, the commentators are not of one mind. There is a huge interpretative watershed, a continental divide, between two fundamentally different interpretations or basic pictures of what Kant had in mind, each with several variations when it comes to detail. According to the first and

more traditional picture, Kant held that there are two realms of objects, two fundamentally different kinds of things. These are the phenomena, on the one hand, and the noumena, on the other; the things in themselves and the things für uns. (These two distinctions don't exactly coincide in Kant; the ways in which they don't aren't relevant to our present inquiry.) On the one hand, on this picture, there are tables and chairs, horses and cows, stars and planets, the oak tree in your backyard, just as we ordinarily think. These things really exist and are really there. They are phenomenally real, real parts of the world of experience. But they are also transcendentially ideal: that is, they are not part of the world as it is independent of human experience. On the other hand, there are the noumena, which are transcendently real. These are the things as they are in themselves; they do not depend for their existence or character upon human beings or human experience. These two realms are disjoint: none of the phenomenal objects is a noumenon, and none of the noumenal objects is a phenomenon. Here are a couple of passages supporting this interpretation:

Now we must bear in mind that the concept of appearances, as limited by the Transcendental Aesthetic, already of itself establishes the objective reality of noumena and justifies the division of objects into phaenomena and noumena and so of the world into a world of the sense and a world of the understanding (mundus sensibilis et intelligibilis) and indeed in such manner that the distinction does not refer merely to the logical form of our knowledge of one and the same thing, according as it is indistinct or distinct, but to the difference in the manner in which the two worlds can be first given to our knowledge, and in conformity with this difference, to the manner in which they are in themselves generically distinct from one another. (A 249, Kant's emphasis)
Appearances are the sole objects which can be given to us immediately, and that in them which relates immediately to the object is called intuition. Appearances are not things in themselves; they are only representations, which in turn have their object—an object which cannot be intuited by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, transcendental object = x. (A109)

These phenomena are objects, objects that exist in space and time. The noumena, by contrast, are neither temporal nor spatial; space and time are forms of our intuition rather than realities that characterize the things in themselves. Noumena and phenomena, therefore, are distinct.

Still further, we have experience only of the phenomena, not of the noumena:

We have sufficiently proved in the Transcendental Aesthetic that everything intuited in space or time, and therefore all objects of any experience possible to us, are nothing but appearances, that is, mere representations,

Further still, the phenomena, the world of stars and planets, trees and animals, depends on us for existence. The above passage continues:

which in the manner in which they are represented, as extended beings, or as series of alternations have no independent existence outside our thoughts. (A491, B519)

Elsewhere:

That nature should direct itself according to our subject ground of apperception, and should indeed depend upon it in respect of its conformity to law, sounds very strange and absurd. But when we consider that this nature is not a thing in itself but is merely an aggregate of appearances, so many representations of the mind, . . . (A114)

Now to assert in this manner, that all these appearances, and consequently all objects with which we can occupy ourselves, are one and all in me, that is are determinations of my identical self, is only another way of saying that there must be a complete unity of them in one and the same apperception. (A129)

This is the more traditional way of understanding Kant, the way Kant was taken by his great successors. To put it briefly and all too baldly, there are two realms of objects; our experience is only of one realm, the realm of phenomena, which themselves depend on us for their existence; if we should go out of existence, so would they. That is because the phenomenal realm is somehow constructed by us out of the given, the data, the raw material of experience. The noumenal realm, however, is not thus dependent on us but is also such that we have no intuition, no direct experience of it. Finally, there is nevertheless a connection between the two worlds in that something like a causal transaction between the noumena and the transcendental ego (itself a noumenon) produces in us the given out of which we construct the phenomenal world.

Call the above the two-world picture; this has been the dominant interpretation. There has always been another basic interpretation of Kant, however, one that more recently has perhaps achieved majority status. According to this other picture, there really aren’t two worlds after all, a world of phenomena and underlying it another world of noumena. There is only one world and one kind of object, but there are (at least) two ways of thinking about or considering this one world. All objects are really noumenal objects, and talk about the phenomena is just a picturesque way of talking about how the noumena the only things there are, appear to us. The phenomena-noumena distinction is not between two kinds of objects but, rather, between how the things are in themselves and how they appear to us.

So, for example, Graham Bird:

Such phrases [e.g., ‘transcendental objects and empirical objects’] should be understood to refer not to two different kinds of entity, but instead to two different ways of talking about one and the same thing. 15


And Michael Devitt:

It is tempting to equate an appearance with the foundationalist’s sense datum, taking the thing-in-itself as the unknowable external cause of this mental entity. Kant’s writing often encourages this temptation. Nevertheless, scholars seem generally agreed—and have convinced me—that this two-worlds interpretation is wrong. What Kant
intends is the following influential, but rather mysterious, one world view.

An Appearance is not a mental sense datum, but an external object as we know it. In contrast the thing-in-itself is the object independent of our knowledge of it; it is not a second object, and does not, indeed could not, cause an appearance.\(^\text{16}\)


Although this second picture is perhaps now the majority opinion, it seems a bit difficult to reconcile it with Kant's own view that his thought constituted a *revolution*—his famous second Copernican revolution.\(^\text{17}\)

17. "Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But also attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori* by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. We should then be proceeding precisely on the lines of Copernicus' primary hypothesis." (Bxvii)

After all, much of this second picture would be accepted even by such staunch prerevolutionaries as Aristotle and Aquinas. Both would agree that there is or can be a difference between the world (or any less impressive object) as it is in itself and the world as it appears to us; this is to admit no more than that we can be mistaken about the world or things in the world, and of course Aristotle and Aquinas would hardly deny that. Both would agree to something much stronger: that the world might have many properties of which we have no conception, so that our way of thinking about the world, the properties we ascribe to it, are not necessarily all and only the properties it has. For Aquinas or any other theist, this would be close to a truism: God, obviously enough, has many properties we don't know about, and presumably many of which we could not so much as form a conception. The essential elements of the one-world view seem perhaps a bit too uncontroversial, at least with respect to Kant's predecessors, to constitute a revolution, Copernican or otherwise.

According to Merold Westphal:

Finally, all twelve categories insofar as they constitute the world of human experience and are not merely formal features of judgment, are schematized with an essential reference to time. Thus the object and property that would disappear from the world in the absence of human knowers are not object and property per se, but substance and accident as defined by human temporality. Similarly, the truth and falsity that would disappear derive from the categories of reality and negation as essentially linked to our experience of time. Thus we are back to the tautology that in the absence of human cognition the world as apprehended by human minds would disappear.\(^\text{18}\)


That does, indeed, seem to be a tautology, or at least a trivially necessary truth; we could add that in the absence of bovine cognition, the world as apprehended by bovine minds would disappear. But how could Kant think of this as constituting a *revolution*, one according to which objects must conform to our minds (rather than, as previously thought, our minds to objects) if we are to have knowledge? Could a tautology constitute a revolution?

1. **The One-World Picture and Reference to the Noumena**

Our main interest here does not lie in trying to resolve the question of what Kant intended: that is perhaps necessarily beyond our powers. Instead, we are looking to see if there is good reason, either given by Kant or constructible from materials given by him, for the conclusion that our concepts do not apply to God. And how does the difference between these two interpretations of Kant bear on this question? Consider the second picture first, and note that on this picture, if our concepts apply to *anything*, they apply to the *Dinge*, those being the only things there are. Similarly, if we manage to refer to and think about anything at all, we succeed in referring to and thinking about the *Dinge*, because they are all that there is. So how could it be that the categories and our other concepts do not apply to them?
Well, what is it for a concept to apply to something, for something to fall under a concept? Consider the concept being wise. That concept applies to something (a thing falls under that concept) only if that thing is wise, only if, that is, it has the property of being wise. Properties and concepts are thus correlative. I have the concept being wise only if I grasp, apprehend, understand the property being wise. I have the concept being a prime number if and only if I grasp or apprehend the property being a prime number. For each property or attribute of which I have a grasp, I have a concept. Of course there are properties of which I have no concept. Small children often lack the concept of being a philosopher; that is to say, they have no grasp of the property being a philosopher. Large philosophers often lack the concept of being a quark; that is to say, they have no grasp of the property being a quark. No doubt there are properties none of us human beings grasps.

One further familiar fact about properties and concepts: they have negations or complements. There is the property being red; there is also its complement, which, naturally enough, is being unred, not being red. There is the property of being wise but also the property of being unwise, failing to be wise. So if one of my concepts (e.g., being wise) does not apply to a thing, then the complement of that concept (being nonwise, not being wise) does apply to it.

Perhaps you want to point out that this way of putting the matter presupposes that there are negative properties, such properties as being nonred, being unwise, and the like; you might object that in fact there are only positive properties, not negative ones. (You might also object to disjunctive and conjunctive properties.) This is no place to try to settle that issue. Clearly, there is the concept of a thing's failing to be wise (I know what it is for a thing not to be wise), even if there is no negative property nonwisdom. So if you object to negative properties, say that a thing falls under the concept nonwisdom just in case it does not fall under the concept wisdom; more generally, for any property $P$, a thing falls under the concept $P$ if and only if it has the property $P$; it falls under the concept not-$P$ if and only if it does not fall under the concept $P$.

Given this elementary lore about concepts and properties, how could it be that the categories and our other concepts do not apply to the Dingé? Take the categories first—the category of causality, for example. What would it mean to say that this category does not apply to the Dingé? So far as I can see, what this would mean is that the noumena do not stand in causal relations to each other or anything else. Consider the property stands in causal relation to something; if the category of causality does not apply to the noumena, then it must be that none of them has that property. So our concept standing in causal relation to something wouldn't apply to things as they are in themselves. It follows, however, that the complement of that category or concept

would apply to things as they are in themselves: each of them would be such that it does not stand in a causal relation to anything else. The same would go for our other concepts. On this way of thinking of the matter, our 'positive' concepts, you might say, do not apply to things as they are in themselves, which is really to say that there is no positive property we grasp that characterizes a thing as it is in itself. As it stands, however, this needs more work: there are problems about this distinction between positive and negative properties. There are also problems of other sorts: what about such positive properties as being self-identical, for example? Are we to suppose the Dingé are not self-identical?

Well, perhaps these matters can be straightened out. (See chapter 2, p. 48.) For present purposes, what we need to see is that on this way of thinking, it would not really be the case that our concepts fail to apply to God in such a way that we cannot refer to and think about him. What would follow, given that he is a noumenon (of course, in this way of thinking, everything is a noumenon), is that God would not have any of the positive properties of which we have a grasp. It would not be the case that we couldn't refer to God and predicate properties of him: we could perfectly well do so, but we would be mistaken if we predicated of him a positive property of which we have a grasp. Thus we would make a mistake if we said that God is wise, or good, or powerful, or loving. That would be because nothing is wise, good, powerful, loving, and the like. (On the one-world picture, the Dingé are all there is; so if positive properties can't be ascribed to the Dingé, they can't be ascribed to anything.) Here there would be nothing at all special about God; what holds for him also holds for everything else. But those theologians who suggest that Kant showed we cannot refer to and think about God presumably believe that Kant showed there was a special problem about God; they don't think that what Kant really showed is that we can't talk or think about anything. As Kaufman puts it in the passage I quoted above (p. 4), "The central problem of theological discourse, not shared with any other 'language game,' is the meaning of the term 'God.' " So Kant, taken this way, doesn't fill this particular bill; it doesn't give us a relevant way of seeing that our concepts do not apply to God.
2. The Two-World Picture and Reference to the Noumena

Now suppose we consider the other main interpretation of Kant: the two-world picture. This is the more traditional way to understand Kant and still, perhaps, deserves the nod. (Here I am not interested in which picture most accurately represents Kant, but whether Kant, taken any plausible way, gives support to the idea that we cannot refer to and think about God. 19)

19. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the one- and two-world pictures as I present them are the only possible (or actual) interpretations of Kant; clearly, there are various complications and extensions of each. What I claim is that none of them offers aid and comfort to the claim that our concepts do not apply to God.

) On this picture, there are two disjoint realms: phenomena and noumena, the Dinge and the things of experience. To add another quotation:

Accordingly, that which is in space and time is an appearance; it is not anything in itself, but consists merely of representations, which, if not given in us—that is to say, in perception—are nowhere to be met with. (A494, B522)

Now when we think about the application of our concepts to the noumena, we see that this two-world picture divides into two sub-pictures.

(a) The Moderate Subpicture. On the one way of thinking, (some of) our concepts apply to the things in themselves; we can think about them and refer to them, all right, but we can't have any knowledge of them. When we think about them, predicate properties of them, what we have is just speculation, mere transcendental schijn, and we deceive ourselves if we think we have more. Our knowledge doesn't extend beyond experience; hence, it does not extend to the realm of the things in themselves. This would explain that bewildering variety and proliferation of metaphysical views Kant found so shocking. The reason, fundamentally, is really that all the metaphysicians have been just guessing, whatever their pretensions to apodictic conclusions and conclusive certainty. Our reason can't operate in the rarefied atmosphere of the noumena, and the result of trying to do so is a mere beating of wings against the void.

Of course Kant also represents his own work in the Critique of Pure Reason as knowledge and as certain and conclusive. And in that Critique he seems to tell us a fair amount about the Dinge: that they are not in space and time, that the world of experience is (in part) a result of a 'causal transaction’ 20

20. We need the scare quotes because Kant's official view is that the concept of causality doesn't apply to the Dinge.

between the Dinge and the transcendental ego, and that the latter has no intellectual intuition into the former. So the picture isn't wholly coherent. Coherent or not, however, this picture doesn't even suggest that we cannot think about and predicate properties of God. What it suggests, instead, is that when we do, we are not on the sure path of knowledge but on some much more hazardous climber's trail of mere opinion. So the moderate sub-picture, too, gives no aid and comfort to the claim that our concepts do not apply to God.

(b) The Radical Subpicture. There is a more striking version of the two-world picture, however, on which we do get the result that we can neither refer to God nor predicate properties of him (call it 'the radical subpicture'). On both versions of the two-world picture, the appearances are distinct from the things in themselves. The appearances are objects; they exist; they are empirically real. But they are also transcendentially ideal. And what this means, in part, is that they depend for their existence on us (on the transcendental ego[s]) and our cognitive activity. We ourselves are both noumena and phenomena: there is both a noumenal self and an empirical self. The things in themselves somehow impinge on us (taken as transcendental ego), causing experience in us; there is a productive interaction between the transcendental ego and the Dinge (the other Dinge, since the transcendental ego is itself a noumenon), the result of which is experience, the manifold of experience.

As it is initially given to us, this manifold of experience is a blooming, buzzing confusion with no structure. Perhaps it contains among other things what Kant calls 'representations' (Vorstellungen); these are of more than one kind, but among them might be phenomenal qualia, something like sense data, or Humean impressions and ideas. The manifold must be ‘worked up’ (Kant's term) and synthesized by the application of the categories and other concepts. Thus we impose structure and form on it, and in so doing we construct the phenomena, the appearances. So the phenomena, the things für uns, are constructed out of the manifold of experience.
Well, how do we do a thing like that? How do we construct a phenomenon (a horse, let’s say) from the manifold of experience? At this point, the radical subpicture diverges from the more pedestrian version of the two-world picture, for on the radical subpicture, we construct objects by applying concepts (representations, Vorstellungen) to the manifold. The world of appearance gets constructed by virtue of our synthesizing the manifold, which proceeds by way of our applying concepts —both the categories and other concepts—to the manifold. We can’t perceive or in some other way witness this construction; Kant says we are largely unconscious of the activity whereby we structure the manifold and construct the phenomena. Still, it proceeds by way of the application of concepts to the blooming buzzing manifold of experience.

This would require a way of thinking about concepts and their function that is very different from the way of thinking about them I outlined above (a way according to which a concept is fundamentally a grasp of a property). And Kant suggests a different way of thinking of concepts: he sometimes calls them rules. Kant says that the understanding is the faculty of concepts; it is the source of our concepts. But he also says of the understanding, “We may now characterize it as the faculty of rules . . . . Sensibility gives us forms (of intuition) but understanding gives us rules” (A126, Kant’s emphasis). And he goes on to say,

> Rules, so far as they are objective . . . are called laws. Although we learn many laws through experience, they are only special determinations of still higher laws, and the highest of these, under which the others all stand, issue a priori from the understanding itself. They are not borrowed from experience; on the contrary, they have to confer upon appearances their conformity to law, and so to make experience possible. Thus the understanding is something more than a power of formulating rules through comparison of appearances; it is itself the lawgiver of nature. (A127)

I don’t for a moment pretend that this passage or others that could be cited are easy to interpret. Still, the passage does seem to suggest that concepts are rules and rules are laws. What sort of rules and what sort of laws? Perhaps they are rules for synthesizing the manifold, rules for constructing the phenomena. This is the heart of the radical sub-picture. Again, I don’t mean to suggest that this is Kant’s view, but some of what he says suggests it. (Some of what he says also suggests that it is false; that is part of his charm.) For example: “What is first given to us is appearance. When combined with consciousness, it is called perception. . . .”

Interpretative difficulties abound; the basic idea, however, is that concepts are rules, rules for the synthesis of the manifold and the construction of phenomena. (They are also laws, laws whereby the phenomena are constructed from the manifold of experience.) These rules apply to portions or bits of experience and, by way of their application, the phenomena are constructed. A rule of this sort perhaps specifies that certain portions of the manifold are to be combined or ‘thought together’ as an object. So, for example, consider your concept of a horse: it instructs you to associate, think together a variety of representations, a variety of items of experience, thus unifying that bit of the manifold into an empirical object: a horse. It is a rule which would say something like: think that particular congeries of representations together as a unity.

Now again, I don’t mean to claim that this is a coherent picture or a coherent way of thinking about concepts; on the contrary, I believe that it is not. But note that if it is coherent, then (at least if all of our concepts have this function) any concepts which are rules for judgments of any sort, whether limited to items of experience or not, and only this function) our concepts will not apply to the noumena. Consider the concept being a horse.

Understood this way, this concept is a rule for constructing phenomenal objects out of the manifold of experience. Of course it does not apply to the noumena: it cannot be used to construct an object out of them; they are not given to us (experience, the manifold, is what is given to us), and in any event they aren’t the sorts of things out of which phenomenal objects could be constructed. So it isn’t just that the concept being a horse does not apply to the Dingé in the sense that none of them, as it happens, is a horse (all are nonhorses), for then the complement of that concept—being a nonhorse—would apply. But that concept doesn’t apply either: it, too, is a rule for constructing objects from the manifold. It is another way of unifying, synthesizing the manifold. So thought of, a concept could no more apply to the Dingé than a horse could be a number.

On the radical subpicture, therefore, our concepts surely wouldn’t apply to God, if there were such a person. For God would be a noumenon. God would not be something we have constructed by applying concepts to the manifold of experience (God has created us; we have not constructed him.) So, on the radical subpicture, we can’t refer to, think about, or predicate properties of God.
This way of thinking clearly displays a deep incoherence: on this picture, Kant holds that the Dinge stand in a causal or interactive relationship with us, taken as transcendental ego(s); 22

22. How many of those transcendental egos are there, anyway? Like many questions of Kantian exegesis, this question is vexed. Indeed, on the radical subpicture, it is more than vexed. If the category of number doesn't apply to the noumena, then there is presumably no number n, finite or infinite, such that the right answer to the question “How many of those transcendental egos are there?” is n.

and he also says that they are not in space and time. But on the radical subpicture, Kant (at least if his intellectual equipment is like that of the rest of us) should not be able to refer to the Dinge at all, or even speculate that there might be such things.

He certainly shouldn't be able to refer to them and attribute to them the properties of being atemporal and aspatial, or the property of affecting the transcendental ego(s), thereby producing experience in them. He shouldn't be able to refer to us (i.e., us transcendental egos), claiming that we don't have the sort of godlike intellectual intuition into reality that would be required if we were to have synthetic a priori knowledge of the world as it is in itself. (On this picture, we might say, Kant's thought founders on the fact that the picture requires that he have knowledge the picture denies him.) If this picture were really correct, the noumena would have to drop out altogether, so that all that there is what has been structured or made by us. The idea that there might be reality beyond what we ourselves have constructed out of experience would not be so much as thinkable. 23

23. In addition, of course, there is the problem that it takes a great deal of effort to believe that we are really responsible for the existence of sun, moon, and stars, not to mention dinosaurs and other things, that (as we think) existed long before there were any human beings.

B. Arguments or Reasons?

Clearly, there are problems of coherence here. Suppose we ignore them for the moment: what kinds of reasons does Kant give for the contention that we can't think about, refer to, predicate properties of the Dinge? Or, if he gives no such reasons (perhaps because he thinks we can think about them), what sorts of reasons or arguments does his work suggest for that conclusion? This conclusion—that our concepts are really rules for synthesizing the manifold into phenomenal objects and that the only things we can think about are objects we ourselves have somehow constructed—is, to say the least, rather startling. Some pretty powerful arguments would be required.

Argument for this view is distressingly scarce. It is extremely difficult to find much that could pass muster as an argument, or even as one of those “considerations determining the intellect” John Stuart Mill sometimes gave when, as he conceded, he didn't have an argument. There is nothing here like the ontological or cosmological arguments for the existence of God, or Descartes’ argument that a person is not identical with her body (but is, instead, an immaterial substance), or the argument for the conclusion that propositions, the things we believe and assert, are not contingent objects. 24

24. See my Warrant and Proper Function (WPF), pp. 117ff.

Perhaps one must think of the radical subpicture as a sort of hypothesis proposed as best explaining certain phenomena. More likely, those who urge it are simply overwhelmed by what they see as its sheer intellectual beauty and power; they don't feel the need of argument. Indeed, they find the picture so dazzling they are willing to put up with a strong dose of incoherence in addition to absence of argument. Well, if you find the radical subpicture overwhelmingly attractive, then (incoherence aside) I guess you'll have to go with it. Then again, that doesn't constitute much of a reason for the rest of us—those of us more impressed by the incoherence of the picture than its beauty—to accept it.

There is, however, a set of Kantian considerations that some might see as taking us partway to the conclusion. These are to be found in what he says about the antinomies: allegedly powerful arguments on both sides of a given question. Thus there is an allegedly compelling antinomical argument for the thesis that the world had a beginning in time, but an equally compelling argument for the antithesis that it did not. In the same way, there are compelling arguments for the theses that the world is composed of simples, that there is such a thing as agent causation (where an agent cause is a being that freely originates a new causal series), and that there is an absolutely necessary being; sadly enough, however, there are equally compelling arguments for the antitheses that the world is not composed of simples, that there is no such thing as agent causation, and that there is no absolutely necessary being. Here
we seem to be in a nasty fix; we can prove four (everything in the Critique comes in fours) important theses, and for each of these four, we can also prove its denial.

Now Kant apparently intends these antinomies to constitute an essential part of the argument for his transcendental idealism, the doctrine that the things we deal with (stars and planets, trees, animals and other people) are transcendently ideal (depend upon us for their reality and structure), even if empirically real. We fall into the problem posed by the antinomies, says Kant, only because we take ourselves to be thinking about things in themselves as opposed to the things for us, noumena as opposed to mere appearances:

If in employing the principles of understanding we do not merely apply our reason to objects of experience, but venture to extend these principles beyond the limits of experience, there arise pseudo-rational doctrines which can neither hope for confirmation in experience nor fear refutation by it. Each of them is not only in itself free from contradiction, but finds conditions of its necessity in the very nature of reason—only that, unfortunately, the assertion of the opposite has, on its side, grounds that are just as valid and necessary (A421, B449)

We solve the problem by recognizing our limitations, realizing that we can't think, or can't think to any good purpose, about the Dinge.

In presenting the antinomies, Kant does not explicitly argue for the radical subpicture. But suppose we try to find something like an argument there, either for the radical subpicture or for the conclusion we have been deriving from the radical subpicture, the conclusion that our concepts do not apply to the noumena, so that we cannot refer to and think about them. Perhaps the premises would be:

(2) If we are able to think about and refer to the Dinge, then the premises of the antinomical arguments (the premises of the arguments for the theses and for the antitheses) are about the Dinge and are all true, and

(3) If those premises are all true, then the theses and antitheses would all be true, so that contradictions would be true.

Naturally enough, however,

(4) No contradictions are true.

Therefore:

(5) We cannot think about or refer to the Dinge.

We could perhaps weaken the first premise (2) to make it a bit more plausible:

(2*) If we can refer to and think about the Dinge, then each of the premises of the antinomical arguments will be about the Dinge and have overwhelming intuitive support.

(This is weaker, of course, because it says, not that the antinomical premises are true, if we can think about the Dinge, but that they strongly seem true to us.)

The second premise would then be:

(3*) If each of the premises has overwhelming intuitive support, we will have overwhelming reason to accept each of the theses and antitheses, and we see that each thesis is contradicted by its antithesis.

If, however, we weaken the first premise, we must strengthen one of the other two. Perhaps we could strengthen the third as follows:

(4*) It couldn't be that we should have overwhelming reason to accept a proposition p and also its contradictory not-p. And the conclusion would be as before.

Is it really true that (as (4*) claims) we couldn't have overwhelming reason to accept both a proposition p and also its denial not-p? 25

25. It seems we could have good reason to accept each member of a set S of beliefs such that there is no possible world in which all the members of S are true (the conjunction of the members of S is impossible), as is shown by the paradox of the preface. I write a book, of course believing every proposition asserted therein. Past experience and self-knowledge, however, lead me to think that very likely the book contains at least one false statement. (All of my previous books, as I've discovered to my sorrow, contain false statements.) In the preface, therefore, I sadly concede that at least one statement in the book is false. The total set of my beliefs, therefore—the statements in the book plus the statement that at least one statement in the book is false—is such that it must contain at least one falsehood; nevertheless, I have good reason to accept each member.

This would be an interesting inquiry but would take us too far afield; in any event, it isn't necessary for our present purposes, for there are at least two impressive problems with these arguments, one debilitating and the other fatal. I shall briefly outline
the first and then look into the second in more detail. The first, the debilitating objection, is that even if we are not able to think of the noumena, we can think of the phenomena; and if the first premises of these arguments are true for the noumena, what is to prevent their being true for the phenomena

as well? The two versions of the first premise ((2) and (2*)) of the argument claim the following: if it is true that we can think about the noumena, then the antinomical premises are about the noumena and either are true or have overwhelming intuitive support. Isn’t it equally apparent that if we can think about the phenomena, then the antinomical premises are about the phenomena and are either true or have overwhelming support? If so, however, the argument would also prove that we can’t refer to the appearances. What it would really prove, then, if it proved anything, is that we can’t refer to or think about either noumena or phenomena. Because noumena and phenomena are all the things there are, the conclusion would be that we can’t think about anything; and that seems a bit strong.

Much more should be said about this objection to the argument, but I want to turn to the fatal objection. That is just that the antinomical arguments are not, to put the best face on it, at all compelling. Here I will argue this only for the premises of the first antinomy; exactly similar comments would apply to the others. In the first antinomy, there is an argument for the conclusion that “The world had a beginning in time and is also limited as regards space” (A 426, B454); this is the thesis. There is also an argument for the antithesis: “The world has no beginning, and no limits in space; it is infinite as regards both time and space” (A426, B454). And the idea (in accordance with premises (2) and (2*)) is that if we can think about and refer to the Dinge, then both of these would be true or would have overwhelming intuitive support.

Well, what is the argument? I am sorry to say it is hard to take seriously. The argument for the thesis goes as follows:

If we assume that the world had no beginning in time, then up to every given moment an eternity has elapsed, and there has passed away in the world an infinite series of successive states of things. Now the infinity of a series consists in the fact that it can never be completed through successive synthesis. It thus follows that it is impossible for an infinite world-series to have passed away, and that a beginning of the world is therefore a necessary condition of the world’s existence. (A426, B454)

This argument proceeds by reductio ad absurdum: show that the denial of your conclusion leads to a contradiction, thereby proving your conclusion. The first premise is that if the world had no beginning in time, then at any point in time an infinite stretch of time would already have elapsed. This is dubious because it is at least abstractly possible that time and the world began together, some finitely many years (or seconds) ago. If so, then we should say that the world didn’t have a beginning in time, although it did have a beginning with time. But let that pass. According to the second premise, “the infinity of a series consists in the fact that it can never be completed through successive synthesis”; that is, it is characteristic of an infinite series that

it can’t be completed by starting from the beginning (or, more generally, some point only finitely far from the beginning) and adding things (events, say) one at a time (or more generally, finitely many at a time). This is true, provided the things (events) in question are added at a constant rate. If you start with the first event (or the nth, for some finite n) and add another event every second, you will never complete the series: at any subsequent time only a finite number of events will have occurred. According to current lore about the infinite, however, there is no bar of this kind to completing the infinite series in a finite time if the time taken for each event diminishes appropriately. For example, the first event takes one second to happen; the second event takes half a second; the third a quarter, the fourth an eighth of a second, and so on. At that rate, it won’t take long at all for an infinite number of events to have elapsed—only a couple of seconds.

But the real problem with the argument lies in a different direction. Kant points out that an infinite series can’t be completed by starting from some point finitely far from the beginning and adding members finitely many at a time at a constant rate; fair enough. He then concludes, “It thus follows that it is impossible for an infinite world-series to have passed away, and that a beginning of the world is therefore a necessary condition of the world’s existence.” This doesn’t follow at all. To claim that it does is to claim just what is to be proved: that the series in question had a beginning. The premise tells us that if you start from some finite point in a series—that is, some point finitely far from the beginning of the series—and add a finite number per unit time, then you will never complete the series. Fair enough; but if the world has existed for an infinite stretch of time, then there was no first moment, no first event, and no beginning either to the series of moments or the series of events; more generally, at any preceding moment an infinite time would already have elapsed. To conclude, as Kant does, that it is impossible that an infinite series of events has occurred is just to assume that the series in question had a beginning—that is,
is finite—but that is precisely what was to be proved. So the argument really has no force at all. It is not as if it is an argument the premises of which have a certain limited amount of intuitive plausibility; it is rather that this transition to the conclusion completely begs the question by assuming what was to be proved: that the series in question has a beginning. The argument therefore fails to establish its conclusion; it merely assumes it. It therefore gives us no reason at all for accepting that conclusion.

The argument for the antithesis is no more promising. Here is how Kant puts it:

Let us assume that it [the world] had a beginning. Since the beginning is an existence which is preceded by a time in which the thing is not, there must have been a preceding time in which the world

end p.25

was not, i.e., an empty time. Now no coming to be of a thing is possible in an empty time, because no part of such a time possesses, as compared with any other, a distinguishing condition of existence rather than nonexistence. . . .

(A427, B455)

Again, the argument is by *reductio*: assume the denial of your conclusion and show that it is impossible, thereby establishing the conclusion. Here the two premises are

(6) The beginning of an event or a thing is always preceded by a time in which the thing is not, that is, a time at which the thing in question does not exist.

and

(7) In an empty time (a time at which nothing exists) nothing could come to be, because there would be no more reason for it to come to be at one part of that empty time than at any other part of it.

Neither premise is at all compelling. As to the first, this is true only if it is not possible that time and the world (the first event) should come into existence *together, simultaneously*. Is it known that this isn't possible? Certainly not. Indeed, some of the most popular theories of time (relational theories) would assume, not merely that this is *possible*, but that it is *true*.

As for the second premise, it is equally unpromising. Suppose (in accord with the picture governing the argument) an infinity of time had elapsed before the first event of the world took place—before its creation, say. The objection is that there would have been no more reason for God to create the world at one moment than at any other; hence he wouldn't or couldn't have created it at any moment at all. Again, why believe this? If God proposed to create the world, and no time was more propitious than any other, why couldn't he just arbitrarily *select* a time? 26


This argument is like those arguments that start from the premise that God, if he created the world, would have created the best world he could have; they go on to add that for every world God could have created (weakly actualized, 27


say) there is an even better world he could have created or weakly actualized; therefore, they conclude, he wouldn't

end p.26

have weakly actualized any world at all, and the actual world has not been weakly actualized by God. Again, there seems no reason to believe the first premise. If there were only *finitely* many worlds among which God was obliged to choose, then perhaps he would have been obliged, somehow, to choose the best (although even this is at best dubious). 28


But if there is no best world at all among those he could have chosen (if for every world he could have chosen, there is a better world he could have chosen), why think a world's failing to be the best is sufficient for God's being unable to actualize it? Suppose a man had the benefit of immortality and had a bottle of wine that would improve every day, no matter how long he waits to drink it. Would he be rationally obliged never to drink it, on the grounds that for any time he might be tempted to, it would be better yet the next day? Suppose a donkey were stranded exactly midway
between two bales of hay: would it be rationally obliged to stay there and starve to death because there is no more reason to move to the one bale than to the other?

The arguments for the other antinomies don't fare any better. In no case is there anything like a conclusive argument (given the assumption that we are thinking about the Ding) for either the thesis or the antithesis. In some cases, we may not know or be able to tell which (thesis or antithesis) is true: but that doesn't constitute much of an argument for the conclusion that we can't think about the noumena. What would be needed for the argument to work would be a really powerful argument for the thesis and an equally powerful argument for the antithesis. In none of these cases do we have something like that.

Suppose we think a bit further about antinomies and paradoxes in connection with this question of concluding that we simply can't think about a given area or topic. Consider the Russell paradoxes, in their simple set-theoretical guise. Like Frege, we are all initially inclined to think that for every condition or property, there exists the set of just those things that meet the condition or have the property. It is pointed out that there is such a property as \textit{being non-self-membered}, the property a thing has just if it is not a member of itself; hence there must be a set \( S \) of non-self-membered sets, but then \( S \) is a member of itself if and only if it is not a member of itself, which is a contradiction.

Here it would be unduly enthusiastic to conclude that we can't really think and talk about sets as they are in themselves and can instead think only about sets that we have ourselves constructed, sets as they appear to us. One takes the argument as proving only that there is no set of non-self-membered sets and that, contrary to appearances, it is not true that for every property or condition, there exists the set of just those things satisfying the condition or displaying the property.

Take, instead, the Russell paradox as specified to properties, rather than sets; in some ways, this is a more serious paradox. One is initially inclined to think that there are properties, that some properties (for example, the property of being a property) exemplify themselves, so that there is such a property as \textit{self-exemplification}, and that every property has a complement. These together lead to trouble: they imply that there is such a property as \textit{non-self-exemplification}, which inconsistently both does and doesn't exemplify itself.

29. If you balk at such properties as \textit{self-exemplification} and \textit{non-self-exemplification}, conduct the argument instead in terms of \textit{conditions}; see Tomberlin and van Inwagen, Alvin Plantinga, p. 320.

Once again, however, it hardly seems to follow that we simply can't think and talk about properties \textit{an sich}. We needn't hold that if we can think about properties \textit{an sich}, then there is a property that both does and doesn't exemplify itself. We can quite properly conclude, instead, that one of the group of propositions we are initially inclined to accept must be false, and we look for the one with the least intuitive warrant or support, the one we are least strongly inclined to believe. (We might be inclinded to think, for example, that there really isn't such a property as \textit{non-self-exemplification} [even though it seems as if there is] so that either there is no such property as \textit{self-exemplification}, or it is false that every property has a complement.) This is mildly disquieting, and gives us reason for a bit of humility with respect to the deliverances of reason, but we certainly aren't forced into the position of holding that we can't refer to and think about properties \textit{an sich}.

In what conditions \textit{would} this drastic conclusion be right? Perhaps in none at all, and if in some, it is hard to say which. At the least, however, it would involve our being very strongly inclined to accept each member of a set of propositions about some subject matter, which set (by argument forms we are very strongly inclined to accept) entails a contradiction. It would also involve there being several such sets of propositions about the subject matter in question. Each of the premises and arguments involved would have to have very powerful, maximal or near maximal intuitive support; otherwise, we would more reasonably hold that a premise (or argument form) with only moderate intuitive support is false (or invalid). If there were several such sets of propositions—about properties, say—and each of these propositions and argument forms had the degree of intuitive support enjoyed by, say, \( 2 + 1 = 3 \) and \textit{modus ponens}, then perhaps the right conclusion to draw would be that either there simply aren't any such things as the objects in the alleged realm, or that if there are, we are incapable of thinking about them.

Even here, however, there would be reason to doubt the success of the argument. It would involve as a premise something like:

(8) If there are several sets of premises about properties, each member of each set having maximal intuitive warrant, and the members of each set together entail a contradiction, then we cannot refer to and think about properties \textit{an sich}. 
The next premise would be the antecedent of (8), and the conclusion would be the consequent of (8)—that is, the proposition that we cannot refer to and think about properties an sich. But if that conclusion were true, how could we grasp (8), the first premise? That premise seems to be, among other things, about properties an sich, and if we grasp it, we are able to think about properties an sich. The argument appears to be self-referentially self-refuting: if it is a successful argument, its first premise is both about noumena and such that we can grasp it, in which case that premise must be false.

The sensible Kantian conclusion, so it seems to me, is that if, indeed, we can refer to and think about the Dingē, reason alone doesn't tell us such things as whether the world had a beginning in time or whether there are simple substances. It seems more likely than not, perhaps, that there are simple substances and that there are free agents who initiate new causal chains in the world, but the negations of these propositions are not demonstrably mistaken. Most certainly, it is not the case that both these propositions and their denials are demonstrable, so that each is both demonstrably true and, furthermore, demonstrably false.

We must also recall that the whole scheme, the whole radical sub-picture, seems incoherent in a familiar way. One who states and proposes this scheme makes several claims about the Dingē: that they are not in space and time, for example, and more poignantly, that our concepts don't apply to them (applying only to the phenomena), so that we cannot refer to or think about them. But if we really can't think the Dingē, then we can't think them (and can't whistle them either); if we can't think about them, we can't so much as entertain the thought that there are such things. The incoherence is patent.

Would it be possible to induce coherence by refusing to make the distinction between phenomena and noumena, speaking only of what, if we did make that distinction, would be the phenomena, and claiming that whatever there is, is either a bit of experience or an object constructed by us from bits of experience by way of concepts (i.e., rules for constructing things from experience)? That is extremely hard to believe: are the stars, for example, which, as far as we can tell, existed long before we did, either bits of human experience or objects constructed by us from bits of human experience? How are we supposed to make sense of that? On this view, furthermore, the objection to Christian belief would not be that serious Christians improperly take it that they can refer to God; the objection would be that there is no God. If there were such a person, he certainly wouldn't be either a bit of human experience or something we have constructed from it. Still further, on this picture we ourselves (because we are among the things there are) would either have constructed ourselves from bits of experience or we would just be bits of experience; but of course we couldn't have constructed ourselves before we existed, so we must have started off, at least, as bits of experience with the power to construct things. Not a pretty picture. And even if we could somehow induce coherence here, why should we feel obliged to believe it? What possible claim could such a bizarre scheme have on us?

By way of conclusion then: it doesn't look as if there is good reason in Kant or in the neighborhood of Kant for the conclusion that our concepts do not apply to God, so that we cannot think about him. Contemporary theologians and others sometimes complain that contemporary philosophers of religion often write as if they have never read their Kant. Perhaps the reason they write that way, however, is not that they have never read their Kant but rather that they have read him and remain unconvinced. They may be unconvinced that Kant actually claimed that our concepts do not apply to God. Alternatively, they may concede that Kant did claim this, but remain unconvinced that he was right; after all, it is not just a given of the intellectual life that Kant is right. Either way, they don't think Kant gives us reason to hold that we cannot think about God.
The problem statement identifies the current state, the desired future state and any gaps between the two. A problem statement is an important communication tool that can help ensure everyone working on a project knows what the problem they need to address is and why the project is important. Related: Problem-Solving Skills: Definitions and Examples. Importance of a problem statement. A problem statement is important to a process improvement project because it helps clearly identify the goals of the project and outline the scope of a project. It also helps guide the activities and decisions of Tiffany knew what the problem was immediately. She'd seen it before, at birthday parties. Her brother was suffering from tragic sweet deprivation. Yes, he was our work while the technicians figured out what the was and solved it. When a similar failure happened a few months later, we did the same thing. How did you decide what problem was asking you to find? (What was unknown?) work? Would it ever work? Why or why not? What is the same and what is Jul 27, 2015 and explaining the problem to people in forums seemed impossibly abstract, primarily because I did What is it that's proving to be problematic or difficult? A: “Yes, hello, what's the problem?” B: “Sorry to disturb you at this hour, ma'am, but the reactor is reaching critical status.” 2. Used rhetorically to imply that the issue brought up by the other person is not actually problematic. A: “You do know that this move will alienate some of our customer base, right?” B: “And? What's the problem? Any business we lose from old customers will be made up for tenfold in the expansion.” Farlex Dictionary of Idioms. Â© 2015 Farlex, Inc, all rights reserved. What's the problem? 1. Lit. What problem a The problem is that each player's use indirectly interferes with the other's use and that some arrangement is necessary to reconcile both uses. From the Cambridge English Corpus. More examples Fewer examples. Coordination problems abound, and their solutions are facilitated when players have the ability to quickly acquire expectations about fellow players' behavior. The zero plural avoids the problem of having two sibilants in quick succession at the end of the words, and coincidentally maintains the classical tradition. From the Cambridge English Corpus. In particular, problems of coexistence and exclusion of competing species have been theoretically investigated using models based on partial and ordinary differential equations. From the Cambridge English Corpus. The problem is that there are too many people in one room. Statement form: | The problem -- is | (what?) Direct question: What | is --- the problem? Indirect question (embedded): I don't know what | the problem -- is. Jenny is singing. Who is singing?Â Pter What is the matter with is particularly problematic because we don't usually use the statement form. I am still thinking about what the statement form should be. the matter used to mean wrong has a highly idiosyncratic grammar. Besides the question form, only a few statement forms are often used, and these almost exclusively with the indefinite pronouns show below.