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KANT AND JOB'S COMFORTERS: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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If Ann Loades' *Kant and Job's Comforters* (Avero, 1985) is rather picaresque in its historical approach to Kant's theodicy, the attempt to articulate the compatibility between the God of theistic faith and the problem of radical evil, it is perhaps because there is today no direct route from the 18th century through our darkening time to orthodox faith. The reason for this lies in Kant.

Dr Loades tells us that Kant, who has as much to do as any with the shape of our contemporary culture, "offered his 'authentic theodicy' to put a stop, once and for all, to activities of that kind". In understanding the last journey for us, he uprooted all the outer, orienting signs which might point out the justifying prevalence of goodness that had been set out for us in sacrament and ecclesiastical polity, in scripture and reason, in historic faith and mystical transcendence. Nothing remains that might manifest God's presence and his redemptive love. Instead, Kant taught us that only in the autonomous and sovereign privacy of inner sense, as readers of the figurations of the transcendent in acting for the sake of duty, could we hope to be cartographers of the spiritual landscape. "I have therefore," he said, "found it necessary to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*" (Bxxx).

This is all very well and good, for faith has always been a concern of the inner man, except that now by Kant's own critical doctrine the introspective self is never in anything like a certain and immediate presence to itself (B68; B133). The Aristotelian moral agent had always been a part of the "visible" world; but now what makes an action is its motive: did I really act out of respect for the law, or did I conform to the law on other, heteronomous grounds? One's moral motives are always stripped away and self-respect undermined by the explanatory and reductive levelings of an empirical psychology; self-scrutiny is reduced to the Skinnerian dimensions of a blatantly mechanistic materialism. The inner life is ordered, neither by wisdom, the pursuit of a communal goodness and beauty, nor by the love of God, but rather by illusions of autonomy come to grief among fictions of matter (B274-79). This geographer of the horizons of human experience (A758/B786-A760/B788), as he styled himself, is a sure guide to the abyss.

Now that public world seems almost a wasteland, as if the forces of a new and altogether maniacal subjectivity, first summoned by Kant's call to freedom in the pursuit of moral purity, had unleashed instead the licences of a hundred years' war. Of course this good little man would have cared, but who besides Kierkegaard in *Either/Or* seems to have noticed and seen the point? Who today really bothers much about evil, much less about its origin? What else can one expect; after Feuerbach, who is really very much interested in God? The Eucharistic sacrifice is all but forgotten by the crowd celebrating life. The common effort to speak sensibly of God, the final fruit of philosophy, the loving striving to be wise that is expressed in those saints who have tried to live God's own life of mind (*Nous*) and speak his word, Aquinas, Augustine, Origen, Scotus, Leibniz, Hegel, and our own Austin Farrer, the purest and most unsullied accomplishment of our civilization, is almost totally abandoned. The priests, having mastered the hedonics of our folk religion, have become psychologists.

The shape of Dr Loades' text reflects our condition; one finds as in life a series of tableaux, each intensely interesting, but what do they come to? First there is a wealth of historical detail chronicling the political, educational and religious history of Kant and his family, Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), and then East Prussia. Kant's ancestors, like everyone else in a Baltic buffer city then and now, seem to have been among the many sober and industrious people cast there by deep and ill-defined historical movements. Most were victims of religious and dynastic warfare, refugees from religious and political persecution, denied again and again a sheltering place by history. Nothing about Kant in English tells us so much that we might want to know about this past that brought him into our presence. Why would we expect this first among the displaced to delineate an historical and public landscape? He sought to show us a way to self-respect and to dignity within the labyrinth of the self – and delivered us over to nihilism and other physical monstrosities.

Though from his very beginnings his country was almost always at war and for a time, as now, occupied by Russian troops, Kant was concerned with an optimistic theodicy in the grand manner of a Leibniz. In such conditions one might well be prompted to look beyond Königsberg to the cosmos and its origins in a wise and beneficent (and more or less deistic) God. With this sublime and yet vaguely personal image of order and unity before one, could one not follow the downward way Diotema laid out for Socrates from God through the "science of order everywhere" to the dream of a time when men would "step from the lawless condition of savages into a league of nations"? Dr Loades does well to remind us that even in the great *Universal Natural History* which set out his nebular hypothesis on "Newtonian principles", Kant seemed rather more concerned with God than with physics. Dr Loades is on target when she suggests that his pre-critical physico-theology was on the whole a continuation of Leibniz's theodicy.

A stunning account of the birth of an optimistic, ecumenical, and morally and intellectually robust Christianity in the *Theodicy* of Leibniz that survived until early in this century opens the third of Dr Loades' tableaux. Kant may have dreamed of a League of Nations. Leibniz dreamed of irenic ecumenism at every level of institutional and intellectual life – and acted. He said he never read anything he thought was totally nonsense. He respected reason and its unifying power, and lived to the end of philosophical, religious, and political reconciliation. It is hard to imagine that this sublime human self-confidence and socially responsible vision was an issue of the late, high German Gothic, of Luther, and of the 100 Years War. With Leibniz our modern Christian era reached its apogee. Dr Loades sent me back to Leibniz and his *Theodicy*, and while as I reread it I experienced again a profound and immeasurable loss, I still cannot believe any of it. Given August 1914, the death of out liberal eschatology, and its aftermath, what else can one expect?

If the *Theodicy* was a popular success, Voltaire and the wits surrounding him took Leibniz for a fool. Rousseau resisted. He was sustained by the optimism "in his own sufferings and griefs" and, Dr Loades tells us, "Voltaire shattered his hope and thereby reduced him to despair".

We all know the deep attachment Kant felt for Rousseau through *Emile*, while with his *Savoyard Vicar* Kant "pondered the fate of mortals, adrift on a sea of human opinions without compass or rudder, and abandoned to their stormy passions with no guide but an inexperienced pilot". Kant responded by giving us a world in which we could navigate with confidence, the world of possible experience. Its map lay, not in reason as God's equitable distribution of good sense that enables us to distinguish the true from the false, but rather in a rule of reason that unconditionally commanded what all could understand, be truthful. Was the Critique, like Hume's *Treatise*, written to establish a moral point of view? Just as Hume was required to eliminate the mechanisms of self-interest by an epistemology founded on feelings, i.e. lively ideas accompanying present impressions, equally the basis of the moral life, so Kant may have been concerned to eliminate the metaphysical order grounding human knowledge in eternal presences to leave room for the moral self-experience required by faith. Faith can proclaim the goodness of God. Theodicy had failed to make that reasonable. Isn't this in effect what Kant said he was up to? Dr Loades suggests by her treatment that we should take him seriously.

There is no great mystery surrounding Kant's elimination of theodicy. In order to have a theodicy, one first has to have a cosmos and then be able to discover why among its possible arrangements its good, wise, and powerful author brought this one to be and saw that it was good. How is this God related to the cosmos? Even if he is a being who created the cosmos, is he a being distinguishable from other beings, e.g. by a variety of exemplary predicates? To have a totality, we must have a being or beings to whom and for whom it is a totality. Eliade reminds us that all archaic myth is cosmogonic, where god(s) are distinctions within the world. Gods and worlds are correlatives. With the failure of that relation, Kant made the structural possibilities of any knowable world the correlative of the self. Quite simply and for all the wrong reasons, Kant eliminated that concept of God as correlative with world.

The Copernican Revolution in philosophy was concerned to cut Leibniz and his actual infinites down to size by means of a finitistic constructivism. As early as 1761 Kant had expressed doubt in the validity of the ontological argument and long before 1781 had decided that "existence is not a real predicate". The consequences were slow to dawn; and yet without access to God, there could be no physico-theology, and no theodicy. Possible experience had to replace possible worlds. By these synthetic methods of original presencing, one had to generate space and time (A143/B182) as the condition for the self-affective experience of objects (B68), objects of our own making (Bxvii). The possibility put to Herz on 21st February, 1772, of an "intuition that should itself be the ground of things" became the synthetic method of the first Critique. So baldly stated, isn't it clear that this new world of possible experience that turns out to be explicable only in a mechanistic materialism has no place for either good or evil? Since the transcendental self to whom this world is given as its correlative transcends any complete determination by this empirical manifold, then it can imagine its self-determination by laws entailing its freedom that it obeys through respect. These laws express the freedom of the divine will in the form of obligations for a community of the blessed who in the disinterested pursuit of universal duty may have made themselves worthy of happiness, etc. Evil lies in evil wills. This is not exactly the terrain for a theodicy, is it? Dr Loades is content to let matters rest with Kant's moral insights. I should like to add a more speculative conclusion.

By preventing inferences to a constitutively transcendent being as ground, Kant eliminated the possibility of our traditional metaphysics. These inferences presumed the classical status of God as a being among beings, even if creator and incommensurable with them. But this confused our God with Aristotle's. Philosophers, if not theologians, have continued to treat God as if he were a (infinite) being and to justify the apparent incongruities entailed in predicating a same, e.g. good, of both an infinite and finite term. What analogy has been able to cover over with its "attributions", "inequalities", and "proper proportions" was what was unique to our theistic faith, first clearly captured and expressed by what St Anselm said must exist in the understanding, a being greater than which none greater may be conceived. Whether or not the ontological argument is valid – and until help came from the modal logicians I felt rather stupid in arguing that it was – did we bother to listen to what it had to say? In the most important of recent theological studies, Fr Robert Sokolowski's *The God of Faith and Reason* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), we have been made to stop and listen. God, than whom nothing greater can be conceived, is not greater by the addition of a world, even by the addition of you and me. God and the world is not greater than God alone. God is not a feature in being, however pre-eminent. The old comparisons do not work. The goodness of God, who is wholly God before anything was, is not the goodness of a distinction between good and evil in the world. It is the goodness that gives being as a gift, not a neo-Platonic goodness that overflows in its sheer fecundity. It is by God that such distinctions are disclosed as possible. To borrow a theme from Kant's Paralogisms, that which is the condition for every condition and the origin of every conditioned is not among the conditioned or conditions. By him all things are. God is also truth and light, that whereby there is being to stand forth in distinction and unconcealment, *alētheia*. What Plato discerned of the good, that is beyond Being and Truth and yet is their cause, is close to the Christian understanding. But this cause is not wholly apart from the world. Not so for our God. Theodicy promises to be possible again on these new and satisfying foundations.

Kant, after all, taught us to be oblivious to landscapes. He did admire the design in wallpaper. Did he not forsake the deistic theme of an integrated and ordered universe for that of the interior journey, the labyrinth that after two centuries still awaits its Theseus, if not its Socrates. Be sure that none will step forward to demolish the beast at its centre. Nothing can so domesticate the labyrinth of subjectivity as to enable us safely to play hide and seek among its passages. It is better to avoid such artefacts of metaphysics. But in all this playing about we have been learning to back away; and in the process of what is by now a retreat from Cartesianism, have we not been able to recover – and not without Kant's perhaps unintended assistance – through the new interpretative possibilities of hermeneutics the glory of our tradition? Landscapes can be fashionable again. We can walk in the sun. Theodicy is possible. Those desiring to undertake it would do well to read Ann Loades' stimulating and informative *Kant and Job's Comforters*.