

Immortality of the soul and God as postulates of pure practical reason (from *Critique of Practical Reason*)

Argument for immortality of soul (134-135)

1. As moral beings, the moral law requires us to will the highest good
2. The “perfect accordance” of the mind/will with the moral law is a condition of the highest good. [the perfect accordance seems to be that the moral agent always acts according to and out of respect for the moral law and cannot be deterred from such action, i.e. the agent always acts from a good will.]
3. Therefore we must will that accordance.
4. However, that accordance is “holiness” and no sensible being (being that exists in the world of sense) is capable of such holiness. So we are not capable of bringing about that accordance/holiness.
5. That perfect accordance can be posited if we envision an endless and infinite progress of our individual will toward that state of holiness. This requires that our individual soul be immortal.
6. Since we are required by our moral will to try to bring about that perfect accordance, we must posit that such accordance is possible. Hence we must posit the endless and infinite progress of our individual moral identity toward that goal, which is to say, we must posit the immortality of the soul.

Argument for existence of God (136-137) [SHORT VERSION]

1. As moral beings, the moral law requires us to will the highest good
2. The highest good involves happiness in proportion to virtue
3. But in the empirical world there is no basis for any connection between virtue and happiness (and—Kant has said earlier—we often find virtuous people being unhappy and vicious people being happy)
4. The connection between virtue and happiness involved in the highest good can only be brought about by God, who has the power to do so.
5. (repeat of 1): We are required to believe that the highest good is possible, in order to be able to will it.
6. Therefore, we are required to believe that there is a God who is able to bring about the connection between virtue and happiness.

Commentary:

- a. Although the 2 arguments use the same initial premise, they use distinct aspects of the highest good as the operative premises, which are stated in premise 2. So in a way they are quite different arguments.
- b. The argument for the immortality of the soul depends on a premise that solely concerns our own wills and what our wills can accomplish.
- c. But the argument for God brings in an element—happiness in proportion to virtue—that is not within our control, not within the scope of our individual will, even if we have immortality.
- d. This seems to mean that the “postulate” in the argument plays a quite different role in the 2 cases. In “immortality” it can support our effort to strive for moral perfection while knowing that it cannot be fully attained (and thereby avoid the temptation to give up on the attempt since it is impossible, and also to fool ourselves into thinking we have achieved it, as the theosophists do [135, 2nd full par]. But what does it do in the God case?