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RE-KANTING POSTMODERNISM?:
DERRIDA'S RELIGION WITHIN THE LIMITS OF REASON ALONE

James K. A. Smith

This essay considers the legacy of Kant's philosophy of religion as appropriated by Jacques Derrida in his recent, "Foi et savoir: les deux sources de la 'religion' aux limites de la simple raison." Derrida's adoption of this Kantian framework raises the question of how one might describe this as a postmodern account of religion, which in turn raises the question of the relationship between modernity and postmodernity in general, and Derrida's relationship to Kant in particular. Following an exposition of Derrida's notion of a formal "ethical" religion as a repetition of Kant's critique in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, I offer a critique of Derrida's (and Kant's) "formalization" of religion and the relationship between faith and reason, arguing that a more persistent postmodernism requires a de-formalization of the modern concern for justice, appreciating its determinate prophetic origin.

Could it be that deconstruction—offspring of *enfant terrible*, Jacques Derrida—is in fact only a new attempt to liberate humanity from its self-incurred tutelage? In other words, is deconstruction simply a new Enlightenment, a project we can trace to Kant? And conversely, could it be that Kant was (unwittingly) engaged in deconstruction? Derrida himself seems to hint at just such a genealogy, suggesting something of a German origin of this French movement: "I am resolutely in favor," he proclaims, "of a new university Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*]."[1] And more recently, expressly evoking the Kantian tradition of critique, he has undertaken the task of considering religion "within the limits of reason alone"—a "religion without religion"[2] which, in the spirit of Kant's "reflective faith,"[3] would constitute a "universal" religion.[4] For Derrida, like Kant, such a religion is ultimately a matter of ethics or justice, such that the "religion" which Derrida discloses is remarkably similar to Kant's "moral religion," including the tie which binds it to democracy.[5] Further, this plays itself out within a framework which understands the relationship between faith and knowledge in a manner we might describe as "hyper-Kantian," faulting even Kant for failing to radically think religion within the limits of reason alone—for not being enlightened enough (FS 19/11). Thus Derrida, the consummate "postmodernist," lays claim to a filiation which is distinctly modern, making deconstruction a child of the Enlightenment.

Derrida's appropriation of Kant when reflecting on religion, along with

his affirmation of a new *Aufklärung*, raises the question of the (dis)continuity between modernity (and Kant, in particular) and what has been commonly described as "postmodernity." Is postmodernity a "new Enlightenment?" If so, in what sense is it "new?" Derrida's philosophy of religion and his account of the relationship between faith and reason seems to be little more than a repetition of Kant's own account, and thus subject to the same critique as other Enlightenment accounts of the "essence" of religion (FS 34/23), of which Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* is a celebrated example.[6] Further, this specter of Kant (evoked by Derrida himself), problematizes accounts of postmodernism which posit a radical discontinuity with the modern, Enlightenment project.[7] Instead, it seems that these purported "postmodern" accounts of religion differ little from Enlightenment criticisms. For some, this would be a redeeming trait of postmodernism. But what if that Enlightenment critique of religion was itself subjected to criticism? In that case, Derrida would here simply be repeating one of the most problematic Enlightenment prejudices against determinate or "dogmatic" religion—a prejudice that should be unveiled as such (*pace* Gadamer[8]) and subject to (postmodern) critique.

The goal of this paper is to provide an exposition of the way in which Derrida repeats Kant's project of thinking religion within the limits of reason alone (concurrently pursuing questions about the relationship between modernity and postmodernity[9]) and its disclosure of a purportedly "pure" moral religion, and then subject such a project to a more persistently postmodern (and perhaps Augustinian) critique, developing an alternative understanding of the relationship between faith and reason.

I. Thinking Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone: Derrida's Repetition of Kant

The occasion for Derrida's reflection on religion is the surprising "return of religion" (FS 13/5); or better, the so-called "return" of religion which surprised only a post-Marxist or post-Feuerbachian academic community—which is to say, a post-Kantian, post-Enlightenment community.[10] But why is this so surprising? Does it not only surprise those who *naively* opposed religion and science (Enlightenment, Reason, Criticism)—"as though the one could not but put an end to the other" (FS 13/5). Instead, Derrida argues, a different "schema" will be required to think the relationship between faith and knowledge, suggesting that Derrida will provide an alternative to the Enlightenment notion of an "autonomous" reason which is untainted by faith (found in Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Feuerbach). Here several problems arise which need to be explored. First, does Derrida really provide an alternative schema for the relationship between faith and knowledge, or is his conception of this relation in fact a hyper-modern notion of "autonomous" reason—a repetition of Kant? Second, is this critique of religion—whether found in Kant or Derrida, whether modern or postmodern—a philosophically viable project, or is it itself subject to critique? Third, are there other elements of Derrida's analysis of religion which undermine his attempt to think religion within the limits of reason alone, resulting in the deconstruction of Derrida's critique?[11] The first

question is taken up in Part I, and the final two questions are the focus of Part II.

For Derrida, in a gesture he describes as Kantian (FS 16/8), the question of religion opens as a question of *abstraction*:

> How "to talk religion?" Of religion? Singularly of religion, today? How dare we speak of it in the singular without fear and trembling, this very day? And so briefly and so quickly? [...] To give oneself the necessary courage, arrogance or serenity, perhaps one must pre- tend for an instant to abstract, to abstract from everything or almost everything, in a certain way. Perhaps one must take one's chance in resorting to the most concrete and most accessible, but also the most barren and desert-like, of all abstractions (FS 9/1).

Thus abstraction becomes linked to a discussion of "salvation" and libera- tion; but here a question arises: "Should one save oneself *by* abstraction or *from* abstraction" (FS 9/1, emphasis added)? Derrida seems to opt for the former: in order to speak of religion, one must ("perhaps") engage in abstraction from the concrete and determinate religion*s* ("almost")—a kind of flight to the desert, separated from the particularity of historical, determi- nate religions in order to discover, in this desert of abstraction, a "universal" religion whose structure is a relation of justice. By this process of "desertifi- cation" (FS 27/17), Derrida proposes to disclose a structure of ethical obliga- tion which precedes the structures of determinate religion and morality: "Even if it is called the social nexus, link to the other in general, this fiducia- ry 'link' would precede all determinate community, all positive religion, every onto-anthropo-theological horizon" (FS 26/16). In other words, this process of abstraction exhibits a basis of ethical responsibility which does not depend upon any conditions of experience (cp. RWLRA 94-96).

Abstraction, then, is the movement by which Derrida seeks to disclose the religious structure of responsibility, or the outline of a "pure moral reli- gion" lifted out of the determinate and concrete historical religions. Throughout "Foi et savoir," Derrida takes up this question of the relation- ship between the universal and the particular (or better, the universal and the *singular*[12])—so central to Kant's ethical framework as outlined in both the *Groundwork* and RWLRA—through the metaphor of *topos*: of place (*lieu*), location. Could there be a religion which is not tied to a particular place—a "Promised Land"[13]—and so a particular *history* of revelation (FS 17/8)? For if the foundation for ethical obligation were to be located in a particular religion, with ties to a particular revelation and place, we would compromise its universality. But it is precisely this penchant for universal- ity which pushes Derrida to the "desert" of abstraction. As he reflects on the Isle of Capri, these particular individuals who have gathered to "talk religion" share "an unreserved taste, if not an unconditional preference, for what, in politics, is called republican democracy as a universalizable model" (FS 16/8)—an ideal which can be traced to the lights of the Enlightenment and the project which sought liberation from all external authority and power, *especially* religious dogmatism.[14] And thus our predilection for republican democracy as a *universal* ideal would seem to

commit us to a certain *epoché*—thinking religion "within the limits of reason alone" (FS 16/8), which for Derrida is to think religion "in the desert." The "desert," for him, is a kind of metaphor for a level of abstraction or universality which is disconnected from all particularities of place and history, such that this "desert" of abstraction would represent a "*place* that could well have been *more than* archi-originary, the most anarchic and anarchivable place possible" (FS 26/16). Elsewhere, this desert of abstraction is described as a place that is not a place, a 'place' which "comes under no geography, geometry, or geophysics."[15] Once this epoché is effected, the ethical structures of democracy which 'remain' are understood as a priori[16]—divorced from any particular historical or geographical heritage, even if they maintain a certain affinity with particular determinate religious traditions.

It is Kant's notion of a "reflective [*reflektierende*] faith" which Derrida describes as "a concept whose possibility might well open the space for our discussion" (FS 19/10, trans. modified). This is a faith which "does not depend essentially upon any historical revelation and thus agrees with the rationality of purely practical reason" (FS 19/10), which is why it is opposed to "dogmatic faith" which "claims to *know* and thereby ignores the difference between faith and knowledge" (FS 19/10). There is an important difference, he notes, between "believing one knows and knowing one believes" (FS 54/40). Reflective faith has been purged of its particularity, immune to any contamination of time or place. Thus, while Kant remained indebted to his Pietist heritage,[17] the impetus for his reflections on religion was philosophical, and more specifically, the telos of his own critical project, such that *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* has been described as a kind of "fourth critique." At the heart of this Kantian project is a distinct concept of the relationship between faith and reason, presaged in the famous dictum from the Second Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*."[18] The relationship between faith and knowledge is precisely one of *heterogeneity*: arriving at the limits of scientific knowledge, it is necessary to displace a dogmatic metaphysics in order to make room for faith and a concept of God—one of the positive implications of laying out the principles of pure reason. In other words, the procedures of reason which issue in knowledge are autonomous vis-à-vis faith: knowledge is the product of operations which do not in any way involve faith, whereas our consciousness (not "knowledge") of freedom and moral obligation is characterized by a faith which displaces any priority which speculative reason might seek for itself.[19]

This question of the relationship—or rather, heterogeneity—between faith and knowledge is taken up more systematically after the ethical works, which further clear the space and mark the necessity for thinking religion within the limits of reason alone. Thus RWLRA operates with an understanding of the relationship between faith and reason laid down much earlier. But while space was cleared for religious faith through a critique of reason, faith itself is subject to critique; that is, the boundaries or limits must be established lest faith, as reason is wont to do, seeks to claim more than it can deliver. This concern is already seen in CPR, where Kant

remarks: "No one, indeed, will be able to boast that he *knows* that there is a God, and a future life; if he knows this, he is the very man for whom I have long [and vainly] sought" (A828-29/B856-57). Faith needs to be reminded that it is just that—faith, and *not* knowledge.[20] It is in the first of four *parerga* in RWLRA that this same concern is expressed by the distinction between "reflective" and "dogmatic" faith. Broaching the matter of grace, Kant suggests that "[r]eason believes this with a faith which (with respect to the possibility of this supernatural complement) might be called *reflective*; for *dogmatic* faith, which proclaims itself as a form of *knowledge*, appears to her dishonest or presumptuous" (RWLRA 48). "In making such assertions and pretensions to knowledge," he later remarks, "reason simply passes beyond the limits of its own insight" (RWLRA 63-64), claiming to know where it cannot see. In other words, dogmatic faith fails to recognize itself *as* faith, and thus fails to recognize the heterogeneity between faith and knowledge.

In his lectures, Kant not only lays out this distinction but demonstrates why it is beneficial: faith in these matters is, in a sense, more virtuous. For instance, our moral belief in the existence of God is not a mere "hypothesis" or "opinion" (arguing from the contingency of the world to a supreme author), but rather demands "firm belief" because it is from "some absolutely necessary datum."[21] "Hence our faith," Kant concludes,

> is not scientific knowledge, and thank heaven it is not! For God's wisdom is apparent in the very fact that we do not *know* that God exists, but that we should *believe* that God exists. For suppose we could attain to scientific knowledge of God's existence, through our experience or in some other way (even if the possibility of this knowledge cannot be immediately thought). And suppose further that we could really reach as much certainty through this knowledge as we do through intuition. Then in this case, all morality would break down.[22]

Morality would break down because it would no longer be voluntary, and the moral agent would act out of fear of punishment rather than virtue. Thus, "as regards our morality, it is very good that our knowledge is not scientific knowledge but faith. For in this way the fulfillment of my duty will be far purer and more unselfish."[23] Hence we can see why the confusion of faith and knowledge—as in "dogmatic faith"—would in fact be detrimental to morality. For the sake of morality, it is imperative that we recognize and maintain the heterogeneity between faith and knowledge.

The result will be a "pure religious faith" (RWLRA 94)—"rational" or "reflective" faith—which has both purged itself of dogmatism (RWLRA 48,63-64) and extirpated any vestige of elements which derive from particular, determinate, historical faiths (RWLRA 94-115). The latter "kenotic" movement is necessary in order to achieve the universality which is required of a moral religion—the only "true" religion (RWLRA 95,98). Indeed, "a church dispenses with the most important mark of truth, namely, a rightful claim to universality" (RWLRA 100; cp. 105). Thus "pure moral religion" stands not only in contrast to "dogmatic faith" (which fails to recognize the heterogeneity of faith and knowledge), but also "ecclesias-

tical faith," which is dependent upon a particular, historical revelation (RWLRA 96). Kant in fact argues that the term "religion" ought to be used more prudently, advocating that what we describe as "religions" ought to be termed "faiths," since "[o]ne does too great honor to most people by saying of them: They profess this or that religion. For they know none and desire none—statutory ecclesiastical faith is all that they understand" (RWLRA 98-99). In a manner very similar to Derrida's concern regarding "wars of religion" in the Middle East and Eastern Europe,[24] Kant argues that "so-called religious wars" were in fact devoid of religion and are only "wrangles over ecclesiastical faith" (RWLRA 99).

This distinction between "faiths" which are particular, historical and determinate and a "religion" which is universal is reproduced in Derrida's own distinction between particular "messian*isms*" and the "messianic" as a universal structure. Motivated by a similar concern regarding the contingency of the historical and determinate, the *messianic*, or "messianicity without messianism," is defined as "the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice but without horizon of expectation and without prefiguration" (FS 27/17). But why this latter requirement? Why must it be a justice which cannot be pre-determined or "prefigured?" Because any pre-determination would be precisely a *determination*, and for Derrida, it is precisely determination itself which is unjust. In other words, any "horizon of expectation" [*horizon d'attente*] or predelineated anticipation would undo the universality of such justice, representing an *in*justice. Thus the "messianic exposes itself to absolute surprise" (FS 28/17); it is a "general structure of experience" which denotes a responsibility to the other as justice (FS 28/18). This responsibility must be determined *by the other* and therefore cannot be prefigured or determined by the subject of responsibility. As such, to delineate this general "messianic" structure, one must engage in *abstraction*, such that abstraction becomes a kind of liberation, an "abstract messianicity" (FS 28/18). So, this "general structure of experience," which is the structure of justice,

> does not depend upon any messianism [i.e., determinate religion], it follows no determinate revelation, it belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion (even if I am obliged here, "among ourselves," for essential reasons of language and of place, of culture, of a provisional rhetoric and a historical strategy of which I will speak later, to continue giving it names marked by the Abrahamic religions) [FS 28/18].

Thus, like a Kantian moral religion, Derrida's "messianic" is not dependent upon any historical, determinate "revelation" (cp. RWLRA 94-95).

However, while both Kant's "pure moral religion" and Derrida's "messianic" (or "religion without religion") eschew any dependence upon particular, determinate faiths, they both still affirm the priority of faith in matters practical. Thus both are characterized by a dual movement: on the one hand, discharging determinate religion in the name of rationality/universality; on the other hand, displacing knowledge in order to make room for the faith of practical reason—justice, responsibility, *la religion* which is *la réponse*. The tie that binds me to the other in responsibility is, at root, a

bond of faith—a "fiduciary 'link'" (FS 26/16). "This abstract messianicity," Derrida argues, "belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and of a trust that 'founds' all relation to the other in testimony" (FS 28/18). This would be a 'universal' faith before every determinate faith, akin to Kant's "pure religious faith" which would be the condition of possibility for any "ecclesiastical faith" (RWLRA 95). So "religion"—a universal religion—whose structure is unveiled as the messianic (not a messian*ism*), is in its very structure a relation of justice: my responsibility to the other. But it is not a responsibility that I know; rather, it is one that I believe. So it is necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for this responsibility. And it is "[t]his justice, which I distinguish from law[25] [*droit*], [that] alone allows the hope, beyond all 'messianisms,' of a universalizable culture of singularities" (FS 28/18)—a kind of "kingdom of ends" where the singularities are precisely *others* (echoing both Kierkegaard and Levinas). This is because "the other makes the law, the law is other: to give ourselves back, and up, to the other. To every other and to the utterly other [*A tout autre et au tout autre*]" (FS 47/34). This faith inscribes itself at the very origin of language and thus is characterized by universality.[26] And it is "the universalizable culture of this faith" which "alone permits a 'rational' and universal discourse on the subject of 'religion'" (28/18). It is a messianicity which is "stripped of everything, as it should [*sic*], this faith without dogma" which marks the possibility of a universal justice (FS 28/18) which leads Derrida to associate this founding faith with what Montaigne and Pascal describe as "the mystical foundation of authority" (29/18).[27]

Thus the universal structure of ethical obligation, on the one hand clearly disengaged from any particular faith or religion, is nevertheless itself 'known' only by a kind of practical faith or trust. Here we see the clear repetition of the Kantian dual movement noted above. Further, such abstraction has, according to Derrida, liberating implications: "this abstraction, without denying faith, liberates a universal rationality and the political democracy that cannot be dissociated from it" (FS 29/19).

Kant, however, has not made it to the "desert." In fact, Derrida criticizes Kant for not properly carrying out a radical abstraction or "desertification" of moral obligation. While repeating Kant's demand that a pure moral religion be decontaminated of any particular, determinate, historical faith, Derrida concludes that such a process of decontamination was not properly completed by Kant. This in two ways: first, Kant continues to privilege the Christian religion, such that "the Christian religion would be the only truly 'moral' religion" (FS 19/10). Second, "pure morality and Christianity are indissociable in their essence and in their concept" (FS 19/10). In other words, it would be a contradiction for moral obligation to be purely "rational" and non-Christian and so it must remain, in a veiled sense, linked to the particularity and historicity of a Christian revelation. "The unconditionality of the categorical imperative," Derrida concludes, "is evangelical. The moral law inscribes itself at the bottom of our hearts like a memory of the Passion. When it addresses us, it either speaks the idiom of the Christian—or is silent" (FS 19/11). This is why Derrida considers his disclosure of the "messianic" a completion of the process of

decontamination. The messianic, he claims, even if it remains linked 'in name' to the Abrahamic religions, remains a completely universal structure of responsibility which in no way depends upon any particular religion or messian*ism*. This, of course, does not call into question Kant's project, but rather completes it: an unveiling of the structure of moral obligation which is decontaminated of any dependence upon a particular, determinate, historical religion—and yet which is 'known' only by faith.

II. The Very Idea of Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone: A Postmodern Critique

So Derrida (the postmodern) does not question the Kantian (modern) project of thinking religion within the limits of reason alone; indeed, he takes it up in order to complete it. The problem which arises, for Derrida, is just *how* such a project would be possible: "How then to think—within the limits of reason alone—a religion which, without again becoming 'natural religion,' would today be effectively universal" (FS 23/14)? But this is a question that Kant also tackles when he considers the relationship between "historical" or "ecclesiastical faith" and "pure religious faith." What is the relationship between these two? While the latter is superior to the former, is ecclesiastical faith nevertheless the necessary condition for the idea of morality which characterizes pure religious faith? Kant is somewhat ambiguous on this point, though I think we can infer his answer. He simply states that, "[i]n men's striving towards an ethical commonwealth, ecclesiastical faith thus naturally precedes pure religious faith" (RWLRA 97). But what does Kant mean by saying the one "naturally precedes" the other? This is somewhat clarified by a brief note which asserts that "morally, this order ought to be reversed" (RWLRA 97n). In other words, it seems that Kant argues that "morally"—which must also mean "rationally"—pure religious faith is prior to any ecclesiastical faith, but historically speaking, ecclesiastical faiths are the means by which we come to reflect on and understand the "one true religion." In the order of knowing, ecclesiastical faith is prior, but in the order of being, pure religious (i.e., moral) faith comes first. Thus Kant routinely refers to historical or ecclesiastical faiths as "vehicles" for the propagation of pure religious faith: "it remains true once for all that a statutory *ecclesiastical faith* is associated with pure religious faith as its vehicle and as the means of public union of men for its promotion" (RWLRA 98).[28] And eventually, one would hope pure religious faith could makes its way around on its own, no longer needing a ride from ecclesiastical faith. As Kant projects:

> When…an historical faith attaches itself to pure religion, as its vehicle, but with the consciousness that it is only a vehicle, and when this faith, having become ecclesiastical, embraces the principle of a continual approach to pure religious faith, in order to finally dispense with the historical vehicle, a church thus characterized can at any time be called the *true* church (RWLRA 106).

The job of the church, then, as a still particular historical faith, is to work

itself out of a job, to no longer be needed as a promoter for pure religion. As a kind of "tutor" to the moral law, ecclesiastical faith plays only a propaedeutic role. Derrida, as we have noted above, questions this genealogy, suggesting that the roles of father and son have been reversed—that, in fact, the Categorical Imperative remains, by filiation, Christian and hence both dependent upon and product of a particular, determinate "ecclesiastical" faith (FS 19/10-11).

This question of precedence or conditions also arises, not surprisingly, in Derrida's very Kantian approach to the issue. For Derrida, the question is: does the messianic or "religion" here outlined *precede* determinate messianisms as their condition of possibility? Or is it possible to sketch this universal messianic structure only on the basis of particular, determinate revelations?

> The question remains open, and with it that of knowing whether this desert can be thought and left to announce itself "before" the desert that we know (that of the revelations and retreats, of the lives and deaths of God, of all the figures of kenosis or of transcendence, of *religio* or of historical "religions"); or whether, "on the contrary," it is "from" this last desert [historical religions] that we can glimpse that which precedes the first, which I call the desert in the desert (FS 31-32/21).

While here Derrida seems content to remain undecided, even advocating "tolerance" (FS 32-33/21-22), this response to the question is disappointing and, in truth, a punt on Derrida's part. This is not a question of ethical "undecidability" (which is a condition of all decisions which demands precisely that one decide) but simple indecision on his part, since *either* possibility (and I cannot see other options) would be problematic for him on his own grounds. He would either end up siding with a particular determinate religion (and here it is precisely his Enlightenment penchant for universality which prevents him from doing so), or for a purely transcendental structure—also a deconstructive heresy.[29] Further, he has earlier already answered the question, opting for the latter stance: the "messianic," he has told us, "does not depend upon any messianism, it follows no determinate revelation, it belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion" (FS 28/18). The messianic, then, as *a priori*, is a transcendental condition for all particular, determinate religions and is itself immune from any particular faith.

Here I would unpack two criticisms of Derrida, which also constitute criticisms of Kant and the general modern project of thinking religion within the limits of reason alone. First, affirming Derrida's unveiling of the determinate "evangelical" heritage of the Categorical Imperative, we must subject Derrida's claims to the criticism he leveled against Kant, *viz.*, that the ethical structure disclosed by this process of desert abstraction retains very distinct geo-political ties: to Abrahamic, Western understandings of ethical obligation and to political democracy. In other words, the elements of this "general structure" remain determined by a particular time, history, and place. And indeed, one of the 'articles of faith' of deconstruction is that it could not be otherwise; as a result, both Kant and Derrida's own project

of a "purely rational religion" must falter on this inescapable particularity. It is true that Derrida claims that the messianic is "Abrahamic" only in name (FS 28/18). But if so, then why that name? Why not another?[30] Could this ethical structure be described as "kharmic" or "Taoist?" Why not? Because in the end—or rather, in the beginning—it remains an understanding of ethical obligation which owes its *disclosure* to a determinate prophetic (more specifically, Hebrew[31]) tradition, the same tradition which gave birth to Kant's Categorical Imperative. Further, it remains committed to a very determinate political ideal: republican democracy.[32] While Derrida does concede that our understanding of this moral obligation is a matter of faith, he fails to recognize that it is also particular and determinate. However, it should be noted that the particular or determinate genealogy of this ethical structure does not disqualify it from moral import; that would only be the case if we continued to operate with the hope of being able to step outside history, which is precisely what is challenged by Derrida. Instead, I would argue that we ought to: (1) recognize that every ethical and political framework must necessarily have a determinate and historical origin, even a "religious" origin, broadly understood[33]; and (2) recognize that the ethico-political ideal outlined by both Kant and Derrida finds its determinate heritage in the prophetic and Christian tradition.

Further, it is not simply a question of the genealogy or heritage of this structure of ethical obligation (whether Kant's Categorical Imperative or Derrida' "messianic") which is a problem, nor is its universality *per se*. Instead, at issue is its mode of disclosure, revelation, or what we might describe—in a more Kantian gesture—as the question of its *justification*.[34] In other words, what is at stake is not the *ontological* universality of the messianic, but rather the epistemological particularity of its disclosure. As noted above, the particularity of the messianic's geo-political heritage does not disqualify it from universal ethical import; in other words, to disclose its determinate origin is not to argue that such an ethical obligation only applies to persons within that tradition. The (Jewish) understanding of obligation outlined by Emmanuel Levinas (precursor to Derrida's "messianic") is also understood to be universal in its scope; that is, it characterizes all human intersubjective relationships. But it is only *disclosed* through a particular tradition, even a particular revelation, which must be shared by any who would understand this structure. At stake, then, is an epistemological issue, not an ontological one. Ontologically, the structure of obligation inheres in all human relationships, but it can only be "known" or "disclosed" through a particular revelation or faith-tradition. This is why the particular religion or revelation cannot function as a disposable "vehicle" in the sense that Kant suggests, because it is this particular tradition which is the condition for its disclosure or legitimation. The particular faith is the criterion for legitimation. What falters in postmodernity—and Derrida himself has contributed to its demise—is precisely the notion of a "reason" which could be a universal criterion for justifying just such a claim regarding the messianic. So what is disqualified is not the universality of the messianic, but rather any appeal or epistemological claim which could claim to 'demonstrate' its legitimacy outside of particular traditions

(i.e., outside particular "faiths").[35]

This points to the second criticism. The notion of an autonomous or "pure" reason—untainted by either history or faith (or prejudice) is an Enlightenment myth. Derrida's project of thinking religion within the limits of reason alone depends upon a heterogeneity between faith and knowledge which presupposes that reason conducts itself within a pure, autonomous arena. Such a pure reason in Kant has been the subject of criticism since Hegel. As Merold Westphal observes, "For Kant, the forms and categories that constitute the phenomenal world are at work in all human cognition, at all times, and in all places. But almost immediately people began to notice the operation of historically specific a priories constituting a variety of human worlds."[36] In other words, reason itself is not free and cannot be free of all prejudice, but rather begins from certain cultural assumptions or, at the very least—as Derrida notes—an implicit *trust* in language. More specifically, as I have argued elsewhere,[37] reason is always already grounded in a worldview which constitutes a fundamental trust or commitment. As a result, faith and knowledge are not as heterogeneous as Kant and Derrida would have us believe. It is here that I would locate the Augustinian moment of this critique of Kant and Derrida: I do not believe only where I cannot know; rather, I believe in order to know. Faith—whatever that faith might be—is the necessary condition for knowledge. So their relation is not one of heterogeneity but rather dependence. Thus the attempt to think religion within the limits of reason alone would not be a project of formalization or secularization (attempting to distill a "purified" or "uncontaminated" rational religion), but more a kind of comparative theology: the attempt to think one faith within the limits of another faith.

As such, the project itself becomes questionable, or at least the assumptions which motivate it would be dismantled. At that point it would seem fair to ask why the project should be carried out at all. That is not to say, of course, that one is opposed to enlightenment, or even critique; but it would open the space for a new appreciation of Enlightenment as "illumination."

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NOTES

1.   Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils," trans. Catherine Porter and Edward P. Morris, *Diacritics* 13 (1983), p. 5. This essay might be read as Derrida's "What is Enlightenment?," or in the spirit of *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Derrida engages the latter at pp. 19-20.

2.   Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 49.

3.   Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 48. Henceforth abbreviated in the text at RWLRA.

4.   Jacques Derrida, "Foi et savoir. Les deux sources de la 'religion' aux limits de la simple raison," in *La religion*, ed. Thierry Marchaisse (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), p. 23 / "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at

the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. Samuel Weber in *Religion*, eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 14. Henceforth abbreviated in the text as FS, followed by French and English pagination. In addition, Derrida suggests in "Sauf le nom," that this project is moved "in a way" by "a kind of spirit of the Enlightenment." See Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 71.

5.   Here Derrida also follows the lead of Emmanuel Levinas, for whom "religion" *is* ethical responsibility (see, e.g., Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969], pp. 40, 80). Thus Derrida will ultimately conclude that religion is *responsibility*: "*La religion, c'est* **la réponse**" (FS 39/26, emphasis original). On Levinas' relation to Kant, see John Llewelyn, *Hypocritical Imagination: Kant and Levinas* (New York: Routledge, 1999). It is precisely the commitment to democracy which leads Derrida to a Kantian "epoché" or liberating "abstraction" (FS 16/8): "this abstraction, without denying faith, liberates a universal rationality and the political democracy that cannot be dissociated from it" (FS 29/19). The democratic element of this project will be further discussed below.

6.   The other quintessentially modern account, though operating from a standpoint very critical of Kant, would have to be Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially the Second Speech, "On the Essence of Religion" (pp. 18-54).

7.   I have addressed these questions further in my "A Little Story About Metanarratives: Lyotard, Religion, and Postmodernism Revisited," *Faith and Philosophy* 18:2 (2001): forthcoming.

8.   For the Enlightenment, religion itself constitutes a prejudice from which we need to be liberated. Here I would follow Gadamer's unveiling of the Enlightenment *prejudice* against prejudice: "The fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself." See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 273. It is not a matter of escaping or eliminating prejudice (which would be impossible), but becoming aware of prejudice and subjecting it to critique.

9.   In this article, I am taking the opportunity to pursue the question raised in note 4 of my "Determined Violence: Derrida's Structural Religion," *Journal of Religion* 78 (1998), pp. 197-212. For a broader analysis of Derrida's notion of religion, readers should consult this article and the seminal work of John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

10.   Later Derrida suggests that Marx's critique of religion itself depends upon the "appeal to a heterogeneity between faith and knowledge" (FS 23/14).

11.   It should be emphasized here that for Derrida, "deconstruction" is something that happens in the middle voice, something which texts do to themselves, not something a reader or interpreter does to a text. So it is not a matter of *my* deconstructing Derrida, but rather locating these opposing trajectories within the text and allowing it to deconstruct itself.

12.   The notion of "singularity" in Derrida is appropriated from Kierkegaard. To my knowledge, the earliest discussion of singularity, with reference to Kierkegaard, is in Derrida's first essay on Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 110-11, and more recently and extensively in *Gift of Death*.

13.   Or Rome: "We are not far from Rome, but are no longer in Rome" (FS 12/4).

14. Which, however, "does not mean from all faith" (FS 16/8)—only from a *certain* doxa.

15. Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 57.

16. Derrida would resist such a description, perhaps opting to say that these structures are "quasi-*a priori*." But it seems hard not to conclude that a structure which is divorced from and precedes all particular conditions of experience must be *a priori* in a Kantian sense.

17. On Kant's (and Derrida's) terms, the nature of this "debt" would be problematic. It could not be that Kant's disclosure of the Categorical Imperative, for instance, was a thinly disguised "Pietist" imperative, since this would undo its universality. While below we will see that Derrida seems to make just such a charge against Kant, I will argue in Part II that Derrida is subject to the same critique.

18. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), Bxxx. Henceforth abbreviated as CPR.

19. Gilles Deleuze makes a case for the role of the imagination in moral understanding, arguing that "the consciousness of morality, that is to say the moral common sense, not only includes beliefs, but the acts of imagination through which sensible Nature appears as fit to receive the effect of the suprasensible. Imagination itself is thus really part of common sense." Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 43. "Thus faith," he continues, "is not related to a particular faculty, but expresses the synthesis of the speculative interest and the practical interest at the same time as the subordination of the former to the latter" (p. 44). On this subordination, see *Critique of Practical Reason*, I.ii.2.3.

20. Despite all of his protests against Kant, it seems it must be conceded that Kierkegaard also adopts a Kantian understanding of the relationship between faith and reason.

21. Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood and Gertrude M. Clark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 123.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

24. One of the tasks of FS is "a programme of analysis of the forms of evil perpetrated at the four corners of the world 'in the name of religion'" (FS 22/13). Elsewhere, Derrida considers the "war of the messianisms" in the Middle East. See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 58. I have considered this in more detail in my "Determined Violence."

25. I have modified Weber's translation here; he translates *droit* as "right", but it is *du droit*, with the article, which is generally translated as "law" and better conveys Derrida's sense.

26. This is also analyzed in Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 93-94, 129-136. I have considered this in more detail in "Is Deconstruction an Augustinian Science?"(forthcoming).

27. See also Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-67.

28. For a discussion of particular faiths as "vehicles," see also Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, trans. Lewis White Beck in *On History* (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 113n7.

29. For a discussion of why such a transcendental structure is problematic

on deconstructive grounds, see my "Determined Violence," pp. 197-199, 207-212.

30. Derrida does also consider this under the name *chora* (drawing on Plato's *Timaeus*), but this would only offer an alternative, Western naming and would not signal a rupture with time and place altogether.

31. Hegel pointed out the "Jewishness" of Kant's ethical framework, only to therefore reject it. See Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity," in *Friedrich Hegel on Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 211. For a gloss, see Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 34a-51a.

32. Derrida seems to think that this notion of "democracy" is somehow a pure transcendental structure which is completely undetermined, such that he will speak of the "messianic" as a "democracy to come." If I were to ask Derrida whether this call for a "democracy to come" was assuming anything determinate, he would say, "No." Well, then, can I speak of "the theocracy to come?" Certainly not, he would reply. Then it must be the case that he has some idea of what this "democracy to come" must look like; in other words, the notion of democracy entails some content, in which case it is not a pure or merely formal idea but, in fact, another messiani*sm*.

33. Within this broader understanding of "religion," even a traditionally "secular" worldview such as Marxism would be religious insofar as it is grounded in fundamental commitments. Derrida suggests the same by describing Marxism as yet another "messiani*sm*" (*Specters of Marx*, pp. 58-59). This accords with a Reformational (in the tradition of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd) understanding of "religion." For a helpful unpacking of this concept in an ethical and political context, see Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: An Essay in Christian Public Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). See also Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

34. This corresponds with what Lyotard sees as the central symptom of the "postmodern condition": a legitimation crisis. Because of the incommensurability of language games, and the lack of a single universally shared language game, there can be no appeal to a universal criterion in order to justify such a claim (specifically excluding appeals to the "metanarrative" of a universal Reason, which Lyotard discloses as a particular and determinate narrative). For further development and analysis, see my "A Little Story About Metanarratives" (op. cit.).

35. On the relationship between faith and "traditionality," see James K.A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), ch. 6. My thanks to Philip Quinn for constructive questions which pushed me to clarify these themes (any remaining ambiguity is my own responsibility).

36. Merold Westphal, "Christian Philosophers and the Copernican Revolution," in *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, eds. C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 172.

37. See my "The Art of Christian Atheism: Faith and Philosophy in Early Heidegger," *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997), pp. 76-79. Here I draw on Heidegger's analysis of traditionality, Thomas Kuhn's analysis of the role of "paradigms" in scientific research, and Derrida's own account of the relationship between faith and knowledge in his *Memoirs of the Blind*, which concludes with the injunction: "I don't know; one must believe [*Je ne sais pas; il faut croire*]."