

KANT'S RATIONAL FOUNDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS FAITH

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ABSTRACT

Kant's Rational Foundations for Religious Faith is a work of philosophy and religion. The dissertation as a whole falls within the field of Kant studies. In particular, the interpretations of Kant made by several contemporary scholars are analysed in depth with the view to establishing the rational basis by which Kant thinks faith gains a foothold in his philosophical programme. Two obstacles to the establishment of faith in Kant's programme are presented. The first is the problem of coherence that Gordon Michalson expounds regarding Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. The second is the problem of knowledge as presented in the work of P. F. Strawson and others. In proposing a way past the latter of these two problems, a hypothesis is made for how to overcome the former. The proposal is to understand faith not in terms of knowledge, but instead in terms of cognition. When this is done, Kant's train of reasoning for the development of his transcendental theology becomes clear. It yields a hypothesis for interpreting *Religion* by focusing the combined resources of cognition and faith on certain underdeveloped aspects of Kant's thought. Chief of these underdeveloped aspects is the human moral disposition. I demonstrate that this hypothesis, when applied exegetically to *Religion*, overcomes the most significant objections raised by Michalson. Kant's rational foundations for faith are shown to reach their fullness when an existential decision is made to believe in God based on a simultaneous conviction in the meaningfulness of the world. For Kant, such an existential faith has a specific shape that is fleshed out in his analysis of human depravity as a problem for belief in the meaningfulness of the world and the possible adoption of the disposition of the prototype of perfect humanity as solution to it.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A brief overview of Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793) and *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) is enough to raise a number of important questions in the mind of any reader who attempts to grasp the whole of Kant's philosophy while at the same time trying to make sense of his specific views on religion. Does the topic of religion offer Kant's philosophy anything new? Why does he tackle this topic at the end of his career rather than at the beginning or somewhere in the middle? Is Kant's philosophy of religion merely an extension of his moral philosophy or is it more properly thought of as a development of his transcendental theology? Does Kant's philosophy of religion need traditionally religious concepts like grace and redemption, and, if so, how does he justify this need in terms that satisfy the critical tenets of his philosophy?

In answer to these questions and many others that will arise along the way, this dissertation argues that a theologically affirmative interpretation of Kant is possible and that such an interpretation can be understood in a way consistent with his critical philosophy. This dissertation delineates the fundamental features of such an interpretation by first, understanding them in the context of other successful interpretations of Kant, second, juxtaposing them with the strongest challenges to the coherence of Kant's philosophy of religion in the current literature, and third, positing an interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion that brings together the best resources of the successful interpretations along with new insights for the explicit purpose of overcoming these challenges.

This current volume is a substantially revised version of one previously submitted in the Fall of 2001, entitled *Reading Kant Religiously*. Of that original dissertation, only Chapter One remains, and that in a substantially edited and revised form. Chapter One is a compilation of the philosophical portions of the former Chapters One, Two, Three, and Four. It outlines three interpretations of Kant's philosophy of religion from the history of Kant interpretation over the last century, and presents three contemporary interpretations of Kant's rational foundations for religious faith that correspond to the three historic interpretations. Outside of this

compilation, virtually none of the original dissertation has survived. Portions of the arguments from Chapter One are already in published form. A version of the argument in Section One can be found in the 'Editor's Introduction' to *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*.¹ Sections Two and Three are revised portions of arguments found in two different articles, entitled 'Kant and Religion: Conflict or Compromise?' and 'Kant's Two Perspectives on the Theological Task', respectively.²

Chapter Two of this new revised version summarizes the work of Gordon Michalson as a complex and critical assault on the coherence of Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. It also begins the task of responding to these criticisms from the perspective of the three interpreters from the previous chapter, each of whom defends the coherence of Kant's philosophy of religion with a different set of resources and arguments. Chapter Three examines Kant's view of knowledge as a fundamental problem facing any interpretation of Kant that purports to provide a critically defensible understanding of faith. I argue that two resources, namely, cognition and faith, stemming from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* provide room in Kant's thinking for the development of his transcendental theology in terms of an existential faith rooted in practical reason and inspired by the needs of reason in its judicial employment.

Chapter Four provides an expository interpretation of *Religion* for the expressed purpose of overcoming Michalson's most difficult challenges. The interpretation in Chapter Four shows that there is a discernable line of argumentation in *Religion* that, when properly understood, is resistant to the kinds of criticisms Michalson forwards. Chapter Five completes the defence of Kant against Michalson's objections by showing that the final portions of *Religion* and *The Conflict of the Faculties* support the interpretation previously espoused. As this dissertation is primarily constructive and set on the backdrop of two influential and

¹ *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist, Eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Forthcoming Fall 2005).

² Chris L. Firestone, 'Kant and Religion: Conflict or Compromise?' *Religious Studies* 35 (June 1999), 151-171. Chris L. Firestone, 'Kant's Two Perspectives on the Theological Task', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2/1(March 2000), 63-78.

critical discussions of Kant (viz., the problem of knowledge found in the first *Critique* and the problem of coherence forwarded by interpreters of *Religion*), we cannot hope to field every possible objection. Nevertheless, the dissertation provides a presentation of Kant's rational foundations for religious faith and a partial defence of these foundations in the face of two significant challenges to its viability.

It is important to note that this dissertation will focus on Kant's philosophy in English translation and interpretation with but a few exceptions. The twentieth century witnessed the publication of an immense amount of secondary literature on Kant in English, covering his entire philosophy and representing an extensive variety of interpretation. Over the last three decades, this has become increasingly true for interpretations of Kant's philosophy of religion, and applications of them in the discipline of theology. The current interest in Kant's philosophy and its relationship to religion and theology in the Anglo-American context coincides with a virtually complete and liberally annotated translation of Kant's writings recently published by Cambridge University Press. These two occurrences have made it possible and in some ways preferable to do Kant interpretation in English with reference to the German for clarification and elaboration. This is the genre of this study.

What makes this kind of study timely and a real contribution to the field of Kant studies is not just the fact that the primary and secondary literature is now in place to make it feasible, but that this study addresses a significant lacuna in the field of Kant interpretation. Historically, the field of Kant interpretation has been successful in setting the agenda in epistemology broadly considered, but equally unsuccessful in taking into account the implications of Kant's writings on religion for his philosophy as a whole. Very often Kant's chief writings on religion are dismissed as incoherent in themselves or inconsistent relative to Kant's previous critical philosophy. As a result, this field has only recently been able to affirm theologically affirmative interpretations of Kant's philosophy of religion as reasonable alternatives to the traditional standard for interpreting Kant. This dissertation is written in conscious awareness of this context and seeks to bridge the gap between the theologically affirmative (but under-appreciated) aspect of the

tradition of Kant interpretation and the theologically negative (but fully appreciated) aspect of tradition often called ‘the traditional interpretation’.³

At least part of the reason for the timeliness of this study can be attributed to the situation surrounding the publication of competent and comprehensive translations of Kant’s texts. While Kant’s first and second *Critiques* were both translated (1838 and 1873, respectively) and disseminated (the late nineteenth century) relatively early, Kant’s writings on religion were generally translated and disseminated later. Although *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* was first translated by J. Richardson in 1799 and then again by J. William Semple in 1838, it only became widely disseminated in the English-speaking context after the 1934 publication of Theodore M. Greene’s and Hoyt H. Hudson’s popular translation. *The Conflict of the Faculties* is most significant in this regard. It was not fully translated into English until Mary J. Gregor’s 1979 translation. Very little work, for example, has been done on the relationship between *Conflict* and *Religion*, even though *Conflict* was written after the lifting of the censorship and covers many of the same themes as *Religion*.⁴ For this reason, at least in part, the view that *Religion* is little more than an extension of Kant’s practical philosophy has inflated currency in the literature. More work needs to be done on this topic from both the point of view of Kant’s philosophy as a whole and the point of view of Kant’s writings on religion. This dissertation provides a step forward towards this end.



My heartfelt appreciation goes out to the community of scholars past and present at the University of Edinburgh. I am especially thankful to Nick Adams, Gary Baddock, Ken Gavel, Jeffrey Privette, and Kevin Vanhoozer for their friendship and support over the extended time it took to research and write this

³ For the definitions and analyses of the terms ‘theologically affirmative interpretation’, ‘theologically negative interpretation’, and the ‘traditional interpretation’ see the ‘Editors’ Introduction’ in *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*. The volume as a whole brings together for the first time many of the most influential affirmative interpreters of Kant’s philosophy of religion currently working, including John Hare, Ronald Green, Elizabeth Galbraith, Stephen R. Palmquist, Leslie Stevenson, Philip Rossi, and Michel Despland.

⁴ See Allen W. Wood, ‘General Introduction’ in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, tr. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xiii-xxxiii (esp. xxviii).

dissertation. Their willingness to listen, read, and dialogue concerning matters not always germane to their particular fields of interest was invaluable to me in crystallizing my own ideas. Of particular importance to my most recent work on Kant are the poignant criticisms of Peter Byrne, my external examiner. His lofty expectations and specific challenges sent me on a quest to understand Kant in a way far more ambitious than I had previously thought possible (or even desirable). I now know otherwise. Whatever new insight this dissertation contains owes its inspiration to his careful assessment of my earlier work.

I also want to give a special thanks to Stephen R. Palmquist of Hong Kong Baptist University. My initial exposure to the difficulties of interpreting Kant's writings well came during his postgraduate supervision of my work in the year and a half leading up to the Hong Kong handover to China in 1997. Many, if not most, of the good ideas in this dissertation (assuming, of course, there are some) first began to surface in the conversations, camaraderie, and communion of that difficult time. Another person I need to thank is Nathan Jacobs, who as a former student of mine (and now fellow sojourner in Kant interpretation) provided invaluable assistance in the form of emotional, spiritual, and academic support in the preparation of this most recent version. Chapters Four and Five are an outworking of our joint study of Kant's philosophy of religion and will be important parts of a new book on Kant's *Religion* that we hope to produce in the coming years. I, of course, assume sole responsibility for this text as it stands presently.

I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues at Trinity International University in Deerfield and the Tyndale House Fellowship in Cambridge, as well as the many others (too numerous to mention each by name) who helped to provide the context for completing this project. This is especially true of my wife, Beth, and children, Hannah, Matthew, Emma, and Rebekah without whose support this dissertation would never have been completed.

NOTES ON TEXT QUOTATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

As already mentioned, this dissertation will focus on Kant's writings in English translation. I have made every effort to adopt the new Cambridge University Press (CUP) translation throughout, although, since this has involved a great deal of revision of my notes and quotations, there may still be some minor differences lingering in a few of the translated passages. In contexts where the particular source under consideration is obvious, I have taken the liberty of simply highlighting the pagination of the standard German edition of Kant's works, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian/German Academy of Sciences. If the source text is unclear or paraphrased, I have footnoted the text, giving the page numbers of both the English and German. Although *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* only capitalizes the first word of individual titles to Kant's works, I will treat these titles in the same way that I treat all titles by capitalizing the major words. At the time of writing the relevant portions of this dissertation, CUP had not yet published the complete volume on Kant's *Aesthetics and Teleology*. Therefore, I decided to use the *Critique of Judgement*, translated by James Creed Meredith, and the address 'Concerning Sensory Illusion and Poetic Fiction', translated by Ralf Meerbote. These two editions are listed under the 'Other Editions' heading below. There are a number of places where translations not listed below are cited, especially, for example, Kemp Smith's translation of the first *Critique* and my own translation of specific words and phrases from *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. These usages are usually limited to important exegetical contexts and in each case where appropriate the citation is duly footnoted. A full bibliographic record of secondary sources is located in the appendices. The complete list of bibliographic citations and abbreviations of Kant's writings used in this dissertation is provided below:

The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (General Editors: Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood)

Correspondence. Tr. and Ed. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

- Critique of Pure Reason*. Trs. and Eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Cited as ‘first *Critique*’.
- Lectures on Ethics*. Tr. Peter Heath and Eds. Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Lectures on Logic*. Tr. and Ed. J. Michel Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Lectures on Metaphysics*. Trs. and Eds. Karl Americks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Opus Postumum*. Trs. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen, and Ed. Eckart Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- Practical Philosophy*. Tr. and Ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). This text includes, among other works, ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?’ (cited as ‘What is Enlightenment?’), *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals* (cited as ‘*Groundwork*’), *Critique of Practical Reason* (cited as ‘second *Critique*’), ‘Toward Perpetual Peace’, and *The Metaphysics of Morals*.
- Religion and Rational Theology*. Trs. and Eds. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). This text includes ‘What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?’ (cited as ‘Orientation’), ‘On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy’ (cited as ‘Trials in Theodicy’), *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (cited as ‘*Religion*’), ‘The End of All Things’, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (cited as ‘*Conflict*’), ‘Preface to Reinhold Bernhard Jachmann’s *Examination of the Kantian Philosophy of Religion*’, and ‘Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion’ (cited as ‘Lectures on Religion’).
- Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*. Tr. and Ed. David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). This text includes, among other works, ‘An Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism’ (cited as ‘Optimism’), ‘The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God’, ‘Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics’ (cited as

'Dreams'), and 'On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World' (cited as 'Inaugural Dissertation').

Other Editions

Critique of Judgement. Tr. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

Cited as 'third *Critique*'.

Kant's Latin Writings: Translation, Commentaries, and Notes. Tr. and Ed. Lewis White Beck (New York: Peter Lang, 1986). This text includes, among other works, 'Concerning Sensory Illusion and Poetic Fiction'. Cited as 'Poetic Fiction'.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will explore the nature of theology in light of the full scope of Kant's philosophical programme. No single study can hope to address every aspect of Kant's thinking on this topic. My plan instead is to locate and trace what I take to be one particularly important line of reasoning in Kant's work that grounds theology on principles consistent with his critical writings. The line of reasoning that I have in mind originates in the first *Critique*, develops in his subsequent writings, and crystallizes in his thinking in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. The idea is to present the case that Kant's moral theology begins the extension and development of his philosophical programme in a way that both adheres to his strictures on knowledge set out in the first *Critique*, and prepares for the development of rational theology in accord with the transcendental character of Kant's philosophy of religion.

Much of what I will argue throughout is set on the backdrop of Gordon Michalson's influential exploration of Kant's philosophy of religion. In introducing the topic of Kant and theology, he observes that the interpretation and reception of Kant's philosophy in the two centuries since Kant's death have been characterized by two very different tendencies. One tendency has been theologically affirmative, 'veering off in the direction of constructive theological efforts to accommodate Christian faith and critical thinking'.¹ Interpretations of this kind understand Kant's philosophy to be both chastening of and in some sense supportive of traditional forms of religion and theology.² Such 'affirmative' interpretations find room for faith in different corridors of Kant's philosophy. Nevertheless, the common feature of this tendency is to believe that, despite the appearance of Kant's theoretical philosophy, there are very real and reasonable ways in which theology gains a foothold in Kant's philosophical programme. The task of interpretation is to articulate precisely how Kant secures this foothold.

¹ Gordon Michalson, *Kant and the Problem of God* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 4-5.

² For a complete account of this current trend, see Stephen R. Palmquist and Chris L. Firestone, eds. *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Fall 2005).

Michalson takes this tendency of interpretation to be the predominant one insofar as it has given rise to a whole set of problems and approaches unique to the theological discussion after Kant.

Michalson, however, notes that another prevalent tendency is to argue that Kant's philosophy implicitly advocates the 'abandonment of theism'. Interpretations of this kind understand Kant's philosophy and its influence on theology to be primarily negative. This position, Michalson's own, argues that Kant's 'efforts to ameliorate the theologically destructive effects of the *Critique of Pure Reason* implicitly makes things worse for Christian theism, not better'.³ This tendency understands Kant's influence to be traceable down the predominately atheistic path of Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and Marx. Kant, according to this tendency, releases human autonomy and sets it up in such a way that it becomes imperialistic and reductionistic relative to theology in all its manifestations.⁴

My thesis is that Kant's late writings, most especially his classic text *Religion*, provide a consistent development of his moral foundations for theology. The faith that Kant made room for was indeed moral faith, but, as I will argue, it was more than just morality. I contend moral faith only comes to completion (and indeed fruition) for Kant in the context of his turn toward the topic of religion and the question of hope. This turn is not solely determined by Kant's moral philosophy, but instead is the result of ongoing developments in Kant's thinking on the transcendental nature of his philosophy. These developments, I suggest, are consonant with the doctrines of central concern to Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy and are propelled by further concerns expressed and only partially addressed in the *Critique of Judgement*. In particular, the question of hope

³ Michalson, *Kant and the Problem of God*, 5.

⁴ For the purposes of this dissertation, interpretations of Kant's philosophy that tend to be received in a theologically negative way will be called 'traditional'. These interpretations are thought either to undermine all conceivable theological efforts to stake a claim regarding the nature of God, or to understand all talk about God to be an example of theological non-realism or deism. Referring to the 'traditional interpretation' of Kant's philosophy within these parameters is common parlance in the field of Kant studies, just as it is in the broader philosophical academy. See 'Editor's Introduction' in *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist, Eds.

occasions Kant's development of the moral theology, moving it decisively towards the use of distinctly religious concepts and an existential conception of transcendental theology.⁵

The thesis of this dissertation thus amounts to a presentation of Kant's transcendental theology and a partial defence of this theology against the charge of incoherence. Chapter One looks at three models for advancing beyond the first *Critique* and thereby understanding the whole of Kant's philosophical programme, including most importantly Kant's philosophy of religion. Section One develops an historical account of these three ways as representative of the tradition of Kant interpretation in English. In Sections Two, Three, and Four, we focus on each of these three interpretations respectively by looking more closely at three contemporary representatives of them. Considering the work of Ronald Green, Adina Davidovich, and Stephen R. Palmquist, we examine each interpretation for exegetical proficiency and its potential for providing a Kantian basis for theology. I argue that each of these interpreters is successful, albeit in markedly different ways, in establishing a rational basis in Kant's critical writings for the development of theology. However, each interpreter has to make interpretive concessions in order to make Kant's philosophy of religion consistent with his philosophy as a whole. These interpretations seem to indicate that, in order to understand Kant's philosophy of religion to be a consistent philosophical proposal, one needs simultaneously to deny specific insights in his critical philosophy proper or add to that philosophy something that it is not readily prepared to accept. This sets up the question of whether or not it is possible to interpret Kant in a way that provides a sound basis for theology and is consistent with his critical writings.

In the context of trying to determine if the issue of Kantian coherence has more to do with subsequent interpretations or with Kant's writings themselves, we turn in

⁵ Throughout the dissertation, the term moral theology is used in reference to the kind of theology that depends exclusively on Kant's practical philosophy. The term transcendental theology, however, is context specific, and used to refer to each of the various stages in the development of Kant's rational foundations for religious faith beginning in the first *Critique* and extending throughout his writings until his death.

Chapter Two to Kant's main text on religion, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. This work serves as the litmus test for all interpretations that purport to provide the definitive reading of Kant on religion and theology. First, we consider an interpreter who argues that inconsistency is the only constant in Kant's thinking on religion. This involves doing a detailed examination of Gordon Michalson's interpretation of *Religion*. The idea is to understand many of the central conundrums and inconsistencies in Kant's work, as understood by Michalson, and to locate those problems that need to be overcome if a sound philosophical basis for theology is to be established. In other words, Michalson's work becomes the main interlocutor in this dissertation for the defence of any interpretation found to be a sufficient understanding of Kant on religion and theology. After looking at these problems from the point of view of Michalson, we then return to the interpretations of Green, Davidovich, and Palmquist as a means for resolving them. We find that, although these readings go some way toward resolving these difficulties, they are not able to answer all of the objections (and some of the most important among them) and, to that extent, are likewise not able to present a complete and cogent case for a secure foundation for theology within the confines of Kant's philosophical programme.

With this established, Chapter Three turns to the first *Critique* to make plain the fundamental problem Kant faces in the establishment of the rational foundations for faith. We begin in Section One by examining a theological problem present in Kant's theoretical philosophy. There Kant argues that 'All concepts, and with them all principles, even such as are possible *a priori*, relate to empirical intuitions, that is, to the data for a possible experience. Apart from this relation they have no objective validity' (B195). Knowledge and the substantive use of the categories of the understanding appear restricted to appearances and derivations from appearances for Kant. By looking at the work of P. F. Strawson and Henry Allison, we explore two ways of understanding Kant's claims in the first *Critique* with a view to unpacking the grounds by which Kant believes himself licensed to move theology away from dogmatics, with its emphasis on being grounded in the appearance, to a more critical form of theology, with an emphasis on being grounded in the practical.

In the context of exploring a debate, started by Peter Byrne, over the very prospect of grounding theology in the practical, I present a case for this grounding beginning with the first *Critique*. This involves making two sets of distinctions. In Section Three, the distinctions made are between knowledge (*Wissen*) and cognition (*Erkenntnis*), on the one hand, and faith (*Glaube*), opinion (*Meinen*), and knowledge (*Wissen*), on the other hand. The chapter concludes with an explanation of why Kant takes cognition and faith to be essential for understanding rational theology, not as merely a formal element of his moral theology but as an existential part of his judicial philosophy.⁶ In the context of Keith Ward's interpretation of this transition to the practical as an example of 'empty formalism', I argue with Allen Wood and Leslie Stevenson for the establishment of a new method for understanding Kant's account of theology rooted in practical reason. With this fresh understanding of the role of cognition, its distinction from knowledge, and the place this carves out for religious faith, the chapter closes with a section devoted to articulating a new interpretive hypothesis for interpreting *Religion* that I call the 'Transcendental Union Thesis'.⁷

The climax of the dissertation is an expository interpretation of *Religion* in Chapter Four according to the Union Thesis. I argue in Chapter Four that *Religion* is an extension and development of Kant's moral theology in terms of a prototypical theology. In particular, I argue that the role of human cognition and moral faith first espoused in the first *Critique* comes to the fore in Kant's thinking in *Religion* and warrants his movement beyond merely moral theology (i.e., where God is considered merely as a postulate of the moral life) and into what he calls 'rational religion' (i.e., where God is considered as having condescended in the person of the prototype and as such is the proper object of any truly rational faith). It is faith in the reality of the human moral

⁶ This movement to the practical in the latter stages of the first *Critique* marks the beginning of the renowned fact-value bifurcation of philosophy and sets Kant on his later quest to 'bridge the gap' between nature and freedom that we find in the *Critique of Judgment*. It also initiates a kind of moral metaphysics of cognition that will not reach its fullness until the arguments of *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

⁷ The term 'Transcendental Union Thesis' is explained in more detail in Chapters Three and Four. For the sake of brevity, I will refer to this thesis as just the 'Union Thesis' throughout the dissertation.

disposition that is key to the grounding of Kant's prototypical theology in reason.⁸ Rational religion provides Kant with an array of reasonable ways of speaking about religion and theology. It is constituted in Kant's philosophical programme through the convergence of cognition, faith, the moral philosophy, and the question of hope.

Central to Kant's thinking on rational religion, I argue, are three forms of union that act as pillars holding up the main sections of his philosophy of religion; these pillars support theology in Kant's philosophical programme and are the main contributions of his critical inquiry into religion. These three pillars comprise the three main parts of the Transcendental Union Thesis. The three parts refer to three senses of union found in the first three Books of *Religion*. They are each important to keep in mind in order to master the many complex arguments and sub-arguments in *Religion*. The first is a conceptual union of humanity as an object of human cognition. There is, argues Kant, a universal idea of the human species (or humanity's moral disposition). On closer analysis for Kant, it is found out that this universal moral disposition is fundamentally corrupt. This problem makes way for Kant to present a second union in Book Two, namely, a possible union of the human person with the prototype of perfect humanity through moral faith. This second union involves belief, not in the gradual progress of human persons toward moral perfection, but in the complete replacement of the human disposition with the disposition of the prototype through the act of conversion. The third union is found in Book Three. This union involves a community of individuals under the good principle who intentionally and freely come together for the purpose of overcoming the evil principle.

Where Chapter Four provides an expository interpretation of *Religion* according to the Union Thesis, Chapter Five focuses on Kant's second experiment in *Religion* (Book Four) and *The Conflict of the Faculties*. *Religion* confirms the merits of the Union Thesis and extends it by addressing those aspects of Christianity that are not consonant

⁸ I borrow the term 'prototypical theology' from an essay by Nathan Jacobs, entitled 'Kant's Prototypical Theology: Transcendental Incarnation as a Rational Foundation for God-Talk' in *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*.

with rational religion; *Conflict* is at once a political treatise and a philosophical statement on the place of theology in the ongoing quest for human understanding in the university. I argue, in light of the interpretation of *Religion* previously espoused, that *Conflict* builds on the groundwork of rational theology established in *Religion* by expounding the basic criteria for Kant's philosophical framework for the ongoing work of theology. This includes an important role for the biblical scholar/theologian and for historical faith as that necessary feature of Kant's religious worldview promising to hasten the day when one universally true rational religion will be realized.

In the end, this dissertation provides a statement of and partial defence for Kant's conception of transcendental theology as a distinctly moral/rational/religious theology; it is rooted in the possibility of belief in God afforded by human cognition in Kant's theoretical philosophy, the grounding of belief in God as a postulate of Kant's moral philosophy, the establishing of belief in God through an existential commitment to the meaningfulness of the world, the fleshing out of belief in God as development of Kant's rational theology in the first three books of *Religion*, and finally the framework for religious practice and theological method outlined respectively in Book Four of *Religion* and in *The Conflict of the Faculties*.

CHAPTER ONE

KANT'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION REVISITED

I. Three Interpretations of Kant's Philosophy of Religion

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the history of Kant interpretation with a view to understanding the various approaches to interpreting the whole of his philosophical programme and its implications for his philosophy of religion. The point here is not to conduct anything like a complete survey of Kant's texts, nor is it to highlight every possible interpretation. Instead, we will take stock of Kant's programme insofar as it demonstrates potential for establishing a rational foundation for theology. Guided by the tradition of Kant interpretation, the analysis below seeks to identify concepts that, according to Kant and his key contemporary interpreters, appear important to the nature and viability of Kant's philosophical programme. These interpretative strategies provide guidance on how to understand Kant's writings on religion that are explored in more detail in the subsequent sections and chapters.

Interpretations of the writings of Immanuel Kant are unique in the history of philosophy. No single author has been so widely praised while at the same time so diversely understood. The extent of this interpretive diversity becomes immediately apparent when one considers the nature of the large, but still manageable, amount of literature in Kant studies at the turn of the previous century. The late nineteenth century is when Kant studies began to distinguish itself as a major subdivision of philosophy in the English-speaking academy. For reasons that will become increasingly clear as we survey the literature, the diversity of interpretation from this period can serve as a convenient preview of the various 'live options' for interpreting Kant's philosophy today. Corresponding to the 'back-to-Kant movement' in Germany,¹ competent research on Kant in English showed its first significant signs of life at this time. The surge of

¹ One of the most important developments in the dissemination of Kant's philosophy was the founding of the pre-eminent Kant journal *Kant Studien* in 1896.

interest in Kant led to a number of significant translations of his writings and notable secondary sources. These translations, in combination with several noteworthy original studies, outlined the legacy of interpretive disagreement over Kant's philosophy throughout the next century.

One of the most important interpretations of Kant emerging from this period was Kuno Fischer's *A Critique of Kant* (1888). This account was, at the time of its translation, the fullest account of Kant in any of the standard histories.² Following Fischer's publication, Edward Caird produced the first significant piece of Kant scholarship for our understanding of the tradition of Kant interpretation. Caird's two-volume work, entitled *The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant* (1889), was the first substantial work on Kant in English covering the full extent of his philosophy. His interpretation of Kant's philosophy is divided into four books. The first three books correspond to the three *Critiques* and the fourth book addresses Kant's *Religion*.³ For Caird, as well as Fischer, the most natural reading of Kant is the holistic one.⁴ 'For the theoretical, the practical and the aesthetic and religious consciousness are not really independent things, or the products of independent faculties, which stand side by side with each other; they are different forms of one conscious life, forms which rise out of each other in a certain order determined by the very nature of the intelligence'.⁵ Caird understood Kant's thought to be a coherent and dynamic whole, in which apparent contradictions find their resolution in the development and filling out of ideas, rather than in their relative demise due to logical inconsistency.

Another influential translation, entitled *Kant* by Friedrich Paulsen, was published in 1902. It provided an account similar to that of Caird in detail, but opposing it in its

² See translator's comments in Kuno Fischer, *A Critique of Kant* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey, 1888), esp. v. *A Critique of Kant* was vol.5 of Fischer's *History of Modern Philosophy*.

³ Edward Caird, *The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*, Vols. I and II (Glasgow: James Madehose & Sons, 1889). Caird's interpretive divisions closely follow Kant's own. The titles of his books are 'The *Critique* of Pure Reason', 'Kant's Ethical Works', 'The *Critique* of Judgment', and 'Kant's Treatise on Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason'.

⁴ Fischer, *A Critique of Kant*, 146. See also 'Translator's Preface', vi.

⁵ Caird, *The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*, 644.

overall vision. Among their notable agreements was their emphasis on ‘system’ or ‘critical wholeness’ in the interpretation of Kant. Instead of understanding Kant as a philosopher of four realms, however, Paulsen stressed Kant’s early critical position of there being essentially two intellectual realms. At the time Kant wrote the first edition to the first *Critique*, he had hoped that a complete critical philosophy would only need theoretical and practical explications. ‘[T]he chief question always remains: “What and how much can understanding and reason cognize free from all experience?” (Axvii)’. Kant’s transcendental philosophy, Paulsen thus believed, ‘falls into two branches: The metaphysic of nature and the metaphysic of morals or natural philosophy and moral philosophy. This corresponds to the great division of the objective world into spheres of nature and of freedom. The physical and moral world constitute as it were the two hemispheres of the *globus intellectualis*’.⁶ Paulsen downplays the importance of Kant’s work after the second *Critique* and highlights Kant’s failing health and inability to construct an adequate metaphysic upon the foundation of his transcendental philosophy.⁷

Henry Sidgwick’s *The Philosophy of Kant and Other Lectures* provided a complement to Paulsen’s work. The book was compiled posthumously from Sidgwick’s lecture notes in 1905. His account of Kant’s philosophy runs parallel to Paulsen’s in that it too asserts the systematic sufficiency of Kant’s theoretical and practical philosophies. It differs slightly, however, by rejecting the image of dual spheres in Kant’s work, positing instead the idea that Kant’s theoretical philosophy served as the foundation upon which the practical philosophy was built. To Sidgwick’s mind, Kant believed that the ‘ultimate aim of the whole of his philosophy is to establish the beliefs in “Immortality, Freedom, and God”’ and he ‘establishes them primarily as postulates of the practical reason, resting ultimately on our certain, irrefragable conviction of duty, together with our equally strong conviction that, in order that morality may be more than an idle dream, reason must assume a supersensible world in which happiness depends on

⁶ Friedrich Paulsen, *Immanuel Kant: His Life and Doctrine* (London: J. C. Nimmo, 1902), 110.

⁷ See, for instance, pages 43 and 111. ‘Thus in all respects the “doctrinal” construction fell far short of the “critical” foundation’. Paulsen, *Immanuel Kant*, 111.

the performance of duty'.⁸ Significantly, Sidgwick to my knowledge never mentions the third *Critique* or *Religion* in his writings that reached publication, and, when addressing topics such as the imagination and God, he limits himself to the technical applications of the first *Critique* or the postulates of the second *Critique*.⁹

Caird and Sidgwick, like their complements Fischer and Paulsen, set the early agenda in Kant studies with the emergence of Kant's popularity. In an important way, their interpretations summarised 19th century Kant scholarship and demarcated the parameters of Kant studies for the 20th century. As we have seen, two distinct avenues of interpretive influence emerged: Kant as the philosopher of four realms (theory, practice, judgement, and religion) and Kant the philosopher of two realms (theory and practice).¹⁰ John Watson forwarded a third possibility in his *The Philosophy of Kant Explained* (1908). He held that Kant's critical philosophy was in fact a consistent and coherent whole. He pointed out that there existed an inordinate gap in the two-realm interpretation of Kant and that the largely ignored third *Critique* had only to be properly understood to see the adequacy of Kant's own three-realm resolution. In the theoretical philosophy, the phenomenal/noumenal gulf represented an impassable barrier. Practical reasoning compels us to go beyond sense perception, because nature must 'permit ... the realisation of freedom; in other words, the sensible and supersensible realms must be so adapted to each other that the former does not present an insuperable obstacle to the realisation of the latter'.¹¹ For Watson, this clearly meant that the third *Critique* was no simple corollary to the theoretical or practical philosophies, nor was it an afterthought of little consequence. Even though Kant had not envisioned the need for writing it in the

⁸ Henry Sidgwick, *The Philosophy of Kant and Other Lectures* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1905), 17 and 18, respectively.

⁹ Sidgwick, *The Philosophy of Kant*, 63 and 184-195.

¹⁰ These two positions roughly separate two German schools of thought in the Neo-Kantian tradition: the Marburg School of Herman Cohen and the Baden School of Paul Natorp. Frederick Copleston, S. J., *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. VII (New York: Double Day, 1963), 362.

¹¹ John Watson, *The Philosophy of Kant Explained* (Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons, 1908), 396.

early 1780's,¹² the third *Critique* was, in Watson's opinion, the necessary and natural next step of Kant's critical inquiries. 'We must therefore expect that Judgment will mediate between understanding and reason by bringing into harmony the realm of nature and the realm of freedom, and that it will also be related to the feeling of pleasure and pain as the link between knowledge and desire'.¹³ Watson nowhere mentions religion with regard to the critical philosophy, but he does find consistency and completeness in Kant's three-realm understanding of reason.¹⁴

Interest in Kant's philosophy of religion peaked in the decade following Watson's interpretation. The 1920's saw a revival of interest in the field of religion and religious experience due to the exceedingly popular work of Rudolf Otto. Otto's *Das Heilige* of 1917 (ET *The Idea of the Holy*, 1923) represented an attempt to develop Kant's programme squarely into the realm of religion. Otto argued for four realms in his transcendental philosophy. According to Otto, Kant did not write a fourth *Critique*, because he did not recognise that religious experience was a universal phenomena. If he had, Kant would have been able to identify and articulate the unique sphere of religion. In short, Otto set out to do what Kant did not, namely, discover the necessary conditions for the universal phenomena of religious experience that could be observed throughout the world. He called it the 'holy'. According to Otto, the holy is the common

¹² Lindsay, in support of the three-*Critique* interpretation, writes, 'It will be remembered that Kant, in his letter of June 1771 to Marcus Herz, where he first talks of the work which was to become the *Critique of Pure Reason*, says that he has been concerned with what is "involved in the theory of taste, metaphysics, and moral theory."' Lindsay also points out other references in Kant's earlier letters that suggest that 'aesthetics ranked with metaphysics and moral theory as part of the general Critical program'. See A. D. Lindsay, *Kant* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1934), 215-220.

¹³ Watson, *The Philosophy of Kant Explained*, 396-7.

¹⁴ In Watson's earlier work, he links morality and religion, but writes that Kant in the third *Critique* 'points beyond the abstractions of the sensible and the supersensible to their actual concrete unity; but ... the most he can persuade himself to say is, that man is entitled to a rational faith in God, freedom and immortality, though these are objects which lie beyond the range of his knowledge'. John Watson, *Christianity and Idealism* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1897), xxxvi.

denominator of all religious experience; it identifies the human as essentially a religious being, and completes reason at its highest level.¹⁵

Spurred on by the work of Rudolf Otto, Clement Webb wrote an influential and timely book entitled *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (1926). This book was Webb's attempt to clarify the philosophical importance of religion in a purely Kantian context. On one level, his view represented a kind of tripartite synthesis of Kantian interpretation. It contained aspects of Caird's, Sidgwick's, and Watson's views, but comprised yet a new vision of the whole of Kant's philosophy. Like Watson, Webb recognised the seriousness of the gap in Kant's natural and moral philosophies and found the bridge between them in Kant's writings of the 1790's. Unlike Watson, however, he ignores the pertinence of the third *Critique*,¹⁶ finding the bridge instead in Kant's writings on religion. 'To appreciate the position of Kant in the history of philosophy of religion it is well to bear in mind his threefold division of the interest of human reason into the scientific, the moral, and the religious'.¹⁷ Only religion, in Webb's estimation, could provide the successful mediation of reason's transcendental dichotomy. This part of his work was successful in bringing the subject of religion back into purview of the way we understand Kant's philosophy.

Unity in Kant's philosophy, according to Webb, 'was essentially unattainable by the method of Science' and pure practical reason was of little help as well. Webb asserted that the essential bridge in Kant's philosophy 'was apprehensible by faith, or, in other words, belonged to the sphere of Religion'.¹⁸ On a deeper level, however, Webb's interpretation displayed significant inconsistencies. His interpretation neglected the third

¹⁵ See Chris L. Firestone, 'Rudolf Otto' in *The Dictionary of Historical Philosophy*, Ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 410-412.

¹⁶ Clement Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926), 71-2. Webb called the third *Critique* an 'artificial "architectonic"' and claimed that many of its arguments properly belonged to one or the other of the earlier *Critiques*. He believed that the most important function of the third *Critique* was as a precursor to Kant's work on religion. '[W]e shall not therefore be surprised to find in the *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, and especially in the second part of it, which deals with teleology, passages of great importance to the student of his philosophy of religion'. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 72.

¹⁷ Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 2.

¹⁸ Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 2-3.

Critique, and, as a result, was unable to explain satisfactorily how the progression of Kant's thought might justify the distinctiveness of religion. He conjoined religion and morality in a way reminiscent of the Paulsen/Sidgwick line of interpretation. 'It is the distinctive feature of the philosophy of religion that it teaches us to seek in our moral consciousness and there alone the essence of religion; for although in Religion there is, according to [Kant], as I have already pointed out, a certain connexion established between practice and theory, which are otherwise at odds, it is this connexion in which the practice determines the theory and not the theory the practice'.¹⁹ The integral connection between religion and morality seems to be why Webb believed that Kant held to the primacy of practical reason.

Webb's interpretation supplanted the earlier work of Caird, Sidgwick, and Watson, and became the century's leading perspective of Kant on religion. Its strength lay in its ability to synthesise features important to each of the three main interpretations of Kant, rather than its exegetical accuracy or explanatory virtues. Webb's interpretation integrated the systematic completeness of Watson's account, Caird's concern for the distinctiveness of Kant's philosophy of religion, and the two-tiered Kantian interpretation of Sidgwick. The third of these interpretive approaches, however, seems to have most significantly influenced Webb's understanding of Kant. A vital bridge between nature and freedom in the first two *Critiques* was absent in Webb's estimation and Kant had not succeeded in providing one in the third *Critique*. Webb argued that religious faith was the principal resource in Kant's writings to solve the problem. This faith was not a religious faith based on purely religious or theological resources; it was a moral faith in the postulates 'God' and 'immortality' based on pure practical reason.²⁰

Since the publication of Webb's *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, this linking of faith to moral postulates, and religion to practice, has become the traditional approach to

¹⁹ Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 17.

²⁰ Any consideration of 'Kant's general view of the world ... must bear in mind his conception of faith as a sufficient ground for action, though not for demonstration to the theoretical intelligence; and also his doctrine of the primacy of practical reason over the theoretical'. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 76.

interpreting Kant. In the interpretations of Sidgwick, Watson, and Caird, we find three quite different attempts to demarcate the fundamental contours of Kant's philosophy. Sidgwick held a two-tiered view, Watson suggested a three-realm view, and Caird argued for four forms of reason. Webb's interpretation marked a shift of balance towards Sidgwick's interpretation. The first sign of this shift was the publication of *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (ET *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 1934). Even though the translation itself quickly became the new standard and proved quite reliable in this role, Theodore M. Greene's introductory essay set the tone for its reception into the field of Kant interpretation. His essay certified the Webb/Paulsen moral interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion and dismissed Caird's interpretation.²¹ Instead of simply providing a good overview of the various ways in which one might approach reading *Religion*, Greene prescribed the two-realm view as the only good way of understanding Kant. Webb's book and Greene's essay served to catalyse the trend toward what I have called 'the traditional interpretation'.

In the years leading up to the contemporary discussion of Kant's philosophy of religion, which began for the sake of argument with the publication of Allen Wood's book *Kant's Moral Religion* (1971) and Michel Despland's book *Kant on History and Religion* (1972), numerous publications and debates centring on the two and three-realm interpretations epitomized the field of Kant studies. An interesting comparison, typical of this period, can be made between the interpretations of Richard Kroner in *Kant's Weltanschauung* (1956) and Stephan Körner in *Kant* (1955).²² For Kroner, 'Two great cultural powers are at the very foundation of the Kantian philosophy: natural science and moral life. The manner in which Kant pits these two powers against each other constitutes the dynamics of his system. For in their reality he sees the foci around which

²¹ Theodore M. Greene, 'The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant's Religion' in Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1934), ix-lxxviii. In a footnote on page xxxvii, Greene highlighted Webb's contribution to the interpretation of Kant's view of religion. For his summary dismissal of Caird's interpretation, see lxviii.

²² Richard Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956) and Stephan Körner, *Kant* (London: Penguin Books, 1955).

all philosophical thought moves, and he regards it as of the utmost importance to coordinate the two within a system'.²³ Kroner carried the theme of dualism throughout his interpretation of Kant's writings. It permeated into a complex system of dualisms based on Kant's scientific and moral emphases in the first two *Critiques*.²⁴

Körner, on the other hand, held to a three-part view of Kant's philosophy and its implications for religion. According to him, 'The Critiques of theoretical and practical reason are a systematic survey of a priori principles of empirical knowledge and of morality. They are not the whole system and not even the whole outline of the critical philosophy. ... Another Critique had to be thought out and written by Kant'.²⁵ Körner understood Kant to be holding to a close connection between morality and religion.²⁶ Yet, he argued for the possibility of a 'rational faith' in the writings of Kant.

[T]he two *Critiques* have prepared the ground for an act of faith which is in harmony with the findings of his critical philosophy. It can in this sense be called a rational faith. According to Kant it is rational also in the sense that it satisfies "an interest of pure reason", namely the connexion between the realms of nature and of moral freedom. However difficult it may be to understand Kant's notion of rational faith, he leaves us with no doubt that it is different from the apprehension either of the moral law or of the world of empirical fact. It belongs to the sphere of religion.²⁷

Körner highlights the importance of faith and the role of the third *Critique* for providing harmony among the critical components of Kant's philosophical programme. However,

²³ Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung*, 2.

²⁴ This can be seen in Kroner's understanding of God and God's relationship to human knowledge. He writes, 'God, and God alone, knows the full truth at a glance.... One can say that the entire separation of object and subject as well as that of theoretical and practical reason is only human; in the comprehension of God it does not exist. How far this comprehension can be fathomed by us is a difficult question'. Kroner, *Kant's Weltanschauung*, 81-2. Kroner's understanding of the dualisms in Kant capture the radical difference between the divine and human standpoints. For him, Kant's prolegomena to metaphysics ends there, and the only way to say more is to move to Kant's practical philosophy.

²⁵ Körner, *Kant*, 175.

²⁶ Körner, *Kant*, 168-71.

²⁷ Körner, *Kant*, 169.

he did not explore the possibility of a link between these two aspects. For Körner, Kant's philosophy of religion is distinct from his ethics in that it provides the vital unifying function. Nevertheless, it remains an enigmatic feature of Kant's thought; its only definitive place is in 'the realm of faith', which remains outside the confines of standard philosophical dialogue.

A valuable contribution to recent trends in Kant scholarship is Michel Despland's *Kant on History and Religion* (1973). In Despland's words, his book attempts to 'bring out the full meaning of Kant's philosophy of religion not primarily through the study of his views on morality and on the source of the moral law, but rather through the study of his views on the philosophy of history and on the problems of theodicy'.²⁸ His interpretation resists the temptation to understand Kant's philosophy of religion solely from the point of view of his earlier work, not by rejecting the traditional interpretation outright, but by emphasizing the development of Kant's thought into insights and perspectives unique to his later work. If Webb's *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* marked a turning point in the history of Kant interpretation, then we could rightly say that Despland's book marks a *returning* point. He fleshes out the concepts of community and hope in Kant's philosophy of religion, and, in so doing, relieves much of the stress on Kant's moral philosophy for interpreting his philosophy of religion.

Grace and revelation, in Despland's interpretation of *Religion*, act as necessary supplements to the human striving after goodness and a perfect moral kingdom. In *Religion*, Despland points out, the church plays a vital role in humankind's progression towards a perfect moral kingdom. The purifying and reforming of humankind via the church are made possible, on the one hand, by 'reason as the focus that draws and attracts', and, on the other hand, by 'revelation and grace [which are] the dynamic realities that move man along this progressive path'.²⁹ According to Despland, Kant's posture with regard to religion is one of reform. His interpretation liberates Kant's philosophy of religion from the other philosophical spheres, and shows that it contributes to the unification of the

²⁸ Despland, Michel, *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), 1.

²⁹ Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*, 242.

whole of his philosophy by regulating and chastening theology so that religion may in the end fulfil its proper function.³⁰

Despland's interpretation marks the return of a dispute in contemporary Kant scholarship between the three different ways of interpreting Kant's philosophy. His arguments make it clear that the traditional interpretation of Kant is often times too restrictive. Kant's writings display optimistic tendencies in regards to religion that suggest over and over again that he took the study of religion to be an important resource for his philosophical programme. This has direct implications regarding how we interpret his chief text on religion. *Religion* was certainly reliant upon Kant's moral philosophy, but, more than this, argues Despland, it demonstrated a definite and positive inclination towards the tenets of empirical Christianity, contained elements of hope from the third *Critique*, and left undecided, from the perspective of reason alone, the ultimate questions of revelation and religious experience. Despland's work paved the way in the field of Kant interpretation for re-examining the various ways of approaching Kant's philosophy of religion.

Around the same time as Despland's book, Allen Wood presented another influential account of Kant's philosophy of religion. Its importance for our discussion is that, like Despland's book, Wood's *Kant's Moral Religion* defends the claim that there is rational room, and perhaps even need, for the belief in revelation and grace in Kant's philosophy of religion. According to Wood, 'Kant does not dogmatically *deny* the possibility of a divine revelation to man', even if knowing that God has revealed himself is another matter entirely.³¹ He also makes an important point that 'Trust in God's forgiving grace, then, is an important aspect of moral faith, and it is itself justified in the *Religion*'.³² He highlights Kant's assertions never to contest the 'inner possibility of revelation' and 'the necessity of a revelation as a divine means for the introduction of religion' as proof of this contention. However, an instructive tension exists in Wood's

³⁰ Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*, 246.

³¹ Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 204.

³² Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 248.

interpretation that is absent in Despland. For Wood, Kant's theoretical and practical philosophies combine to create a kind of antinomy in Kant's account of religion. He explains it in this way: 'But though divine revelation itself is not possible [sic], it is impossible for any man to know through experience that God has in any instance actually revealed himself'.³³ Kant's decision not to dismiss the possibility of revelation makes for an uneasy tension with his theoretical philosophy. Is it both possible for God to be *revealed* and impossible to know it was God? And if so, what does this imply about any theological knowledge claim within the Kantian paradigm?

Wood's analysis of this difficulty focuses on the distinction in Kant between 'inner' revelation and 'outer' revelation. The former, which he links to morality, is said to serve as a 'touchstone' for any understanding of 'genuine revelation'. The latter has to do with empirical religion and Kant's theoretical philosophy. Wood's interpretation in *Kant's Moral Religion* resonates with the two-realm interpretations of Kant in the way it focuses on the moral dimensions of Kant's philosophy of religion. Yet, there is no sustained argument for why the concepts of taste, teleology, and history should be excluded at this crucial juncture. Wood's interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion parallels Despland's with the exception that Despland considers the historical dimension and its symbols as integral elements to understanding Kant's writings on religion. *Religion*, according to Despland's interpretation, is a complex and interwoven nexus of perspectives germane as much to the first and third *Critiques* as it is to Kant's moral philosophy. It is clear, for instance, that Kant believed that God could not reveal himself solely to a person's understanding or the theoretical faculty of sense experience, and that despite this lack of knowledge reason in its practical employment supports belief in God. It is not so clear, in light of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (as well as a number of his later writings), what this means for the prospects of revelation according to the whole of Kant's philosophy. Despland's interpretation takes considerable account of this insight without explaining how it might be more fully realized, while Wood's interpretation recognizes it, but is unsure about how to understand it coherently.

³³ Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 204.

Wood's position on Kant's philosophy of religion has gradually become less optimistic and more entrenched. In his article 'Kant's Deism', for instance, Wood argues that it was Kant's intention to transform Christianity into rational religion, 'includ[ing] as much as possible of it within the religion of pure reason'.³⁴ Wood adopts the position that, for Kant, historical religion is derivative of rational religion, and likewise relies exclusively on practical considerations for its determination. In Wood's interpretation, as it develops in the years following *Kant's Moral Religion*, religion becomes essentially an expression of morality.³⁵ Interpreters like Denis Savage and Bernard Reardon have promulgated this position in Kant studies. Savage argues against the thesis of Wood's early work by suggesting that Kant was a common deist who rejected the possibility of divine revelation outright.³⁶ In *Kant as Philosophical Theologian* (1988), Reardon suggests that 'What *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* offers us is ... a reinterpretation of Christianity solely in terms of moral values'.³⁷ Not only does Reardon contend that Kant limits Christianity itself to the moral tenets of his system, but also he makes the case that all manifestations of religion for Kant are exclusively linked to his moral philosophy. Reardon summarizes, 'Religion, accordingly, is equivalent to morality, but as seen not so much from the standpoint of the individual moral conscience—which is what ethics, in Kant's view, presents—as, so to speak,

³⁴ Allen W. Wood, 'Kant's Deism' in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, eds. Philip J. Rossi and Michael W. Wreen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 9.

³⁵ The primary exegetical evidence Wood forwards is based on a passage in which Kant lays out the four logical positions—the 'rationalist', 'pure rationalist', 'naturalist', and 'supernaturalist'—that may be adopted toward revelation (see 6:154-5). Wood argues that 'Kant is plainly a rationalist because he is simply an agnostic about supernatural revelation'. Wood, 'Kant's Deism', 11. John Hare argues the opposite—Kant was a 'pure rationalist'. John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 41-45. For Kant, the issue seems to be an ongoing debate that must be decided in the context of both philosophers and theologians: 'The point of dispute can therefore concern only the reciprocal claims of the pure rationalist and the supernaturalist in matters of faith, or what either accepts as necessary and sufficient, or only as accidental, to the one and only true religion' (6:155).

³⁶ See Denis Savage, 'Kant's Rejection of Divine Revelation and His Theory of Radical Evil' in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, 54-76.

³⁷ Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Kant as Philosophical Theologian* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1988), 90.

“objectively”, as part of that divine moral order in which the individual has his essential role’.³⁸

One of the main reasons why this theologically bleak line of interpretation has been under increasing pressure in recent years is that it lacks a comprehensive account of the whole of Kant’s philosophy. At the beginning of *Kant’s Moral Religion*, Wood notes well the dilemma of the traditional interpretation: ‘Much careful and fruitful labor has been devoted to the analysis of the subtle argumentation of Kant’s epistemology and moral philosophy; but his philosophical outlook as a whole, his view of the world and man’s place in it, is often grotesquely caricatured’.³⁹ He follows that comment with an outline of the solution: ‘there is an area of Kant’s philosophical thought—itself badly neglected by responsible scholarship—which though no less demanding on the reader than most of his writing, does give us a more or less direct access to Kant’s outlook as a whole. ... This area of thought is Kant’s investigation of rational religious faith’.⁴⁰ Like Despland, Wood highlights a problem with interpretations of Kant that reduce the theological spectrum of his thought to mere morality and outlines a number of key features to be considered by any plan that might address this problem.

This is where more theologically affirmative interpretations of Kant have gained a foothold in the contemporary debate over how to interpret Kant. Typically, these interpreters hold that there is room for rational thought, discourse, and belief about God within the parameters of Kant’s philosophy, provided that such thought, discourse, and belief are not limited to the resources of Kant’s theoretical philosophy alone. The foundation for theology comes from a different part of Kant’s philosophy that, though not dependent on the theoretical philosophy, is deemed to be compatible with it. In other words, the case for theology in Kant cannot be made with reference only, or even primarily, to the first *Critique*; it requires arguments drawn from texts that Kant wrote

³⁸ Reardon, *Kant as Philosophical Theologian*, 93.

³⁹ Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion*, 1.

⁴⁰ Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion*, 1-2.

after the first *Critique*. These arguments usually make it a point to capture a sense of the whole of the philosophical enterprise, something that is often lost to those interpreters of Kant who emphasize the authority of the first *Critique* for understanding the nature and extent of Kant's philosophical programme. Among these theologically affirmative interpretations of the whole of Kant's philosophy, the way the arguments are articulated and defended varies greatly. In the years following Despland, three approaches (analogous to the tradition outlined above) have become central to the interpretive debate.⁴¹

Ronald M. Green has taken up the task of advancing beyond the traditional interpretation in order to interpret Kant's philosophy of religion in a theologically affirmative and relevant way. In his three books, entitled *Religious Reason* (1978), *Religion and Moral Reason* (1988), and *Kant and Kierkegaard: The Hidden Debt* (1993),⁴² he offers the most thoroughly worked out case in the current literature for what I call 'the moral interpretation'. In a recent article, Green writes, 'At the heart of [my] program is the conviction that the moral judgments that we make and the array of religious beliefs that surround them arise from complex but ultimately comprehensible operations of practical reason'.⁴³ His interpretation of Kant continues the stream of interpretation consisting of Paulsen, Sidgwick, Webb, and Greene. This group, as noted earlier, emphasizes the two-realm reading of Kant's philosophy and interprets Kant's philosophy of religion based on Kant's moral philosophy. Green argues that Kant's philosophy provides an opening in the theoretical philosophy and thereby creates a bridge between the theoretical and practical philosophies. This connection between the theoretical and practical provides room necessary for substantiating a meaningful form

⁴¹ See Stephen R. Palmquist's introductory essay to *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, entitled 'The Place of This Volume in Recent Kant Scholarship'.

⁴² Ronald M. Green's *Religious Reason: The Rational and Moral Basis of Religious Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), *Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), and *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴³ Ronald M. Green, 'Probing the Depths of Practical Reason: Looking Back over Twenty-five Years', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 25/1 (Spring 1997), 15.

of theology. Key to Green's interpretation is the practical philosophy; it not only provides the justification necessary for metaphysical beliefs, but also provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for metaphysics in all its rational forms. We will take a closer look at Green's interpretation in the next section.

Adina Davidovich presents a case for the three-dimensional view of Kant's philosophy in line with Fischer, Watson, Körner, and Cassirer and applies it to Kant's philosophy of religion. In her book *Religion as a Province of Meaning* (1996), she focuses on Kant's third *Critique*, making the case that the faculty of judgement became, for Kant, reason's most important faculty. This is not only crucial, thinks Davidovich, for understanding how Kant's whole programme comes together, but also is decisive for determining the nature of Kant's philosophy of religion. She summarizes her interpretive strategy in her prefatory remarks:

I contend that in his last systematic works Kant considered religion an essential bridge between the worlds of theory and praxis and elevated its status as such to that of a necessary principle through which alone the unity of reason is established. Accordingly to this conception of religion belief in God is neither theoretical nor practical. I argue that through his discoveries in the *Critique of Judgment* Kant came to consider belief in God as a contemplative belief.⁴⁴

The picture of Kant's philosophy that emerges is a bifurcated sphere of theory and practice held together and harmonized by judgement. *Religion*, in her view, became an expression of Kant's understanding of what is most important to judgement. She calls this kind of judgement 'reflective' and 'contemplative' reasoning in its highest form, the form of judgement that deals with life's most important questions. Her interpretation contends that Kant's faculty of judgement, as explicated in the third *Critique*, not only provides an explanation of the language used to express human metaphysical beliefs, but also provides the only meaningful access we have to metaphysics.⁴⁵ The opening in her

⁴⁴ Adina Davidovich, *Religion as a Province of Meaning: The Kantian Foundations of Modern Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), xv.

⁴⁵ See Chris L. Firestone, 'Kant's Two Perspectives on the Theological Task', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2/1 (March 2000), 63-78. There, I argue that Davidovich's thesis is an example of the

interpretation of Kant is less a direct access or bridge to the theoretical and more an approximation process in which humans strive to understand God as the provider of harmony between nature and freedom and the ultimate guarantee of justice. Her interpretation, as an example of what I call 'the poetic interpretation', will be the focus of Section Three.

We also find in the recent literature a renewed attention to the stream of Kant interpretation initiated by Caird. Stephen R. Palmquist makes the case that Kant's philosophy is best understood as a system of three perspectives with an overarching ontology.⁴⁶ Palmquist's interpretation provides a good example of the four-realm interpretation or what I call 'the religious interpretation'.⁴⁷ His interpretation argues that Kant's later writings, particularly his writings on religion and his posthumous writings, bring into sharp relief a 'Transcendental Perspective' in which reason comes to consummation in the pre-reflective interface of reason and being-itself at the outermost bounds of human experience. This fourth realm acts as a fourth perspective of reason in Palmquist's terminology that becomes vital to the coherence and completion of Kant's philosophy. Palmquist's interpretation is based on the conviction that, for Kant, the religious uniquely manifests itself in the reality of human experience. According to Palmquist, Kant's understanding of religion is founded on the experience of God as being-itself. This is the origin and ground of all reasonable theological discourse and belief. Understanding this feature of Kant's thinking provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for what Palmquist calls 'Critical Mysticism'. Palmquist's religious interpretation has a direct impact in the way Kant's philosophy of religion is interpreted

'poetic hypothesis' for interpreting Kant's philosophy. The poet uses reflection and error to project images of the Highest Good and in this way seeks contemplative harmony for reason. For Kant's definition of the poet, see *Critique of Judgement*, tr. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 176-77 (314).

⁴⁶ See also Gregory R. Johnson, 'The Tree of Melancholy: Kant on Philosophy and Enthusiasm' in *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*.

⁴⁷ Palmquist accepts this designation in his contribution to the book *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*.

in that it relies upon the experience of God as a powerful personality and a loving lord.⁴⁸ Palmquist's interpretation is the focus of Section Four.

As we will see, each of these interpretations finds room in Kant's philosophy for theology in some form (albeit quite differently from interpreter to interpreter). But the question to keep in mind throughout this survey (and the question that we will address in this chapter and the next) is whether the room carved out for theology is truly on Kant's terms or representative of creative attempts to philosophise where Kant does not. My argument regarding each of these interpretations is that they do succeed in providing a rational foundation for theology out of Kant's philosophical programme, but that this success is not always achieved in ways consonant with Kant's philosophical programme on the one hand, and philosophy of religion on the other. This chapter focuses primarily on these interpretations as they relate to Kant's critical writings proper, while the next chapter focuses on them relative to Kant's writings on religion.

II. Ronald M. Green's Moral Interpretation of Kant

In the most general sense, Ronald Green's interpretation of Kant's critical writings amounts to a self-contained and systematic philosophy of reason.⁴⁹ It is self-contained in the sense that almost all human experience is said to derive from reason's often intense need to be logically consistent, and systematic in the sense that every significant human trait is held to be either directly or potentially treated within the system's general framework. The interesting thing about Green's interpretation is that it posits a two-realm view of Kant's philosophical programme that does not reduce religion to morality in an eliminative way; instead it provides a coherent account of Kant's philosophy as an integrated system based on two realms of philosophy in

⁴⁸ As Palmquist somewhat contentiously puts it, '[Kant] not only *believed* in the reality of a transcendent God represented by our theoretical idea, manifested in our practical reason (speaking to our conscience), and communing with us in prayer, but also actively *experienced* this reality in his daily life'. Stephen R. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2000), 313.

⁴⁹ Green, *Religious Reason*, 28.

dynamic relationship and a philosophy of religion that is theologically affirmative. The first realm of the philosophy he calls theoretical reason and designates as Kant's 'epistemology'; the second is practical reason or Kant's 'ethics'. Taken together, these two realms constitute the overarching structure of Kant's entire philosophical programme. The questions of hope and human identity, which are questions from the first *Critique* that appear on first blush to transcend the questions of knowledge and duty, can be explained by the 'deep structure' of reason in its theoretical and practical employments. This deep structure not only provides a clear picture of the whole of Kant's philosophical programme, but also a clear indication of what Kant was trying to accomplish in his writings on religion.

Green focuses most of his attention on the inner workings of practical reason. Although Kant's critical writings emphasize what Green calls practical reason's moral viewpoint, practical reason is necessarily composed of three interrelated 'points of view'—the moral, the prudential, and the religious. In describing Green's interpretation, we will try to maintain his most recent usage. Thus, for the two overarching parts of Kant's philosophy, we will use the terms 'theoretical reason' and 'practical reason', and designate his three subdivisions of practical reason as either 'points of view' or 'viewpoints'. Green believes that each point of view is important for, though the latter two are only implicit in, Kant's system. The implicit nature of these two viewpoints should not, however, lead the interpreter to think that they are somehow less important. According to Green, the internal logic of Kant's thinking depends on rightly understanding these points of view. By understanding the implications of these viewpoints on Kant's critical philosophy, we can understand its internal consistency as well as the consistency and profundity of Kant's philosophy of religion. Green contends that the logic of transcendental philosophy suggests three practical points of view taken together are all that is necessary to complete reason, that is, to bridge the gap between freedom and nature. This bridge of the fact/value divide establishes the location of the philosophical basis for religion and theology. Reason, thus, comes to consummation with the three viewpoints of practical reason.

The first point of view, or the surface structure of practical reason, is moral reasoning. In answering the question ‘What ought I to do?’ in any given situation, reason is naturally led to seek the ideal answer from a point of view which suppresses or even ignores our own ‘special needs and desires’. This viewpoint of practical reason is what Green calls ‘a direct expression of reason’.⁵⁰ Moral reasoning orients us to knowledge of the ideal action in any situation (subject of course to the limits of one’s knowledge of the facts). An ideal action is a selfless act of doing on behalf of others, not in the sense of completely ignoring the self, but in viewing oneself as just one amongst others affected by the decision. ‘[Moral reason] involves a perspective of radical impartiality or “omnipartiality” before the choices facing us as moral agents. It asks us to choose as though we might be any of the people affected by our conduct’.⁵¹ Practical reason acting morally is by definition so completely impartial that the term ‘impartial reason’ may be used as its synonym. By standing outside of ourselves so to speak, as though we were our own moral legislators, reason is able to establish the standard of perfect partiality necessary for moral effectiveness. Green believes that the impartial/moral point of view is the only viewpoint of practical reason that legitimates the categorical imperative as a constitutive principle of practical reason.⁵²

Despite the crucial role that the categorical imperative has for Kant’s moral philosophy, it was not the only principle that Kant thought necessary in order for practical reason to know what to do in a given situation. Green believes that the second half of the second *Critique* shows that happiness is related to practical reason in a way that transforms its inner workings into a new point of view.

Now we learn that happiness plays an important, indeed indispensable, role, in moral reasoning. In addition to the categorical imperative, Kant tells us, practical reason has as its presupposition and requires belief in the attainability of the “highest good,” understood as the proportionate and exceptionless union

⁵⁰ Green, *Religious Reason*, 34.

⁵¹ Green, *Religion and Moral Reason*, 6.

⁵² Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant*, 45.

of virtue and happiness. Without a constitutive role for the highest good, he says, morality would lack a complete object and moral striving itself would become empty and vain.⁵³

Green contends that Kant's discussion of happiness and the Highest Good at this crucial juncture implies practical reason has or at least should have deeper structural levels than the moral point of view alone (which he believes is constituted without reference to happiness and the Highest Good). In the second stage of practical reason, just as impartial reasoning compels us to do what we ought to do in an ideal world of thought or from a perspective of 'omnipartiality', prudential reasoning, given the reality of our individual situations in the actual world, urges us to choose according to our 'personal concerns'. It is that self-centred employment of reason that Kant would later develop into his theory of radical evil.

Below the surface of moral deliberation, personal happiness ineluctably transforms the inner workings of practical reason and constitutes a completely different and competing point of view. Moral reasoning, when personal happiness is seriously considered below the surface of moral deliberation, becomes prudential reasoning. One might say that if moral reasoning answers the question of duty by emphasizing duty to others, prudential reasoning answers the question by emphasizing the duty that we have to ourselves. Green does not use the term, but his view of prudential reasoning could be called *partial reasoning*, where partial is taken to mean 'favouring oneself' as opposed to the less desirable 'reasoning in part'. Prudential reasoning provides a viewpoint for making decisions that are partial to one's self. When reasoning prudentially, we are compelled to act according to our own special needs and desires because 'impartiality before the social array of desires can cause all or most of my desires—and the most important among them—to be suppressed'.⁵⁴ Prudential or partial reasoning puts the urgency of our own concerns to the forefront of our minds; it condones selfishness when selfishness is necessary to maintain our essential interests in the real world.

⁵³ Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant*, 50.

⁵⁴ Green, *Religious Reason*, 35.

Like Green, Allen Wood calls feeling (or the pursuit of happiness), when it constitutes a form of practical decision-making, 'reason as prudence'; however, unlike Green, instead of ascribing to it a status equal (and subsequent) to moral reason, he treats it as a preliminary form of practical reason which must give way to pure practical reason. 'Reason as prudence, therefore, defines a natural good for man prior to any moral considerations. ... Human happiness, well-being, or the natural good in given instances, however, may be either included in the object of pure practical reason, or excluded from it'.⁵⁵ If feelings of happiness can be included in the object of pure practical reason then it is 'a good for morality'; if feelings of happiness constitute one's actions and remove the moral law as the necessary condition of practical deliberation, then it 'is in fact a moral evil in Kant's view'.⁵⁶ For the purpose of attaining the purest practical reason, Kant argues that we must decide to give the formal principle precedence over the material principle in practical reason, 'for, as a principle of right, it has unconditional necessity, whereas the [material principle] necessitates only if the empirical conditions of the proposed end, namely of its being realized, are presupposed' (8:377). Practical reason has no necessary conflict with itself in its pure form; only prudential reasoning introduces conflict.⁵⁷ In contrast to Wood, Green's clever insight is that prudential reasoning is logically inevitable and a necessary component of honest human reasoning. This honesty creates the opportunity for reason to both embrace religion and bridge the gap between nature and freedom.

If one's initial reaction is to doubt the centrality of this notion of prudential reason in Kant's philosophical programme or to think that it cannot be made to cohere with Kant's strict emphasis on the moral law, Green asks us to wait for his complete

⁵⁵ Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 82.

⁵⁶ Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 82-3.

⁵⁷ The conflict with which Kant appears explicitly concerned is not between impartial and partial reasoning, but between the fluctuating (conditional) judgements opposing one another *within prudential reasoning itself*. 'The world will by no means perish by there coming to be fewer evil people. What is morally evil has the property, inseparable from its nature, of being at odds with itself in its aims and destructive of them (especially in relation to others similarly disposed), so that it clears the way for the moral principle of the good, even if progress is slow' (8:379).

explication of Kant's system of practical reason. Admitting happiness into moral deliberation does not degrade virtue; it, as already suggested, makes practical reason honest. When theoretical reason encounters the world, we learn that we not only have knowledge of things as they appear, but we also have knowledge of our own desires in relation to those things. Theoretical reason in a sense transforms moral reasoning, which before might have been called the 'pure' practical reason of virtue, into prudential reasoning, or a more genuine form of practical reason based on personal happiness. This complete transformation sets up a conflict in practical reason. In difficult situations, impartial and partial reasoning compel us to choose diametrically opposed courses of action. If these two employments of practical reason were our only recourse, we would find ourselves in constant turmoil and would be forced in the most difficult circumstances to self-destruct. Difficult moral decisions provide so much internal tension that reason's only 'reasonable' way forward is to seek an even deeper level of practical deliberation. Here, the concept of the Highest Good becomes vitally important.

Employing what Kant designated in the second *Critique* as an 'object' of practical reason (5:4 and 5:115), Green suggests that the idea of the Highest Good can have a constitutive role in practical reason. All that is necessary in Green's opinion to secure such a role for the Highest Good are the postulates God and immortality fully clothed in culturally contingent religious beliefs and practices. They allow us to act on behalf of the Highest Good knowing perfectly well that it may not be achievable in this life. 'There is, in fact, no third use of reason that can adjudicate the conflict between morality and prudence. But it may be that there is another way of handling the dispute between reason's two employments, *one that involves showing that no dispute really exists*'.⁵⁸ Religious reason, constituted by the Highest Good and supported by religious adherence, does not adjudicate the conflict; it simply views the situation in a whole new way. This new way is rooted in the religious beliefs and practices emerging out of the cultural/linguistic context of history. We can believe in the reality of our central

⁵⁸ Green, *Religious Reason*, 54.

religious doctrines because reason demands these beliefs as a stabilizing bridge between theory and practice (prudence and impartiality).

Reason employed religiously insists that the discrepancy between morality and prudence is 'only apparent, not ultimate'. Religious reason teaches us that the only rational way forward in decisions that affect our special needs and desires is to believe that moral retribution and rewards are certain. 'Just as a belief in retribution eases the apparently insuperable opposition between prudence and morality, so religious beliefs can make it rational to renew our dedication to moral effort even as we realize the difficulty of this task and the failures that loom before us'.⁵⁹ Because reason necessarily finds itself in conflict between the action of virtue and the action of happiness, only the postulation of a moral will greater than our own and faith in this postulate can guarantee that virtue and happiness will ultimately be brought together in their proper proportion. It is an improbable choice, but when all else is eliminated it is our only hope. 'Kant's total argument', Green contends, 'drive[s] us to the realization that his own transcendent resolution, as offensive as it may be, is the one to which reason is ineluctably driven'.⁶⁰ Although it is not entirely clear how this reconciliation is effected and sustained, it may not be wide of the mark to summarize it in the following way. Religious reason allows us to embrace the internal strife caused by practical reason's other two employments: it urges us to act morally, and, in the event that special needs and desires require strictly prudential decision making, it justifies our actions through faith in postulated religious beliefs. For Green then, transcendental belief is grounded in the relationship between the practical conflicts of reason and the theological beliefs of actual religious traditions.

Green's analysis of Kant's practical philosophy makes sense out of Kant's drive toward the religious in his later writings by linking them decisively to the practical philosophy. In so doing, he goes a long way toward establishing a reasoned foundation for religion and theology in Kant's philosophy. He argues that the relentless logic of Kant's moral philosophy, divided into partial and impartial components, requires faith

⁵⁹ Green, *Religion and Moral Reason*, 20.

⁶⁰ Green, *Religious Reason*, 68-9.

not just in a formal idea of God suitable for right action, but also faith in the reality of God consonant with Kant's theoretical strictures on knowledge. According to Green, the logical force of reason in conflict conjoins morality and metaphysics and leads to a breakthrough of Kant's first *Critique* strictures on knowledge. By appealing to the logic of a practical faith in God and immortality clothed in the phenomena of culture-specific religious beliefs and practices, Green argues that Kant shows how theology is critically rooted in reason. Green avers that practical faith in God and immortality 'opens a narrow aperture in the restraining wall of human cognition [Kant] built in the first *Critique*'.⁶¹ Theory is breached by the needs of practical reason, which, by its inherent logic, demands belief in those ideas which can guarantee the eventual fulfilment of the Highest Good. Because theoretical reason has already linked itself to practical reason through prudential reasoning, the way back to theory is open along the same path, which at a still deeper level is transformed into religious reasoning.

At the core of Green's interpretation of Kant then is a two-way bridge connecting nature and freedom. The empirical realm of reason, by forcing us to take our personal interests and predicaments seriously, links itself to practical reason, transforming its inner workings by changing moral reasoning into prudential reasoning; and practical reason, by postulating God and immortality as moral beliefs according to strict logic applied to our internal conflicts and external cultures, links itself to theoretical reason by creating an aperture in its limits, transforming the conflict of impartial and partial reasoning into religious reasoning.

In this simple and straightforward manner, Green's interpretation systematizes a number of the important elements in Kant's practical philosophy. It accounts for both Kant's primacy of practical reason doctrine and his later turn to religion with a powerful hermeneutic hypothesis for understanding Kant's philosophical programme as a whole. This whole provides the philosophical framework for theology rooted in the various religious traditions and practices around the world. Belief in and discourse about God is

⁶¹ Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant*, 57.

possible because the internal logic of reason is driven out of necessity to fuse morality and metaphysics. Historical religious beliefs and practices are the means by which this synthesis takes place. In the second half of *Religion and Moral Reason*, and then again in his work on Kant and Kierkegaard, Green begins the task of showing how Kant understood in this way provides a fruitful account of religion in its various forms, and a foundation for discourse about God that makes sense of human experience.

There are a variety of points at which Green's interpretation is open to criticism, however. For example, it could be contended that freedom in Green's interpretation is very different than freedom in Kant's moral philosophy proper. According to Henry Allison, for example, freedom and the moral law imply each other. Outside of its relationship to the moral law, freedom is likely to be hindered rather than helped.⁶² Green's interpretation could also be criticized insofar as it answers the questions of duty and hope at the expense of the questions of knowledge and human identity. Are our own prudential concerns the most appropriate theoretical aperture for the establishment of a moral theology? Most significantly, however, and this will be our primary focus for the rest of this section, the viability of Green's interpretation as an interpretation of Kant seems to hinge on the concept of transformation.

Green's interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion centres around an unresolved problem in Kant's practical philosophy. When practical reason encounters the world and incorporates our desire for personal happiness into our moral deliberations, it leads to the reconstitution of morality into a new prudential form. This new viewpoint, Green contends, constitutes a new kind of freedom; we are 'free to be immoral' as well as free to do our duty. The freedom to be moral and the freedom to be immoral constitute opposing practical viewpoints, which lead reason into what appears to be an irresolvable conflict, one which is only exacerbated when we are confronted with the most difficult of life's decisions.⁶³ According to Green, the problem is resolved

⁶² See Henry E. Allison, *Idealism and Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 114-18.

⁶³ Kant, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, highlights two concepts of freedom, negative freedom and positive freedom. This division does not suggest competing notions of freedom, but complementary notions of

for Kant in the transformation of practical reason into a third viewpoint. The purpose of this second and final transformation of practical reason is to replace the uncertainty and inequity inherent in the dual employments of practical reason with the certainty and equity of one dominant religious employment. In this light, the transformation of freedom moves one step beyond even prudence. Instead of having two disputing notions of freedom, one emphasising the freedom to be moral and the other the freedom to be immoral, practical reason in Green's account is logically driven to transform freedom once again according to the concept of the Highest Good. We, as individuals, are no longer compelled to act according to ends designed to enhance our innate capacity to be free, but ends based on our capacity to be just. Green's interpretation thus comes to culmination in the concept of justice as the supreme moral principle.⁶⁴

Although Green is right to link the moral law and the Highest Good to Kant's philosophy of religion, his interpretation is vulnerable on the issues of human justice and moral transformation. We will focus on the latter of these two issues here and address the former in more detail in the next section.⁶⁵ Contrary to Green's interpretation, it seems to me that Kant wants *transition*, and not transformation, to be the *modus operandi* of his philosophical system. I will argue for the remainder of this section that, to the extent that Green's interpretation diverges from Kant's concept of transition, it becomes less viable as an interpretation of the whole of Kant's philosophy in general and the details of his philosophy of religion in particular. We begin with the first *Critique*. There, Kant made two points of note concerning transformation and transition:

freedom that lead to practical reason's fulfilment. 'Freedom of choice is this independence from being *determined* by sensible impulses; this is the negative concept of freedom. The positive concept of freedom is that of the ability of pure reason to be of itself practical. But this is not possible except by the subjection of the maxim of every action to the condition of its qualifying as a universal law' (6:213-214).

⁶⁴ In the last section of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant's discussion of ethics and morals, like that of Green, concludes with the concept of justice. Instead of focusing on human justice as the supreme end of all our actions, Kant appeals to 'divine justice' (6:489). Divine justice has to do with the ultimate ends of our actions. Divine justice incorporates the concepts of eternity (immortality), God, and the Highest Good by appealing to reflective teleology and the end of the human race in love (6:488).

⁶⁵ Where Green locates the concept of human justice in the realm of individual decision-making, Kant locates it in the realm of political decision-making. See 'Doctrine of Right' in the first half of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and Kant's essay 'Toward Perpetual Peace'.

firstly, the concept of transition is to be favoured over certain kinds of transformation, and secondly, the concept of transition will be useful for the ultimate completion of the transcendental philosophy. In discussing some of the positive aspects of Plato's philosophy in the Transcendental Dialectic, a practical application of transformation, similar to one which Green's interpretation espouses, is the target of Kant's indignation:

Whoever would derive the concepts of virtue from experience and make (as many have actually done) what at best can only serve as an example of an imperfect kind of exposition, into a pattern from which to derive knowledge, would make of virtue something which changes according to time and circumstance, an ambiguous monstrosity not admitting of the formation of any rule (A315, B371).⁶⁶

Notice how Kant's tone is stern and personal. His main point is that giving a determinative role to experience (or the personal concerns which arise because of experience) in practical deliberation turns virtue into something it cannot be. This transformative procedure is the very opposite of what Kant took to be correct about Plato's theory, that is, his method of moving from the original idea of virtue to judgements about moral worth and not the other way round. Mierklejohn's 1887 translation is less emotive on this point than Smith's and perhaps even more revealing. Instead of using a term like 'monstrosity' to translate '*Unding*', Mierklejohn chose the word 'nonentity'.⁶⁷ For Kant, a conception of virtue transformed under the conditions of experience becomes literally a nonentity. Transforming moral reasoning into prudential reasoning is not a matter of simply transforming virtue into something like qualified self-interest (which would seem to exemplify the essence of Smith's translation

⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1929). In order to maintain continuity with the published form of this section, all subsequent quotations of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in this section are from this text. However, I have expanded the section beyond its published form and added references to the new Cambridge University Press translation in the text and footnotes to maintain an overall continuity.

⁶⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. J. M. D. Mierklejohn (London: George Bell and Sons, 1887), 222. In the Cambridge University Press translation of the first *Critique*, Guyer and Wood side with Mierklejohn's translation. Mierklejohn also used the word 'transform' instead of 'make' to translate '*machen*'. Here, Smith's translation, as well as Guyer's and Wood's translation, which also uses 'make', is the better translation.

anyway). On the contrary, the above passage suggests that our understanding of self-interest, given the varying conditions and complexities of life that contribute to it, is critically unstable and incapable of attaining any usable form.

Within the context of the first *Critique*, however, we are getting somewhat ahead of ourselves. Kant at that time had not fully articulated the concept of transition, and we have to follow the development of his thought carefully to avoid reducing it simply to the sum of its parts. Kant's negative view of moral transformation is offset in his system by the positive affirmation of the concept of transition. Although the details are not specifically worked out in this text, Kant did go as far as suggesting that the concept of transition would allow the critical philosopher to navigate beyond the realm of scientific reason into the 'wide and stormy ocean' of metaphysics itself (A235, B294-295). The possibility of this role for transition is first brought to light in the chapter entitled Transcendental Doctrine of Judgement. In writing of perception, Kant notes, 'Now, from empirical consciousness to pure consciousness a gradual transition [*Veränderung*] is possible, the real in the former completely vanishing and a merely formal a priori consciousness of the manifold in time and space remaining' (A166, B208). Although this suggestive remark was meant to provide only one part of numerous smaller arguments for categorical thinking, it anticipates further developments in Kant's thinking and his later more extensive use of transition (*Übergang*) in explicating his critical philosophy.

Kant is sure enough of the merits of transition to bring up the idea later and in increasingly important contexts. One of these contexts is a section immediately following the one in which Kant discusses transformation (quoted above). While noting the limitations that theoretical reason imposes upon the critical philosopher, Kant asserts that the concept of transition could play an important role in seeing the ideas of freedom, immortality, and God as potential avenues for reason's self-consistent extension. '[The] concepts of reason', he writes, 'may perhaps make possible a transition [*Übergang*] from the concepts of nature to the practical concepts, and in that way may give support to the

moral ideas themselves, bringing them into connection with the speculative knowledge of reason. As to all this, we must await explanation in the sequel' (A329, B385-386).⁶⁸ The importance of transition for moving from the theoretical employment of reason to the practical employment is later confirmed in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Written between the first and second *Critiques*, Kant describes the purpose of this short work as 'nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*' (4:392). Kant divides *Groundwork* into three sections which all bear the word 'transition' in their titles. In fact, Kant makes it clear that the book as a whole was to serve as a transitional phase for a '*Critique of Pure Practical Reason*' and a prolegomena to his proper *Metaphysics of Morals*. According to Kant, all this would be done without severing 'the unity of practical [reason] with speculative reason ... which must be distinguished merely in its application' (4:391).

Groundwork, understood as a preparatory and transitional phase in Kant's writings, leads directly to the second *Critique*. This movement is not, as we have already noted, performed in any way by transforming reason, only by the promise of moving to a new vantage point, one appropriate for a critical answer to the question of duty (viz., What ought I to do?). This explanation of transition is most closely related to the definition of the German word *Übergang*, meaning literally 'to walk over', as to gain another perspective. *Übergang* connotes movement 'over' or 'across', whereas a word like *Umformung*, meaning 'transformation', connotes a *turning* 'over' or 'around'. Only by moving to a different point of view—one with its own rule—can reason hope to resolve the question of duty. As would be expected, the concept of transition surfaces at key junctures in the second *Critique*. In that work, Kant makes it clear that it is not only desirable to go beyond his first *Critique* (of theoretical reason) in order to make a critique of practical reason, but also possible to do so 'because reason is considered in transition to quite a different use of those concepts from what it made of them *there*. Such a transition makes it necessary to compare the old use with the new, in order to

⁶⁸ Kant refers to freedom, immortality, and God as 'unavoidable problems set by pure reason' in the 'Introduction' to the first *Critique* (A3, B7).

distinguish well the new path from the previous one and at the same time draw attention to their connection' (5:7). Kant later provides a synopsis of the details for this transition after his table on freedom in the *Analytic of Practical Reason*. He highlights an analogous connection between theory and practice: 'One quickly sees that in this table freedom is regarded as a kind of causality—which, however, is not subject to empirical grounds of determination—with respect to actions possible through it as appearances in the sensible world' (5:67). The passage goes on to assert that freedom, considered under the concept of transition, can be understood as a 'causality outside the sensible world' because it is presented to practical reasoning in association with the moral law (5:67).⁶⁹

Putting aside for a moment the conceptual debates surrounding this claim, it will be useful for the exegetical aims of this section to juxtapose this positive portrayal of transition with the resolutely negative portrayal of transformation that Kant reaffirms in the second *Critique*. One such passage associates transformation with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of the ancient Greek schools. Interestingly, we find it near the beginning of the *Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason*, the part of the second *Critique* that Green often refers to in support of his interpretation:

One must regret that the acuteness of these men (whom one must, nevertheless admire for having in such early times already tried all conceivable paths of philosophical conquest) was unfortunately applied in searching out identity between extremely heterogeneous concepts, that of happiness and of virtue. But it was in keeping with the dialectical spirit of their times, which sometimes misleads subtle minds even now, to suppress essential and irreconcilable differences in principle by trying to change them ... and this usually occurs in cases where the unification of heterogeneous grounds lies so deep or so high, or would require so complete a transformation of the doctrines assumed in the rest

⁶⁹ Henry Allison has defended at length two theses that are important to mention with regards to freedom and the moral law. They are the 'Incorporation Thesis' and the 'Reciprocity Thesis'. The Incorporation Thesis is 'the view that inclinations or desires do not of themselves constitute an incentive or sufficient reason to act but do so only insofar as they are "taken up" or "incorporated" into a maxim'. Allison, *Idealism and Freedom*, 109. As noted earlier, the Reciprocity Thesis is that the moral law and transcendental freedom imply each other.

of the philosophic system, that they are afraid to penetrate into the real difference and prefer to treat it as a diversity merely in formulae (5:111-112).

The identity of 'the real difference' between the concepts of happiness and virtue to which Kant alludes in this passage is open to some debate, but one thing seems clear: whatever it is, it should not be discerned by transformation. Empirical considerations of happiness are primarily a matter for theoretical reasoning and moral considerations of virtue belong to practical reasoning. This is not to say that there is no relationship between them, but only that a critical explanation of such a relationship should resist all forms of transformative synthesis. As mentioned earlier, Kant calls the idea of the Highest Good 'the object' of practical reason, but, in the context of second *Critique*, its significance is not fully explored.

Despite the distrust of transformation that is found interspersed throughout the second *Critique*, it is at the same time not hard to see how Green derives prudential and religious reasoning from passages in the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason. At the beginning of Book Two, for example, Kant writes that the Highest Good must be 'the whole *object*' of pure practical reason (5:109). For Green, phrases like this provide interpretive evidence that the Highest Good might *become* a constitutive principle in the final employment of practical reason, even though Kant is quick to point out that the Highest Good 'is not on that account to be taken as [the pure will's] determining ground' (5:109). The point is further supported, it would seem, by the first paragraph in the following section entitled 'On the Dialectic of Pure Reason in Determining the Concept of the Highest Good' (5:110-113). There Kant writes:

That virtue (as worthiness to be happy) is the supreme condition of whatever can seem to us desirable and hence of all our pursuit of happiness and that it is therefore the supreme good has been proven by the Analytic. But it is not yet, on that account, the whole and complete good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings; for this, happiness is also required, and that not in the partial eyes of a person who makes himself an end but even in the judgment of an impartial reason, which regards a person in the world generally as an end in itself. For, to need happiness, to be also worthy of it, and yet not to participate in

it cannot be consistent with the perfect volition of a rational being that would at the same time have all power, even if we think of such a being only for the sake of experiment. Now, inasmuch as virtue and happiness together constitute possession of the highest good in a person, and happiness distributed in proportion to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy) constitutes the highest good of a possible world, the latter means the whole, the complete good, in which, however, virtue as a condition is always the supreme good, since it has no further condition above it, where as happiness is something that, though always pleasant to the possessor of it, is not of itself absolutely and in all respects good but always presupposes morally lawful conduct as its condition. (5:110-111)

A passage like this supports the contention that both happiness and the Highest Good have significant roles in the constitution of practical reason. Happiness, it seems, must also be considered as part of the aim of practical reason. Only with an assumed role for happiness in practical deliberation can we reasonably expect that the Highest Good could conceivably be a part of a possible world under the governance of the supremely wise Creator.

Now the question that remains to be decided is what the role for happiness and the Highest Good might be for the critical philosopher. An answer to this perplexing problem is pursued in greater detail in the third *Critique* and *Religion*. However, Kant uses language similar to Green's in the concluding paragraph of the above section to point to the resolution of this difficult question from the practical perspective:

Thus the question, how is the highest good practically possible? Still remains an unsolved problem despite all the attempts at coalition that have hitherto been made. The Analytic has, however, shown what it is that makes the problem difficult to solve, namely that happiness and morality are two specifically quite different elements of the highest good and that, accordingly, their combination cannot be cognized analytically (as if someone who seeks his own happiness should find, by mere resolution of his concepts, that in so acting he is virtuous, or as if someone who follows virtue should in the consciousness of such conduct

find that he is already happy ipso facto); it must instead be a synthesis of concepts. (5:112-113)

Here Green's dialectical structure is in place and the elements virtue, happiness, and the Highest Good find roles amenable to Green's interpretation. From these passages, one could argue that Green has a strong case. Yet, his position is more enlightening in its deviations from details of Kant's argument than it is in its similarities to it.

If there is one conclusion to the Analytic in the first half of the second *Critique* that seems to demand complete adherence by any interpreter of Kant, it would have to be the proposition that 'The moral law is the sole determining ground of the pure will' (5:109). The moral law is the very proof that freedom 'does in fact belong to the human will', that 'pure reason can be practical ... [and that] it alone, and not reason empirically limited, is unconditionally practical' (5:15). To say that a prudential decision is practical is to make either a false statement or to make a conditional statement. The first possibility we need not consider here, for some prudential decisions are selfish in a quite negative sense or simply evil. The second possibility, however, Kant does seriously consider. The condition which makes a prudential decision practical in the strictly Kantian sense is the condition that all our prudential musings conform to the moral law. Green is clearly correct to notice that Kant is aware of another principle (*viz.*, our desire to be happy) at work in moral deliberation, and that the moral law and the prudential law are logically opposed to one another, and even that they call for a synthesis to complete a full critique of practical reason. However, he appears outside the parameters of what Kant's writings will allow when he argues that the moral law must give way to happiness in the first instance and the Highest Good in the second, and that freedom must be transformed from its pure moral state to a more honest moral/religious state.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ In Chapters Two and Four, I will argue along with Green that transformation does have a positive role in Kant's philosophy of religion, but this role is not one that transcends the moral law but only fulfils it.

III. Adina Davidovich's Poetic Interpretation of Kant

Adina Davidovich's *Religion as a Province of Meaning: The Kantian Foundations of Modern Theology* capitalizes on the work of Watson, Körner, and Cassirer, and advances the three-realm interpretation of Kant's philosophy in a new form. Where Green finds the ground of religion and theology in reason's practical employment, Davidovich finds this ground in reason's judicial employment. Davidovich's interpretation draws attention to the fact that Kant's philosophy has at its disposal the faculty of judgement, which, in the context of the first and second Critiques, has no constitutive function. In *Critique of Judgement*, however, aesthetic and reflective/teleological judgement, which are the themes of its first and second halves, work together to form a kind of judicial reasoning. According to Davidovich, the faculty of judgement is the supreme faculty of reason and judicial reasoning is the supreme employment of reason. They generate the human capacity to contemplate by poetically fusing feelings and concepts, and thereby harmonizing nature and freedom. Contemplation, as such, is the constituent feature of religion as a realm of meaning and the chief means by which the gap between theory and practice can be overcome. Davidovich explains, 'Kant is led to a position that we can only characterize as the *supremacy of contemplation* over both practical and scientific concerns'.⁷¹ Understanding the inner workings of contemplation and its relationship to the third Critique is crucial to understanding the novelty and profundity of Davidovich's interpretation of Kant.

The significance of Kant's third *Critique* for Davidovich comes to the fore early in *Province of Meaning*. In the chapter entitled 'The Conflict between the Interests of Reason', she argues that, even though Kant at one point did hold to the primacy of practical reason, the third *Critique* reveals that this was not his final position. As Kant's philosophical programme developed, the transcendental method of reason in transition (first modelled in Kant's move to the second *Critique*) demanded that a third *Critique* be

⁷¹ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 40. Italics mine.

thought up and written. If Kant's philosophy is thought of in a bifurcated form, the Copernican revolution as an answer to Hume's dilemma of causality is as much a problem for philosophy as it is a solution. The nature-freedom divide is, philosophically speaking, as potentially problematic as the causal gap between experience and knowledge. Where for Hume we have only a feeling of a necessary connection between repeatable observations and scientific knowledge, for Kant we have causality and freedom as opposing a priori constituents of reason. Hume's philosophy admits to an inductive separation, while Kant's philosophy appears to be on the verge of transcendental contradiction. According to Davidovich's interpretation, this is a sufficient reason to expect from the third *Critique* a resolution to the problem of unifying the whole transcendental system of philosophy.

As with Hume, Kant in the third *Critique* turns to feeling in order to resolve the problem of a gap. Feeling, for Kant, is not limited to the empirical context, but refers more fully to an experience of beauty and the sublime in the context of hope and Highest Good. His expressed intention is to undertake a transcendental quest to find the a priori constituents for the faculty of judgement.⁷² The degree of success of Kant's quest in the third *Critique* is a long-standing debate in the field of Kant studies. Realizing this, Davidovich thus begins her interpretation with a frontal assault on the common assumption that the primacy of practical reason is a cornerstone of Kant's philosophy. According to her defence, Kant asserts the primacy of practical reasoning only over theoretical reasoning, and only because of the stifling effects caused by the conflict between our inclinations (theory) and the moral law (practice).⁷³ Davidovich does not find in Kant, however, the kind of prudence and religious belief (understood as purely practical resources) for bridging this gap that we find in Green's interpretation. The insoluble conflict between theoretical and practical reason is exacerbated by the infinite

⁷² 'But now comes *judgement*, which in the order of cognitive faculties forms a middle term between understanding and reason. Has it got independent *a priori* principles? If so, are they constitutive or merely regulative, thus indicating no special realm? And do they give a rule *a priori* to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, as the middle term between the faculties of cognition and desire, just as understanding prescribes laws *a priori* for the former and reason for the latter?' (168)

⁷³ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 33.

gap between them and no bridge can be constructed with the resources of either side. Kant explicitly addresses the gap between nature and freedom only in the third *Critique*, and, for this reason, it is there, and not in the second, that we should expect Kant's unification of nature and freedom.⁷⁴

As a hypothesis for understanding the trajectory of Kant's philosophical programme, Davidovich's interpretive strategy has considerable appeal; it gathers in Kant's third instalment to his critical philosophy while maintaining the purity and integrity of the previous two, and it provides an important role to Kant's highly influential but often maligned theory of aesthetics and contemplation. However, as an interpretation of Kant's philosophy in the context of a lengthy tradition, it must overcome a couple of obvious objections. If judicial reasoning or contemplation did actually become primary for Kant in the years after writing the *Critique of Practical Reason*, why did he neither reconfigure the original doctrine nor defend the supposedly new doctrine? And why are his later writings on religion at least as prone to a moral interpretation as they are to a poetic interpretation? Davidovich's arguments are most convincing in establishing the necessity in Kant's mind for the unification of reason. There are textual obstacles, however, to establishing contemplation as the supreme concern of Kant's critical philosophy that she has to overcome and it will be worth taking a closer at these obstacles as they present themselves in the third *Critique*.

The chief concern of the third *Critique* is to understand how it is that reason can hold the theoretical and practical perspectives simultaneously and in unity. From the perspective of theoretical reason, actions have consequences that can only be understood meaningfully according to the category of causality. From the perspective of practical reason, all deliberate human action must finally be free action, even if this means, in situations of physical coercion that freedom manifests itself only as the free objectification of oneself. These two interpretations of 'freedom'—one pragmatic and

⁷⁴ 'Albeit, then, between the realm of a natural concept, as the sensible, and the realm of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, there is a great gulf fixed' (175-176). 'There must, therefore, be a ground of the *unity* of the supersensible ... [which] renders possible the transition from the mode of thought according to the principles of the one to that according to the principles of the other' (176).

the other transcendental—appear at odds with one another. Davidovich places this problem under the rubric of epistemology. In trying to live a moral life, reason confronts the following problem: How do we know ‘that moral acts, worthy and vicious, do take place’?⁷⁵ We need to know that good and evil actions ‘are realized’ in order to have a reasonable hope of overcoming the state of nature that threatens to undo us. In other words, the problem of the gap between nature and freedom boils down to a problem of history. Davidovich sums it up this way: ‘Kant sees this as a problem that can only be answered through a teleological principle, from the point of view of a conception of the end of history in light of the rational Ideal of the Highest Good’.⁷⁶ We need to know that there is history, because only in knowing that we are actually capable of acting freely (in spite of the causal nexus of the world) can we hope to become truly moral.

For Davidovich, the problem of unity creates the critical space necessary for a third employment of reason based on human ‘contemplation’ or ‘contemplative reason’. This space is dependent on the idea of the Highest Good and the existence of an all-powerful moral judge who insures its viability. ‘Armed with this contemplative principle, humans can interpret the world itself as the stage for moral evolution and not just some blind mechanical causality’.⁷⁷ She unpacks the method of contemplation in reference to the third *Critique*. ‘[W]e learn from the *Third Critique*’, she writes, ‘by reflecting on the various reflective judgments, we reach contemplative conclusions’.⁷⁸ The key words in her definition are ‘reflecting’ and ‘reflective judgments’. The former, she contends, refers to ‘thinking’ (or discursive reasoning), while the latter involves the conjoining of ‘feeling’ and ‘purposiveness’. Reflective judgements provide the grounds for theological faith and religion as a realm of meaning. The fusion of our theological

⁷⁵ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 54.

⁷⁶ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 69.

⁷⁷ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 57. For Davidovich, however, ‘*Religion* cannot be interpreted as providing an account of the historical evolution of Practical Reason ... [or] an “evolutionist” theory of Practical Reason because for him the moral law is a fact of Reason’. Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 142.

⁷⁸ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 154.

reflections and the purposiveness that we feel in nature provide Kant's first secure philosophical foundation for religious belief and practice.

Feeling is the main focus of Kant's account of aesthetic judgement in the third *Critique*. The faculty of judgement, in this sense, 'finds a reference in itself to something in the Subject itself and outside it, and which is not nature, nor yet freedom, but is still connected with the ground of the latter, i.e., the supersensible—a something in which the theoretical gets bound up into unity with the practical in an intimate and obscure manner' (353). Davidovich identifies this 'something' as the notion of a 'supersensible substrate' by which 'Kant accounts for the universal validity of the judgments of taste'.⁷⁹ She likewise writes that 'The analysis of taste thus becomes a decisive stage in the restoration of unity to our cognitive powers'.⁸⁰ This designation, if taken literally and in the context of Davidovich's overall interpretation, can be misleading, however. In Davidovich's way of interpreting Kant, aesthetic judgement is only 'decisive' in the sense that it paves the way for an even more decisive role for teleological reflection. She supports this interpretive strategy by comparing the form of the third *Critique* to that of the first *Critique*. 'According to my interpretation of the first part of the *Third Critique*, the task of the analysis of judgments of taste is analogous to the aesthetic of the *First Critique*. Like the discussion of space and time, the analysis of the judgments of taste is a propaedeutic. It paves the way for the study of teleological judgments'.⁸¹ The purpose of her comparison is to argue that the role of aesthetics in Kant's philosophical economy is subordinate to that of teleology. This downplaying of the critique of taste is the most distinctive aspect of her interpretation of Kant's judicial philosophy and the key to understanding it. This downplaying of aesthetics is also, I believe, the point at which her interpretation of Kant is its most vulnerable.

The third *Critique* appears to be more of an exploration than a discovery. Kant turns in the third *Critique* to judgement to order to assess whether or not or to what

⁷⁹ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 70.

⁸⁰ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 71.

⁸¹ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 71.

extent judgement *might be* constituted by a priori principles. It is true that the second half of the third *Critique*, like the first half, has both analytic and dialectic chapters, thus signalling a significant critical function, but it is not evident, however, that the ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgement’ is propaedeutic to the ‘Critique of Teleological Judgement’. If anything, the details of their functions in the third *Critique* suggest quite the reverse is the case. Aesthetic judgements serve to unite freedom and nature through feeling (178). The role of teleological judgements is to lead us to understand such feelings as being full of purpose; they ‘affect’ our understanding of metaphysics from a philosophical point of view by treating science and morality as a ‘propaedeutic’ to theology (417). This subtle distinction in the relationship of aesthetic and reflective judgement in Kant’s third *Critique* is perhaps the most important feature to keep in mind in trying to develop an adequate account of the third *Critique*.

Paul Guyer, in his book *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, addresses the relationship between aesthetic and reflective judgements in Kant’s judicial philosophy. He writes, ‘We may use the theory of reflective judgment to interpret Kant’s model of aesthetic response, but not to identify the *a priori* principle of aesthetic judgment’.⁸² To identify the *a priori* principle of aesthetic judgement using a deduction of reflective judgement is to unravel (to make objective) that which by its very nature is enigmatic (subjective, or, more exactly, intersubjective).⁸³ Guyer expresses this point succinctly as follows:

[W]hat Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgement can adopt from his general theory of reflective judgment is the idea of a cognitive goal, analogous to that of systematicity, the satisfaction of which is a constant objective on our part, but not an idea that the fulfillment of such a goal must or even can be postulated in advance of the experience of particular objects. ... Kant’s ultimate connection between the faculty of reflective judgment and our pleasure in objects of taste depends on the fact that the fulfillment of the aesthetic analogue of systematicity cannot, if it is to be pleasurable, be anticipated on the basis of any

⁸² Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 65. Henceforth cited as *Claims of Taste*. See also Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 33 (191-92).

⁸³ Guyer, *Claims of Taste*, 50.

conceptualization of the object of taste. Thus a principle which allows us to postulate a priori that nature possesses a property in virtue of which it conforms to our own faculty of reflective judgment is not merely irrelevant to Kant's theory of taste; it is actually precluded by the explanation of aesthetic response which lies at the basis of that theory.⁸⁴

If Davidovich appeals to aesthetic judgement as that instance in which reflective unity is experienced, then taste, and not contemplation, must be the essence of Kant's judicial solution to the problem of unity. Guyer argues convincingly for the hermeneutic priority of 'aesthetic judgement' for reason in its third employment over 'reflective judgement'.⁸⁵ Basically it is the aesthetic experience of the subject that, according to Kant, occasions a smooth transition from theory to practice and not the meaningfulness attributed to that response by reflective judgement. Reflective judgement, instead, helps us to understand how it is humanly *possible* to conceive of a unity between the theoretical and practical perspectives of reason. Aesthetic judgement provides the unity that we actually experience. Through the feeling of harmony (*purposiveness*) which is totally mysterious (*without a purpose*), we experience things as 'beautiful'.

All this is not to say that reflective judgement is superfluous or nugatory. Davidovich understands that 'To be able to recognize spatio-temporal events as moral acts, we need to be able to contemplate nature in terms of final causes'.⁸⁶ The main feature of reflective judgement is not to constitute an instance of aesthetic judgement, but to demonstrate that it is *possible* to ascribe meaning to those ineffable (but genuine) feelings of purposiveness that are part of a purely aesthetic experience. It fills in the teleological blind spot of judicial reason with a creatively constructed, humanly oriented *possibility*. This poetic designation pushes to the very borderline of the philosophical quest and is consonant with Kant's first *Critique* strictures on knowledge. In this way, Davidovich's doctrine of contemplation can provide an important philosophical resource

⁸⁴ Guyer, *Claims of Taste*, 50-1.

⁸⁵ See Guyer, *Claims of Taste*, 50-51.

⁸⁶ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 89.

for doing theology, because it makes sense of the purposiveness that we feel without being able to identify definitively its source or to adjudicate decisively its truth. Provided we reflect passionately and soundly on life's deepest questions in full recognition of the empirical facts and in obedience to the moral law, the religious life can flourish. Theological truth claims must remain, however, more like reasonable approximations of truth rather than manifestations of truth.

Contemplative judgements make their first appearance in the third *Critique* in the 'First moment' of the 'Analytic of the Beautiful'. There, Kant forwards a definition that puts aesthetic judgements under the rubric of contemplative judgements. '[T]he judgement of taste is simply *contemplative*, i.e., it is a judgement which is indifferent as to the existence of an object, and only decides how its character stands with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure' (209). Now, a question immediately arises. Does this mean that aesthetic judgements are determined in any sense by reflective concepts or simply that they fall into a new non-empirical category of judgement? Kant's answer is clear: 'But not even is this contemplation itself directed to concepts; for the judgement of taste is not a cognitive judgement (neither a theoretical one nor a practical) and hence also is not *grounded* on concepts, nor *intentionally directed* to them' (209). What distinguishes judicial reasoning from the theoretical and practical employments of reason is not that it ascribes a purpose to feelings of pleasure, though it certainly does, but that it enables us to experience purposefully, freely, and without interest, and in so doing allows reason to make a transition smoothly and peaceably between nature and freedom.⁸⁷

For Kant, pure judgements of taste are not derivable from concepts chosen from the free play of contemplation, since such judgements would inevitably have interest attached to them. They are instead 'aroused' when 'the imagination (as the faculty of intuitions *a priori*) is undesignedly brought into accord with the understanding, (as a

⁸⁷ In the second moment of aesthetic judgement, Kant argues that taste has a universal quality. It is this universal quality that moves us to imagine taste as a possible manifestation of purpose (purposiveness), even as part of a grand purpose (a finality), and to share in this with others. 'The judgement of taste does not *postulate* the agreement of everyone ... it only *imputes* this agreement to every one ... it looks for confirmation, not from concepts, but from the concurrence of others'. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 56 (216).

faculty of concepts,) by means of a given representation' (190). This free sense of purpose, without a definitive purpose of its own, unites freedom and nature using only its a priori resources, that is, without an imaginative notion of purpose. What then is the function of contemplative/teleological judgements in relation to the broader economy of Kant's judicial philosophy?

A hint of this function can be found in Kant's third moment of judgements of taste. In summing up why feelings of pleasure in aesthetic judgements are 'merely contemplative', Kant explains that 'We dwell on the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself' (222). Kant implies here that even though there is an immediacy and universality to feelings that we call beautiful, they are not necessarily lasting impressions. Only through the contemplation of teleological reflection are aesthetic judgements able to persist.⁸⁸ Contemplative reason stores the experience of purpose afforded by taste in the free play of the imagination and in human memory.

It should not be assumed, however, that teleological judgements capture any actual purpose inherent in an experience of beauty. For Kant, our contemplated purposes are more like symbols for a hidden divine purpose. Such a divine purpose may or may not be the constitutive a priori principle of aesthetic judgements of beauty, but the content of the divine purpose is certainly beyond the grasp of any conceivable human perspective alone. This should not deter us from constructing such a purpose in its absence, however. As Kant in his 'Dialectic of Teleological Judgement' put it, '*For the reflective judgement ... we must think a causality distinct from mechanism, namely a world cause acting according to ends, that is, an intelligent cause—however, rash and undemonstrable a principle that might be for the determinative judgement*' (389).

⁸⁸ 'It is of note that the imagination, in a manner quite incomprehensible to us, is able on occasion, even after a long lapse of time, not alone to recall the signs for concepts, but also to reproduce the image and shape of an object out of a countless number of others of a different, or even of the very same, kind'. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 77 (234).

In the extended section that follows this statement, Kant goes on to outline important considerations for the determination of any ultimate causality. In the teleological employment of judgement, Kant contends we ‘cannot avoid the necessity of drawing a distinction between the possibility and actuality of things’ (401). Unlike the theoretical philosophy, which demands that we think of the immediate experience as things-in-themselves, judicial reason demands that we recognise the provisional nature of imaginative thought. ‘For if the understanding thinks it—let it think it how it will—then the thing is represented as merely possible. If it is conscious of it as given in intuition, then it is actual, and no thought of any possibility enters into the case’ (402).

Kant thinks that, in trying to move smoothly from the second *Critique* to the third, and from aesthetics to teleology, reason needs a contemplative purpose to accomplish cognitively what aesthetic judgement only accomplishes experientially through taste. It achieves its demands, but, in view of the third *Critique* alone, only in the realm of possibility. The realm of possibility, however, is not stagnant; it moves toward the realm of actuality. On Davidovich’s interpretation, teleological reflection is spurred forward by the idea of the whole in the context of our incomplete and inadequate conceptions of the Highest Good. The idea of the whole chastens and guides the human understanding, and, for this reason, is crucial to substantiating Kant’s philosophical writings after the first *Critique*.

Davidovich’s interpretation of Kant understands the whole as a ‘regulative’ concept of contemplation. In reference to its importance to science, she writes, ‘Kant introduces the concept of an *organized whole* as a regulative concept of reflective judgment that guides Reason, in its manifestation as Judgment, in its search for sufficient causes of organisms’.⁸⁹ Clearly, however, the idea of the whole has an even more important role in Davidovich’s interpretation than merely the advancement of science. The whole guides reason towards a unified conception of experience by

⁸⁹ Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 110.



regulating the expansion of reflective reason towards the contemplation of nature and freedom under one purpose.

There exists an important difference between Davidovich's and Kant's understanding of the whole. There are at least two senses of holism present in Kant's writings. Elsewhere, I have designated them under the terms *hermeneutic* and *hermetic* conceptions of the whole.⁹⁰ The hermeneutic conception of the whole follows from Kant's constant reminders to his readers of the importance of keeping in mind his whole system when reading its parts. This sense of the whole is not what I am referring to as the point of disagreement between Davidovich and Kant. The hermetic conception of the whole is different, however. The whole in this sense refers to the surplus of meaning in human cognition that yields the possibility of faith from a philosophical perspective. In Chapter Three, we will focus on cognition as a crucial aspect of Kant's theoretical philosophy for establishing a rational foundation for faith. For now, it is enough to notice that Davidovich, because of the way she prioritizes teleological reflection over aesthetic judgement, uses the concept of the whole as the constitutive feature of human reflection on God, world, and humankind, whereas Kant maintains the primacy of practical reason and develops these grounds for theology in answer to questions that still remain to be addressed in his subsequent writings.

IV. Stephen R. Palmquist's Religious Interpretation of Kant

Palmquist's interpretation defends the contention that there is one overarching perspective that is fundamentally important for understanding the nature and extent of Kant's philosophy. The insights of Green and Davidovich have provided the structure of our analysis thus far. Depending on which part of Kant's post-theoretical philosophy is held to be primary, a completely different understanding of the extent and limitations of Kant's philosophy of religion emerges. When practical reason is held to be both the

⁹⁰ These terms are developed in Chris L. Firestone, 'Kant's Two Perspectives on the Theological Task', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2/1(March 2000), 63-78.

primary perspective of reason and the only perspective of fundamental significance to theology, the resulting ‘gap’ leads to partial reasoning and a prudential theory of religion. If judicial reason is held to be the bridge connecting theory and practice and the supreme perspective of reason, the whole becomes the constitutive element of all theological reflection and religious practice.

The most distinctive part of Palmquist’s religious interpretation, the part separating it from the other two so far examined, is the assumption that religious experience is experience of a special kind. This experience is not, strictly speaking, scientific, moral, or aesthetic, but instead is mystical. Religious experience is the experience of something non-worldly impinging itself upon us. According to Palmquist, reason has this kind of fourth dimensional access to reality. A critical examination of this religious function of reason is both necessary and sufficient for a complete explication of our metaphysical beliefs. Palmquist’s technical name for it is the ‘Transcendental Perspective’.⁹¹ The Transcendental Perspective does not have a special relationship to any single *Critique*, but is the overarching perspective governing all of them. As Palmquist writes, ‘This over-arching “Transcendental (or “Copernican”) Perspective”, which is based on the assumption that the subject imposes certain a priori conditions on the object, defines the systematic context into which all three Critical systems fit’.⁹² The Transcendental Perspective, because it is the most general of all Kant’s assumptions, surfaces primarily in the ‘Preface’, ‘Introduction’, and ‘Doctrine of Method’ sections of Kant’s Critiques, and only approaches critical completion in his writings published posthumously.

⁹¹ Palmquist, *Kant’s System of Perspectives*, 61. Palmquist asserts that ‘There is no ‘transcendental standpoint’—i.e. no separate *Critique* corresponding to the transcendental perspective—because this perspective forms the Transcendental Perspective which governs *all* the [perspectives] on the very highest level on which the principle of perspective operates in Kant’s System’. The capitalization of Transcendental Perspective signifies the overarching nature of this perspective. In *Kant’s Critical Religion*, the Transcendental Perspective becomes crucial to the understanding of Kant’s residual affinity for metaphysics after his critical turn in the first *Critique* as well as his bold return to metaphysics in the *Opus Postumum*.

⁹² Palmquist, *Kant’s System of Perspectives*, 58.

The very idea that Kant's philosophy might require a third transition to this overarching fourth perspective is not obvious just by simply surveying his major works in a linear or chronological fashion. Kant's system does not appear either readily equipped for such a transition or in the immediate need of one. His philosophy, as Davidovich argues, is composed of three Critiques in dialectical formation, each representing a different perspective and each in active interface with the others. Reason, fully extended, depends upon this interface for its constitution and stability. Under the religious interpretation, however, this structural description of reason serves only as a technical explanation of reason's inner workings; it is indicative only of a careful analysis of reason under the strict condition that such an analysis takes place without appeal to experience. This sort of inquiry constitutes a critical account of the fundamental *parts* of reason, but does not constitute a critical account of the *whole* as it manifests itself in our actual encounter with the world. Only a critical assessment that takes into account our being in the world is able to complete Kant's transcendental philosophy.

This way of understanding Kant's philosophy is indicative of Palmquist's interpretation in his most recent book, entitled *Kant's Critical Religion*. To this point, we have followed the technical development of Kant's philosophy into three parts or realms. Palmquist's interpretation of Kant is compatible with the understanding of Kant suggested by this account. His interpretation, however, as it moves into Kant's later writings, goes a step further. He understands the ontological features of Kant's posthumous writings in such a way that they fill in what Kant terms a second 'gap' in his critical philosophy. According to Palmquist, Kant refers to this gap in a letter to Christian Garve in 1798 (12:256–12:258). We will discuss this letter in more detail below. The letter was written seven years after the third *Critique*, and is sketchy enough in its details so as to make the nature of the gap referred to in it not easy to discern with anything like certainty. However, armed with Kant's pre-critical essay 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics' and the notes left on Kant's desk when he died (now called the *Opus Postumum*), Palmquist makes a bold and original case for what he coins 'Kant's Critical Mysticism'.

Critical mysticism assumes that human experience has, as its source, a unique ontological dimension. This assumption involves the conviction that we actually have religious experiences that are distinct from all other kinds of experience and that are rooted in our encounter with the world at its most fundamental level. These experiences are hard, if not impossible, to put into words, but they are among the most basic or primordial features of our experience. They make up a unique dimension of human experience—the religious—and provide the ground for all theological and metaphysical discourse. Humans as a species have universal access to this religious dimension of reason, but for some this capacity to experience religiously goes unrecognized. When this capacity is critically assessed, Palmquist believes it becomes clear that the overarching transcendental perspective provides the decisive perspective of reason. It unites Kant's philosophy into a metaphysical whole and leads reason to its final consummation. We will here be tracing Palmquist's cumulative case for a religious interpretation beginning with his analysis of 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' and ending with his analysis of the *Opus Postumum*.⁹³

Palmquist's strategy for supporting his version of the religious interpretation depends upon showing a relationship between the beginning and end of Kant's philosophy. At the beginning of Kant's philosophy, Palmquist contends that the seeds of Kant's mature ideas were originally sewn in his encounter with the mystical writings of Swedenborg in the 1760's. In 1766, this encounter led Kant to write 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer'. In this essay, Kant vehemently criticized Swedenborg's account of his supposed mystical experiences for lacking any sense of philosophical rigour and 'contain[ing] not a single drop of reason' (2:360). Often interpreters take this firm rejection of Swedenborg's writings to mean that Kant was against the possibility of any kind of mysticism whatsoever. Gregory Johnson, in the Introduction to the latest translation of 'Dreams of Spirit-Seer', disagrees with this conventional wisdom. Johnson asks essentially three questions: (1) Why did Kant choose to publish "Spirit-Seer"

⁹³ Palmquist's case for Critical Mysticism involves addressing the full range of Kant's philosophy. In many ways, his interpretation agrees with or advances on the work of others already discussed. This section is merely focusing on what makes Palmquist's interpretation unique in the field of Kant studies.

anonymously? (2) Why does Kant here depart from his notoriously stolid academic prose? (3) Why does Kant vacillate between such extremes of scorn and admiration, indifference and fascination, for Swedenborg's work? Johnson points to the possibility that Kant was "two-faced" in his dealings with Swedenborg—interested as much in career advancement as with being perfectly transparent about his real affinities for a controversial figure like Swedenborg.⁹⁴ Palmquist concurs with Johnson's analysis, and argues that the conventional interpretation is unwarranted. He understands 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' to be exemplary of the cognitive context out of which Kant's critical writings emerged. He uses the metaphor of a tree and its soil to describe Kant's interest in Swedenborg's mysticism. Like a tree, Kant's philosophy grew out of this soil of mysticism. 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' thus represents, according to Palmquist, the hidden seed of his philosophical quest.

At the end of his philosophy, the *Opus Postumum* was Kant's attempt to compose a mystical finale to his system. Its primary task, according to Palmquist, was to seek to understand the inner workings of the overarching transcendental perspective of reason. This perspective provides reason with its primary subjective faculty and unifies theory, practice, and judgement into a whole system of transcendental philosophy. For Palmquist, Kant's third *Critique* had shown how to begin the task of bridging the gap between theoretical and practical reason, but 'the bridge he has built is not nearly as strong and secure as might be desired'.⁹⁵ The *Opus Postumum* supports the view that Kant desired a final Transcendental Perspective that could provide ontological closure for his philosophy. Palmquist holds the combined force of re-evaluating the significance of 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' and the *Opus Postumum* supports the veracity of the religious interpretation and the compatibility of mysticism with Kant's philosophy. We will work our way toward an interpretation of the *Opus Postumum* under the religious

⁹⁴ *Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*, Ed. Gregory R. Johnson, Trs. Gregory R. Johnson and Glenn Alexander Magee (Swedenborg Foundation, 2002).

⁹⁵ Palmquist, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, 310.

interpretation by following Palmquist's reading of 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' and relating this reading to the flow of Kant's writings in his critical period.

Palmquist begins his interpretation of 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' by acknowledging the obvious point that Kant rejects most of Swedenborg's visionary claims as being critically untenable. Kant's language is at times harsh and his tone often sarcastic. The reason for this uncharacteristic approach is not clear. Whatever the actual case, he later seemed somewhat embarrassed by 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' and did not include the essay in a book of his collected writings.⁹⁶ Palmquist suggests that the tone of 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' is often over-interpreted. Limiting ourselves to what Kant actually writes, argues Palmquist, we discover that Kant is clearly against mysticism of a certain kind, namely, fanatical kinds of mysticism, which attempt to usurp reason's authority in its rightful domains, and superstitious kinds of mysticism, which attribute special powers to worldly things without good reason for doing so (2:360). Palmquist contends that, although Kant condemns Swedenborg's writings as an *ad hoc* mixture of both of these bad forms of mysticism, he does not disavow all forms of mysticism without exception. Palmquist feels that this way of approaching 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' creates enough room to think that Kant could have developed a positive position on mysticism in his subsequent writings without contradicting the critical tone of his earlier work.

What is needed is a constructive argument from the writings of Kant's critical period. Palmquist believes that the case for critical mysticism emerges in the comparison of 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' with the first *Critique*. In describing the content of 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' as it relates to Swedenborg's writings, Palmquist writes, 'Many of the important doctrines of his Critical philosophy are foreshadowed in this book (*and*, using rather different language, in Swedenborg's own books).'⁹⁷ In one passage in 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer', for instance, Kant outlines two advantages to maintaining a critical approach to metaphysics; both sound very much like his emphasis on critical inquiry and

⁹⁶ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 25 (F12).

⁹⁷ Palmquist, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, 321.

limits in the first *Critique*. The first advantage is that it neutralizes the work of mystics like Swedenborg, who enlist reason to support theories about hidden properties of things without reasonable cause (2:367). ‘The second advantage of metaphysics’, according to Kant, ‘is more consonant with the nature of the human understanding. It consists both in knowing whether the task has been determined by reference to what one can know, and in knowing what relation the question has to the empirical concepts, upon which all our judgements must at all times be based. To that extent metaphysics is always a science of the *limits of human reason*’ (2:367-8). The emphasis on limits, Palmquist points out, is a clear indication of its relatedness to Kant’s later critical writings.

Other passages in ‘Dreams of a Spirit-Seer’ foreshadow the central themes of the second *Critique* (2:369-73). In a series of rhetorical questions, for example, Kant asks, ‘What, is it only good to be virtuous because there is another world? Or is it rather the case that actions will one day be rewarded because they are good and virtuous in themselves? Does not the heart of man contain within itself immediate moral prescriptions?’ (2:372). Material links like these provide the first part of the evidence that Palmquist forwards in support of his interpretation. This is not original exegesis in the sense of saying something about Kant’s writings that is not already acknowledged by other scholars.⁹⁸ Palmquist’s work on ‘Dreams of a Spirit-Seer’, however, is constructive and helpful in that it puts all in one place many arguments and evidences from kindred interpreters (as well as Kant himself) that create enough interpretive room to think that there really is a link between Kant’s early encounter with mysticism and his later critical philosophy.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Palmquist draws our attention first to Borowski’s biography of Kant, which uses the metaphor of the seed to describe the relation of ‘Dreams of a Spirit-Seer’ to the first *Critique*, and then to Manolesco who uses the same metaphor: ‘this treatise [(‘Dreams of a Spirit-Seer’)] contains ... many of the seeds of Kant’s Critical Philosophy’. Even Paulsen finds that the ‘[“spiritology” in “Dreams of a Spirit-Seer”] is not intended [by Kant] to be entirely without seriousness’ because it foreshadows the later two worlds doctrine later spelled out in the first *Critique*. Friedrich Paulsen, *Immanuel Kant: His Life and Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 731. Cited in Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 84.

⁹⁹ Swedenborg’s writings add further confirmation to this reading in as much as they too foreshadow some of the themes in Kant’s critical writings. Kant himself implied this foreshadowing when he wrote that Swedenborg’s thought ‘resembles so uncommonly the philosophical creation in my own brain’. Kant, ‘Dreams’, 359 (100). See Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, Chapter Two.

Rather than understanding 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' as a work of either 'pre-Critical' or 'Critical' philosophy, Palmquist sees it as a writing of transition. It exhibits the kind of critical resourcefulness important to his early writing and anticipates features integral to his later transcendental writings. This is Palmquist's interpretive prelude to the assessment of the mystical significance of the first *Critique*. He marshals evidence from the first *Critique* to support the claim that the critical method was part of Kant's broader methodology throughout his career. 'The Critical method is, for Kant, the method of striking the middle way between two extremes.... It operates by trying to locate a boundary between what can be known (and *proved*) and what can never be known (yet remains *possible*)'.¹⁰⁰ What distinguishes his so-called 'critical period' (i.e., the time after 1770) from his pre-critical period (i.e., the time before 1770) is not the discovery of a new critical method, but the turn to the subject or the Copernican revolution. 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' does not lack the critical method, but it does lack any clear understanding of the Copernican insight. If Palmquist is right, it is conceivable to think of Kant as being both critical of Swedenborg's spiritual visions at one point while later accommodating transformed versions of these ideas under the paradigm of transcendental philosophy.

Palmquist argues that the main difficulty of finding anything other than disdain in Kant's application of the critical method to mysticism is that interpreters often read 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer' and the first *Critique* as compatible 'Copernican' rejections of mysticism. 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer', according to Palmquist, represents a pre-Copernican mixture of perspectives in which Kant vents his frustration at not being able to cope satisfactorily with Swedenborg's claims. Palmquist writes, 'The fact that "glimpses [of 'the infinity in the finite and the universality in the individual'] are distrusted" by Kant is taken by most interpreters as a distrust of immediate [religious] experience, when in fact Kant's expression of distrust in such "glimpses" always relates to their inadequacy when viewed from reason's theoretical standpoint, the standpoint

¹⁰⁰ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 20.

that aims at and depends on empirical knowledge'.¹⁰¹ The question of knowledge that commanded Kant's attention in the first *Critique* led to the formulation of a theoretical account of reason in which mysticism finds no secure foothold.

In short, Palmquist boils down the role of 'Dreams' to two points. Firstly, he argues that in writing 'Dreams' Kant's goal was 'to reject uncritical (speculative or fanatical) forms of mysticism, not in order to overthrow all mysticism, but to replace it with a refined *Critical* version, directed towards *this* world and our reflection on it from various perspectives'. Secondly, Palmquist argues that Kant also wanted 'to prepare the way for his own attempt to provide a metaphysical System that could do for metaphysics what ["Dreams"] does for mysticism'.¹⁰² This interpretation of the relationship between *Dreams* and the first *Critique* corresponds, according to Palmquist, with the concluding portions of *Conflict* and the posthumous writings. This kind of holistic interpretation of Kant provides a kind of cumulative case argument in Palmquist's religious interpretation.

Kant's posthumous writings are important to Palmquist's interpretation, but specifying their exact meaning is a difficult task. Palmquist admits that 'it is now extraordinarily difficult—if not impossible—to know for sure just what Kant himself was aiming to get across in that final work'.¹⁰³ Employing the critical method meant that Kant would weigh both sides of an issue, searching for what was right about both, before making a judgement. For this reason, making any definitive claim regarding the meaning of the *Opus Postumum* is impossible. For Palmquist, however, this does not mean that these writings should be ignored. If the *Opus Postumum* was to be the final instalment in Kant's philosophy, it would indeed have important ramifications for interpreting his philosophy. For this reason and armed with his understanding of mysticism from 'Dreams of a Spirit-Seer', Palmquist adopts the interpretive posture of a *reasoned speculation* to interpret the *Opus Postumum* as the final instalment in Kant's '*Critique of*

¹⁰¹ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 303.

¹⁰² Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 42-3.

¹⁰³ Palmquist, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, 322.

mysticism'.¹⁰⁴ As Palmquist puts it, 'The final confirmation of the mystical character of Kant's world view will require a thoroughgoing examination of [the *Opus Postumum*], for in this work Kant was attempting to realize his long standing dream of establishing a Critical mysticism on the basis of his Critical metaphysics'.¹⁰⁵ In short, Palmquist argues that the *Opus Postumum* appears to be Kant's attempt in his final years to provide an ontological climax to his philosophical system.

Palmquist's most important argument is perhaps best expressed in an essay entitled 'What is "Tantalizing" about the "Gap" in Kant's Philosophical System?',¹⁰⁶ which has since become Chapter XI of *Kant's Critical Religion*. This essay draws attention to a conundrum in Kant's last years. The conundrum surfaces in Kant's correspondence mentioned earlier. Consider the following excerpt from Kant's September 21, 1798 letter to Christian Garve:

I see before me the unpaid bill of my uncompleted philosophy, even while I am aware that philosophy, both as regards to its means and ends, is capable of completion. It is a pain like that of Tantalus though not a hopeless pain. The project on which I am now working concerns the "Transition from the metaphysical foundations of natural science to physics." It must be completed, or else a gap will remain in the critical philosophy. Reason will not give up her demands for this; neither can the awareness of the possibility be extinguished; but the satisfaction of this demand is maddeningly postponed, if not by the total paralysis of my vital powers then by their increasing limitation. (12:257)

Here, Kant confided to his friend that there was a tantalizing 'gap' in his system and that he was working on (in what is now the *Opus Postumum*) a final transition that would resolve the problem. In the light of our earlier analysis, such a transition might not seem out of place. This situation, however, is unusual and deserves further consideration. In

¹⁰⁴ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 292.

¹⁰⁵ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 291.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen R. Palmquist, 'What is "Tantalizing" about the "Gap" in Kant's Philosophical System?', *Studies in Early Modern Philosophy IV*, ed. Stanley Tweyman and David A. Freeman (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1997), 171-195.

his ‘Tantalizing’ essay, Palmquist argues that the ‘gap’ referred to in Kant’s letter to Garve is bound to be misunderstood ‘if it is read through the closed and relatively bland spectacles of Kt1 [the first *Critique*] and Kt3 [*Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*], rather than through the more open and fresh spectacles of Kt7 [the third *Critique*] and Kt8 [*Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*], where Kant’s Critical Mysticism comes to the fore’.¹⁰⁷ Defending the legitimacy of the *Opus Postumum* as corroborating the extension of Kant’s philosophy into an overarching fourth perspective, one which picks up where the third *Critique* and *Religion* left off, is important to substantiating Palmquist’s theory as being of Kant.

In the Introduction to the recent Cambridge translation of the *Opus Postumum*, the translator Eckart Förster suggests, on the basis of a 1795 letter from Kiesewetter, that Kant must have wanted to make some kind of ‘transition’ since at least as early as 1790. Quoting Kiesewetter, Förster reports ‘that “for years now” Kant had promised to present the public “with a few sheets which are to contain the transition from your *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* to physics itself’.¹⁰⁸ If the ‘gap’ mentioned in the letter to Garve in 1798 was referring to the same issue, then the *Opus Postumum* is in fact Kant’s preparation for repairing the first *Critique*. In this view, the *Opus Postumum* is best read as an amendment to the theoretical philosophy, and not a formal transition to a completely new perspective. Palmquist argues against Förster’s explanation of the gap. He suggests that the gap mentioned in Kant’s letter to Garve refers to something more in line with the natural *development* of his thoughts than a *change* in the first *Critique* itself. The gap is related to the need to synthesize the metaphysical wings of Kant’s system. Suffice it to say that the issue is complicated. Neither explanation appears to yield a strong enough case to be conclusive, and certainly neither can provide a firm enough premise to yield an argument for or against the religious interpretation.

¹⁰⁷ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 342.

¹⁰⁸ Eckart Förster, ‘Introduction’, *Opus Postumum*, tr. Eckart Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xxviii.

Given the fragmented nature of the *Opus Postumum* and the conjecture involved in relating its content to the arguments of Kant's early writings, the content of Palmquist's thesis is difficult either to substantiate or argue against. He must appeal broadly to considerations outside of Kant's critical period and at the same time forward disparate pieces of data from the critical period to support his thesis.¹⁰⁹ According to Palmquist, critical mysticism depends, not on sloppy reasoning or an emotional encounter with the world, but upon symbols.¹¹⁰ Kant identifies the starry heavens above and the moral law within as two of the most important symbols from Kant's famous passage in the second *Critique* (5:161-162). Similar examples can be found in the third *Critique* and *Religion*. While discussing the pleasures of nature and morality in the *Analytic of the Sublime*, Kant writes, 'if we call the sight of the starry heaven sublime, ... we must take it, just as it strikes the eye, as a broad and all-embracing canopy: and it is merely under such a representation that we may posit the sublimity which the pure aesthetic judgement attributes to this object' (71). He follows this representation of the starry skies with a similar exaltation of the moral law: 'The object of a pure and unconditioned intellectual delight is the moral law in the might which it exerts in us over all antecedent motives of the mind' (72).

The chief difficulty in Palmquist's interpretation is that nowhere in all the textual evidence from Kant's writings do we find an instance of sustained defence for 'Critical Mysticism' and an overarching fourth perspective. Although his interpretation makes sense of many often-neglected passages in Kant's writings, none of these passages

¹⁰⁹ Palmquist adds to the evidence for his cumulative case a number of examples that show that Kant's daily life involved quasi-mystical experiences. Palmquist cites a particularly illustrative incident that occurred on one of Kant's daily walks (reported by Gabriele Rabel). 'Kant was a profoundly religious man ... When Kant had discovered [on one of his daily walks] that in a bad summer swallows threw some of their own young out of the nest in order to keep the others alive, he said: "My intelligence stood still. There was nothing to do but fall on one's knees and worship'. Gabriele Rabel, *Kant* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), vii. Cited in Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 314. Quotations like this go against the grain of the caricature of Kant as a lack-lustre philosopher who made up for in intellectual prowess what he lost in personal rigidity.

¹¹⁰ Two other symbols used by Kant, according to Palmquist, are the 'land before' and the 'sea beyond'. Combine with the starry heavens and the moral law, these symbols constitute 'Kant's Four Guiding Symbols'. See Figure X.1 in *Kant's Critical Religion*, 322.

comprise the central theme of a *text*. The closest possible example of such a ‘text’ is the *Opus Postumum*, and yet it went unpublished by Kant and is without enough hermeneutic signposts to go beyond conjecture with anything like certainty. Are these notes meant for eventual publication? If so, how close to completion are they in their present form? If not, are they merely the musings or something more? How much interpretive license are we to take with these documents?

One way to move toward an answer might be to consider the *Opus Postumum*, despite its obvious shortcomings, as if it were a text. In order to attain the level of cogency that Palmquist needs, we would have to have some reason for justifying the importance of Kant’s second grouping of fascicles (VIIth fascicle, Ist fascicle, and wrapper Ist fascicle) over and against all of the other fascicles. Although there are some circumstantial reasons for proceeding in this way, these reasons are not conclusive. Making a difficult case even more difficult, a number of the other fascicles were also written around this time, making it appear that several purposes were at work in Kant’s mind at the same time. This fact allows Palmquist to focus on the religious aspects of these writings and Förster to focus on the scientific portions, both arguing for independent but contradictory positions. The *Opus Postumum* is simply too discombobulated and its details too complex for any kind of definitive interpretation to be made. Certainly, the first *Critique* has a strong influence on these writings (esp., the IVth fascicle on *Oktaventwurf*, the II fascicle on the ether proofs, and the Xth and IXth fascicles on the possibility of physics). Unfortunately, no vision of the whole is found in the posthumous writings themselves. There are no sensible introductions and no conclusions drawn. There is simply no text.

As it stands, the *Opus Postumum* can be used to proof text several interpretations of Kant’s philosophy. One could envision the proponents of all three interpretations so far examined using the *Opus Postumum* as support. In the final fascicle, for instance, we find evidence that seems to support the two-realm and three-realm interpretations. The moral or two-realm interpretation is supported, for example, by passages emphasizing the two-realm understanding of philosophy and the ongoing importance of the morality in developing and sustaining the idea of God.

A being which includes the whole of all possible sense-objects, is the world. (A being in relation to whom all human duties are likewise his commands, is God.) (21:21)

The two principles: that of moral-practical and the principle of technical-theoretical reason (to which mathematics also belongs) together form complete unity. (21:22)

The judicial or three-realm interpretation likewise finds support in passages affirming the Highest Good and the highest Being as mutually significant concepts, and ultimately important to the constitution of transcendental philosophy.

A being who is originally universally law-giving for nature and freedom, is God. Not only the highest *being*, but also the highest *understanding - good* (with respect to holiness). *Ens summum, summa intelligentia, summum bonum*. The mere idea of him is likewise proof of his existence. (21:14)

[God] is the highest being with respect to power, and, as a being who has rights, a living God in the quality of a *person*. A single God, like the object of his power, subordinate to him: one world. (21:17)

These concepts are altogether contained analytically in the idea of the highest being, which we ourselves have created; but the problem of transcendental philosophy remains unresolved: *Is there a God?* (21:17)

In one passage all three interpretations seem to be operative:

Three principles: God, the world, and the concept of the subject which unites them and brings synthetic unity into these concepts (*a priori*) insofar as reason makes this transcendental unity itself. Aenesidemus. *God, the world, and I; God, the world, and the human spirit*, as that which combines the former two: moral-practical reason with its categorical imperative.

The intelligent subject which grounds the combination of God with the world under a principle.

The highest nature

The highest freedom

According to the religious or the fourth dimensional interpretation, man is at the perspectival centre of reality, and Kant's emphasis on the 'I' seems to support this interpretation. However, practical reason and the moral law appear to maintain a kind of constitutive role for the subject. The combination of the two would then be called the human spirit. This supports the moral interpretation from which we began our inquiries. Kant then writes that the 'intelligent subject' combines God and the world under the principle of the Highest Good. This appears to support the three-realm interpretation. One thing is for certain, the *Opus Postumum* comprises Kant's handwritten notes and should not be read as a completed and affirmed text in their present unfinished form. At many places, Kant seems to be experimenting with several different trajectories in his thinking simultaneously.

Despite the ambiguities, Palmquist presses on, arguing that there is a discernable theme in the *Opus Postumum* of such significance as to provide the key to interpreting Kant's philosophy as a philosophical whole or complete system. It is traceable to the often-repeated phrase 'God, World, and Man'. Kant repeats one thing with sufficient regularity in the *Opus Postumum* to be regarded as one of his main points. For Kant, 'mankind itself (or the idea of man in the world) is the unifying link between God and the world'.¹¹¹ According to Palmquist, 'the highest point of Kant's system is reached ... when we are able to conceive of "God above me, the world inside me, the human spirit within me—combined into one all-inclusive system of transcendental philosophy."¹¹² The climax of Palmquist's interpretation (under the religious interpretation) of *Opus Postumum* is found in the idea of man. 'Kant now saw before his eyes the possibility of composing a metaphysical Doctrine of unity of all forms of human experience under one transcendental idea, the idea of "man" as the being in whom "God and World" are united'.¹¹³ According to Palmquist, 'Kant's entire philosophical System culminates in

¹¹¹ Palmquist, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, 322.

¹¹² Palmquist, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, 322. See also, quoting from *Opus Postumum*, 21.39.

¹¹³ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 292.

this 'one man'—that is, Kant himself, and each of us, as representatives of the ideal God-man'.¹¹⁴

For Palmquist then, the Transcendental Perspective itself is the fulfilment of reason; it provides the highest vantage point from which reason is able to conceive reality. The defining moment of this grand conception, what makes it more definite than mere poetic possibility, is the immediacy of our experience that Palmquist calls 'Critical Mysticism'. This Critical Mysticism represents 'a metaphysical bridge between the Metaphysics of Morals and the Metaphysics of Nature' that might also be called a 'Metaphysics of Religious Experience'.¹¹⁵ For Palmquist, this metaphysical bridge or 'mystical life' is the 'empirical realization of religion'. Although 'it transcends the bounds of rational philosophy ... [it] can ... serve as the natural *conclusion* of a healthy philosophy, and also the final *goal* of reason itself'.¹¹⁶ Kant's critique of the mystical moment of the human being's encounter with being-itself in the *Opus Postumum* brings closure to his philosophical quest; it also brings us to the doorstep of German Idealism. This closure allows the dialectic of immediacy—God, world, man—to remain the culmination of the philosophical quest, and to be its ontological point of departure and its point of contact with theology.¹¹⁷

The religious interpretation in the sense of Palmquist is difficult to argue against insofar as it agrees with much of our earlier analysis, advancing beyond the two- and three-realm interpretations on the basis of arguments stemming from Kant's marginal texts and their relationship to the whole of his philosophical enterprise. His emphasis on mysticism and inscrutability provide an intriguing lens through which to read Kant's late writings and specific passages throughout Kant's work that affirm religion and theology. However, as we turn specifically toward Kant's philosophy of religion, the explanatory

¹¹⁴ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 377.

¹¹⁵ Palmquist, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, 323.

¹¹⁶ Palmquist, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, 323.

¹¹⁷ For two diagrams of the God-man-world relationship in Kant's philosophy, according to Palmquist's reading, see Figures XII.1 and XII.2 in Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 354 and 375.

power and limitations of Palmquist's interpretation become clear. In *Religion*, Kant immediately points to the problem of radical evil as a threat to human moral striving on the one hand, and human hope on the other. In the next chapter, however, evil is shown to be an even more radical conceptual problem for Kant's philosophical programme. A coherent account of hope will depend less on the promotion of a mystical encounter with God and the merits of human effort, and more on moral faith in the idea of perfect humanity and divine grace.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the three interpretations focused on in this chapter provide coherent and sensible accounts of the grounds for theology found in Kant's philosophy. Additionally, each of these interpretations makes the case that Kant himself provides the room for theology in one or another corridor of his philosophy after the first *Critique*. To this extent, what these interpreters have shown is that it is possible to provide a creative interpretation of Kant with affirmative theological implications. Nevertheless, the verdict we must render is that the room carved out for theology in these interpretations is not always demonstrable on Kant's terms. If my analysis is accurate, then none of the interpretations succeeds in such a way that all of Kant's principal concerns are met.

In keeping with this conclusion, the next chapter will focus on Kant's writings on religion and suggest, following the work of Gordon Michalson, some of the most difficult challenges for interpreting Kant are found in the heart of his philosophy of religion. In particular, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* presents significant problems for understanding the coherence of Kant's thought. Focusing on Michalson's interpretation, we catalogue the chief difficulties in making sense of Kant's *Religion*. The intent is to use the difficulties Michalson exposes as a backdrop for the analysis of the work of Green, Davidovich, and Palmquist, and to formulate a new hypothesis for interpreting Kant's *Religion*. Each of their interpretations gives an account of Kant's philosophy of religion that goes some way towards overcoming the difficulties that Michalson presents. However, I argue that, although each of these interpretations provides valuable resources for understanding Kant's philosophy of

religion, none of them on their own succeeds in overcoming some of the most compelling problems that Michalson identifies.

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING KANT'S RELIGION WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF MERE REASON

I. From Philosophy to Philosophy of Religion in Kant

In the previous chapter, I argued that there are at least three discernable interpretations in the tradition of Kant studies that have, with varying degrees of exegetical persuasiveness, looked to Kant's writings after the first *Critique* to establish rational foundations for religious faith. Our task in this chapter is not to decide the promise of the theological systems built on these Kantian foundations, but merely to understand the foundations themselves and show the extent to which they are viable as interpretations of Kant. What we are more concerned with is whether or not (or to what degree) the Kantian foundations established by these interpretations are consistent with Kant's philosophy of religion, and, to the degree that they are not found to be so consistent, whether or not a more secure foundation might be established via some correction or combination of these interpretations. We have already pointed out some of the weaknesses in these interpretations with regards to Kant's philosophy proper. These weaknesses are not necessarily fatal, nor are the arguments presented in their support exhaustive, but the previous chapter indicates that no interpretation of Kant's philosophy as a whole seems equipped to contain in its explanatory purview all the specific passages and general themes found in Kant.

In this chapter, we turn to the interface of philosophy and theology in Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. In Gordon Michalson's early work on Kant, he makes the case that *Religion* is best understood as a complete text and an important contribution to Kant's philosophy. He also argues that Book Three of *Religion* presents the interpreter with tensions that threaten to undermine the integrity of Kant's

entire philosophy of religion.¹ In recent years, Michalson's challenge to Kant's project in *Religion* focuses on the heart of the arguments in Books One and Two. Although Michalson holds Kant's position to be instructive and a profound influence on Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment thinking, he states unequivocally that 'Kant's position is a nest of tangles', 'riddled with inconsistencies', and 'meets with awkwardness'. According to Michalson, the arguments of *Religion* are 'sufficiently problematic' so as to lead to an 'entire set of wobbles' (or 'telling wobbles').² We will unpack Michalson's defence of these claims below.

Michalson's treatment of *Religion* assumes Kant to be fundamentally committed to human autonomy. This interpretive emphasis on human autonomy is rooted in Kant's central concern to articulate and defend his practical philosophy. Michalson believes that the themes of autonomy and morality spill over into *Religion* and are among its defining features; as such, they are crucial components to consider when making sense of the text. Kant's commitment to autonomy and morality, Michalson believes, puts his philosophical programme in a conceptual strongbox from which transcendental theology and a viable philosophy of religion cannot reasonably escape. Michalson writes, '[Kant] wants human autonomy to take over the role traditionally played by divine action in the creation of a good universe, with a corresponding displacement of the supernatural world by the noumenal realm where Kantian freedom enjoys its possibility'.³ It is this guiding presupposition which leads Michalson to conclude that there are numerous 'wobbles' throughout Kant's philosophy of religion and that these wobbles have a crippling effect on his attempt to account for religion and theology under the rubric of transcendental philosophy.

¹ See Gordon E. Michaelson, Jr., *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith: The Role of History in Kant's Religious Thought* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979). We will return to this book in Chapter Four with specific reference to potential problems with Book Three of *Religion*. I have not been able to track down why there is a spelling change in Michalson's name after his first book. For ease of reference, I will simply use the most recent spelling (i.e., without the 'e') in all references except direct references to this book.

² Gordon E. Michalson, Jr., *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 8.

³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 8-9.

The next section will follow Michalson's interpretation of Kant and attempt to outline these 'wobbles' and 'conundrums' as a guiding set of problems to be resolved by any interpretation of Kant that seeks to achieve both a unified understanding of Kant's transcendental theology and a coherent understanding of his philosophy of religion. Sections Three and Four return to the theologically affirmative interpretations outlined in Chapter One. Each of these interpretations of Kant has creative ways forward for grounding theology according to Kant's writings and we will focus on the many resources they present for overcoming Michalson's chief concerns. I will argue, however, that these resources are only partially successful at overcoming Michalson. Their inability to account for *Religion* in light of the various wobbles outlined by Michalson indicates that more needs to be done to discern the rational grounds for theology according to Kant. This task we will take up in the next chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is thus to flesh out the challenge facing theologically affirmative interpreters of Kant by Kant's philosophy of religion. In particular, we will examine the various conundrums in *Religion*, as presented by Michalson, which must be accounted for and made sense of if there is to be a satisfactory interpretation of Kant. The next section summarizes Michalson's arguments that Kant's philosophy of religion exhibits numerous inconsistencies and is out of step with central components of his philosophy. Sections Three and Four explore resources in Kant for the resolution of the apparent inconsistencies in *Religion*. As we will see, the main interpretations of Kant are able to handle the various wobbles only by glossing over the specifics of what Kant has laid out in *Religion*. More needs to be done if we are going to be able to resolve the specific conundrums identified by Michalson.

II. Conundrums and Wobbles in Kant's *Religion*

In the Introduction to *Fallen Freedom*, Michalson identifies four 'wobbles' which constitute what he takes to be the main inconsistencies of Kant's philosophy of religion. The first of these is Kant's apparent assertion of two incompatible (if not outright contradictory) claims, namely that human beings have an original predisposition

to good and yet also possess a propensity to evil.⁴ Speaking of the threefold characteristics of the human disposition (viz., animality, humanity, and personality), Kant states: 'All these predispositions in the human being are not only (negatively) *good* (they do not resist the moral law) but they are also predispositions to *the good* (they demand compliance with it)' (6:28). On the other hand, when referring to humanity's propensities, Kant writes, 'propensity to genuine evil, i.e. moral evil...must reside in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from the moral law. And, if it is legitimate to assume that this propensity belongs to the human being universally ..., the propensity will be called a *natural* propensity of the human being to evil' (6:29). Michalson takes these statements to be in fundamental opposition and indicative of inconsistencies still to come.

The second 'wobble' concerns Kant's declaration that evil is both innate within humanity and something brought about by individual acts of human freedom.⁵ Kant captures both of these in 6:38, where he writes: 'This *innate* guilt...is so called because it is detectable as early as the first manifestation of the exercise of freedom in the human being, but ... must nonetheless have originated from freedom'. According to Michalson, Kant has some explaining to do. On the one hand, he assumes evil to be present in human nature prior to any exercise of the will, and on the other hand, that humans are responsible for radical evil because we bring it upon ourselves through the exercise of freedom. Kant himself recognizes the tension as he attempts to press ahead. He asks, 'But does not the thesis of the innate corruption of the human being with respect to all that is good stand in direct opposition to this restoration through one's own effort?' (6:50) In spite of his awareness of this issue, his answer is forthright: 'Of course it does' (6:50). From this point forward, Kant attempts to unpack how this conundrum could be the case. Michalson believes Kant's efforts in this regard are noble but no less abortive.

The third difficulty Michalson identifies has to do with the uneasy relationship between the moral demands placed on human effort and the insurmountable nature of

⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 8.

⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 8.

evil. In Kant's view, radical evil 'must equally be possible to *overcome* ... for it is found in the human being as acting freely' (6:37) yet Kant asserts later that radical evil cannot be eradicated through human effort.⁶ Regarding our obligation to deliver ourselves from radical evil, Kant writes: 'The human being must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil' (6:44). It seems that, for Kant, if it is within human power to overcome radical evil through moral fortitude, we are required to do so. We are obligated to resist and overcome temptation and evil according to the moral law. Nevertheless, Kant also asserts an apparently contradictory claim, namely, that we are not able to overcome evil on our own. 'This evil is *radical*, since it corrupts the ground of all maxims; as natural propensity, it is also not to be *extirpated* through human forces, for this could only happen through good maxims—something cannot take place if the subjective supreme ground of all maxims is presupposed to be corrupted' (6:37). How is it that Kant can maintain both our moral obligation to overcome evil by our own accord and at the same time assert that we are powerless to do so?

The fourth and final 'wobble' is closely related to the third: Kant appeals to divine grace despite his assertion that 'The human being must make...*himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil' (6:44). Divine aid may be necessary in light of the pervasive nature of evil and the fact that Kant thinks it to be innate, but this necessity appears to contradict the cardinal Kantian dictum, 'Ought implies can'. If we ought to *make ourselves* victorious over the temptations of nature and our own propensity to evil but, in fact, may be in need of divine assistance, we have been led deep into murky crosscurrents of human autonomy and divine intervention. What philosophical theory can have human beings acting freely to make themselves into what they ought to be and yet, at the same time, assert that humans must be fundamentally assisted by a divine being in the achievement of this goal? Kant's appeal

⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 8.

to divine grace seems not only arbitrary, but thinks Michalson, ‘antithetical to his deepest philosophical instincts’.⁷

Michalson surmises that the cause of Kant’s various wobbles at the outset of his philosophy of religion is the desire to reconcile his denial of knowledge with his earnest ‘metaphysical trust’. He suggests that ‘[Kant’s] ability to incorporate both radical evil and ultimate coherence in a single outlook reflects a deep metaphysical trust on his part, a trust that is perhaps the decisive dividing line between Kant and Ivan’.⁸ Where Ivan Karamazov from Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* despaired in the face of radical evil, declaring God’s handiwork to be incoherent, Kant is more optimistic. Michalson notes, ‘Kant’s universe is finally coherent...[and] the “center *does* hold”’.⁹ The picture Kant affords is a unified vision in which ‘reality as a whole is the scene of an ongoing, cooperative effort between humanity and God in the production of a moral universe’.¹⁰ This picture is not as orderly as we might hope, however, because the movement towards Kant’s *telos* in the Highest Good is propelled by the needs of reason. These needs ‘subtly transform certain logical features of his train of thought into a metaphysical content’.¹¹ Kant’s metaphysical trust in a balanced universe hinges on a concept of the Highest Good in which virtue and happiness are maintained in proper proportion. It is not at all clear, thinks Michalson, why happiness gets a foothold in Kant’s moral theory. All we know is that ‘God enters Kant’s scheme by riding on the coattails of the principle of proportionality’.¹²

Michalson forwards a two-part thesis that fundamentally depends on the four ‘wobbles’ previously summarized. The first part of the thesis is defended in the final two chapters of his interpretation of Kant on ‘Radical Evil’, and focuses on the first two

⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 9.

⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 18.

⁹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 18.

¹⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 18.

¹¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 18.

¹² Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 24.

Kantian wobbles presented above. There, Michalson defends the position that ‘Kant’s view...produce[s] the series of wobbles I allude to in my introduction to this study, culminating in his oscillation between appeals to human autonomy and divine action in his account of the salvation process’.¹³ The second is found in his subsequent section on ‘Moral Regeneration’, and focuses on the last two: according to Michalson, ‘Kant’s...strategy for recovering from radical evil delivers his entire philosophy of religion into a subterranean yet vicious circularity...[which] arises out of...Kant’s appeal to symmetry and direct proportion’.¹⁴ In summation, the circularity articulated by Michalson turns on the twofold realization that God’s existence is postulated in the second *Critique* by appeal to the symmetrical universe, while the symmetrical universe is guaranteed in *Religion* by appeal to God.

Michalson believes that Kant can defend the claim that moral evil is a transcendental condition for the possibility of evil action. Such a formalized concept of evil ‘depicts one of the ways in which freedom can relate to the moral law, namely, in a way that subordinates the moral law to the incentive of self-love’.¹⁵ However, Michalson thinks that such a formal claim is dependent not on transcendental reflection, but on the *observation* of the empirical reality of evil actions. It is thus not rooted innately in or along side freedom in the human being, but merely a transcendental placeholder, limiting freedom and expanding our understanding of how freedom functions. Yet, as noted earlier, Kant clearly wants more from his account of radical evil. ‘This evil is radical’, Kant contends, ‘because it corrupts the ground of all maxims...moreover...the ultimate subjective ground of all maxims is postulated as corrupt’ (6:37). Despite being based on purely formal inquiries, Kant goes on to assert that evil is ‘innate’. Kant has not succeeded, argues Michalson, in bridging the gap between the formal establishment of evil (as a limitation of and corrective to freedom) and the ontological identification of evil as a fundamental corruption of the human subject.

¹³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 28.

¹⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 28.

¹⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 31.

Michalson takes this tension to be clear from the outset of *Religion*, where Kant establishes straight away that ‘the source of evil cannot lie in an object *determining* the will through inclination, nor yet in a natural impulse; it can lie only in the rule made by the will for the use of its freedom, that is, in a maxim’ (6:21). Here appears what Michalson takes to be a clear chronological gap that works against Kant’s identification of evil as an innate corruption of the will. He takes this to mean that Kant is working from the belief that maxim-making—a decision of the will in the context of a particular set of circumstances—is often corrupted, with the stronger claim that there is something essentially evil about the human being. For Kant, ‘every maxim contains both moral and [sic] sensuous incentives’ and ‘moral evil itself is a property of the act of the will that freely subordinates one incentive to another, the moral to the sensuous’.¹⁶ Where the whole notion of maxim-making for Kant appears to be merely an epistemic process of decision making that triggers the will, moral evil (which Kant derives from maxim-making gone wrong) is a positive or ontological reality: ‘far from being a mere limitation or negation, moral evil is a specific variety of free “doing” that gets crystallized in a maxim’.¹⁷

Kant adds a further layer of complexity to this problem in his distinction between *Willkür* and *Wille*, and Michalson contends that many of the arguments in *Religion* trade on the ‘equivocalness’ of these two terms. *Willkür* is ‘the faculty of choice that is subject to both rational and sensuous incentives’; it is ‘our actual capacity for agency’.¹⁸ *Wille*, on the other hand, ‘is the source of our respect for the moral law and very close to what must be rationality itself for Kant’.¹⁹ The will (*Wille*) determines the imperative of duty and provides it to the will (*Willkür*), but it has no determining ground of its own and must allow the freedom and moral agency embedded in *Willkür* to determine a course of action. This theory is notoriously difficult to articulate, and appears to convey ‘a note of

¹⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 34 and 35.

¹⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 35.

¹⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 35.

¹⁹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 35-36.

arbitrariness'.²⁰ Henry Allison takes the *Willkür/Wille* distinction to be of little consequence to Kant's philosophy of religion, but Michalson argues that Kant gets a lot of argumentative mileage out of it. For example, Kant is able to explain how we can remain rational even when we act immorally. He also is able 'to avoid the trap of only being able to impute virtue or a brutish, amoral heteronomy to the moral agent'.²¹ Even when *Willkür* acts to subordinate the moral law to the sensuous (*sinnlichen*) inclination, *Wille* continues to lobby for the moral order of incentives. *Wille* is never eliminated, but retains its potential goodness. This point, according to Michalson, will be a necessary element in Kant's account of moral regeneration and his solution to radical evil.²²

Books One and Two of *Religion*, says Michalson, rest on such murky distinctions. Perhaps none is more strained than the distinction between the 'predisposition to good' and the 'propensity to evil'. It is Kant's burden in the opening part of *Religion* to examine and explain these features of humanity, and 'chart the carriers of these two features of human nature in a universe that is presumed to be rational'.²³ The predisposition refers to 'human nature as it is prior to any actual exercise of freedom'.²⁴ When Kant says that we must make ourselves into whatever we are to become, what he means is that the predisposition prior to action is morally unblemished. As soon as it encounters nature, however, Kant tells us that this predisposition is transformed by a propensity to evil. What we know about this propensity is difficult to ascertain according to Michalson. Kant provides us only with a 'tortured' definition: 'the subjective ground of a possibility of an inclination' (6:29). What we know is that somehow in the context of *Willkür*, sensuousness gets the upper hand on duty. Kant

²⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 36.

²¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 36.

²² The culmination of the conceptual murkiness is a wide hermeneutic window from which to view his subsequent arguments: 'because of what he says about human nature' writes Michalson '...the *Religion* as a whole can just as easily be read as a Kantian soteriology—surprisingly orthodox in many of its features—as it can be read as a reduction of religious belief to moral action, which is the reading the book mainly invites'. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 37.

²³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 37.

²⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 38.

provides both an anthropological portrait of humanity based upon predisposition to animality, humanity, and personality, and a type of ‘calculus of sensuousness’ which is meant to provide a description of a good structure of human predispositions. According to Michalson, Kant does not adequately define the propensity of evil, merely providing an example and leaving the reader in the dark as to its precise meaning.

Michalson thinks that this is a crucial gap in Kant’s account of moral evil, and it comes in the vital opening stages of his arguments. In Kant’s account of morality, human propensities are rooted in free choice (*Willkür*), and yet there is precious little we can say about how the propensity to evil actually functions. Michalson finds this aspect of Kant’s account ironic. On the one hand, Kant’s theory depends on the principle of proportionality—it gives rise to the idea of the Highest Good, belief in immortality and belief in God, and yields a highly rationalistic account of morality and religion. On the other hand, Kant appeals to a propensity to evil somehow imbedded in human nature and manifest as soon as we are called upon to act—but ineffable when analyzed by the same rational processes that gave rise to his theory in the first place. ‘Kant clearly believes that all rational beings do in fact succumb to the propensity to evil, but the absence of genuine argumentation for this crucial point is one of the most outstanding features of *Religion*’.²⁵ According to Michalson, the only support Kant does offer is an appeal to empirical facts: ‘from what we know of man through experience we cannot judge otherwise of him’ (6:32). This inference, Michalson asserts, ‘cannot support the argumentative weight Kant seems to be placing on it’.²⁶ In the end, Kant is led to the ‘paradoxical judgment that evil is both freely elected and “innate”, a view that would rob either “freedom” or “innateness” of its point’.²⁷

The insurmountable question for Kant, in Michalson’s analysis, amounts to the following: How can Kant avoid making the phrase *humanity is evil by nature* synonymous with the phrase *humanity is evil by necessity*? Kant’s answer is hardly

²⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 46.

²⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 46.

²⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 46.

satisfactory, argues Michalson, because it is rooted in an attempt to make ‘evil by nature’ the equivalent of ‘radical evil is innate in human nature’. There are only two ways to proceed in the assessment of what Kant is doing: either his account of religion ‘shades off into self-contradiction’ or allow Kant to validate an infusion of mystery into his rational account of morality—an infusion that heretofore would not have been allowed.²⁸ Because of this dilemma, *Religion* demonstrates that there can be nothing more than a limited continuity to Kant’s project. This has telling consequences for Michalson’s interpretation of Kant’s work in Book Three. In Book Three,

[t]here can be no easy appeal to the corporate level as a solution to the *individual’s* task of moral regeneration. Such is the bitter consequence of Kant’s highly individualistic account of the freedom of the will and accountability in moral matters. One implication of this result is that Kant’s own effort to view history teleologically and propose a general theory of cultural progress is made vastly more difficult—if not undermined altogether—by what he has to say about radical evil.²⁹

Kant’s *Religion* projects an overarching vision of reality in which humanity and God cooperate in the creation of a morally good and meaningful universe. However, the specifics of Kant’s vision centre around the fall of the human disposition based on radical evil—so radical that we are unable to save ourselves. Kant’s position, according to Michalson’s account, is led into an ‘awful paradox’ which he concludes must end in self-contradiction. Regeneration, if it is to be possible, must occur both by our own power and according to the resources of a good disposition. However, ‘it is precisely the existence of an *evil* disposition that produces the need for moral regeneration in the first place’.³⁰ The cutting edge of Kant’s account is the movement from moral evil as a formal change of maxims to the source of this change in the underlying common ground of all decision-making. ‘The underlying common ground of *all* of our maxims is what

²⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 47 and 49.

²⁹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 51.

³⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 54.

Kant calls the subjective disposition: the disposition, Kant tells us, is “the ultimate, subjective ground of the adoption of maxims”.³¹ For Kant, this disposition is the unified expression of freedom in conjunction with the moral law. He calls it ‘the supreme maxim’ (*die oberste Maxime*); it is the individualized personification of the moral law ‘that arises out of a free act and gives characteristic tendencies or patterns of our various acts of maxim-making’.³²

Michalson thinks it is incumbent upon Kant to explain ‘the exact relationship between the free act by which the moral agent chooses his or her disposition, and the free acts arising out of the disposition in individual acts of maxim-making’.³³ There seem to be two different levels of choice going on in Kant’s account of maxim-making; one is at the level of the supreme maxim, and the other is in the ‘everyday moment of decision making’.³⁴ This leads Kant inevitably into a linguistic quagmire as he attempts to discuss the ‘primordial agency in a way that protects it as agency (instead of transforming it into a fixed essence), while simultaneously avoiding having this agency dissolve into formless chaos, unrelated to any structure that could underwrite moral valuation’.³⁵ Because the theme of unity is so important to any account of human depravity and eventual regeneration, Michalson feels it is crucial for Kant to maintain the unified disposition, explain the fluctuations of our maxim-making in individual circumstances, and give an account of how these two can be done simultaneously.

Although the disposition is the most important and novel contribution of *Religion* to Kant’s ethical theory, Michalson believes it cripples Kant’s theory and makes his account of moral regeneration incoherent. He suggests that the corroborating evidence is Kant’s consistent appeal to mystery and the ‘timely use of the [fallacious] argument

³¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 54.

³² Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 54.

³³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 56.

³⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 56.

³⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 57.

from ignorance'.³⁶ Michalson sees Kant's employment of this fallacy in the form of an infinite regress: 'For if Kant is going to tell us that freely produced maxims have a certain underlying ground which is also freely produced, we will inevitably ask what the "ground of the ground" is (and so on)'.³⁷ Kant is thus required either to give an account of how moral agency and essence can be held simultaneously, or be subject to an infinite regress of causes—unpalatable to his rational instincts. Instead, 'Kant deals with the possibility of a regress by invoking a systematic agnosticism in his effort to account for the ultimate ground of maxim-making and the source of evil'.³⁸ It is at this point that Michalson declares Kant's understanding of the human disposition to be nothing more than 'a useful fiction designed to protect two of Kant's most important insights: the ultimate unity of moral agency and the indecipherable character of moral freedom'.³⁹ This seems a key reason why Michalson believes Kant veers toward non-realism; a reasoned analysis of Kant's arguments suggests, according to Michalson, that even the human disposition, which Kant believes to be a fundamental presupposition if humans are to have dignity, is simply not viable on the basis of Kant's arguments.

Michalson's conclusions concerning Kant on the disposition are crucial to keep in mind as he addresses Kant's constructive account of moral regeneration in Book Two of *Religion*. It is only because human beings possess rational agency and the ability to choose moral maxims for themselves without the fixed essence of a moral disposition that Kant can declare that humans are not 'devilish'. There is hope for moral regeneration in *Religion* because humans, through their own efforts and exercise of reason through freedom, can make themselves pleasing to God. Put into other terms, 'freely willing to reject the moral law would be equivalent to exercising reason for the sake of being irrational'.⁴⁰ Kant is able to reject the notion that regeneration is

³⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 66.

³⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 59.

³⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 59.

³⁹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 61.

⁴⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 75.

incompatible with freedom only through the bifurcation of will wherein *Willkür* acts so that we become evil, but ‘neither destroys *Wille* as a fully rational aspect of the will, nor does it ever totally lose the capacity to be affected by the rational incentive produced by *Wille*’.⁴¹ Michalson thus holds that Kant is closer to Erasmus than to Luther on the question of the will. Using Kant’s language, Luther holds that ‘our fall includes the destruction of *Wille*, while Erasmus believes *Wille* remains intact’.⁴²

The point of central contention in Kant’s argument, according to Michalson, is found in a conundrum in Book One:

This evil is *radical*, since it corrupts the ground of all maxims; as natural propensity, it is also not to be *extirpated* through human forces, for this could only happen through good maxims—something that cannot take place if the subjective supreme ground of all maxims is presupposed to be corrupted. Yet it must be possible to *overcome* this evil, for it is found in the human being as acting freely (6:37)

‘Upon first reading, this comment simply seems to be self-contradictory: Kant is evidently claiming both P and not P.... But the comment as a whole is not quite as self-contradictory as it first appears.’⁴³ The reason that Michalson believes it is not self-contradictory is *not* that there is an underlying ontology of human dispositions. Such a position would appear to commit Kant to the assertion that it is both possible and impossible for humans to extirpate radical evil. Instead, Kant must be asserting that there is a fundamental difference between ‘extirpating’ and ‘overcoming’. Michalson points out that the German word for ‘overcoming’ is *überwiegen*, which literally means ‘to outweigh’. The notion of outweighing appears at first to be an image of the scales in which our moral progress is weighed, determining if we are good enough or holy enough to be found pleasing to God. Michalson points out, however, that ‘To succeed in ‘outweighing’ the opponent is potentially to succeed by getting help from another body,

⁴¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 75.

⁴² Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 76.

⁴³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 76.

but in a manner that still utilizes the bulk and energies of one's own body'.⁴⁴ This way of casting Kant's intentions succeeds in setting the stage for divine cooperation without the spectre of losing human autonomy.

Michalson calls what is left of human autonomy after radical evil and divine cooperation are admitted into the Kantian paradigm 'the lingering "seed of goodness" [which] assures the sheer logical possibility of moral renewal'.⁴⁵ Kant implies further that 'some as yet unspecified act or set of acts will transform this logical possibility into a real possibility'.⁴⁶ Because Kant rejects the possibility of a predisposition to evil, he necessarily lays out the contours of a transition from logical possibility to real possibility and implies that this is the intended course of his arguments. Moral regeneration or conversion, according to Michalson's interpretation of Kant, means 'the transformation of the underlying disposition—from evil to good'.⁴⁷ Such a transformation requires a reversal of the moral order of incentives and a restructuring of the affected disposition, and this must be done under human power along with divine cooperation. Michalson believes that Kant does not possess the critical resources necessary to address this problem inherent in reason. It is at this crucial juncture that Kant appeals to biblical language in a surprising and remarkable fashion.

In two pivotal statements describing moral regeneration, Kant appeals to Johanine and Pauline concepts, respectively. In the first, Kant writes, 'And so a "new man" can come about only through a kind of rebirth, as it were, a new creation (John 3:5; compare with Genesis 1:2) and a change of heart' (6:47). The second is a paraphrase of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, wherein he writes of 'laying off of the old man and putting on of the new' (6:48; Eph. 4:22-24). Michalson takes Kant's appeal to biblical language to be an admission on Kant's part that his own arguments fail when it comes to moral regeneration. On Michalson's interpretation, this is equivalent to Kant's

⁴⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 77.

⁴⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 77.

⁴⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 77.

⁴⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 77.

earlier arguments in which he appeals to ignorance or mystery at key junctures or whenever his own concepts fail him. ‘The either/or character of his ethical rigorism drives him toward the metaphor of a “revolution,” while the absence of any principle of integration between the noumenal-moral and the phenomenal-temporal commends the appropriation of the Johannine language of “rebirth” and “new creation.”’⁴⁸ It is not, says Michalson, ‘sophisticated conceptual technique’ which helps Kant to overcome radical evil at this crucial moment of rebirth, but an account of moral regeneration emanating from the Königsberg catechism on which he was raised.⁴⁹

To this point, Michalson believes that he has shown Kant’s account of religion to be most notable for its numerous points of tension, difficult metaphysical questions, and assortment of complex considerations. Central to these conceptual issues and ‘perhaps the chief culprit producing conceptual turbulence is what we might call the “before and after” feature of the transition from radical evil to a renewed disposition’.⁵⁰ If Kant is going to talk about moral conversion, some discussion of the temporal progression of the human disposition is inevitable. Kant must be able to discriminate between the human agent as fallen and the human agent as redeemed, and yet Michalson judges ‘that same feature is virtually unintelligible from the standpoint of the very philosophy that demands it’.⁵¹ He cites the first *Critique* in support of this contention:

In respect of the intelligible character, of which the empirical character is the sensible schema, there can be no *before* and *after*.... Reason ... acts freely; it is not dynamically determined in the chain of natural causes through either outer or inner ground antecedent in time. (p. 83; B581)

⁴⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 79.

⁴⁹ Michalson notes an inherent tension as Kant appeals to the Bible in the service of morality, but at the same time ‘Kant reaches out to biblical language to announce what his concepts necessitate but cannot describe’. Michalson continues, ‘it is more than a little noteworthy that Kant is driven to this non-reductionistic and—whatever his actual intensions in the matter—virtually confessional appeal to scripture by the problem of moral evil in human life’. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 81. Michalson’s bottom line is that there is a conceptual failure on Kant’s part that makes his philosophy of religion both friend and foe to classical Christian realism insofar as it is reductionistic and non-reductionistic at the same time.

⁵⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 83.

⁵¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 83.

Kant's consistent assertion then, according to Michalson, is that reason cannot be thought of in terms of acting definitively in time, for that would be an admixture of the empirical and moral and thus strictly prohibited. But, in order to account for the very concept of conversion and explicate it in terms of human freedom, he must have linguistic access to a before and after conceptual scheme. Michalson thus concludes with a rather dark portrayal of our prospects for success in a Kantian account of moral conversion:

Kant has utterly crippled his ability to make clear sense of any instance of moral and religious "change," of any alteration in one's moral condition or religious state that occurs in sequential terms. The effects of the Second Analogy [in the first Critique] seep down into the smallest conceptual passages relevant to the individual's experience of duty and of episodes of moral decision-making, and they flood into the larger channels formed by Kant's progressive view of history and by the impact of teleological pressures on his efforts to grasp the career of freedom in the most comprehensive terms, as reason demands.

The bottom line here, according to Michalson's interpretation, is that Kant's account 'culminates in the paradox that an act having no relation to time produces a moral agent who is materially different "after" the act from "before"'.⁵² This again is even more than a mere paradox for Michalson; the position entails the surprising and rather dubious position that 'every free act is for Kant a "conversion"'.⁵³ Since, for Michalson, Kant has provided no metaphysical connection between moral conversion and temporal succession, humans must in a sense re-convert at every decision-making moment.

Michalson concludes that this leads Kant's account to a crisis of personal identity. Considered over time, the person who made the first moral choice to adopt an evil disposition is 'numerically' different than the person who makes the later choice to become good again. Even if we can grant that Kant is able to account for the difference between the original human being possessing a predisposition to good and the same

⁵² Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 85.

⁵³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 85.

human who is evil by nature after succumbing to the propensity to evil, we still cannot account for the same human being who later embraces the good again. As Michalson puts it, ‘the very idea of regeneration or conversion ... suggests two distinct moral agents, a fallen and a redeemed one; while ... morality’s noumenal insulation from the effects of time suggests just one moral agent’.⁵⁴ The problems can be reduced to two: first, ‘if ... we end up with two metaphysically distinct agents—it ultimately becomes unclear how we are intelligibly to relate the issues of fall and regeneration’, and second, ‘the problem concerns showing that the agent was sufficiently different at one point (in time?) than at another for the very idea of moral conversion to have meaningful application’.⁵⁵

In order to create the conceptual space necessary to establish his account of moral regeneration, Kant appeals to divine grace and divine aid. Allied with these concepts we also find Kant’s surprising appeal to what he calls ‘the personified idea of the good principle’ in Section One of Book Two.⁵⁶ For Michalson, this consideration once again yields the conundrum of competing implications. For, on the one hand, the close alliance of moral regeneration and the personified idea of the good seems to entail ‘the position that Kant’s commitment to radical evil forces his position back to some sort of reliance on a specific historical occurrence—in the form of Christ’s breaking the “power” of the evil principle to hold us against our will’.⁵⁷ On the other hand, ‘every other feature of his position tends to subordinate history to the imperializing tendencies

⁵⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 87.

⁵⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 87.

⁵⁶ Michalson’s comments: ‘Throughout this section [(i.e., Section One, Book Two of *Religion*)], Kant equivocates between simply discussing the “objective reality of this idea” and actually employing this idea for the purpose of explaining how moral conversion actually occurs. One might put the point more positively by saying that, in this section of the *Religion*, Kant is implicitly acknowledging that one cannot discuss radical evil (“original sin”) without also discussing christology, and that one cannot discuss the latter without discussing the doctrine of justification. This is a perfectly natural theological principle; the problem is that it is not clear from the discussion how it can be a Kantian principle’. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 92.

⁵⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 92.

of a universalizing rationality'.⁵⁸ Kant must then 'integrate a theory of atonement with his coveted principle of autonomy, with a rather convoluted theory of punishment for past sins'.⁵⁹ The convoluted nature of Kant's theory of punishment for past sins, according to Michalson, provides some of the strongest evidence for the inadequacy of Kant's account of moral regeneration in general and his more specific accounts of the divine-human partnership centred on the christic archetype.

Michalson puts his finger on the key question regarding Kant's account: 'But if a man is corrupt in the very ground of his maxims, how can he possibly bring about this revolution by his own powers and of himself become a new man?'⁶⁰ Michalson suggests that in the crucial portions of Kant's argument, the ones that should provide a rejoinder to this question, 'he simply skips over the answer to the specific question and describes what the change is like, not how it occurs'.⁶¹ Kant thus explains very little regarding human autonomy and divine aid according to Michalson; instead he merely 'runs together the question of how moral generation is possible with the christological question of whether "the personified idea of the good principle" is possible'.⁶² It thus appears, according to Michalson, that 'Kant remains utterly agnostic on the question of the reality of grace' and once again oscillates between two positions, namely, whether we take Kant's statements about 'divine aid to be actual comments about divine activity or simply motivational devices designed to offset a sense of moral futility'.⁶³ Kant appears content simply to accept that these positions are on the frontiers of reason's capacity to understand and—at least for the time being—mysterious.

Before moving to the last topic of importance in Michalson's interpretation of *Religion*, it is important to understand the essence of his characterization of Kant's

⁵⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 92-93.

⁵⁹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 93.

⁶⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 93 (citing Kant's *Religion*, 6:47).

⁶¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 94.

⁶² Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 94.

⁶³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 96.

solution to moral regeneration. Michalson holds that Kant's commitment to divine assistance must simultaneously mean 'restoring the predisposition to good to a position of preeminence'.⁶⁴ The predisposition to good, for Michalson, is the ontological and original state of humanity prior to the exercise and fall of the will. He characterizes Kant's position as a 'metamorphosis' that moves from 'comments about moral regeneration ... into the moral psychology of an agent in the grip of radical evil'.⁶⁵ The whole discussion can be regarded as a mere descriptive of 'the religious self [which] learns something about itself rather than something about a state of affairs outside of itself'.⁶⁶ There is a 'fragile balance' in Kant's position, leading to confusion in the mind of the reader as to exactly that Kant would have us believe: 'on the one hand, Kant does not want to place the emphasis on the theoretically dubious beliefs about states of affairs outside the believer; but on the other hand, he is admitting that radical evil requires the believer to hope for outside aid in ways that seem to entail certain religious beliefs'.⁶⁷ If we are to make sense of what Kant seems to be implying, then understanding his appeals to divine grace might simply be considered heuristic devices 'employed to produce a specific moral result and then dropped as, in itself, a matter of indifference'.⁶⁸

Michalson takes it as obvious that Kant 'somehow translates the appeal to the figure of Christ into an appeal to our own autonomy'.⁶⁹ There is in Kant's account no 'ready-made existence of a disposition totally well-pleasing to God, but the existence of radical evil', and only radical evil 'could produce "difficulties" opposing the reality of the personified idea of the good principle'.⁷⁰ Put into the context of 'the problem of how a defective disposition can, through its own resources, regenerate itself ... and the problem of the "surplus," concerning the offsetting of debt accrued since the fall into

⁶⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 97.

⁶⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 98.

⁶⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 98.

⁶⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 99.

⁶⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 99.

⁶⁹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 110.

⁷⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 110.

radical evil', we have indications for why Kant moves decisively away from pure philosophy and towards the adoption of biblical claims.⁷¹ 'The key element in Kant's solution to the problem of surplus is the universal, rational, archetypal character of this quality that makes Christ the Christ'.⁷² For Michalson, the only way Kant can account for autonomy in the process of moral regeneration and the importance of the archetype of perfect humanity is to trade on the implicit suggestion that the historic Christ is in fact a manifestation of universal good. 'The archetype possesses its reality prior to any historical manifestations, but it so happens to have been made manifest in Christ. Kant's account amounts to a kind of logos Christology, ethically conceived'.⁷³ Kant not only borrows from the Christian narrative, says Michalson, but also requires belief in the person and work of Christ as the means of resolving the problematic of radical evil and dispositional punishment. The implicit appeal to a rationalistic conception of Christ to resolve the problem of the surplus is grafted onto what Michalson takes to be 'a rather awkward theory of punishment for the sin of an evil disposition. [Kant's] specific aim is to offset the third and last difficulty facing the objective reality of the personified idea of the good principle. In doing so, he simultaneously produces his autonomous atonement'.⁷⁴

The anatomy of Kant's account of atonement is illustrative of how Michalson's interpretation of Kant works itself out. There are judicial punishments applicable to each stage of dispositional development that Kant's commitment to symmetry seems to require. The former disposition requires punishment that the renewed disposition does not deserve, while the renewed disposition, though on a path of moral improvement, still requires a punishment that Kant seems to believe it can escape. Michalson recognizes that Kant's theory appears to hinge on punishment 'occurring "during" the change of heart', but he is not sure what to make of this solution. It appears to him that 'the aspect

⁷¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 110.

⁷² Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 114.

⁷³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 114.

⁷⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 114.

of “duration” here seems to rely on the idea that, for an unspecified period, the moral agent is neither fully good nor fully wicked—in stark contrast to his more typical admonition that it is “of great consequence to ethics in general to avoid admitting, so long as it is possible, of anything morally indeterminate ...” (p.22; p.18).⁷⁵ Kant has essentially ‘boxed himself in: the solution to the problem of the surplus of debt requires a punishment, but the punishment itself requires a linkage between the moral and the temporal that strains against other features of Kant’s philosophy’.⁷⁶

In order to understand Michalson’s account of Kant’s resources for resolving the problem of atonement in Book Two we must recognize that Michalson suspects there is neither a unified moral disposition in Kant’s philosophy nor an actual personification of the good principle free of the historical belief in the Christ for its atoning significance. In his own words, ‘One of [Kant’s] framing premises, after all, is that the punishment cannot be justly visited upon the agent possessing a regenerated disposition ... [and] if the regenerated disposition is the necessary precondition for the departure from evil, it is not clear where Kant can locate the punishment without overriding his own premise’.⁷⁷ This conclusion is the inevitable result of Kant’s commitment to the reality of human autonomy *and* radical evil, and it forces him to find a solution in an appeal to biblical language. Reason has run out of resources.

This appeal, as indicated above, leads to what Michalson takes to be an impossibly awkward and cumbersome doctrine of atonement. The issue of the before and after dispositional state of the human being who has converted to the good yields the need to punish the person(s) piecemeal. Regarding the punishment of the ‘old man’, Michalson concludes, ‘Evidently, Kant’s point is that, following moral conversion, the struggles, trials, and temptations that the “new man” faces—faces precisely by virtue of having become good again—are viewed as punishments for the earlier self’.⁷⁸ The

⁷⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 115.

⁷⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 115-116.

⁷⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 117.

⁷⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 117.

punishment of the ‘new man’ who is finite and still ‘affected by sensuous inclinations’ complicates the matter; this punishment ‘must attend moral regeneration if Kant’s rational standards are to be observed’.⁷⁹ Only by appeal to this complex ‘cluster of insights’ can Kant walk the ‘narrow path’ of maintaining his prized principle of proportionality and thus be ‘fair’ to all the dispositional states concerned. In order to unify what has become an exceedingly cumbersome account ‘Kant effectively fuses atonement and autonomy’.⁸⁰

Michalson understands Kant’s appeal to ‘the Christ principle’ to be both the crucial moment of solution to the dilemma facing his philosophy of religion with the emergence of radical evil, and the ‘surprising’ and ‘odd’ blend of the rationalistic and the christocentric that makes his solution so difficult to follow and troubled in its specifics. ‘Kant’s christology is integral to his overall theory of radical evil, for it is the debility produced by radical evil that requires the christological account ... [and] there is no problem reconciling Kant’s view of Jesus with his overriding rationalist principle, since the thing that makes Jesus the Christ is an archetype residing in all rational beings’.⁸¹ Despite the positive currency that the Christ principle affords him, Kant is still saddled with a gap in his thinking that is not so easily filled: ‘the capacity of Jesus to break the power of the evil principle to hold rational beings against their will—is not so easily absorbed by the rationalist religious insight’.⁸² He puts the point this way: ‘The sheer fact that it is at least plausible to argue that, in one limited sense, the completion of Kant’s rational religion requires an appeal to a specific historical figure, indicates the depth of the problem into which his theory of radical evil has led him’.⁸³

The whole matter comes to a head in Kant’s search for the ‘surplus’ required to offset the accrued debt from the original fall into radical evil. The way Michalson sees it,

⁷⁹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 117.

⁸⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 119.

⁸¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 121.

⁸² Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 121.

⁸³ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 122.

the problem all along has been that the inexplicable act producing moral conversion cannot offset or pay off the moral debt acquired ever since the original fall into radical evil. Whatever else we can or cannot say about the act leading to conversion, we can at least say that it was obligatory in its own moment and cannot serve to offset the accrued debt. Kant's search for the "surplus" that *will* offset the debt culminates in the conception of ongoing, temporal punishment I described earlier.

This search for the surplus also necessitates Kant's appeal to grace, for it 'is itself a profit which is reckoned to us *by grace*' (6:75). Michalson takes the whole appeal to grace as ambiguous at best and a symptom of 'the instability running throughout his entire discussion of moral regeneration'.⁸⁴ Fundamentally necessary to Kant's entire account is a clear understanding of 'the payment of this punishment to produce the needed surplus' and this payment leads to 'his theory of the possibility of Christology ... [which] quite literally becomes a theory of the possibility of moral regeneration'.⁸⁵

III. Religion as a Province of Meaning and the Primacy of Practical Reason in Kant's *Religion*

In this section and the next, we return to the interpretations of Ronald Green, Adina Davidovich, and Stephen Palmquist with specific reference to the interpretive difficulties noted in the previous section. We will ask these interpretations—individually and collectively—to make sense of Kant's arguments in *Religion* and to provide an exegetical framework in which the text's more difficult passages can be explicated. Each of the interpreters presented in Chapter One believes, with varying degrees of assurance, that their interpretation of *Religion* allows it to stand as a complete and coherent work of religious philosophy. After assessing just how these interpretations claim to be useful in overcoming the concerns readers tend to have about *Religion*, I will argue that, on their

⁸⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 122.

⁸⁵ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 122.

own, none of these interpretations actually resolve the most difficult exegetical problems.

Turning first to an interface of Adina Davidovich's interpretation with Michalson's objections, we must backtrack and consider the way in which the previous Critiques prepare the way for Kant's thinking on religion and theology. She is convinced that 'central elements of [Kant's] system ... have been obscured by an overzealous portrayal of his thought as a rigoristic abstract formalism'.⁸⁶ 'Like many theologians of our time', she writes, 'Kant refused to ground the validity of religious vision in the authority of revelation or tradition and insisted that we cannot know if our thought about God corresponds to ontological reality'.⁸⁷ This does not mean, however, that religion is meaningless or that we are unable to think and speak of God in meaningful ways. Important to her interpretation of Kant and his relationship to theology is that thinking and speaking about God are not exclusively linked to the moral enterprise. At work in Kant's thinking are at least three different theological models, each useful in its own right, which 'aspire to find a universal role for faith that is rooted in the predicament of finite and subjective beings'.⁸⁸ They are 'ethical postulation', 'imaginative projection', and 'contemplative construction'. While the first is clearly dependant on Kant's moral philosophy, the other two are derived from resources found primarily in the third *Critique*. It is the last of these three models, the one farthest removed from Kant's moral philosophy, that Davidovich will go on to utilize in her interpretation of *Religion*.

The theological model called 'ethical postulation' constructs theology on the basis of the moral law and the ultimate moral end—the Highest Good. '[In order to] protect the practice of morality we must cultivate trust in a divine being who will assist in the realization of the ultimate moral end'.⁸⁹ This model has come under some attack because it attempts 'to derive the rationality of faith from an alleged duty to pursue

⁸⁶ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 323-324.

⁸⁷ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 324.

⁸⁸ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 324-325.

⁸⁹ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 326.

happiness which, together with virtue, comprises the ideal of the highest good'.⁹⁰ Davidovich defends Kant's use of this model by limiting what it purports to show. She argues that the use of the Highest Good in theological construction can show faith to be rational, but not rationally necessary. The main reason is that realizing the Highest Good cannot be shown to be a duty; it is a regulative principle that guides us in moving from a formal moral theory to a theory of ethics. According to Davidovich, a 'better reading [of Kant's theory of the a priori nature of the moral law] observe[s] that practical reason regulates activity not by generating abstract precepts from the categorical imperative, but through licensing maxims that express interests of finite beings'.⁹¹ This understanding of the categorical imperative sees it as a *regulator* of given maxims and not the *generator* of particular maxims. The process of generation presupposes happiness at the moment of deliberation. The best argument Kant gives for including happiness as part of moral deliberation, according to Davidovich, involves the concept of justice. If, in our thought experiments, we conceive of a holy and omnipotent rational being (God), the concept of justice makes a proportionate understanding of happiness and righteousness the only bearable (viz., rationally consistent) option.

The theological model called 'imaginative projection' arises in 'Kant's struggle to respond to the predicament of a person in moral deliberation'.⁹² In a manner reminiscent of Ronald Green, Davidovich asserts that the dynamics of a person's conscience when in moral deliberation lead us to 'experience our conscience [itself] as an authoritative figure watching over us'.⁹³ Our personified conscience, complete with the characteristic of omnipresence, acts 'as a figure from which nothing can hide and from which we cannot run away'.⁹⁴ As Kant put it in *Metaphysics of Morals*, 'a man constrained by his reason sees himself constrained to carry on as at the bidding of

⁹⁰ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 326.

⁹¹ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 332.

⁹² Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 340.

⁹³ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 341.

⁹⁴ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 341.

another person'.⁹⁵ Davidovich adds that 'In fulfilling its function, conscience must project itself outwardly as an image that takes on an uncanny resemblance to the traditional biblical idea of God'.⁹⁶ Where Green understands the empirical fact of human religiosity and specific beliefs that have emerged within the social/cultural nexus of human affairs to be inherent in Kant's position, Davidovich argues for the purity of imaginative projection in conjunction with a definite movement in Kant's thinking toward 'contemplative construction'.

Davidovich points to the third *Critique* in support of the projection model and to the connection between the third *Critique* and *Religion* for the contemplative construction model. In the third *Critique*, Kant argues that 'it is at least possible to assume a being [that exists] apart from the world, and that legislates morality, and to make this assumption without any concern about theoretical proof, let alone selfish interest, but on a basis that (while indeed only subjective) is purely moral and free from all foreign influence: on the mere recommendation of a Practical Reason that legislates only to itself' (third *Critique*, 334-5/445-6). Davidovich believes that 'Kant took pains to clarify that this imaginative projection does not entitle us to suppose that such a supreme being actual exists outside ourselves'.⁹⁷ The idea of God formed by the projection of our conscience, far from mere fantasy however, can be judged by its usefulness for the moral life. This criterion for theological construction is recommended by practical reason and brought to completion by judicial reason. If one idea of God is more adequate in its support of our moral volitions than another, it should be judged rationally superior and—at least contingently—be acceptable as an idea of God for the belief of rational people.

⁹⁵ Beck, 233-34/438.

⁹⁶ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 341. This projection also sees God as an all-knowing judge. With practical reason, 'men are merely pointed in the direction of thinking of conscientiousness ... as accountable to a holy Being ... distinct from us yet present in our inmost being, and of submitting to the will of this Being, as a rule of justice'. Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 342. See *Metaphysics of Morals*, 235/339.

⁹⁷ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 343.

In *Religion*, Kant takes the 'projection' argument a step further by describing the idea of a Highest Good as a social reality that can and should be realized in this world. This can happen only if moral agents, in the spirit of mutual cooperation, combine their limited powers in a common enterprise of seeking the Highest Good. Kant recognizes, however, that this necessity has a stumbling block: the reality of human nature points to evil. Citing the opening arguments of Book Three in *Religion*, Davidovich argues that humans are more likely to corrupt each other's moral dispositions than to cooperate in the realization of the kingdom of morality. 'To overcome [the difficulty posed by mutual corruption in the social make-up of humanity], people must form a social alliance uniquely designed to combat mutual corruptibility. This can be done only through theological constructivism'.⁹⁸ It should be noted that Davidovich's interpretation emphasizes Kant's focus in Book Three on the moral community and the future prospect of developing an ethical commonwealth, rather than the more controversial and difficult passages in Book Two. Theological constructivism is based on the collective understanding of aesthetic feelings united with teleological concepts, not on moral faith or redemption. Davidovich calls this process 'contemplation'.

This third model of theological constructivism is based on the subjectivity of feeling and the process of individual and communal reasoning in dynamic relation: 'The contemplative idea of God that this model suggests is a necessary correlate of both moral decision and the scientific quest for truth'.⁹⁹ Davidovich understands contemplation to be the imaginative middle ground between theory and practice, resolving the problem of unity that neither theory nor practice could resolve on its own. For Kant, contemplative construction means creating a unifying concept or ultimate reference point for reason that, as in his theory of aesthetics, is indifferent to the existence of its object. Since neither theoretical reason nor practical reason in the first two *Critiques* provides resources by which to reconcile the apparent disparity of nature and freedom, the third *Critique* had to 'establish the transcendental unity of the realm of

⁹⁸ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 344.

⁹⁹ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 345.

freedom and the realm of nature'.¹⁰⁰ This endeavour leads Kant to the conception of faith as a reflective contemplation on the idea of a moral designer of the universe, linking it directly to Kant's understanding of the idea of the Highest Good.

In Kant's analysis of three applications of the faculty of reflective judgement, namely, aesthetic judgement, scientific belief in the empirical laws of nature, and the method of biology, humans use reflective judgement to detect purposive order in natural objects. This involves 'a contemplative idea of a supernatural substrate of reality that bridges the gap between freedom and nature'.¹⁰¹ Although we cannot establish the existence of God, Kant believed that 'we are justified in claiming validity for our contemplative thought about [a moral designer of nature]'.¹⁰² Reason is compelled to try and understand the purposiveness that it feels in nature. There is thus a dynamic relationship between aesthetic and reflective judgement. 'Even though the aesthetic judgment does not rely on determinative rules and concepts of theoretical reason, we nevertheless require universal assent to our judgments of taste'.¹⁰³ Such universal assent carries with it a rationale to understand this felt purposiveness. Davidovich writes, 'Kant believed that the critique of taste shows that our feelings of pleasure in the beautiful object commit us to thinking about a possible supersensible substrate, in which the unity of givenness and purposiveness resides'.¹⁰⁴

The discursive process of understanding in the third *Critique* presents itself as a weaker form of judgement than we find in the first *Critique*. Where the first *Critique*

¹⁰⁰ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 346.

¹⁰¹ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 346-347.

¹⁰² Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 347.

¹⁰³ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 347. According to Davidovich, Kant made two important points in his exploration of the transcendental conditions of aesthetic judgment. 'First, he argued that the pleasure we feel in contemplating a beautiful object results from our ability to impose order on a given manifold of intuition and is our only means of awareness of this capacity'. Second, the purposiveness found by employing a reflective judgment of taste can only be accounted for 'by envisioning a supersensible will who designed nature in a way to which our cognitive faculty responds with pleasure'. Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 348. See *The Critique of Judgement*, 406-408 (62-64).

¹⁰⁴ Davidovich, 'Kant's Theological Constructivism', 348. See *The Critique of Judgement*, 422 (82).

requires intuition and concept in synthetic union, the third *Critique* requires only aesthetic and teleological judgement contemplatively combined.¹⁰⁵ Just as everyone will not likely agree with any single judgement that an object is beautiful, everyone will not concur with my reflection on God and the Highest Good. Nevertheless, the dynamic union of aesthetics and reflection in the form of contemplation ‘conveys my conviction that everyone ought to agree with it’.¹⁰⁶ Contemplation is a reflective process aimed at coming to some understanding of God and the Highest Good, and is necessary to fulfil the need of reason for systematic completion and experiential harmony. ‘Thus, the analysis of the faculty of reflective judgment lays the foundation for a justification of faith as a reflective contemplation on an idea of a moral designer, an idea we construct as a necessary correlate of various employments of reflective judgment’.¹⁰⁷ For Davidovich, therefore, ‘Reflective faith is a necessary correlate to both scientific and moral visions of human life as it secures their much-needed integration in a comprehensive worldview’.¹⁰⁸

It is this vision of Kant’s philosophical programme that she carries with her into the reading of *Religion*. In her essay ‘How to Read *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*’, Davidovich posits ‘that *Religion* is, in essence, a concrete elaboration of Kant’s more abstract discussion of the reflective thought (contemplation) about God, an idea which is the main focus of his third *Critique*’.¹⁰⁹ Utilizing third *Critique* resources, she supports her thesis by arguing that reason has *three* powers (as opposed to the conventional two)—the power of reflection along with the powers of understanding and

¹⁰⁵ Despland makes the point that judicial reason demonstrates the employment of the mind constitutive of genius. The genius has the capacity to produce aesthetic ideas or ‘soulful representations’. He writes, ‘the imagination displays a creative activity, animates the mind, opens for it prospects into fields of kindred representations, and thus stretches the mind beyond its accustomed representations and limited vision’. Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*, 152. See also *The Critique of Judgement*, 175-82.

¹⁰⁶ Davidovich, ‘Kant’s Theological Constructivism’, 347. Kant used the term ‘exemplary’ to label the necessity of aesthetic judgments.

¹⁰⁷ Davidovich, ‘Kant’s Theological Constructivism’, 350-351.

¹⁰⁸ Davidovich, ‘Kant’s Theological Constructivism’, 351.

¹⁰⁹ Adina Davidovich, ‘How to Read Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone’ in *Kant-Studien* 85 (1994), 1. Henceforth referred to as ‘How to Read Religion’.

the moral will. The power of reflection bridges the gap between theory and practice by providing a necessary link between these two domains. She recognizes that the common approach to reading *Religion* is to understand it as correlative to Kant's moral philosophy. It is this approach, she believes, that leads quickly to problems of coherence—problems that quickly become the kind of textual morass identified by Michalson. Her emphasis on the third *Critique* promises to smooth over many of these difficulties: as she puts it 'Many themes in Kant's discussion of religion, especially his notion of grace, which have taxed the exegetical ingenuity of his interpreters, emerge as elliptical allusions to doctrines he developed in third *Critique*'.¹¹⁰

After outlining the three degrees of evil and the acute psychological difficulties associated with them, Davidovich turns to the much-maligned concept of Kantian grace. Though she admits that the admission of grace clearly signals new frontiers for Kant, she suggests that Kant has at least two good reasons for moving in this direction: first, Kant 'brings to the fore the realization that in order to overcome evil and sin, we must undergo a total change of heart', and second 'Kant's speculative question reflects the fact that humans cannot avoid asking themselves what they may hope for in life'.¹¹¹ At the heart of *Religion* is a problem of concern to the moral dimension of human experience, namely, that humans require a change of heart in order to act upon their duty in a world full of competing prudential concerns. In order to solve this problem, we must address the question of hope, employing resources available in Kant's judicial philosophy. Given the phenomenon of sin and our duty to aspire to a moral commonwealth, Kant confronts certain questions that reason must answer: 'Can we reform our hearts to moral perfection? Can we ever regard ourselves worthy members of the kingdom of morals even though we have all sinned? What punishment do we deserve for our past sins and how can we atone for them?' Such questions are beyond the reach of reason (in its theoretical or practical employment) to answer; nevertheless reason must ask them and needs to answer them. Thus, Kant's philosophy is driven

¹¹⁰ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 1.

¹¹¹ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 3.

toward answering questions usually reserved for theology—driven, we might add, by its own internal momentum. ‘This,’ according to Davidovich, ‘is the task of religious reflection’.¹¹²

Davidovich’s movement to religious reflection reflects her belief in the three-fold structure of Kant’s philosophical programme as explained in Chapter One. Her strategy for supporting this turn to reflection is based on Kant’s insistence that there are certain questions—those mentioned above for example—that reason must address lest it be shown impotent in dealing with life’s most pressing concerns. Kant puts it this way in *Religion*: ‘Thus the investigation is only an answer to a speculative question, but one that cannot therefore be passed over in silence, since reason could then be accused of being absolutely incapable of reconciling the human being’s hope of absolution from his guilt with divine justice, and this accusation might be disadvantageous to reason in many respects, most of all morally’ (6:76). Dealing with these questions leads us to reflect on possible solutions. The point of this reflection is not to determine answers with anything like certainty; the idea is to bridge the gap between nature and freedom with reflections on or visions of hope. This, in Davidovich’s estimation, is what *Religion* is all about. Thus, Kant is not appending new elements to his moral theory or flirting with empirical theology in a way contrary to his theoretical philosophy. On the contrary, Kant is reflecting religiously on possible solutions to the problem of sin and the question of hope.¹¹³

This is precisely why Kant is justified in appealing to divine aid. Davidovich suggests ‘that it is only in light of his discussion of the reflective recognition of the transcendental unity of Nature and Freedom (in the third *Critique*) that Kant can appeal

¹¹² Davidovich, ‘How to Read Religion’, 4.

¹¹³ Despland concurs with Davidovich in the linking of Religion to the question of hope. Kant, in probing the question of hope, wonders if moral action can ever really come to humankind generally on the basis of a love for the moral law or is it always to be linked with other circumstances. Kant’s turn to religion is an attempt to see what religion can offer to give us further hope. Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*, 167.

(in *Religion*) to divine assistance in the perfection of the human heart'.¹¹⁴ Reflection is the key to understanding the coherence of Kant's appeal to divine aid in spite of his insistence on moral (and even regenerative) autonomy. 'Reason can adopt the idea of the supernatural complement to moral insufficiency, neither in maxims of thought nor in maxims of action'; instead 'Kant maintains that it may be available to the good will' and 'that this belief of Reason, this faith, is *reflective*'.¹¹⁵ Whatever Kant means by making divine aid available to the good will (and this Davidovich holds to be enigmatic in Kant's work), reflective faith is to be understood as a non-dogmatic complement to reason in its quest for moral hope. Kant writes,

'And if in the inscrutable field of the supernatural there is something more than it can bring to its understanding, which may however be necessary to make up for its moral impotence, reason even counts on this something being made available to its good will even if uncognized, with a faith which (with respect to the possibility of this something) we might call reflective, since the dogmatic faith which announces itself to be a knowledge appears to reason dishonest or imprudent' (6:52).

Among the varieties of faiths available through reason's other faculties, reflective faith is distinctive: 'it may strengthen the will (*Willkür*) to execute the moral decree by providing for it a concrete vision of the final moral end, a vision of the kingdom of God'.¹¹⁶

The results of this insight are important insofar as they provide a significant rejoinder to Michalson on the coherence of Kant's account of grace. Davidovich notes 'that if we read Kant's discussion of grace (defined as reflective faith) against the background of the third *Critique*, we shall realize that reflective faith in grace is a trust that, ultimately, nature is contrived to make possible the only object which is an end in

¹¹⁴ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 4.

¹¹⁵ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 4 and 5.

¹¹⁶ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 5.

itself: i.e., a moral being'.¹¹⁷ In fact, when we look at the beginning of Book Two of *Religion*, in which Kant begins by presupposing that the meaningfulness of the world depends upon the possibility of its conceivability as God's creation for the purpose of 'Humanity ... in its full moral perfection' (6:60), we need to understand that Kant is situating his solution to radical evil not only in the moral deliverances of the good will—whatever they may be—but also in reflection on religion as a province of meaning unto itself. As Davidovich remarks, 'All that reflective faith allows us is to believe that our nature makes our rebirth possible. Kant calls it "grace" because this reflection depends on thinking of God as the moral designer of the universe'.¹¹⁸ Since the third *Critique* has 'determine[d] that the supreme principle of reflective judgment is a thought about a moral governor of the universe' and reason has determined that rebirth is possible, Kant has all the cognitive ballast necessary to support his appeal to divine aid.

In this way, Davidovich's way of reading *Religion* as a continuation of the third *Critique*'s role of bringing unity to reason provides at least one way to understand Kant in a more coherent way. Human beings need to believe in divine aid in order to overcome paralysing doubts about the possibility of moral rebirth and betterment, and reflective faith allows us to picture the world as a place in which divine aid can occur. 'Kant's project in [both *Religion* and the third *Critique*] is to show that a *good will* is possible, not that moral *action* is possible'.¹¹⁹ Reflective faith, however, 'cannot be adopted in maxims of action, it does not determine the will and does not infringe on its autonomy'.¹²⁰ Reflective faith merely allows us to believe that the will, which at some point in the past has chosen evil, can become good again. This belief is a large step towards answering the question that pulses at the heart of Kant's philosophy of religion: 'What may I hope?' According to Davidovich, 'In *Religion* the individual can overcome paralyzing doubts concerning the possibility of moral rebirth only with reflective faith in

¹¹⁷ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 5.

¹¹⁸ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 5.

¹¹⁹ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 6.

¹²⁰ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 5.

divine assistance. In both books [(viz., *Religion* and the third *Critique*)] thought about God is reflective and non-deliberative'.¹²¹

Not only is grace understood in a more coherent fashion on Davidovich's interpretation, but the theme of forgiveness also starts to make more sense. 'Forgiveness is no longer an arbitrary indulgence, but an acknowledgement that moral reform leads to a better life and the realization of the kingdom'.¹²² There is thus 'a pedagogical role of faith' that is important to recognize in conjunction with Kant's discussion of agency in *Religion*. 'In the systematic moral works, the will was a rational will, a will capable of determining itself according to duty. It was, however, also a will capable of determining itself according to maxims suggested by inclination. In *Religion*, the will can be moral but it can also be evil. In the systematic works the possibility was recognized and expressed in the metaphor of the will at the crossroads between its a priori principle and its a posteriori incentive'.¹²³ *Religion* focuses on the principle of radical choice (*Willkür*), but its sources are ineffable and 'It is of paramount importance for the agent to know if there is any way in which the scales of decision can be weighted toward a moral outcome'.¹²⁴ This is less a question of practical reason and more a question of moral education according to reflective faith.

This view of Kant's project in *Religion* makes more sense out of Kant's positive language toward empirical/historical religion. Historical religion has a pedagogical purpose for the moral life. Concerning the will, Davidovich writes, 'The fact that we have an inborn capacity to recognize duty and to form a moral will, does not guarantee that we shall indeed decide to accept the decree of morality as our principle of action. To establish the autonomy of morality, Kant portrays the will as a faculty that determines itself'.¹²⁵ The temptation of natural incentives threatens constantly to incline the will

¹²¹ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 11.

¹²² Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 11.

¹²³ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 12-13.

¹²⁴ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 13.

¹²⁵ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 13.

(*Willkür*) toward sensuous inclinations. When we recognize this phenomenon, ‘the question arises as to what, if anything, can be done to assist the will in determining itself according to duty it legislates to itself.... Historical religion is a nexus of dogma and ritual that provides the required expedients’.¹²⁶ Historical religion presents ‘an eschatological picture of world history’ in the form of a ‘concrete image’.¹²⁷ Where morality is concerned, reflection on the Highest Good remains a distant and vague image. The will is constantly under threat from immediate and practical desires and ‘the fear that virtue is futile and may even lead to suffering’; historical religion, on the other hand, ‘depict[s] a world in which divine providence promises the final realization of moral ends, the ideas of Reason acquire concretization in the agent’s mind and are no longer marginalized as mere idealizations that have little to do with real life’.¹²⁸

If religion is a concrete example of the Highest Good, then Jesus Christ is the concrete example of human perfection. ‘Using the power of reflection, we can perceive the events of Jesus’ life as an exemplification of the moral life, and this perception provides us with an impetus to strive and follow Jesus’ example’.¹²⁹ Davidovich understands *Religion* as Kant’s exercise in reflection on human hope in the context of moral failure; his emphasis on the Christ-like archetype of perfect humanity and the ethical commonwealth as the kingdom of God on Earth ‘expresses Kant’s belief that the moral progress of culture depends on an ability to contemplate history as the arena in which moral ends are realized, and on the ability to perceive particular events as moral’.¹³⁰ Grace, according to Davidovich’s interpretation, is not an arbitrary granting of mercy to those who have tried their best to obey the moral law; it is **instead** an expression of faith that ‘nature is ultimately conducive to the realization of moral

¹²⁶ Davidovich, ‘How to Read Religion’, 13.

¹²⁷ Davidovich, ‘How to Read Religion’, 13.

¹²⁸ Davidovich, ‘How to Read Religion’, 13.

¹²⁹ Davidovich, ‘How to Read Religion’, 14.

¹³⁰ Davidovich, ‘How to Read Religion’, 14.

ends'.¹³¹ Interpreters who link *Religion* primarily to the second *Critique*, and then demonstrate that the combination of the two is riddled with inconsistencies often overlook this point.

Davidovich has clearly captured a problem with readings of *Religion* that understand it only as an amendment to his practical philosophy. Kant's overriding concern is with the question of hope and in answering this question he utilizes resources from outside the bounds of the practical philosophy. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to question whether or not the arguments of *Religion* are consistent with his moral philosophy. Clearly, Davidovich cannot be arguing that Kant's reflective faith can and should be maintained in spite of the fact that our reflections exhibit either moral or rational inconsistencies. If we believe in God's grace and forgiveness, and yet are unable to give an account of how grace and forgiveness cohere with what we take to be established already, this would weigh heavily against the viability of reflective faith. This is precisely why Michalson makes so much of human autonomy and responsibility in the context of divine goodness and justice. In light of these considerations, what Davidovich must mean is that reflective faith is not a stagnant faith; it is a faith in motion, a faith constantly reconfiguring itself in light of new insights into the union of nature and morality under one purpose.¹³² Such a faith, though likely to need reconfiguration down the road, provides hope at the very moment despair threatens to encroach. When our moral failures meet the empirical facts of existence and threaten to overwhelm us, reflective faith strengthens us to strive toward a higher purpose. This faith is grounded in aesthetic feeling (viz., beauty and sublimity) and understood against the backdrop of historical faith.

Religion, by these lights, is Kant's best effort to reflect on the purposiveness he feels in the aesthetic dimension of human experience and to articulate (or make concrete) the religious implications of this purposiveness. All the problems mentioned in

¹³¹ Davidovich, 'How to Read Religion', 14.

¹³² Kant's conception of faith, according to Despland, is one of a free personal act, both rational and religious, which struggles against splits between what is and ought to be. Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*, 145.

the previous section are genuine problems for Kant, but, on Davidovich's interpretation, they are not problems that necessarily emerge from the critical philosophy. They emerge instead from time and experience, and in the particular content of human imagination and are therefore germane to the discursive intellect of humans concerned with the question of hope. It really does not matter on Davidovich's interpretation whether or not Kant's particular claims in *Religion* actually cohere with one another, only that we believe they *could* cohere in some form. Of course, this removes the arduous task of showing *Religion* to be coherent from the perspective of like-minded interpreters of *Religion*. Coherence is, according to Davidovich, an important consideration in Kant's thinking, but it is not the most important. Foremost for Kant in the writing of *Religion* is the process of discerning the meaning of the Highest Good, and the stabilization of reason according to this meaning.

This interpretation, though a resourceful and useful corrective to merely moral interpretations, is hardly satisfactory to those who argue that it is not possible to interpret *Religion* as a coherent whole. They may admit that Davidovich's emphasis on the third *Critique* is potentially helpful for understanding Books Three and Four. In particular, the Divisions entitled 'Philosophical representation of the victory of the good principle in founding the Kingdom of God on earth' and 'Historical representation of the gradual establishment of the dominion of the good principle on earth' in Book Three appear especially malleable to Davidovich's insights insofar as they present themselves as inspiring and challenging accounts of how we may envision hope for humanity in the context of evil through promise of divine provision found in the world's religious traditions. However, interpreters like Michalson are likely to find Davidovich's interpretation much less persuasive in accounting for Books One and Two. When stretched to interpret the whole of *Religion*, reflective faith appears to come into conflict with *moral* faith.

Ronald Green's interpretation is more convincing in demonstrating both the primacy of practical reason and the central place of logical exactness and analytic thoroughness in Kant's thinking. Both appear to be downplayed in Davidovich's interpretation. Nevertheless, Green sees these attributes as among reason's most

important virtues and part of the drive that animates virtually every aspect of Kant's philosophical programme. Practical reason is crucial in this regard and it is difficult to overestimate its importance in Kant's thinking. It is practical reason that allows Kant to answer the sceptic of religious faith. Green argues that 'Kant's response to the strict empiricist's position [on religion] is not waged at all on the empiricism's terrain, the terrain of theoretical reason, but from the opposing side of practical reason'.¹³³ This is one reason why Kant believed in the primacy of practical reason, 'because every interest is ultimately practical, even that of speculative reason being only conditional and reaching perfection only in practical use'.¹³⁴ According to Green, even theoretical reason's purpose is practically oriented 'to comprehend nature's causal sequences in order to facilitate our command and control of the environment around us'.¹³⁵ For these reasons, it should come as some concern to readers of *Religion* that the book appears to threaten the coherence of Kant's thinking on the moral enterprise. When Kant's moral philosophy is actually employed (or, as Kant puts it in the Preface to the third *Critique*, when nature and freedom are considered simultaneously), problems emerge for understanding morality that reason must address lest it be dubbed ineffectual in dealing with life's most basic problems.

Clearly, Green is right to emphasize the importance of practical reason. Practical reason gives theoretical reason a purpose and at the same time moves reason beyond purely empirical concerns.¹³⁶ Practical reason has objective resources especially designed for addressing the problems and answering the questions from the theoretical philosophy. However, these resources come with some restrictions. Green lists three rules which govern the ventures of practical reason beyond empirical reason: 1) it cannot oppose theoretical reason, 2) it cannot contradict theoretical reason, and 3) it must move

¹³³ Green, *Religious Reason*, 70.

¹³⁴ Beck, 126.

¹³⁵ Green, *Religious Reason*, 72.

¹³⁶ Green submits that '[Kant] was convinced that the traditional objects of religious faith could be given a firm basis in the needs of practical reason rather than theoretical reason'. Green, *Religious Reason*, 78.

beyond empirical knowledge in a minimalist way.¹³⁷ Green also adds that practical reason must recognize that its knowledge is not knowledge in the empirical sense, but a kind of practical knowledge. Kant refers to this practical knowledge as ‘faith’ or ‘pure rational faith’. It is, according to Green, ‘no less objective and valid than that produced through experience’.¹³⁸ We know freedom and the moral law, and by extension we know of the real possibility of the Highest Good even if it cannot be proven to obtain in this world. Says Green, ‘practical reason can be content with the affirmation only of the real possibility of the Highest Good and does not require absolute proof of its reality’.¹³⁹ This is true of other beliefs as well. ‘I can act rationally if I obey the moral rules and at the same time hold certain beliefs not supported by experience’.¹⁴⁰ Green calls these beliefs ‘religious beliefs’. Religious belief is mustering the cognitive self-assurance that moral obedience is valid in the face of empirical indifference and that the religious resources of our world are sufficient to meet whatever moral challenges we might face in nature.

As a rejoinder to Davidovich’s interpretation, Green’s interpretation has the inherent strength of emphasizing the force of Kant’s desire to be logically consistent along with the primacy of practical reason.¹⁴¹ These appear crucial to the establishment of a firm philosophical foundation for theology in Kant, and Green appears to be correct on these points. His view also accounts for grace to a certain degree by softening Kant’s moral philosophy to include the legitimacy of selfish action and providing a place for prudential reasoning. Grace becomes a potential object of rational religious belief to the extent that it balances the scales of moral conflict and completes the logic of relating

¹³⁷ Green, *Religious Reason*, 70

¹³⁸ Green, *Religious Reason*, 71. Kant’s most systematic discussion of this point is in the first *Critique* (645-52.)

¹³⁹ Green, *Religious Reason*, 71.

¹⁴⁰ Green, *Religious Reason*, 73

¹⁴¹ Because religion is inherently a rational activity, it is committed to the consistency of its beliefs. This means that paradox, not overt self-contradiction must characterize religious thinking. Ronald M. Green, *Religion and Moral Reason*, 4.

nature and freedom on practical terms.¹⁴² Nevertheless, the way Green understands practical reason in Kant shows limitations regarding how we are to understand *Religion*. Green avers that practical reason culminates in the religious belief that acting morally is the only rational course of action in difficult situations.¹⁴³ Acting immorally, on the contrary, occurs because, in the actual employment of our radically free natures, there are occasions in which we choose to act irrationally. For Green, acting immorally is tantamount to acting irrationally—or, at least, with a strong sense of flawed practical reasoning. This, however, appears to be some distance from Kant's position in Book One of *Religion*. There, Kant is unequivocal: evil is both innate to and freely chosen by the human species.

Glaringly absent from Green's understanding of Kantian religion is a detailed explanation of the doctrine of corruption. For Green, Kant's notion of corruption is best understood as a break in the logical precision of reason and the will to act on such a break.¹⁴⁴ For Kant, however, the disposition *itself*—that aspect of the human person that grounds action and secures dignity—is evil. This more ontological doctrine of corruption remains one of the most remarkable features of *Religion* and, as we have seen, precisely how Kant arrives at it is a perennial matter of dispute. Michalson notes, with some reservations, that Kant arrives at the ontological dimension of human corruption because of his more formal account of morality. Green's interpretation, however, never fully accounts for this dimension—perhaps assuming with other traditional interpreters that Kant is here dribbling on his philosopher's cloak or showing signs of senility. For Kant in Book One of *Religion*, humans are 'evil by nature' and this

¹⁴² 'We can think of religion as the effort to utilize a possible but unknowable domain beyond our experience as a way of rationally harmonizing ... those demands of our reason which must be affirmed but which ... remain contradictory'. Green, *Religious Reason*, 117. According to Green, grace is a requirement for any rational religious belief system. See Green's table on 'The Requirements of Pure Religious Reason', which lists the minimum set of beliefs that one must hold to be fully rational. Green, *Religious Reason*, 109.

¹⁴³ Green, *Religious Reason*, 83.

¹⁴⁴ Green admits that Kant wants to establish something more than merely a logical flaw in human persons, but also thinks that this is wrongheaded. In personal correspondence (2000), Green states that he interprets Kant on religion in this way not because it necessarily provides the most accurate reading of Kant, but because it is the only way to make Kant cogent in light of the realities facing us today.

means that something fundamental to the human species is prone to evil. Kant calls this proneness ‘a propensity’. It threatens the very possibility of realizing a good disposition and presents a problem, the solution to which is the primary argumentative thrust of *Religion*.

IV. Palmquist’s Religious Interpretation of *Religion*

Like Davidovich, Stephen Palmquist thinks that *Religion* must be understood from the point of view of the third *Critique*.¹⁴⁵ The unity of reason, as nature and freedom are considered simultaneously, is a third *Critique* problem and one that occasions Kant’s arguments in Book One of *Religion*. Yet, in agreement with Green, he wants to maintain a sense of primacy for practical reason, even in inquiries under the auspices of the third *Critique*. According to Palmquist, practical reason, among reason’s finite employments, is central to Kant’s thinking and must not be supplanted in this role by the transition to judicial reasoning. What makes Palmquist’s interpretation of *Religion* significant, beyond Green and Davidovich, is that he affirms the depth of human corruption present in the arguments of *Religion* and yet utilizes resources throughout Kant’s critical philosophy to help understand it. Theory’s important advantage over practice lies in its immunity from the implications of the judicial philosophy. The problem of unity, as it manifests itself in Book One of *Religion*, is not a threat to the theoretical reason, but is clearly a concern for practical reason. Practical reason is the harbinger of reason’s ultimate interests. The question of unity, which justifies the very existence of the judicial philosophy, poses a problem for the interests of practical reason. Why should we act morally when justice all too often appears absent from this world and the hope of divine justice, it seems, is not apparently justified? Kant feels obligated to give an account of religion in which the concerns of the moral life and

¹⁴⁵ ‘That [Religion] is organized according to such architectonic patterns comes as no surprise, if, as I suggest in [Kant’s System of Perspectives: 96], this book constitutes part of Kant’s philosophical System. To view it as such—i.e., as an alternative, or complement, to [the third Critique]—involves the *judicial* rather than practical (as Kant’s emphasis on morality seems at first to indicate)’. Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 148.

divine justice play a central role, all the while taking it as given that the arguments of the theoretical philosophy remain intact.

Palmquist's approach to Kant's philosophy of religion is unique in that it begins by focusing on Kant's plan for the development of a transcendental theology. Palmquist argues that 'even though Kant begins his theology on an essentially negative theological note, believing he has been able "to discover the fallacy in any attempt [to prove God's existence theoretically], and so to nullify its claims", he nevertheless devotes considerable effort to the task of showing how an honest recognition of the limitations of human reason leaves ample room for drawing affirmative theological conclusions concerning God's existence and nature'.¹⁴⁶ He points out that 'the failure of the traditional proofs does not settle the issue of God's existence, but poses one of the most important problems for Critical philosophy to solve'.¹⁴⁷ According to Palmquist, it is important to root our understanding of Kant's transcendental theology in the first *Critique* and understand his subsequent reflections on theology as a development of the conviction that God is the transcendental ideal or the ground of being. Palmquist takes this emphasis to be consistent with Kant's overarching 'Transcendental Perspective'.

The belief in God as this transcendental ideal, according to Palmquist, makes the later development of moral theology intelligible. Understanding God as the ground of being in terms of faith, and linking this concept to the later development of moral and reflective theologies, means that *Religion* finds a reasonable touchstone for theology in each of Kant's Critiques. According to Palmquist, Kant is attempting not only to bolster his moral theology and flesh out the promise of contemplative thinking for religious purposes, but also to explore the full range of transcendental theology in Kant's later writings. In a maneuver suggestive of Davidovich, Palmquist cites three types of theology, emanating respectively from each of the three Critiques, in support of this contention.

¹⁴⁶ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 68.

¹⁴⁷ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 67.

The first type, emerging from the first *Critique* and dubbed ‘Hypothetical Theology’, is part of what gave rise to the idea of God as the transcendental ground of being in the first place. This type of theology is not represented in Davidovich’s three-fold typology of Kantian theology, but is the point at which Kant initiates his plan to establish a critical theology. Hypothetical theology ‘demonstrate[s] that belief in God is not logically contradictory, since God’s existence, regarded as a constitutive part of the world, can never be proved or disproved, on the grounds that a conceptualizable intuition of God is in principle impossible’.¹⁴⁸ God, in this first *Critique* sense, is a regulative idea.¹⁴⁹ Hypothetical theology, focusing on God as a regulative idea, yields ‘principles concern[ing] how “to philosophise about nature”, not how to investigate nature scientifically’.¹⁵⁰ Understanding God in the first *Critique* as a reference point for investigating nature is a common and incorrect interpretation that is sometimes used to cast doubt on Kant’s project of transcendental theology. According to the first *Critique*, metaphysics ‘does not need the ideas for the purpose of natural science, but in order to pass beyond nature’ (first *Critique*, B395).

Hypothetical theology, according to Palmquist, establishes both the consistency of belief in God and the regulative function of belief for negotiating the complex questions of central concern to transcendental theology. Hypothetical theology is the unique contribution of Palmquist’s interpretation of Kant relative to Davidovich. It provides a theoretical basis for the development of moral and reflective theologies in Kant’s writings after the first *Critique*. Adopting Kant’s language, he calls them ‘moral theology’ and ‘physicotheology’. Moral theology, Palmquist argues, is ‘The Ultimate Rationale for Theistic Belief’.¹⁵¹ If the theoretical philosophy makes it possible to

¹⁴⁸ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 69.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Kant’s theory concerning the regulative idea of God is actually the least substantial of his various ways of affirming the rationality of theology’. Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 73.

¹⁵⁰ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 71.

¹⁵¹ Palmquist avers that ‘Kant’s moral argument for the existence of God is the only aspect of his solution to the problem of transcendental theology that has been duly recognized by commentators’. Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 75. According to Palmquist, there are at least two good reasons for this recognition. These reasons do not negate the importance of theology in its other forms, but they do suggest

believe that God exists (viz., that the idea of God as the ground of being is not inconsistent with human knowledge), then ‘the moral theology ... provides the only adequate philosophical basis for a belief in the existence of God’.¹⁵² The emphasis on moral theology does not compromise theoretical principles by claiming that we can experience the reality of God’s attributes. Kant is asserting only ‘that, despite our inherent ignorance of God’s essence, as necessitated by the perspectival nature of human rationality, it is legitimate for *practical* purposes to describe God, as long as we recognize the dependence of such descriptions on our own perspectives’.¹⁵³

Palmquist puts Davidovich’s imaginative projection and contemplative construction under the rubric of ‘physicotheology’. In both cases, reflection on purpose accounts for human thinking about God. This, of course, must be understood in the context of Kant’s theoretical objections to the teleological argument for God’s existence. Kant employs the concept of purpose in the context of the third *Critique* in order to explain the harmony we feel in aesthetic experiences. On Palmquist’s interpretation of the third *Critique*, it makes no difference whether or not our reflections on God are *mere* reflections or are directly linked to feeling and Kant’s theory of aesthetics. According to Palmquist, the second *Critique* (and moral theology) ‘serves as the only context in which the concept of God can be rationally justified’,¹⁵⁴ while the third *Critique* (and physicotheology) ‘aim[s] to establish ... an experience-based (i.e., existential) justification of practical *belief* in God.’¹⁵⁵ Physicotheology does not establish theoretical knowledge. Viewed from the perspective of the third *Critique* it simply makes the

the fundamental importance of moral theology for rational religious belief. The first reason is that ‘God’s existence, though not theoretically provable, is nevertheless a necessary *assumption* for any moral agent who wishes to conceive of the highest good as being realizable’. Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 76. The second is that holding fast to God the moral postulate does not establish, as some have argued, a condition for the possibility of moral choosing. For Kant, ‘only freedom has this status; God and immortality are conditions not of moral choosing, but of regarding morally good choice as a rational activity’. Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 76.

¹⁵² Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 81-2.

¹⁵³ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 81.

¹⁵⁴ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 80.

¹⁵⁵ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 73.

primacy of moral belief in the existence of God harmonious with the regulative nature of belief established on theoretical grounds in human cognition.

Palmquist's interpretation of Kant's transcendental theology as tripartite, developmental, and rooted in all three Critiques provides an interesting alternative to the theologies espoused in Green's moral and Davidovich's judicial interpretation. He identifies the first *Critique* as the true starting point of Kant's inquiries into the nature of theology by focusing on both the notion of God as regulative idea and of God as transcendental ideal or the ground of being. We can think and speak about God not because we know God in a theoretical sense, but because we believe in him as a regulative idea that grounds human experience, as an object of moral faith that makes moral reasoning viable, and as the guarantee of the poetic purpose of world (i.e., the Highest Good) according to which reason is able to harmonize nature and freedom. All three aspects of Kant's philosophical theology find their footing in the moral philosophy, but correspond to the 'three Critical systems' that make Kant's philosophical programme as a whole. For Kant, the God of moral/religious faith is a 'good governor', a 'holy lawgiver' and a 'just judge' for these very reasons.¹⁵⁶

Because of Palmquist's holistic approach to Kant's development of the transcendental theology, he is sensitive to the shortcomings of interpretations that understand *Religion* as somehow reducing religion to morality in an eliminative way. Eliminative reduction is when 'one special way of explaining something is not only necessary, but *self-sufficient*, so that it can actually replace, or *explain* away all other explanations'.¹⁵⁷ Understanding *Religion* in such a decisively moral way, argues Palmquist, makes Kant's arguments there appear radically inconsistent. It is better, in light of the perspectival nature of Kant's philosophical programme leading up to *Religion*, to see the book as an answer to the question 'What may I hope?' Therefore, he agrees with Davidovich that the third part of Kant's plan for philosophy provides the proper vantage point from which to appreciate *Religion*. Palmquist is so convinced of

¹⁵⁶ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 109.

¹⁵⁷ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 114.

this placement that he even contends that *Religion* rivals the prominence of the third *Critique* in Kant's philosophical system.¹⁵⁸ Both books answer the question of hope, but in Palmquist's estimation only *Religion* gives a systematic and satisfying answer to the question capable of standing as 'a *Critique of Religious Judgment*'.¹⁵⁹ According to Palmquist, '[*Religion*] ought to be viewed as itself a transcendental *Critique of Religion*—i.e., as an attempt to delineate the *boundary* between true religion and false religion by setting forth the *necessary conditions for the possibility of religious experience*'.¹⁶⁰ With this plan in mind, it is most natural to assume that Kant is integrating aspects of all three of his theological methods.

These philosophical and theological considerations set the stage for Palmquist's interpretation of *Religion*. He takes the central question of Book One to be: 'Is human nature originally good or evil?' Kant's answer to this question, argues Palmquist, is 'two-sided'. On the one side, when we refer to the 'potential that resides in every human being ..., then we must regard human nature as originally good'.¹⁶¹ Kant calls this feature of the human person 'the predisposition'. On the other side, if 'the question refers to the *actual* state of every human person in their first (and subsequent) moral act(s), then we cannot avoid the conclusion that an original ('radical') evil exists in every human nature'.¹⁶² Humans in this sense are 'evil by nature'. Book Two, by contrast, asks 'How can an *evil* person *become* good?' Kant's answer here again, says Palmquist, involves two parts. First, 'no matter how good we are, we cannot be good enough to please God'.¹⁶³ God is holy and perfect; we are unholy and flawed. Second, 'by acting morally we render ourselves *susceptible* of "higher and, for us [i.e., for bare

¹⁵⁸ In a way reminiscent of Clement Webb's interpretation of *Religion*, Palmquist suggests that 'it could replace [The Critique of Judgment] as the third *Critique*, with [The Critique of Judgment] then being regarded as a supporting work'. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 123.

¹⁵⁹ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 122.

¹⁶⁰ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 129. *Religion* presents a prolegomena to 'Critical Mysticism' in Palmquist's interpretation of Kant.

¹⁶¹ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 129.

¹⁶² Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 129.

¹⁶³ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 130.

reason] inscrutable assistance”¹⁶⁴ We can hope to become pleasing to God by acting morally and by becoming susceptible to divine assistance to make up for our moral deficiencies. Book Two, according to Palmquist, is an argument for the claim that ‘*grace is a necessary condition of becoming good*’.¹⁶⁵

Given this general understanding of the direction of Kant’s arguments in *Religion*, Palmquist moves on into specifics. He defines the main distinctions of Book One under the notion of the moral disposition. As we saw in Chapter One, belief in the existence of the moral disposition is not negotiable for Kant: it must be upheld for the sake of our identity and dignity as humans. Palmquist’s interpretation of *Religion* takes this moral disposition to be at the heart of Kant’s argument—the conceptual point of reference toward which the other features of Book One point. This is no less true for the theological elements of the book. For Palmquist, Kant in Book One is forwarding an argument about the moral relationship between God and humanity and the prospects for future hope in light of our inadequacies. We believe in God as the transcendental ground of being on moral grounds; humans are creatures with moral dispositions. Kant is thus probing the meaning of the relationship between God the moral ground of being and human beings under the rubric of hope and as a transcendental reflection on the nature of religious experience.

Palmquist defines the generic human disposition as ‘the timeless ground of a person’s maxims at any given point in time’.¹⁶⁶ Precisely what this means is difficult to determine. Although Palmquist seems satisfied, at least initially, with maintaining this definition in its somewhat paradoxical state, he thinks Kant’s strategy is to unpack the meaning of the human disposition in order to get at the transcendental conditions of religious experience and the contours of critical religious belief. Palmquist contrasts the human disposition with what Kant calls the original human ‘predisposition’. The predisposition is ‘the timeless ground of a person’s maxims at the very *outset* of life,

¹⁶⁴ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 130.

¹⁶⁵ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 131.

¹⁶⁶ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 150.

before any moral actions have been performed'.¹⁶⁷ Palmquist contends that the human disposition is essentially a combination of the 'predisposition' with what we might call a 'post-disposition'. When the disposition is considered in its original state of goodness, it is thought of as the predisposition; when the disposition is considered subsequent to its employment in nature, it is thought of as the post-disposition. This second aspect of the disposition, Palmquist thinks, is what Kant means when he says humans are 'evil by nature'. When the human disposition, which is originally good, is employed in nature it naturally inverts the moral order of incentives.

In light of Kant's double-aspect understanding of the human disposition—as comprised of both a predisposition and post-disposition—his position on the nature of the human disposition is that it is a 'good or evil' disposition.¹⁶⁸ The human disposition is therefore a profoundly moral disposition, viewed either in its original state of innocence or the existential state of evil. Between these two aspects of the disposition, we find what Kant calls 'the propensity to evil'. Palmquist defines the propensity to evil as the act of each individual in time of having 'actively *chosen* [evil] even though we are essentially passive recipients of the "indwelling" of radical evil';¹⁶⁹ it is the defining feature of the moral disposition and manifests itself in the actual choices humans make in their encounter with the natural realm.¹⁷⁰ In other words, the propensity to evil is the fulcrum on which the moral disposition is balanced between its original state of innocence and its existential state of corruption.

¹⁶⁷ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 150. '[T]he predisposition to good means a person's "original" situation is characterized by "a state of innocence". We have the potential to do good, originally and at every given moment'. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 151.

¹⁶⁸ Palmquist understands Kant's discussion of the various alternative starting points for his critical inquiry into religion in Book One of *Religion* to dismiss two outright: (1) that the human being moves from good to evil in the course of life or (2) the human being moves from evil to being good. Kant instead opts for a middle ground position. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 149.

¹⁶⁹ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 155.

¹⁷⁰ '[O]ur good disposition is an analytic constituent of what it means to posit the *subject* "man", whereas our evil propensity is a *predicate* that is synthetically added to that concept'. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 152.

Conceived transcendently, the propensity to evil testifies to a hidden 'indwelling' of evil in the human species. This indwelling of evil is a feature of Kant's argument that neither Green nor Davidovich take fully into account. That Palmquist addresses it is part of the strength of his interpretation. Palmquist argues that the indwelling of evil is 'a noumenal act [which] produces an evil propensity in all members of the human race'.¹⁷¹ A noumenal act is by definition inscrutable and the best we can do is locate the ground of evil in the propensity to evil.¹⁷² Radical evil, therefore, 'is a mystery not unlike the mysteries of pure intuition and freedom, both of which Kant regards as basic facts of human nature that must simply be acknowledged, and cannot be proved or explained by reason'.¹⁷³ Radical evil 'somehow produces in human beings a propensity to evil'.¹⁷⁴ For this reason, radical evil is the noumenal complement to the propensity to evil, effecting the turn from the predisposition to the post-disposition and creating a situation in which each human disposition must be converted to the good. According to Palmquist, 'Radical evil converts our potential good into virtually the opposite: the propensity to evil',¹⁷⁵ and this circumstance requires that we convert back to the good disposition through a change of heart. This conversion, he argues, is not just an intellectual acknowledgement of radical evil and the need to change our ways, but an equally 'radical *conversion* of one's disposition'.¹⁷⁶ Conversion must be possible because duty demands it. Nevertheless, it is not a conversion back into the original state, but a turning toward the good in full realization of the possibilities and pitfalls associated with such a conversion.

Despite the sense this interpretation makes of *Religion*, Palmquist admits the presence of profound paradoxes. In fact, Palmquist seems to argue that Kant's *intent* in

¹⁷¹ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 155.

¹⁷² Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 157.

¹⁷³ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 158.

¹⁷⁴ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 158.

¹⁷⁵ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 158.

¹⁷⁶ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 159.

Book One is to show that we necessarily meet with certain paradoxes from the perspective of reason alone. On the one hand, Kant believes that it must be within our power to obey the moral law and, by extension, convert our disposition back to the good, while on the other hand, he asserts that despite ‘a seed of goodness that still remains’ evil is ‘*inextirpable* by human powers’. This paradoxical account of the human condition requires that we seek divine aid as the only reasonable way forward. How even God could provide the kind of assistance that maintains human autonomy and moral self-determination is a mystery, but mystery is part and parcel of the mysticism Palmquist attributes to Kant. Palmquist argues that Book Two rests on another point of mystery—one that serves as part of the eventual solution to the dilemma of radical evil. In Book Two, Kant holds that ‘the “ideal of moral perfection” exists in every human person as an “archetype” and “can give us power”’.¹⁷⁷ According to Palmquist, ‘there is no purely rational explanation for the presence of this archetype of the perfect person within us, other than to assume it is an inscrutable gift from some higher power’.¹⁷⁸ The ideal of moral perfection is thus the inscrutable gift that counterbalances the scales of divine justice. On one side, we have the inscrutability of indwelling evil and on the other the gift of the archetype of perfect humanity.

All of this may appear folly according to the analytic logic of Kant’s detractors, but makes perfect sense according to the synthetic logic of Kant’s critical mysticism. The positing of the moral archetype does not work miracles on the human disposition by itself, but ‘faith in the practical validity of that idea which lies in our reason has moral worth’ (6:63(56)). It is an inscrutable gift of God that emerges out of the moral life. Practical faith in God and the provision of the archetype ‘enables a person to actively turn away from the evil heart within and obey the moral law’.¹⁷⁹ Palmquist’s position is that once the archetype is ‘glimpsed’ and ‘incorporated ... into a good maxim’

¹⁷⁷ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 161.

¹⁷⁸ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 161.

¹⁷⁹ Palmquist, *Kant’s Critical Religion*, 162.

conversion or a change of heart takes place.¹⁸⁰ He argues that this is not a restoration of respect for the moral law, but a purifying of the law as the supreme ground of our maxims. There is 'pain' involved in a conversion of this kind and 'This pain can be regarded as a kind of punishment for the past evil we have perpetrated'.¹⁸¹ Palmquist repeatedly asserts of Kant's position that 'God will judge our moral constitution not by our action but by our disposition'.¹⁸² He thinks that this coheres with God's justice because 'even though we are not fully good, we are regarded as good by God'.¹⁸³ Kant's philosophy of religion follows the dictum 'Try your best and God will do the rest'.¹⁸⁴ Just why God would be willing to 'do the rest' appears to be a third point of inscrutability in Kant's position on religion, but one that is consistent with the tenets of Palmquist's account of Kant's critical mysticism. We do not know why God would do such a thing as forgive, but we feel it and can on moral grounds believe it.

When nature and freedom are considered simultaneously, we are driven to reflection on the question of hope in the context of felt harmony. Palmquist argues that the third *Critique* provides an insufficient account of this harmony and the religious feeling that is often associated with it. *Religion*, as a transcendental critique of the possibility of religious experience, offers a way forward. Palmquist calls it 'critical religious mysticism'. Once we recognize that the human predicament is fundamentally paradoxical, a *Religion*-styled narrative of evil and redemption, based on moral fortitude and divine grace, becomes a rational answer to the question of hope. This paradoxical solution is illustrated clearly in Palmquist's account of how individuals are to work out their salvation. According to his interpretation of *Religion*, grace and works are both required for the hope of salvation. Grace is the theoretical means and works are the practical means. They can never be thought of at the same time, however, for to do so

¹⁸⁰ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 162.

¹⁸¹ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 163.

¹⁸² Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 164.

¹⁸³ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 131.

¹⁸⁴ Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 132.

would yield a contradiction. From the point of view of judicial reasoning, the nature of the relationship between grace and works is inscrutable. Palmquist puts it like this:

The question this raises is: What is their proper *order*? From one point of view, grace must come first, because there is no way a person can erase the evil deeds he or she has already done, and the first moral (i.e., freely chosen) action performed by every person is evil. God must take the initiative. But how does this happen? Kant says bare reason cannot answer this question. All we can do is recognize the *space* left open by reason, which needs to be filled. Filling this space is not an optional extra, intended only for those who need a crutch; rather, it *must* be filled in some way by God's grace if a person is to become well-pleasing to God. Naked reason cannot tell us exactly how this will happen. Only faith, as a compliment to the inadequacy of our theoretical reason, can pave the way for such a disclosure.

Mystery and inscrutability are the hallmarks of Palmquist's interpretation of Kant. He gives intellectual credibility to them precisely because, for Kant, religion is rooted in the paradoxical and ineffable phenomena of religious experience. Like Green, Palmquist speaks of a 'space' or 'aperture' left open by reason and, like Davidovich, he argues that human reflection must fill in the gap. His interpretation uniquely occupies this space by appeal to Kant's belief in God as the ground of being and in the reality of the moral disposition that stands in relationship (either pleasing or displeasing) to the living God through religious experience.¹⁸⁵

This is a highly dissatisfying interpretation of *Religion* to someone like Michalson, who will not be content with systematic (and convenient) appeals to mystery. Something as crucial to a theory of religion as its account of radical evil in human nature appears to need more tangible argumentative support. 'At minimum', Michalson argues, 'it is not clear how Kant can legitimately make a claim about

¹⁸⁵ This is where Palmquist's position diverges greatly from that of Green. For Green, religious belief and discourse are not based on any kind of experience of the "numinous" in the sense of Otto. In fact, according to Green, Otto has it backwards. '[R]eason's own requirements ... give rise to the need to affirm the existence or experience of an enigmatic object'. Green, *Religious Reason*, 118.

something as crucial as innateness on the basis of an appeal to agnosticism'.¹⁸⁶ Perhaps an occasional appeal to mystery would be acceptable, but this is not the only place that we find mystery in *Religion*. Michalson thinks that Kant's use of mystery is so pervasive that the entire 'argumentative structure of *Religion*' appears 'heavily dependent on precisely this timely use of the argument from ignorance'.¹⁸⁷ Palmquist anticipates this appeal to ignorance and understands it as the natural outcome of reason at the outer bounds of its transcendental employment. Michalson simply thinks it argumentatively inadequate and out of step with the logical precision valued throughout Kant's philosophy prior to *Religion*. On Michalson's interpretation, Kant is caught in the dilemma of making either a coherent argument without a systematic appeal to mystery or giving up all hopes of having any argument at all. In Palmquist's interpretation, the relentless logic of Kant's critical philosophy evaporates into paradox in his philosophy of religion, yet in so doing it remains true to his systematic and subtle defence of critical mysticism.

Clearly, textual precedent exists for holding that Kant's philosophy of religion appeals, at certain junctures, to inscrutability.¹⁸⁸ The strength of Palmquist's interpretation is that it anticipates these appeals and is ready-made to explain them as indicators of Kant's 'Critical Mysticism'. However, at the end of the day, it seems that if our understanding of *Religion* only stands by way of an appeal to inscrutability, then the charge that must be overcome is that Kant's whole procedure is all too convenient. What Michalson has succeeded in showing is that there is an issue of convenience at the heart of several of Kant's key arguments in *Religion*, and, in the context of Kant's elaborate argumentation, it seems unlikely that he desires his philosophy of religion to stand only on appeal to inscrutability. More needs to be done by way of understanding the nature and extent of Kant's philosophical foundations for theology if the issue of inscrutability

¹⁸⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 66.

¹⁸⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 66.

¹⁸⁸ There is some textual support for an appeal to inscrutability in *Religion*. See, e.g., 6:21; 43; 45; and 138. However, it is unclear whether these appeals to inscrutability apply in the ways that Palmquist wants to apply them.

is to be overcome. In the end, Kant wants more out of his position in *Religion* than the interpretations of Green, Davidovich, and Palmquist are able to grant, and therefore we must continue looking within Kant's own writings if we are to grasp what Kant intended for theology under his strictures.

CHAPTER THREE

KNOWLEDGE, COGNITION, AND FAITH

I. Knowledge in Kant's Theoretical Philosophy

As seen in the previous chapters, there is a history of Kant interpreters who think religion and theology are appropriately grounded in Kant's writings composed after the *Critique of Pure Reason*. What is common to the three main interpretive camps is the belief that Kant's theoretical philosophy can be combined with other parts of his philosophical programme, particularly, its moral, aesthetic, and religious dimensions, to establish a rational foundation for religious belief. What the previous chapter has made clear, however, is that none of these approaches yields an account of Kant's philosophy of religion that handles the important and very specific inconsistencies Michalson finds in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

This chapter explores the important issues surrounding knowledge and faith in the first *Critique* with a view to exposing resources useful in understanding Kant's philosophy of religion. I argue that an enhanced understanding of Kant's position on knowledge and faith in the first *Critique* gets at the root of the problem of how to understand Kant's philosophy of religion and that understanding the difference between how knowledge relates to faith and how cognition relates to faith enables us to posit a solution to this problem. Our goal in this chapter is to present cognition and faith as resources in the first *Critique* important to the development of Kant's transcendental theology and show how these resources can help us to interpret *Religion*.

In this opening section, we explore Kant's strictures on knowledge by comparing the work of P. F. Strawson and Henry Allison. This comparison demonstrates that the epistemological claims of the first *Critique* do not provide a complete, self-sustaining paradigm, and its incompleteness bids further inquiry into the nature of Kant's transcendental philosophy and the development of his understanding of transcendental theology. Sections Two and Three focus on Kant's understanding of cognition and faith

as the point of departure for the development of Kant's transcendental theology. Section Four posits a new hypothesis for understanding *Religion* based on the developments in Kant's thinking that are linked to these resources.

Strawson does not deny that metaphysical optimism is found in Kant. In fact, he shows that there are many places in the first *Critique* and elsewhere where Kant implies as much. What he does deny is that Kant's metaphysical optimism rests on coherent and cogent philosophical argumentation. For Strawson, the main accomplishment of Kant's first *Critique* was to set philosophy (as opposed to metaphysics proper) 'on the sure path of a science' so that it could compare favourably with mathematics and the natural sciences. Kant's key tool is what Strawson calls 'the principle of significance'. He defines it as 'the principle that there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application'.¹ If a concept, theological or otherwise, is used in such a way that its 'experience-situation' cannot be specified, then we are not using the concept in a legitimate way. Kant appears to support this doctrine in the Second Chapter of the Transcendental Doctrine of the Power of Judgement: 'All concepts, and with them all principles, even such as are possible *a priori*, relate to empirical intuitions, that is, to the data for a possible experience. Apart from this relation they have no objective validity' (B195). According to Strawson, this is evidence that Kant's chief contention is against the very possibility of 'transcendent metaphysics'.

Outside of the principle of significance, philosophers and theologians might seem to have access to information about the nature of reality as it is in itself. However, the feeling that our ideas can correspond to reality outside of our ability to specify an experience-situation, Kant tells us in the first *Critique*, is the delusion of dogmatic metaphysics. It was the singular task of Kant's critical philosophy to establish the boundary between what can be known and what must remain unknown. 'The transcendental concept of appearances in space [(viz., the known)] ... is a critical

¹ P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen, 1966), 16.

reminder that absolutely nothing that is intuited in space is a thing in itself, ... but rather that objects in themselves are not known to us at all' (A30, B45). His philosophy, carrying on the insights of David Hume, acts primarily as a kind of categorical sieve, separating the non-empirical ideas about the nature of reality from ones which could conceivably obtain in some possible experience-situation. Nevertheless, says Strawson, some ideas that are bereft of empirical significance do arise in the course of scientific inquiry and have two discernable purposes. First, they stimulate the indefinite extension of empirical knowledge by inspiring our quest to understand nature in all its manifestations; and second, they make possible other forms of life, such as the moral life, which are important for maintaining our sense of humanness. In short, a genuinely scientific metaphysics exists only in 'the investigation of that limiting framework of ideas and principles the use and application of which are essential to empirical knowledge, and are implicit in any coherent conception of experience we can form'.²

Strawson highlights an important duality in Kant's epistemology. 'This is the duality of general concepts, on the one hand, and particular instances of general concepts, encountered in experiences, on the other'.³ We must have general concepts in order to classify anything that enters our conscious experience and if something does enter our conscious experience it must possess general characteristics. Particular instances of general concepts are called 'intuitions'. The combining of particular instances of general concepts (or intuitions) with the general concepts themselves is the process that Kant calls judgement.⁴ Of course, Kant is intimately familiar with the dualism here expressed, and establishes it in Western philosophical heritage with his famous dictum: 'thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' (A51/B75). Involved with this dualism are two faculties: the receptive faculty of sensibility and the active faculty of understanding. The former is the source of intuitions, while the latter is the source of concepts. This 'prepares the way', says Strawson, 'for

² Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 18.

³ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 20.

⁴ Cf. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 30.

ascribing to these faculties, as their source, those limiting features which he finds in the notion of experience in general'.⁵ Kant's strictures on what counts as knowledge are limited to this intuition-concept formula. 'Thus it seems that there is no conceivable way in which concepts could be instantiated in our experience except by being aware of them in space and time'.⁶ Space and time are forms of intuition that reside 'in us' and make the theatre of nature in which experience is possible. 'The applicability of these notions is, then, a further necessary condition of the possibility of anything which deserves the name experience or empirical knowledge'.⁷

Now, the interesting thing about this fairly standard formulation of Kant's theoretical philosophy thus far is that, though Strawson clearly understands it as an advance beyond the transcendent claims of the dogmatic metaphysicians as well as the preoccupation with the contents of our consciousness of the strict empiricists, he believes it also contains 'the seeds' of what would become a 'disastrous model'.⁸ For Strawson, Kant's focus on the limiting features of distinctly human experience ultimately cuts us off from reality itself. 'Of things as they are in themselves as opposed to these appearances of them, we have, and can have, no knowledge whatever; for knowledge is possible only of what can be experienced, and nothing can be experienced except as subjected to the forms imposed by our sensibility and our understanding'.⁹ Strawson thinks it doubtful that Kant can maintain much of a separation between his transcendental idealism and the empirical idealism of someone like Bishop Berkeley, despite his vigorous defense to the contrary.

The reason for this close identification between Kant and Berkeley in Strawson's interpretation has to do with the incompatibility of the principle of significance with the doctrine of the thing-in-itself and its related concept of 'affecting'. Transcendental

⁵ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 20.

⁶ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 20.

⁷ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 20.

⁸ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 20.

⁹ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 21.

idealism, according to Strawson, is not merely the doctrine 'that we can have no knowledge of a supersensible reality ... [but] that reality is supersensible and that we can have no knowledge of it'.¹⁰ Kant puts it thus: 'since appearances are nothing but representations, the understanding thus relates them to a **something**, as the object of sensible intuition: ... a something = X, of which we know nothing at all' (A250, B307). This doctrine, what Henry Allison and others would later call the 'two-world' interpretation, 'swiftly plunges into unintelligibility' and presses Kant's philosophy towards a decidedly anti-metaphysical position. Strawson points out several problems with maintaining such a philosophical position, but for our purposes we will focus on one in particular. If we maintain the existence of two worlds in our epistemic outlook, one which is the world-as-it-appears given the constituents of human experience and the other is the world-as-it-is-in-itself unconditioned by these constituents, and we simultaneously assert that these worlds are in fact related because the latter gives rise to the former by 'affecting' it, then we are forced into a contradiction regarding the unknowability of the world-as-it-is-in-itself:

The doctrine that we are aware of things only as they appear and not as they are in themselves because their appearances to us are the result of our constitution being affected by the objects, is a doctrine that we can understand just so long as the 'affecting' is thought of as something that occurs in space and time; but when it is added that we are to understand by space and time themselves nothing but a capacity or liability of ours to be affected in a certain way by objects not themselves in space and time, then we can no longer understand the doctrine, for we no longer know what 'affecting' means, or what we are to understand by 'ourselves'.¹¹

Although Kant points out that we are unable to comprehend how the awareness of this affecting is possible, he does not point out, says Strawson, the fact that this lack of comprehension threatens the viability of his entire position that things in space in time

¹⁰ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 38.

¹¹ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 41

are mere appearances. Of course, if this is true, Kant's transcendental idealism is closer to being identified with empirical idealism than it is to being aligned with empirical realism.

Strawson takes the most acceptable of Kant's notions to be the principle of significance and the possibility that Kant's programme affords a scientific metaphysics of experience.¹² The possibility of any kind of transcendent metaphysic is difficult to establish and highly improbable on this scheme. Strawson identifies 'two attempts, substantially independent of each other, to show how there arises that idea of reason which, with the assistance of the transformed dynamical ideas, give impetus to the attempt at extra-empirical knowledge of God'.¹³ The first is 'the idea of a supremely real being is an idea we are inevitably led to entertain by the commonplace thought of every particular object of experience as having a thoroughly determinate character'.¹⁴ Strawson believes that there is 'no plausibility at all in Kant's suggestion that that the entire enterprise of science is necessarily conducted under the aegis of the idea of an intelligent creator, and that we are thus inevitably led to this idea by Reason's characteristic search for general explanations'.¹⁵ The second is 'the idea of a supremely wise Author of Nature is a presupposition of natural science'.¹⁶ Strawson contends that the idea of God, as an absolutely necessary existence, absolute perfection, and ultimate ground of everything, is a plausible contention, but only insofar as the cosmological arguments of the Antinomies are deemed successful. Even if a moderate degree of success is ascribed to them according to these arguments, the idea of God as so stated is impossible to sustain.¹⁷

¹² Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 42.

¹³ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 221.

¹⁴ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 221.

¹⁵ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 37.

¹⁶ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 221.

¹⁷ Cf. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 36-37 and 207-215.

For Strawson, the only good conclusion to draw from Kant's inability to establish the cogency of any claim to extra-empirical knowledge of God is to declare Kant's entire approach to philosophical theology to be illusory. Kant understands reason as being ineluctably driven to escape the chain of causal dependence of one empirical existence on another by assuming the existence of a necessary being that is not contingent on anything else and also does not belong to the sensible world. Kant also thinks that this conclusion can be inferred logically from previously stated doctrines and premises. However, according to Strawson, there is no way to move logically under transcendental principles from universal causal dependence of every particular existence to the existence of something (necessary or contingent) outside of the sensible world. Kant's belief that we simply cannot conceive of how this occurs but that it must occur is simply an illusion of reason. 'Lacking any such conception, we are as far as ever both from the final satisfaction of theoretical reason, which demands a complete explanation of everything, and from the achievement of the philosophical theologian's aim of proving the existence of God'.¹⁸

The only avenue left unexplored for the possibility of knowing God given Kant's theoretical philosophy is 'the enterprise of theoretical theology' itself. 'That is the attempt to prove the existence of God from the character of our actual experiences of the world'.¹⁹ Strawson notes Kant's affection for the teleological argument (or physico-theological proof) for God's existence, but also its limitations. Any theoretically propounded argument for theology falls into a dilemma: either appeal to non-empirical or transcendental modes of argument and be exposed to the same problem as the cosmological argument, or depend on strictly empirical principles to form analogies and fall short of the theological aim. For this reason 'Neither by a priori nor by empirical arguments can the existence of a divine being be established'.²⁰ It is possible to think things that may in fact be true about God, but we are not able to know that these things

¹⁸ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 224.

¹⁹ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 226.

²⁰ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 226.

are true of God, and this is tantamount in Kant's way of thinking to not really having any knowledge, or even the possibility of knowledge, at all. Things predicated of God simply will not stick as forms of knowledge. Implicit in this assertion is a 'two-fold negative utility to theology itself'.²¹ 'If we are inhibited from asserting, we are also inhibited from denying, on theoretical grounds, what we may have other, perhaps moral, grounds for accepting'.²²

In contrast to Strawson's analysis of the ontological deficiencies of Kant's philosophy, Henry Allison's interpretation focuses on the epistemological sufficiencies of Kant's philosophy, emphasizing empirical realism and transcendental idealism as complementary features of his theoretical philosophy. Allison begins the defence of his interpretation of Kant's theoretical philosophy by casting it on the backdrop of the traditional interpretation of Kant's first *Critique*. He distils this interpretation down to two basic insights: (1) the real is unknowable; and (2) knowledge is relegated to the subjective realm of appearances.²³ This interpretation of Kant combines a psychological (or phenomenistic) account of what we actually experience in the mind, and thus 'know', with the postulation of another set of entities that are in fact unknowable. Kant deemed it necessary, according to proponents of this interpretation, to explain how the mind acquires its representations in the face of the difficulties inherent in maintaining this bifurcated position. We are appeared to, and these appearances have to come from somewhere. Critical reasoning asserts that the philosopher cannot revert back to

²¹ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 226.

²² Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 226. Historically, Strawson's interpretation builds on the well-known interpretation and critique of Kant in the work of H. A. Prichard. Prichard believes that Kant's subjective starting point forces him to maintain one of two alternatives: (1) things of experience only seem to be extended in space and time, and this 'seeming' implies that our mental experience of extension and duration is only an illusion (Berkeley Idealism); or (2) our representations of things really are spatial, and this doctrine is incoherent because mental ideas cannot be extended and located in space (Cartesian Absurdity).²² Given the fact that Kant clearly does not want to go down the road of point one, Prichard focuses his attack on the fact that Kant's appearance talk is in fact incoherent as it stands (Prichard, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, 116.). Unless Kant wants his philosophy to be logically driven towards a sophisticated form of Berkeleyan philosophy, it requires the kind of rejuvenation that Strawson's work represents.

²³ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 3-4.

empirical idealism by just assuming that appearances are real. The basic assumption of the traditional interpretation, as exemplified by Strawson, is that the mind can only be appeared to by acquiring data for representation from the real (but unknown) world. The mind has to be 'affected' by things in themselves. Saying even this about things in themselves, however, contradicts their characteristic unknowability. If we can know that they affect representations in the mind of a human being, then we can know something about them. This, though, is ruled out by the definition of their very nature.

Allison summarizes Strawson's position on the incoherence of Kant's doctrine of appearance as follows:

As Strawson sees it, transcendental idealism is the direct consequence of Kant's 'perversion' of the 'scientifically minded philosopher's' contrast between a realm of physical objects composed of primary qualities and a mental realm consisting of the sensible appearances of these objects (including their secondary qualities). This mental realm, like its Kantian counter part, is thought to be produced by means of an affection of the mind, in this case by physical objects. Kant allegedly perverts this model by assigning the whole spatiotemporal framework (which according to the original model pertains to the 'real', that is to say, to physical objects) to the subjective constitution of the human mind. The resulting doctrine is judged to be incoherent because, among other reasons, it is with reference only to a spatiotemporal framework that one can talk intelligibly about 'affection'.²⁴

This is what Allison means by the 'two-world' interpretation of Kant's epistemology. There is the world 'out there' and the world of space and time constituted by the subject's inner state of consciousness and its sensations. It is only the latter world, the world of appearances or representations, that we can know. It has as its source the world out there—and that world out there is the real world—but we can only know of it insofar as it affects our sensibilities and synthesizes with our concepts. We can never know the real world as it truly is.

²⁴ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 4.

Allison's critique of and rejoinder to this standard portrayal of Kant is rooted in its failure 'to distinguish sharply between the empirical and the transcendental versions of two generally acknowledged and closely related distinctions'.²⁵ The distinctions Allison has in mind are between what he calls 'ideality' and 'reality', and 'appearances' and 'things in themselves'. Ideality signifies for Kant what is mind-dependent or in the mind. Reality, on the other hand, signifies what is mind-independent or external to the mind. In the *Transcendental Aesthetic* and *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant makes the explicit distinction between the empirical and transcendental senses of 'ideality' based on the well known and sometimes disputed distinction between his critical philosophy and Berkeleian philosophy. Allison argues that there is an implicit distinction in these passages between the empirical and transcendental senses of 'reality' as well. This additional distinction is the real key to making clear the complex nuances in Kant's theoretical philosophy. These two pairs of distinctions, taken together, create four separate conceptions of philosophy, two of which, can be combined to yield the proper conception of Kant's theoretical philosophy: namely, transcendental idealism and empirical realism.

Transcendental idealism, refers to the universal, necessary, and *a priori* conditions for the possibility of experience and knowledge. Transcendental idealism is not concerned with imagining some affecting realm and positing reality within that realm, but instead with understanding the way in which an object as an assumed part of the real is able to be conceived. It refers to the boundaries and constituents of knowledge rather than to a realm of knowledge posited over and against a realm of unknowable things. It removes the strong ontological features of transcendental realism and does so, according to Allison, on critical and Copernican grounds that are distinct from the empirical idealism of Berkeleianism. For Allison, 'to speak of appearance in the transcendental sense is simply to speak of spatiotemporal entities (phenomena)—that is, insofar as they are viewed as subject to the conditions of human sensibility.

²⁵ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 6.

Correlatively, to speak of things in themselves transcendentally is to speak of things insofar as they are independent of these conditions'.²⁶

Empirical realism, on the other hand, refers to an intersubjective realm of objects that makes up what Kant calls 'the island of truth'. It is here that rational discourse is able to probe the depths of nature with a view to saying something true about reality as we experience it. The real in empirical realism refers to that which is common to all those perceivers with similar noetic structures and sensory apparatuses. This definition of empirical realism appeals to those passages in Kant where he discusses the 'common sense' of humankind and the language of experience that, though imperfect and prone to err, can lead humanity progressively towards a deeper understanding of our world. To be empirically real is to be member of that class of entities that we can talk meaningfully about, make knowledge claims about, and make discernable arguments as to the actual nature of the thing under consideration. This process is open to every subject on theoretically neutral ground. Provided that our rational inquiries are motivated by a design plan aimed at truth, a clear picture of the knowable emerges along with the nature of our empirical access to it. It is linked to the strictly empirical distinction of seeing the world of appearance in a certain way (subject to specifiable conditions in which the experience as such occurs) and imagining the experience of some object in some ideal circumstance (independent of the conditions in which the experience in question occurs). It involves the ongoing process of seeking truth through rational and inter-subjective dialogue. To be transcendentally ideal refers to the epistemic distinction between how objects may be considered: In the first case, objects can be considered 'in relation to the subjective conditions of human sensibility' or as they 'appear'. In the second case, objects can be considered 'independently of these conditions' or as they are 'in themselves'.

One of the key distinctions between Strawson's and Allison's respective interpretations of Kant is that the former engenders what Nicholas Wolterstorff calls

²⁶ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 7.

‘Kantian anxiety’.²⁷ This anxiety is based on the fact that ‘we can have no knowledge of supersensible objects through the categories’ and yet ‘we may nevertheless legitimately think of such objects in terms of categories’.²⁸ It appears difficult to reconcile the notion of two worlds in language that can in principle be understood. Although both worlds require spatiotemporal definitions in order to understand them in even the simplest terms, only the phenomenal can be defined without some kind of implicit contradiction. If we accept merely Kant’s principle of significance as defined by Strawson, then we are left with a serious quandary with regards to how any kind of supersensible or metaphysical discourse is possible.²⁹ In Strawson’s words, it ‘discredit[s], once and for all, the pretensions of transcendent metaphysics’.³⁰ In so doing, ‘It has a different kind of importance as leaving room for certain morally based convictions, not amounting to knowledge’.³¹

Allison’s interpretation appears not to create the same metaphysical anxiety as Strawson’s interpretation, because it maintains a clear distinction between the combination of transcendental idealism and empirical realism and its counterpart transcendental realism and empirical idealism. Allison understands the former combination as the starting point for critical philosophy and the initial step in a thoroughgoing analysis of human experience. When we seek the necessary conditions for the possibility of experience, we must begin with the objects of appearance. These are the things, when we first open our senses, about which we can say something

²⁷ See Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Is it Possible or Desirable for Theologians to Recover From Kant?” *Modern Theology* 14/1 (January 1998), 1-18.

²⁸ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 264-265.

²⁹ Strawson’s understanding of human knowledge under Kant’s theoretical philosophy is reducible to two fundamental points: first, ‘we can have some non-empirical knowledge (knowledge which does not rest on the actual course of experience) of objects of possible experience in space and time’, and second, ‘we can have no other non-empirical knowledge, and hence no knowledge at all of anything else’. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 240. These implications of the principle of significance obviously create problems for the establishment of the possibility of metaphysical discourse.

³⁰ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 240.

³¹ Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 240-41.

immediately coherent and meaningful. The transcendental conditions, however, yield knowledge of the synthetic a priori variety.

The key point of Allison's interpretation is that these transcendental conditions 'do not determine how objects "seem" to us or "appear" in the empirical sense; rather, they express the universal and necessary conditions in terms of which alone the human mind is capable of recognizing something as an object at all'.³² Kant's transcendental idealism is not a psychological thesis about how entities impact the mind to form appearances of the real in human consciousness; instead, it is a philosophical treatment of the conditions that govern human knowledge: We can know things as they appear because of the 'epistemic conditions' governing the way in which this knowledge is received.³³ Examples of epistemic conditions include space and time, or what Kant calls 'concepts of an object in general', and the category of causality, which is a specific 'objectifying condition'. These are examples of what Kant, in the first *Critique*, calls 'necessary conditions' for the possibility of experience. However, Allison submits that a 'broader notion of an epistemic condition better captures the essential thrust of Kant's thought'.³⁴ For Kant is not primarily concerned with the knowledge that comes from experience, but with the epistemic conditions which give rise to that knowledge. This means it is possible, and perhaps even probable, that mathematics and metaphysics are more important to Kant's real concerns than is empirical knowledge as such. Nevertheless, as Allison puts it, 'Epistemic conditions must ... figure in the Kantian

³² Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 9.

³³ Allison defines 'epistemic condition' as follows: a condition 'that is necessary for the representation of an object or an objective state of affairs'. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 10. Things like the brain, central nervous system, and the senses might be thought of as epistemic conditions; although, what Allison has in mind is not these intermediating conditions, but the constitutive ones, which are universal and necessary. Yet, one might think of logical conditions, like the law of non-contradiction, as being a part of what Allison means by epistemic conditions. For Allison, however, these conditions serve merely 'as a rule for thinking, but not for the representation of objects'. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 10.

³⁴ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 10.

account of nonempirical knowledge'.³⁵ The task of the critical philosopher is to find out the nature and extent of these epistemic conditions and to seek explanations for all forms of human experience. For, as Kant puts it, 'The **possibility of experience** is therefore that which gives all our cognitions *a priori* objective reality' (A156, B195). This is at once a more suggestive and metaphysically useful understanding of Kant's theoretical philosophy than that of Strawson in *The Bounds of Sense*, and is crucial to understanding the development of Kant's philosophical programme in terms of its theological implications.³⁶

In Allison's interpretation of Kant there is no doctrine of two mutually exclusive worlds, because Kant's project is deemed to have been predominantly epistemic; it shows what it is possible for humans to know of reality as it is represented to us by the requisite receptive capabilities of the human mind. What appears to be the most revolutionary of Kant's concepts, on this interpretation, is not a metaphysic complete with a detailed ontology, but a transcendental methodology for establishing philosophy on firm footing—a philosophical basis from which to do critical science and to explore critical metaphysics, though never from the same point of view. It is a firm Kantian commonplace that there is a boundary line between the world-as-it-appears or the 'known', and the world as-it-is-in-itself, or the 'unknown'; and that this boundary line dismisses what Kant calls dogmatic metaphysics, which attempt to establish 'the three primary objects of scholastic philosophy, namely freedom, immortality, and God' as

³⁵ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 11. One example of this principle is found in Kant's account of analytic judgments. According to Allison, 'the pure concepts in their "logical use" can even be regarded as epistemic conditions of analytic judgements'. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 11.

³⁶ Although Allison's interpretation of Kant's theoretical philosophy has become arguably the new standard, there are still those who question whether or not it represents Kant's intentions for his philosophy. Alvin Plantinga, for instance, suggests that 'it seems a bit difficult to reconcile [the "double-aspect" interpretation] with Kant's own view that his thought constituted a revolution'. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13. Much of it, he goes on to say, 'would be accepted even by such staunch prerevolutionaries as Aristotle and Aquinas'. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 13.

possible objects of knowledge.³⁷ What is less commonly realized is that a distinctly transcendental form of human cognition constitutes the boundary line and is a crucial part of the epistemic conditions making experience possible.

In Strawson's more recent work on Kant, he addresses interpretations like Allison's and summarizes two distinct interpretive theses for understanding Kant's theoretical philosophy that appear consistent with the first *Critique*.³⁸ Strawson notes that, like his own interpretation in *The Bounds of Sense*, Allison-like interpretations deny the logical viability of the two-worlds doctrine.³⁹ According to Strawson, such interpretations offer neither two-worlds nor two-realisms; instead, empirical realism is maintained and 'we are merely offered the cautious and surely legitimate reminder that human knowledge cannot exceed the bounds of human cognitive capacities'.⁴⁰ In Strawson's view, we are forced into entertaining one of two possibilities for capturing the essence of Kant's critical philosophy: either empirical idealism or epistemic idealism. The first path results from a closer analysis of what the thing in itself would have to mean on this scheme:

If, in accordance with a purely negative concept of the noumenon, the thought of things in themselves is to be understood simply and solely as the thought of the very things of which human knowledge is possible, but the thought of them in total abstraction from what have been shown (or argued) to be the conditions of the very possibility of any such knowledge, then it must surely be concluded that the thought is empty; for the doctrine that we can have no knowledge of things as they are in themselves then reduces to a tautology: the tautology that knowledge of things of which we can have knowledge is impossible except

³⁷ England, *Kant's Conception of God* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1929), 205. Metaphysical objects cannot be known in this way, argues Kant, precisely because they are by definition beyond the physical and have no possible intuition corresponding to their conception.

³⁸ P. F. Strawson, *Entity and Identity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). By inverting the implications of Kant's transcendental idealism, Strawson thinks a third interpretive thesis might be added to the mix of interpretations that appear to be supported in the first *Critique*. Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 249.

³⁹ Though he does not mention Allison by name, it is clear that Strawson's rejoinders are aimed at the kinds of argument developed by Allison. (cf. Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 248.)

⁴⁰ Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 249.

under the conditions under which it is possible; or we can know of things only what we can know of them.⁴¹

Going down this road of interpretation insulates Kant's idealism from the charge of saying more than can be said about the supersensible or unconditioned objects. It also, suggests Strawson, makes the 'idealism' in Kant's 'transcendental idealism' appear vacuous—'little more than a token name'.⁴² It is, in a sense, more Berkeleian than Platonic, or more empirical than metaphysical. The second path is to understand the thing in itself as the by-product of 'the brilliant and largely persuasive demonstration of the necessary structural features of human knowledge and experience which makes the first *Critique* a work of unique philosophical importance'.⁴³ Here we simply defer the ontological question and understand the thing in itself as reality unconditioned and the product of the intellectual virtue of humility.

Strawson essentially leaves us with a choice to either accept his earlier analysis of the theoretical philosophy, and thereby limit the effective range of Kant's philosophy to the empirical realism of the first *Critique*, or accept something like Allison's interpretation, complete with its inherent theological vagueness, and seek clarity from the developments in Kant's philosophy subsequent to its purely theoretical derivations. Important to notice about the second option is that much of the metaphysical optimism of the two-world interpretation is lost, and with it, those portions of Kant's critical writings that appear suggestive of theological realism. As Strawson remarks, 'the thought of a separate, transcendent realm of reality has withered'.⁴⁴ What we are left with then, as we try to hold Kant's first *Critique* together in the light of his competing objectives, is a kind of fuzzy middle ground position—between not totally abolishing the implication of two realisms in his transcendental turn to the subject and understanding

⁴¹ Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 241.

⁴² Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 241.

⁴³ Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 249.

⁴⁴ Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 249.

that 'there may be more to the real things we can have some knowledge of, than we can, or ever could, know about them'.⁴⁵

What we learn then from Strawson's careful analysis is that there is vagueness in the theoretical philosophy, which suggests simultaneously that theoretical knowledge is the philosopher's 'island of truth' (i.e., a rationally defensible philosophical epistemology of the empirical world) and that the 'vast ocean' of metaphysics must be charted in a way other than that of dogmatic metaphysics, but in a way consonant with the transcendental nature of reason. Evident to Strawson is that in all interpretations of Kant's theoretical philosophy

the curtain of sense cuts us empirical beings irrevocably off from *knowledge* of things as they are in themselves, yet the curtain is not, according to Kant, in every respect impenetrable. From behind it reality, as it were, speaks: giving us, not information, but commands—the moral imperative; and, with that, something else: a (kind of) hope and even faith.⁴⁶

Strawson's work leaves us with the realization that the first *Critique*, when isolated from the remainder of Kant's corpus, does not constitute a complete system. The first *Critique* alone, per Kant's admission of unavoidable problems surrounding God, freedom, and immortality, and the lack of any clear indication of what the development of his transcendental idealism will look like, is left wanting. It is not that the first *Critique* is incoherent, but it appears on close inspection to be incomplete both in exposition and extension.

⁴⁵ Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 249.

⁴⁶ Strawson, *Entity and Identity*, 251. In Strawson's early work on Kant, he recognizes, and seeks to legitimate, Kant's insistence on the importance of an ethical sphere in his critical philosophy. However, he believes this sphere is on the same tenuous footing as the appearance doctrine of his theoretical philosophy. Kant's belief in a supersensible reality, despite its apparent support in the first *Critique* distinction between the appearance and the thing in itself, really only finds its rational justification in Kant's moral philosophy. However, Strawson believes this support is equally weak and difficult to sustain. See Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 241.

II. Knowledge, Cognition, and Faith in Kant's Transcendental Theology

While Kant's first *Critique* may not present a single definitive account of the theoretical philosophy, it does offer a clear case for the position that God cannot be an object of knowledge. Virtually all interpreters agree that this claim serves as a backdrop for the intricate arguments of the Transcendental Analytic and Dialectic parts of the first *Critique*, especially those well-known passages in the Transcendental Dialectic critiquing the traditional proofs for God's existence. The claim also extends throughout Kant's writings after the first *Critique* and serves to limit the way in which the rational foundations for religious belief can be constructed. Despite the obvious theological challenges this position presents, Kant's explanation of the transcendental feature of his philosophy in the first *Critique* is decidedly open to the notion of developing a transcendental theology. This openness can be seen in the Introduction to the first *Critique*, again in the Doctrine of Method at the end of the first *Critique*, and sprinkled throughout the rest of the text.

In the Introduction, Kant speaks of the natural predisposition of reason as it 'pushes on, driven by its own need to such questions that cannot be answered by any experiential use of reason and of principles borrowed from such a use; and thus a certain sort of metaphysics has actually been present in all human beings as soon as reason has extended itself to speculation in them' (B21). The openness to the development of a transcendental theology is also found in Kant's admission that the transcendental philosophy itself is not complete, and what remains to be done rests in 'an exhaustive analysis of all of human cognition *a priori*' (A13/B27). Toward the end of the first *Critique*, Kant confirms his plan to develop the implications of his programme into a coherent system of transcendental inquiry: 'Under the government of reason our cognitions cannot at all constitute a mere rhapsody but must constitute a system, in which alone they can support and advance its essential ends. I understand by a system, however, the unity of the manifold of cognitions' (A832/B860).

Added to the various hints throughout the first *Critique* regarding Kant's desire to develop some kind of transcendental approach to theology, we encounter specific

passages devoted to working out the details of what the critical philosophy will allow theologically. A well-known passage is Kant's discussion of the antinomies of reason (A405-A567/B432-B595). In this passage, we find not only Kant probing the limits of reason where theology is concerned, but also a confidence that reason has the resources to deal with the idea of God rationally. Kant writes, for example, 'Now I assert that among all speculative cognition, transcendental philosophy has the special property that there is no question at all dealing with an object given by pure reason that is insoluble by this very same reason' (A477/B505). More specifically, Kant contends that 'If the object is transcendental and thus in itself unknown, ...then we should seek an object for our idea, which we can concede to be unknown to us, but not on that account impossible' (A478/B506).

We even find Kant's openness to theology in The Second Book of the Transcendental Dialectic Chapter Three, subtitled 'The ideal of pure reason' (A567-A642/B595-B670). Very often commentators focus on Sections Three-Six of Chapter Three (A583/B661-A630-B658), wherein Kant sets out to show that all types of speculative reason in support of God's existence are fallacious. However, the context of Kant's arguments against such proofs is Kant's attempt to display the contours of his transcendental theology relative to their theoretical limitations. Reminiscent of similar distinctions made in his *Lectures on Rational Theology*, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant discusses the difference between theology 'from pure reason (*theologia rationalis*) or from revelation (*revelata*)' (A631/B659). In keeping with his subsequent work, Kant focuses on rational theology. Interestingly, the key elements of Kant's account of rational theology in his subsequent discussion concern his definitions of deism and theism: 'Someone who admits only a transcendental theology would be called a deist; but if he also accepts a natural theology he would be called a theist' (A631/B659). Regardless of where one believes Kant finds himself in this distinction, the point here is that even after Kant's refutation of the traditional proofs for God's existence, he still finds it necessary to discuss issues of rational theology.

These dispersed hints of openness to theological inquiry are telling insofar as they indicate that Kant's pessimism over our ability to gain theoretical knowledge of God from things like the traditional proofs for God's existence is not constitutive of a pessimism regarding theology in general. Kant shows signs of optimism regarding the development of some type of transcendental theology amidst his strictures on knowledge. Nevertheless, we still face the question of what part of Kant's denial of knowledge leaves room for faith. Perhaps the best way to delve into these features of Kant's thought is to introduce them on the backdrop of a debate spawned by Peter Byrne with his article, 'Kant's Moral Proof of the Existence of God'.⁴⁷ Byrne's article presents a direct challenge to the very possibility of a Kantian theology. He makes the case for a fundamental flaw in any attempt to advance beyond Kant's strictures on knowledge of God to a rationally defensible posture of faith in God. Where Strawson and Allison mainly do exegetical analysis of Kant in order to show what Kant took to be (or should have taken to be) the implications of his theoretical philosophy for epistemology and ontology, Byrne's assessment of Kant's philosophy is primarily analytic, focusing on first *Critique* doctrines and the difficulties they pose for grounding theological faith in practical reason.

Byrne's main point is to challenge the logic of moving from Kant's 'denial of knowledge' of God to his claim to establish 'room for faith'. He observes that since for Kant 'Knowledge that God exists is in principle impossible ... it follows that we could never have any good reason for claiming to know that God exists'.⁴⁸ Now, any cognitive or volitional activities that depend on knowledge of 'God exists' are likewise to be denied. If Kant's transcendental theology is meant to cohere with his position on knowledge, any kind of justifiable faith in God is problematic. Byrne thinks there is a fundamental incoherence in Kant's procedure: 'If one rules out knowledge of God as impossible in principle then one also rules out the possibility of faith, where this entails

⁴⁷ Peter Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof for the Existence of God' *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1979) 32:333-343. Henceforth called 'Kant's Moral Proof'.

⁴⁸ Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 333.

believing or thinking that God exists'.⁴⁹ For Byrne, Kant's clear intention is to make room for faith in practical reason in spite of the fact that he has rigidly denied knowledge of God in theoretical reason. But, according to Byrne, Kant's plan simply does not work.

Byrne's understanding of Kant's movement from knowledge to faith boils down to an analytic contradiction:

- 1) If justifiable faith in God requiring the truth of 'God exists' is possible, then the truth of 'God exists' could in principle be established;
- 2) If the truth of 'God exists' could in principle be established, then it is possible to have direct empirical evidence of God's existence;
- 3) Kant denies that it is possible to have direct empirical evidence of God's existence;
- 4) Therefore, he likewise denies that the truth of 'God Exists' could in principle be established and that justifiable faith in God requiring the truth of 'God exists' is possible.

Kant essentially claims that we can deny the possibility of direct empirical evidence of God's existence without denying that justifiable faith in God requiring the truth of 'God exists' is possible. Byrne puts it this way: 'So what Kant is doing is denying that we can have direct evidence for the truth of "God exists", whilst saying that we are fully justified in believing or thinking that God exists'.⁵⁰ Kant's attempt to circumvent this deduction focuses on practical reason. For Byrne, however, 'practical considerations [that] fully justify his faith that God exists' are not possible.⁵¹ Kant's earlier denial of knowledge entails the simultaneous denial of any fully justifiable faith whatsoever.

⁴⁹ Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 335.

⁵⁰ Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 335.

⁵¹ Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 335.

Contrary to Byrne, Don Wiebe argues that Kant's theology is rooted in 'cognitive faith ... [and] can quite legitimately, even if only in a weak sense, be referred to as religious knowledge'.⁵² Wiebe counters Byrne's concerns regarding the coherence of combining Kant's knowledge and faith doctrines with a novel attempt to unify the two. His argument attempts to put the two positions on the same cognitive (and thus logical) plane. Wiebe calls practical reason 'a practical function of the same reason [as theoretical reason]'.⁵³ Kant's denial of knowledge in the first *Critique* creates a 'cognitive vacuum' or 'need' in reason and practical reason is what fills in this vacuum or satisfies this need. Wiebe puts it thus:

Kant obstinately denies knowledge of the unconditioned. The cognitive vacuum at the apex of our system of knowledge must remain theoretically or speculatively empty; *but not thereupon completely cognitively empty*. If reason in its theoretical use cannot fill the vacuum, perhaps reason in its practical use can. The ideas of reason, that is, if not capable of theoretical justification may be capable of a practical justification.⁵⁴

The idea is that the inherent logic of theoretical reason leaves an empty void in the area of knowledge. Being at the apex of our knowledge, this void has a quite discernable shape that only the practical dimension of reason is readily able to fill. If reason is ultimately going to be logically consistent, reason needs to perform its practical function and fill in the emptiness at the apex of our knowledge. According to Wiebe,

if we are to avoid moral absurdity ... this cognitive vacuum in our system of knowledge must be filled with something more than mere logical possibilities. Certain assumptions must be made, that is, if moral experience is not to be denied as illusory or the moral law invalid. Such assumptions or "postulates", as Kant designates them, can neither be affirmed nor denied but can be believed or

⁵² Don Wiebe, 'The Ambiguous Revolution: Kant on the Nature of Faith' *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1980) 33:516. Henceforth called 'The Ambiguous Revolution'.

⁵³ Wiebe, 'The Ambiguous Revolution', 518-519.

⁵⁴ Wiebe, 'The Ambiguous Revolution', 519.

disbelieved—they are “mere things of faith”, objects for concepts whose objective reality cannot be proved.⁵⁵

Wiebe’s main point is that the ‘things of faith’ are able to fill in the theoretical void in knowledge even though the ‘things of fact’ cannot. According to Wiebe, things of faith are ‘rational’ but they do not constitute theoretical knowledge. ‘Acceptance of them’, avers Wiebe, ‘is not justified on theoretical grounds but rather on practical grounds’.⁵⁶ In support of his thesis, Wiebe notes an interesting passage from the *Critique of Judgement* on faith:

Faith ... is the moral attitude of reason as to belief in that which is unattainable by theoretical cognition. It is therefore the permanent principle of the mind to assume as true on account of the obligation in reference to it, that which is necessary to presuppose as condition of the highest final purpose, although its possibility or impossibility be alike impossible for us to see into.⁵⁷

In the above passage, Wiebe draws our attention to the boundaries of theoretical reason and the resourcefulness of practical reason to fill out whatever knowledge is needed to complete reason’s quest to understand. His interpretation radically disassociates knowledge and faith according to the boundary between them, and then argues that morality, when it fulfils its function, affords human beings a different kind of knowledge—a lesser knowledge called practical or moral faith.

The emphasis of Wiebe’s account is thus on what morality can do for theoretical reason when its resources have run out, but its desire to know remains.⁵⁸ It can help us to

⁵⁵ Wiebe, ‘The Ambiguous Revolution’, 520.

⁵⁶ Wiebe, ‘The Ambiguous Revolution’, 520.

⁵⁷ Wiebe, ‘The Ambiguous Revolution’, 521. Cited from Hafner (1951), 324.

⁵⁸ Notice, however, how Kant’s emphasis in that passage is more on how practical faith in God is firmly established because it is ‘necessary to presuppose as condition of the highest final purpose’. Kant’s emphasis in the third *Critique*, as Davidovich has shown, is on purpose and meaning reflectively drawing moral faith outward for the sake of meaning, rather than for the sake of knowledge. This insight is important to keep in mind as we progress toward an understanding of the development of Kant’s transcendental theology.

make theoretical assumptions. What reason has, thinks Wiebe, is practical evidence for belief in God akin to theoretical evidence, even if only in a loose sense.

[The] pronouncements [of practical reason] are not to be considered as the intuitive knowledge of theoretical reason, but rather as assumptions. However, when pure practical reason provides reality to these assumptions, transforming them into “postulates”, some entry into the theoretical sphere is gained, but not such as to allow us to call postulates knowledge without some sort of qualification. Nevertheless, they are still more than mere assumptions.⁵⁹

Wiebe argues that practical reason gains access to the theoretical sphere through the aperture supplied by practical faith. This aperture does not lead to theoretical reason *per se*, but instead into the wake left after the theoretical philosophy has run through the traditional attempts to prove God’s existence. Kant’s so-called demolition of the proofs for God’s existence creates room for practical reason to develop a notion of God to meet the needs of reason in a practical way.⁶⁰ When we postulate God, we assume his existence for moral reasons. Although not theoretical knowledge, this postulation is a lesser form of knowledge based on moral considerations. It is, thinks Wiebe, an assumption with a discernable theoretical shape and moral justification.

The main problem with Wiebe’s thesis has to do with where it leads: namely, moral faith entails knowledge of metaphysics. Wiebe writes, ‘a very important characterization of the nature of moral faith ... [is] that through it we gain, in some small way, an *extension* of our theoretical knowledge’.⁶¹ In a response article, J. C. Luik directly contradicts Wiebe’s central contention that faith involves an extension of knowledge. He points out that the principal problem with Wiebe’s interpretation is that

⁵⁹ Wiebe, ‘The Ambiguous Revolution’, 522.

⁶⁰ This outside-in approach (viz., the practical filling in the theoretical) anticipates a central feature of many of the theological affirmative interpreters over the last twenty years.

⁶¹ Wiebe, ‘The Ambiguous Revolution’, 525. ‘Kant suggests this extension of theoretical knowledge through practical reason as early as the first *Critique*’. Wiebe, ‘The Ambiguous Revolution’, 527. ‘But, whereas theoretical reason could think the idea without contradiction, it could not assume any objective reality to it. Practical reason does give it that objective reality and hence extends theoretical reason’. Wiebe, ‘The Ambiguous Revolution’, 529.

in it ‘the postulates are ... not suppositions, subjective injunctions or maxims to act “as-if” freedom, immortality and God were real, but rather, in effect, covert extensions of theoretical knowledge’.⁶² On Wiebe’s interpretation, Kant’s theoretical boundary line between noumena and phenomena is either not fixed or not impregnable. For the practical philosophy appears to be giving knowledge of things of which, in theory, reason can know nothing. Luik points to Kant’s short essay ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’ to clarify matters.

Kant places the entire discussion of the “concept of a First Being” within the context of a discussion of the “need of reason ... to presuppose and assume something which it may not pretend to know on objective grounds”. The “need of reason”, Kant argues, provides us with nothing more than a “subjective ground” for believing in the existence of God.⁶³

Luik also points out that ‘Kant goes on to speak of rational belief in God’s existence as “a subjectively sufficient assent associated with the consciousness that it is an objectively insufficient assent; therefore it is *contrasted with knowledge*”. Notice how this claim contradicts Wiebe’s key contention’.⁶⁴ Luik’s response to Wiebe picks up where Byrne’s argument left off, characterizing Wiebe’s interpretation in terms of ‘a recast[ing] of Kant’s denial of knowledge to make room for faith to denying *theoretical* knowledge to make room for practical knowledge’.⁶⁵ It agrees with Byrne that moral faith is equivalent for Kant with acting ‘as-if’, but that Kant’s arguments do not appear successful in linking the two positions. Luik crystallizes this position by arguing that there is in fact ‘quite literally no Kantian theology’.⁶⁶

Both Wiebe and Luik make valid points regarding Kant’s transcendental theology, but there is an instructive and quite fundamental disconnect between their two

⁶² J. C. Luik, ‘The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1983) 36:341.

⁶³ Luik, ‘The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith’, 342.

⁶⁴ Luik, ‘The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith’, 342.

⁶⁵ Luik, ‘The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith’, 339.

⁶⁶ Luik, ‘The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith’, 345.

positions that leads them to discuss at cross purposes. This disconnect involves the identification of the words ‘knowledge’ and ‘cognition’. Rolf George makes important clarifications regarding Kant’s use of the term *Erkenntnis* (cognition) relative to the term *Wissen* (knowledge) in his essay entitled ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’.⁶⁷ He points out that Johann Christoph Adelung’s dictionary of 1793 lists ten senses for the root *Erkennen* and highlights two senses of particular interest to the study of Kant. In one sense, ‘the word may be translated as “to come to know,” or “to know.”’⁶⁸ This sense of the term *erkennen* ‘has become very much more common during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’.⁶⁹ For this reason, the common tendency when interpreting Kant is to assume that cognition means knowledge without significant variances.⁷⁰ Interestingly, as George points out, ‘Adelung does not allow, or even mention, the nominalization of *Erkenntnis* in connection with [the definition “to know”].’⁷¹ This indicates that *Erkenntnis* had in Kant’s time latitude of meaning that resists generalizations.

The other sense of *Erkenntnis* that George thinks is significant to the study of Kant ‘requires the direct object construction; in this sense the word means “to represent it to ourselves clearly or obscurely, distinctly or indistinctly ...”’.⁷² Unlike the way in which most today use *Erkenntnis* to mean knowledge of empirical objects, ‘To have *Erkenntnis* of a thing [in the time of Kant] was to have in one’s mind a presentation, an idea, an image, a token referring to that thing’.⁷³ Thus, we should expect that cognition

⁶⁷ Rolf George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, in *Interpreting Kant*, ed. Moltke S. Gram (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1982), 31-39.

⁶⁸ George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, 34.

⁶⁹ George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, 34.

⁷⁰ George does point out that, even though ‘*Erkenntnis, dass ...* is now common, ... *Erkenntnis des/der* (followed by a noun in the genitive) still works only for certain lofty subjects, as in *Erkenntnis der Wahrheit, Erkenntnis Gottes*, etc., but not for trees or ships’. Nevertheless, there is still the tendency to nominalize *Erkenntnis* as knowledge. George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, 34-35.

⁷¹ George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, 34.

⁷² George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, 34.

⁷³ George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, 35.

in Kant's writings is a bigger and more flexible concept than merely knowledge in the sense of *Wissen*. George makes the case that Kant's use of the term *Erkenntnis* is in many cases more closely associated with earlier uses of the word as a kind of mental representation rather than a synonym for knowledge. One can have such a mental representation or idea without the need for a corresponding intuition. He highlights Leibniz as a key example:

Leibniz had thought that the German word *Kenntnis* would be a good equivalent of the Latin *terminus simplex*. The suggestion of Leibniz places the word *Kenntnis* in opposition to judgment: it is a *term* of judgment, not itself judgmental. Similarly, Wolffe had used the expression as pertaining to concepts and terms rather than to judgments. "When we represent a thing to ourselves, we recognize it (*erkennen*). When our concepts are distinct, then our cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is distinct too."⁷⁴

George's point of returning to Leibniz and Wolffe is not to show that cognition is in all instances distinct in definition from knowledge. This would contradict conventional wisdom and make many of Kant's arguments in the first *Critique* virtually impossible to understand. Instead, 'Translation of *Erkenntnis* as "knowledge" is appropriate much of the time, but not because Kant used the word in the contemporary sense, but because, quite generally, knowledge was then thought to be a felicitous kind of representation, a sort of successful reference'.⁷⁵

George dubs the theory of reference at work in Kant's mind (and in the academic culture at large) 'the Adamic Language Theory of knowledge'.⁷⁶ He describes it as follows:

If one represented an object in one's mind by a kind of token that was really fitting, in the way in which the names that Adam gave to things were the real

⁷⁴ George, 'Vorstellung and Erkenntnis in Kant', 35. The quotation is taken from Wolffe's *Vernünfftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen* ('German Metaphysics'), 5th ed. (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1731), 466.

⁷⁵ George, 'Vorstellung and Erkenntnis in Kant', 35.

⁷⁶ George, 'Vorstellung and Erkenntnis in Kant', 35.

names of things, then one was thought to be as close to knowing the thing as was humanly possible. This makes understandable the close connection in eighteenth-century philosophy between good reference and knowledge: To know is to have a good picture, the right concept, the correct name, of a thing. Hence the appropriateness of translating *Erkenntnis* as “knowledge” on many occasions. Nevertheless, reading it always as “knowledge” not only leads to absurdities, but effectively bars one’s understanding of central concerns of the *Critique*.⁷⁷

According to George, ‘Kant wanted to use the term *Erkenntnis* much in the way in which Leibniz had suggested: We note that the two subdivisions under the term are intuitions and concepts, i.e., singular and general terms’.⁷⁸ Thus, cognition can be thought of as a judgement taking the form of knowledge, but it can also be thought of as a *terminus simplex* in the sense of Leibniz; for, as Kant is reported to have asserted in his lectures known as the *Vienna Logic*, only a connection of cognitions constitutes a judgement.

George’s work demonstrates that the distinction between knowledge and cognition is very important to keep in mind as one moves through the finer details of the first *Critique*—for example, he makes specific application of the uniqueness of *Erkenntnis* to the derivation of the table of the categories. While George does not examine the development of Kant’s transcendental theology, it is this application of George’s insight that is fruitful for our discussion here. The occasional distinction between cognition and knowledge opens the possibility that Kant holds a firm distinction between faith and knowledge, but not necessarily between faith and cognition. While all examples of knowledge in Kant’s way of thinking are ‘claims to knowledge’, all examples of cognition are not necessarily claims to knowledge.

The Byrne/Wiebe/Luik debate, outlined above, moves forward in its discussion of faith and its relationship to knowledge without recognizing this possible/occasional

⁷⁷ George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, 35.

⁷⁸ George, ‘*Vorstellung* and *Erkenntnis* in Kant’, 35.

distinction between knowledge and cognition. For Luik, ‘God simply cannot be made an object of cognition as natural phenomena can’,⁷⁹ while for Wiebe ‘since faith refers to objects that are not capable of cognition it is based on other than evidential grounds—although to repeat, not other than rational grounds’.⁸⁰ The language of both Wiebe’s and Luik’s essays indicate that their arguments assume cognition and knowledge to be identical. Wiebe’s claim that objects of faith such as God cannot be cognized gives clear indication that he is identifying cognition with knowledge. This forces him to conclude, against Kant’s theoretical strictures, that faith expands the reach of knowledge. In other words, the conclusion that faith expands knowledge is the only way for him to make sense of the crucial texts on faith. Faith has nowhere else to go in Wiebe’s interpretation, except to knowledge.

In contrast, Luik forwards arguments concluding that faith and knowledge do not overlap in Kant’s theoretical philosophy. Interestingly, however, Luik’s argument against Wiebe betrays a very similar identification of knowledge and cognition. We have already noted Luik’s contention that ‘God simply cannot be made an object of cognition as natural phenomena can’.⁸¹ This is true when cognition is taken to be identical to knowledge, but not true when cognition is understood as the mental act of getting God in mind. Luik writes, ‘The idea of God can never be an “object of rational inquiry” as Wiebe claims because it can never be an object in the way that natural phenomena can. As outside space and time, and thus outside of possible experience, God is fundamentally resistant to human understanding’.⁸² Luik is right in the technical or theoretical sense of understanding as it relates to knowledge; practical faith cannot extend theoretical knowledge. Luik is not right, however, in implicitly linking

⁷⁹ Luik, ‘The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith’, 339.

⁸⁰ Wiebe, ‘The Ambiguous Revolution’, 522.

⁸¹ Luik, ‘The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith’, 339.

⁸² Luik, ‘The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith’, 340.

knowledge with cognition in all cases.⁸³ With the assumption that knowledge and cognition are really the same things, the logic of Luik's argument drives him to the conclusion that faith has no room in Kant's philosophical programme.

Byrne, on the other hand, talks about being able to think God (or get God in mind), and the moral inference of acting as-if God exists.⁸⁴ The former seems to indicate that Byrne has an implicit understanding of cognition or something like it at work in his interpretation of Kant. We can, on Byrne's reading of Kant, 'entertain the thought that God exists'.⁸⁵ However, this is declared insignificant because Byrne feels that Kant must link faith with *Wissen*. He avers that these two conclusions hardly amount to knowledge, and, insofar as they provide no evidence for the proposition 'God exists', this 'does not amount to faith'.⁸⁶ Certainly, Byrne's conclusion is instructive if we understand faith to be rational in the sense that it is built on *Wissen* (and this is the thrust of Byrne's argument). But as we will see there is an existential feature to the rational that draws on cognition as distinct from knowledge and gives significance to our ability to have God in mind and live as if he is there, even in the face of theoretical ignorance.

Leslie Stevenson probes Kant's definition of faith in an essay entitled 'Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge'. He claims faith (*Glauben*) has a discernable meaning, and is a plausible concept when understood in terms of the transcendental development of Kant's philosophical theology. Faith, Stevenson concludes, 'is holding something to be true, and being practically but not theoretically justified in doing so'.⁸⁷ The faith which Kant understands to be involved here is of a special kind, however: 'The conviction is not *logical* but *moral* certainty, and, since it depends on subjective grounds (of moral disposition) I must not even say "*It is morally certain that there is a God,*" etc.,

⁸³ Luik admits that 'Kant does acknowledge that the postulate of reason is in no respect inferior to knowledge, but this, of course, does not confer upon it the status of knowledge'. Luik, 'The Ambiguity of Kantian Faith', 342.

⁸⁴ Kant introduces the as-if doctrine in the first *Critique*. See A672-3/B700-1.

⁸⁵ Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 337.

⁸⁶ Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 337-338.

⁸⁷ Leslie Stevenson, 'Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge', *Kantian Review* (2003) 7:88.

but rather “I *am* morally certain” etc.’ (A820/B857). Referring to this passage from the first *Critique*, Stevenson writes, ‘Here Kant strikes an existentialist note, giving us a sneak preview of his practical philosophy. It seems that the distinction between moral beliefs and theoretical beliefs about the supersensible is not between different propositions, but different styles of believing the same propositions: firmly believe in a moral way, unstably believe in the doctrinal way’.⁸⁸ If Stevenson is right, moral faith is a viable concept on Kant’s terms, although it remains to be seen precisely what ‘practical justification’ of moral faith might mean.

There are, for Kant, objects of cognition that have no theoretical correspondence in experience and thus no argument objectively sufficient for belief in these objects can ever be made—they do not have objective reality (see A156). Yet there are objects of cognition that, despite their lack of objective reality, are possible objects of faith that go beyond mere opinion: ‘I can think whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself but in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept ... something more is required’ (Bxxvi). Another way of putting Kant’s point is that we can think about freedom, immortality, and God, and have many opinions about them; however, more is required to establish their objective validity in a way that matters to faith.⁸⁹ This more, argues Kant, ‘need not be sought in the theoretical sources of cognition; it may also lie in the practical ones’ (Bxxvi).⁹⁰ Throughout the first *Critique* Kant’s clear concern is

⁸⁸ Stevenson, ‘Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge’, 95. On 92, Stevenson cites a lengthy footnote on the discussion of belief in the Jäsche Logic: ‘Believing is ... a kind of incomplete holding-to-be-true with consciousness ... it is distinguished from opining ... by the relation that it has to action. Thus the businessman, for instance, to strike a deal, needs not to just opine that there will be something to be gained thereby, but to believe it, i.e., to have his opinion be sufficient for undertaking into the uncertain’ (9:67-68n). Stevenson notes a link in Kant’s thinking between pragmatic belief that is willing to bet on some course of action with varying degrees of self-assurance and historical belief. True gain or loss, however, in order to be rational grounded, must be judged relative to questions of dignity and morality, otherwise they are merely pragmatic. Stevenson, ‘Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge’, 93.

⁸⁹ Kant appears to have two kinds of objective validity at work in his thinking. One kind is a logical type of objective validity where every thought counts if it can be made to cohere with the way we understand the world (i.e., opinion). The other is when there are transcendental reasons for getting some thing in mind. The former is idle speculation, while the latter is critical speculation and the wellspring of Kant’s thinking on transcendental theology.

⁹⁰ Key to Kant’s case for the primacy of the practical in matters of belief is freedom. While freedom (from the theoretical point of view) appears not to be freedom at all, there is a transcendental sense in which

that we realize that what cannot be known in theory can, in principle, be cognized and that the source of this cognition may lie in some other form of reasoning, in particular, practical reasoning.

Kant provides two criteria for subjectively sufficient reasons to believe in an object of cognition: (1) criteria of practical reason, which provide reasons for postulating the existence of God according to the interests of moral reasoning, and (2) criteria of cognition, which is grounded in the universal validity of concepts that is required of all human reasoning. While criteria of practical reason apply only to faith, criteria of cognition apply to reasoning about knowledge and faith alike. Stevenson writes,

As Wood has pointed out, Kant holds that both *wissen* and *glauben* are based on grounds that are universally valid—that is, reasons that appeal to the judgement of any rational person. They both involve conviction rather than mere opinion or persuasion, but the degrees of conviction are different—*wissen* must be based either on logical proof (deduction) or such strong empirical evidence (induction) as to amount to knowledge beyond all reasonable doubt, whereas *glauben* is based on inner faith or moral commitment. (*Glauben* can be even stronger than *wissen* in another way, for as Kant remarked in his lectures, people have sometimes been ready to die for their moral or religious beliefs but not for mathematical theorems.)⁹¹

The internal logic of practical faith takes the idea of God provided by cognition and infuses it with meaning according to the universality of freedom and the moral law. This way of understanding the ‘relentless logic’ of practical reason is consistent with the work of Ronald Green, except that the aperture for transcendental theology on this interpretation is not one opened by prudential considerations. Instead, transcendental theology works itself outward from the theoretical philosophy according to Kant’s understanding of human cognition. Only in this sense is the moral development of Kant’s transcendental theology consistent with the tenets of speculative reasoning.

freedom is realized without ‘any contradiction thereby occurring’ (Bxxviii). According to Kant, freedom ‘asserts its place’, and with it morality is critically established (Bxxix).

⁹¹ Stevenson, ‘Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge’, 85.

According to Kant in the Second Preface to the first *Critique*, ‘pure speculative reason is, in respect of principles of cognition, a unity entirely separate and subsisting for itself, in which, as in an organized body, every part exists for the sake of all others as all others exist for its sake’ (Bxxiii). Kant’s position is that all reasoning must be discursively consistent and moral reasoning on theology advances on the work of its theoretical counterpart only on this cognitive basis.

III. Morality, Meaning, and Kant’s Existential Faith

As we saw in the previous section, human cognition allows reason to get God in mind. We can think God and consider the world as God’s creation, even though we have no corresponding intuition of God. Yet, the movement of transcendental theology to objective validity in a way that matters to faith requires a transition to moral reasoning. Kant’s moral philosophy makes this transition and initiates the next major development of transcendental theology. So far, we have been considering Kant’s transcendental theology solely in terms of its development in theoretical and practical terms. However, when nature and freedom are considered simultaneously, which according to Kant they must, a teleological gap opens up in the critical analysis of reason. The exploration of this gap, with its implications, constitutes the next stage of Kant’s development of the transcendental theology.

The gap between nature and freedom creates space in Kant’s philosophy for the question of meaning to be raised: Davidovich explains this as a need to know that there is a history: ‘Kant sees this as a problem that can only be answered through a teleological principle, from the point of view of a conception of the end of history in light of the rational Ideal of the Highest Good’.⁹² Holistically speaking—that is, from the point of view of the faculty of judgement in the third *Critique*—the moral system, in the face of threats to its viability, holds together only in the context of meaning, purpose, or what Kant sometimes calls the Highest Good. Kant’s transcendental pursuit of an answer

⁹² Davidovich, *Province of Meaning*, 69.

to the question of hope in the face of the nature/freedom gap, raises the idea of God from merely being a postulate of the moral life to a level at which God's existence and the meaning of the world become mutually self-sustaining tenets of transcendental faith, for while we cannot establish the existence of God on theoretical terms, as Davidovich points out, Kant believes 'we are justified in claiming validity for our contemplative thought about [a moral designer of nature]'.⁹³ The development of transcendental theology beyond merely God the postulate of the moral life to God as the object of moral and religious faith directly correlates to the conviction that the world is meaningful. Palmquist identifies this reciprocal relationship as the 'theocentric' character of Kant's philosophy. Permeating Kant's critical writings is the irrefragable conviction that the world is meaningful and that belief in God (despite the lack of determinable objective reality in this belief) is the only reason why the world would ultimately make sense.

Important to note is that this link between the meaningfulness of the world and the existence of God does not constitute an argument for God's existence. As Byrne notes, no such argument can be made:

Kant's moral proof has to fulfil conflicting requirements. He needs an argument from an *ideal* if he is to give a distinct role to practical reason in supporting belief in God, a role substantially different from the fallacious one performed by speculative reason in advancing the traditional proofs. But at the same time he needs an argument from a *fact* if the process is to produce belief.⁹⁴

What this link between meaning and God does indicate is that Kant's denial of knowledge of God in the first *Critique* is a simultaneous denial of knowledge that the world is meaningful. Now this does not mean that Kant's quest for moral faith is religiously insignificant—because of the problem of unity, reason must find a way to escape the strictures of the theoretical philosophy so that reason can find harmony with

⁹³ Davidovich, *Kant's Theological Constructivism*, 346-347.

⁹⁴ Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 343.

what has already been decided by moral reason.⁹⁵ But this does mean that Kant's notion of faith is tantamount to an existential leap of moral faith: We are left with a choice to live as if God is there or to live as if God is not there.⁹⁶ From the theoretical vantage point, a decision cannot be made (Kant is a theoretical agnostic on the question of God's existence); from a practical vantage point, however, we must postulate God's existence if morality is to make sense (Kant is a practical theist): 'I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted' (A828/B856).

Keith Ward accepts many of the main features of this type of interpretation but thinks that Kant is never able to get beyond a purely formal expansion of his ethical theory. Like Strawson, Ward grants that there is some ambiguity in the first *Critique* regarding the status of transcendental idealism and suggests that interpreters of Kant must give some account of Kant's optimism regarding the eventual development of a critical metaphysic. He writes, '[Kant] holds open the future possibility of a final synthesis of human knowledge under necessary principles, even though such a synthesis must wait for the analytic method to be fully explored first. So an a priori universal science remains the Kantian ideal, which he was never entirely to abandon'.⁹⁷ Despite

⁹⁵ Byrne's challenge to this significance is dependent on what he calls 'a great gulf between thinking and believing that a proposition is true and acting as if it were'. Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 337. In support, he provides the example: 'one may have good reason for concealing one's convictions about a person's state of health from his relatives. Here acting as if everything were all right could go hand in hand with the deepest conviction that it was not. Acting 'as-if' does not amount to faith'. Byrne, 'Kant's Moral Proof', 337-338.

⁹⁶ The paradoxical nature of transcendental faith can also be seen in the nature of the transcendental object for Kant: 'To the question, "What kind of constitution does a transcendental object have?" One cannot indeed give an answer saying **what it is**, but one can answer that the **question** itself is **nothing**, because no object for the question is given. Hence all questions of the transcendental doctrine of the soul are answerable ... [for] no answer is an answer, namely that a question about the constitution of something, which cannot be thought through any determinate predicate because it is posited entirely outside the sphere of objects that can be given to us, is entirely nugatory and empty' (A478-479/B506-507). Here we finally see Kant starting to make good on his promise that the first *Critique* silences the dogmatists and skeptics relative to faith in God, freedom and immortality (Bxxx).

⁹⁷ Keith Ward, *The Development of Kant's View of Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 28. Henceforth called *Kant's View of Ethics*.

Kant's clear intentions however, Ward argues that a continuous thread of theological agnosticism permeates his writings from *Dreams* to *Religion*. In defence of this position, he presents an historical account of Kant's thinking that tracks the evolution of his position on ethics from *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766) to *Religion* (1793). Kant's quest for a universal science, according to Ward, includes attempts at providing grounds for theology in the transcendental recesses of reason, but the prospects for these grounds are severely curtailed by the limiting conditions of the first *Critique* and the merely formal way that Kant develops his moral philosophy.

Ward, like Palmquist, begins his analysis of Kant's position with *Dreams*. They both argue that *Dreams* is what the tone and force of language suggest it to be: a frontal attack on metaphysics as represented in the work of the mystic Swedenborg. Unlike Palmquist, Ward thinks this attack spills over into metaphysics more generally considered. *Dreams* marks a time in Kant's life, argues Ward, when metaphysical speculations became meaningless to him. The pursuit of moral perfection was the only meaningful aim in human life. Accordingly, 'One might see the main argument of the *Dreams*, then, as being to establish the independence and logical priority of morality over theoretical speculation'.⁹⁸ In *Dreams*, suggests Ward, 'Metaphysics is confined to an analytic role, resolving concepts into their fundamental elements. It cannot provide knowledge of the ultimate nature of reality. It is at most "the science of the boundaries of human reason"'.⁹⁹ This theme is carried over to the first *Critique* and remains a central component in Kant's transcendental thinking on theology. Thus, Ward contends that '*Dreams* marks the nadir of Kant's metaphysical interests' and the true source of Kant's turn toward morality in his later writings.¹⁰⁰ Metaphysics to the degree of Kant's

⁹⁸ Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 41.

⁹⁹ Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 41.

¹⁰⁰ Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 41. It seems, however, that '*Dreams*' marks an important step in Kant's pre-critical period moving him toward his properly critical philosophy. Ward notices for example on page 42 that '[*Dreams*] shows the origin of the formalistic conception of the categorical imperative', 'lays the foundation for the doctrine of the primacy of practical reason', 'set[s] bounds to the scope of reason', and 'insist[s] on a commitment to morality which is independent of any speculative claims'. See Stephen R. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), Chapter Two.

pre-critical writings does not emerge again for Kant until his moral theology of the second *Critique* in a very different form.¹⁰¹

This new form, often called Kant's moral theology, erases much of the robust realism of Kant's earlier and more conventional approach to metaphysics in favour of a kind of moral formalism conducive to the transcendental nature of reason. Ward notes that the task of establishing an a priori universal science, though begun in the first *Critique*, does not begin to receive Kant's full attention until *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the second *Critique*. In the practical writings, suggests Ward, Kant moves toward establishing a formal system of thought based exclusively on moral feelings: 'But the whole material content of morality—the belief that specific things and acts are good—must, [Kant] believes, derive from feeling'.¹⁰² In the formalization of the rational resources that support this moral feeling, Kant developed his system of ethical ideas in four stages. The final stage, Ward argues, envisioned the triumph of reason over sense and the formalization of the moral realm in his thought.

Ward understands Kant to be a theological moralist whose transcendental philosophy gradually moves from theoretical agnosticism to moral non-realism. To support his view, Ward shows a correlation between the latter part of Kant's pre-critical period (i.e., the markedly sceptical and silent part) and his critical period, utilizing an interpretation of Kant's theoretical philosophy that aligns itself closely with the type of interpretation we find in the early work of Strawson. Nevertheless, Ward remains sensitive to the many indications in Kant's philosophy that are meant to have positive implications for faith. In Kant's *Lectures on Ethics*, Ward points out that Kant explicitly

¹⁰¹ Gregory Johnson asks essentially three questions of those who advocate metaphysical pessimism from evidence in 'Dreams': (1) Why did Kant choose to publish "Spirit-Seer" anonymously? (2) Why does Kant here depart from his notoriously stolid academic prose? (3) Why does Kant vacillate between such extremes of scorn and admiration, indifference and fascination, for Swedenborg's work? Gregory R. Johnson, 'Introduction' in *Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*. Johnson points to the possibility that Kant was 'two-faced' in his dealings with Swedenborg—interested as much in career advancement as with being perfectly transparent about his real affinities for a controversial figure like Swedenborg. Johnson forwards six layers of evidence for Kant's hidden attitude of indebtedness toward and identification with Swedenborg.

¹⁰² Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 29.

affirms that 'though ethics cannot depend upon metaphysical or theological belief, it necessarily gives rise to theological belief and cannot exist without it'.¹⁰³ Although clearly positive in theological intent, little of Kant's pre-critical metaphysics survives the Copernican revolution in Ward's estimation. Kant's rational foundations for theology are directly related to the support they receive from his moral theory, and, for this reason, they remain but a formal aspect of his moral development of transcendental theology.

Ward's emphasis on the formal in morality and conclusion that Kant's thinking on theology lacks of any real metaphysical content have clear implications for the way in which he interprets *Religion*. Ward cannot hold that *Religion* develops Kant's moral theology in specific ways, because this development ends with the postulation of God as a merely formal component of morality. In line with this view, Ward argues that *Religion* is meant simply to vindicate the formal nature of the moral theory. It introduces resources for helping us to think of ways of overcoming our moral shortcomings when the reality of moral evil threatens to undo reason. According to Ward on Kant,

the only important thing in religion is that which is common to all religions, obedience to the moral law and hope of grace to remedy man's seemingly inevitable moral deficiencies. Beyond this a man may believe what he pleases, as long as he does not regard the specific observances of his own religion as in themselves an especially pleasing service to God, or as any more than "a means of awakening within us a godly disposition".¹⁰⁴

Key to note about Ward's interpretation of Kant on religion is that moral character and religious belief and practice are at some remove from each other (as long as religion does not lead to moral deficiency, the content of belief is not significant) and God is

¹⁰³ Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 59.

¹⁰⁴ Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 62.

never to be thought of as though he were a real entity, but merely as an idea postulated for the religious life.¹⁰⁵

Ward interprets the first *Critique* much along the lines of the early Strawson. He sums up Kant's view of God this way: 'Thus not only is talk of God "empty" or purely formal—being not founded on sense perceptions—it is necessarily inapplicable to the object it attempts to conceive. So there is no question that a noumenal object might *correspond* to these ideas of reason'.¹⁰⁶ Ward's main point is that 'the Critical doctrine of the formal nature of the categories of thought and their restriction to the role of functions of discursive thought requires that our concepts actually be denied any literal application to transcendent reality'.¹⁰⁷ The position common to both Strawson and Ward is that our beliefs, cast in theoretical language, are inherently agnostic because we not only cannot know if they correspond to a transcendent reality, but, logically speaking, they could never correspond with reality. For this reason, Ward, like the early Strawson, understands Kant's philosophical foundations for theology to support only agnosticism. This differs markedly from other interpretations of the first *Critique*, such as the double-aspect interpretation of Allison (though Allison has yet to fully develop his interpretation of Kant in directions that would make this insight plain), as well as other ways of relating Kant's philosophy of religion to his philosophy proper.

Allen Wood's interpretation of Kant provides an important counterbalance to Ward's.¹⁰⁸ Wood agrees with Ward that 'The term *idea* is borrowed by Kant quite

¹⁰⁵ Perhaps this comes into sharpest relief with Ward's understanding of Kant on fanaticism. 'Fanaticism' in the Kantian sense is, according to Ward, 'an illusion of the inner sense that where by we believe ourselves to be in fellowship with God and with other spirits'. According to Ward on Kant, communion with the Supreme Being is the highest moral perfection, but it is also an unreachable ideal. '[Kant] will not countenance any conception of an immanent work of grace or of a mystical union with God'. Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 63.

¹⁰⁶ Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ Ward, *Kant's View of Ethics*, 79.

¹⁰⁸ Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978). Wood's general thesis is that 'Kant's argument for the rational inevitability of the idea of an *ens realissimum* is an original and well thought out one, making use of concepts that belong to the metaphysical tradition'. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 147.

consciously from Plato ... [and] refers to any of several concepts formed a priori by our rational faculty, to which no possible experience can correspond'.¹⁰⁹ Wood also agrees that 'since our concept of God is an idea of reason, no sensible content corresponding to it can ever be given. This concept is thus an "empty" or "problematic" one, a concept incapable of serving as a vehicle of (empirical) knowledge'.¹¹⁰ He also agrees, to a certain extent, with Ward's basic deduction:

On the basis of a Kantian epistemology, it might look as if there is very little we are entitled to say about the divine attributes. For according to the critical doctrines, all the properties of which we can form any determinate conception are phenomenal realities, which are necessarily limited in their degree. We have no acquaintance with any of the *realitates noumena* which lie behind these appearances; and consequently no determinate conception of the properties which belong to an *ens realissimum*.¹¹¹

Wood makes this important contribution to our study, however. Even though Kant's denial of theoretical knowledge makes literal language about God problematic from the point of view of empirical realism in the sense of Strawson, it does not mean that language about God rooted in the rational recesses of reason is likewise impossible. Referring to difficult principles surrounding knowledge of God in Kant's theoretical philosophy, Wood writes,

These strictures, however, do not really apply to some predicates, such as those based on the categories, or on the "pure derivative concepts," such as duration and change. For although such concepts are "empty" ones in their application to noumena, they are nevertheless available to us a priori as formal elements of our concept of a thing or object in general. Kant gives the name "ontological

¹⁰⁹ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 17.

¹¹⁰ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 79-80.

¹¹¹ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 80.

predicates” to these “a priori realities” which belong to God in virtue of the fact that they “refer to the universal attributes of a thing in general.”¹¹²

The idea of God in Kant’s work is among those that have a direct relationship to the conditions of reason that give rise to the very possibility of experience. Wood writes, ‘the most proper idea of God, as a supremely perfect being or *ens realissimum*, ... comes about in the course of our attempt to conceive the conditions for the “thorough determination” of things, that is, the unconditionally complete knowledge of them, or the thoroughgoing specification of the properties belonging to them’.¹¹³

In Kant’s thinking, God is the focal point for all discursive reflection on the nature of the world and our experience. Wood summarizes,

Kant’s theory is that since the idea of a most perfect being includes in it every possible perfection or reality, the complete set of properties which might belong to any possible thing could (in theory) be determined by limiting or selecting from properties of God in the right way. The idea of God therefore provides us with a (purely abstract) conception of “the material of all possibility,” of a source from which all the properties of any and every possible thing could in principle be derived.¹¹⁴

Wood concludes that ‘The idea of God is a necessary idea of reason, and Kant has only respect for our natural interest in the content of this idea and our theoretical curiosity about the existence or nonexistence of an object corresponding to it’.¹¹⁵

Lest one think that the idea is merely a place holder in Kant’s system, useful for holding the whole philosophy together yet merely an empty concept on closer examination, Wood points out that Kant ‘even thinks that a certain amount can be known about the content of the idea of God and the attributes which must be thought in

¹¹² Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology*, 80-81.

¹¹³ Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology*, 18-19.

¹¹⁴ Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology*, 19.

¹¹⁵ Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology*, 19.

it'.¹¹⁶ Wood takes much of this knowledge of the idea of God to be negative in nature. According to Wood, Kant 'holds that predicates drawn from phenomena can be applied to God if certain restrictions and qualifications are duly observed. First, he says, we must proceed by the *via negationis* to separate all limitations from the predicates we select... [K]nowledge, volition, and moral goodness ... may be applied to God'.¹¹⁷ There is, however, a corresponding thread of reasonable discourse about God present in Kant's critical philosophy from its earliest inception. Wood names these predicates 'psychological' insofar as they are 'drawn from our empirical acquaintance with the human self or soul as part of nature'.¹¹⁸ Wood writes, 'Kant insists that [properties discovered *via negationis*] must be applied by the *via eminentiae*.... The properties of finite things must be revised or modified to accord with the nature of an infinitely real being if we are to be able to ascribe them to God. Once again, if a property cannot survive this modification, it cannot be literally ascribed to God at all'.¹¹⁹ Kant calls any theology that limits itself to a modest list of ontological predicates 'ontotheology' or 'transcendental theology'. Kant 'regards such a theology as useful from a moral or religious standpoint, in that it prevents us from adopting an "anthropomorphic" conception of God, one drawn from empirical principles'.¹²⁰ Any theology that develops in the direction of psychological predicates Kant terms 'moral theology'.

The point is that Kant draws on these grounds for rational theology as he makes a transition from the theoretical philosophy to the moral philosophy. Important for our purposes is that this transition is as much theological as it is philosophical. In moving from the first *Critique* and *Prolegomena* to the second *Critique* and *Groundwork*, Kant

¹¹⁶ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 84.

¹¹⁸ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 83.

¹¹⁹ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 84. 'Kant's conception of God and his theory of the rational origin of the conception both depend heavily on ontological views which are part of a tradition which goes back at least to Plato'. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 28.

¹²⁰ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 82. 'Transcendental theology, according to Kant, helps to rescue us from ... corrupt religion by supplying us with a more sober and austere notion of the divine, based on our pure concepts of the understanding'. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 82.

is also making a transition from pure transcendental theology (or onto-theology) to moral theology. Wood is clearly right that Kant cannot 'be satisfied, from a moral or religious standpoint, with transcendental theology all by itself. For its concept of God is "deistic"; it is merely the concept of a supremely real ground or cause of the world'.¹²¹ The requirements of his burgeoning anthropology require that morality matter and that the world be understood to have meaning. This is not knowledge in the theoretical sense, but an important part of Kant's burgeoning existential faith based on moral sensibilities. According to Wood,

Moral faith, in Kant's view, requires "theism," the belief in a "living God," a being endowed with knowledge and free volition, who governs the world wisely according to moral laws.... Transcendental theology, says Kant, is an indispensable "propaedeutic" to a fuller theology, but remains "idle and useless" from a moral-religious point of view unless supplemented by it.¹²²

The formal elements of Kant's moral subjectivity propel the transition to the moral but do not restrict moral theology to mere theological non-realism. Inasmuch as human identity is wrapped up in a prior commitment to the good and the moral order of the universe, Kant is likewise committed to a robust moral faith that extends the realm of transcendental theology, broadening it and deepening it.¹²³ Wood writes, 'The supreme good for man, in other words, does not consist in bringing himself into harmony with an order (natural, social, or supernatural) given outside him, but rather in generating his own system of order and imposing it freely on his own actions and on the world'.¹²⁴ There is a strong sense of theological subjectivity in Kant, but this is offset by the moral moorings of faith and the quest for developing faith in a way consonant with a meaningful world. Wood sums up the point this way: 'According to Kant, we believe in

¹²¹ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 82.

¹²² Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 82-83.

¹²³ Kant was convinced that an upright moral disposition rationally required belief in a moral world, purposively ordered by a supremely wise and morally perfect being, very much along the lines of traditional theistic religions'. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 92.

¹²⁴ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 20.

God because this belief harmonizes with, and is rationally required by, our moral disposition to pursue the highest good'.¹²⁵

Belief is not without tether to the theoretical philosophy, however. As Wood contends, 'Kant's justification of theism must be sought not only in the moral and existential considerations leading to practical faith, but also in the theoretical dialectic which is supposed to furnish this faith with a clear and compelling conception of its natural object'.¹²⁶ What this means is that 'Like the other ideas of reason, the idea of God arises for Kant from an attempt to think the "unconditioned" in respect to appearances which must always be given as "conditioned" in some specific manner'.¹²⁷ In the end, argues Wood, 'Kant's theology remained quite conservative. It drew its object of moral faith from an idea generated by theoretical reason, the idea of an *ens realissimum*. And it developed this idea ... very much along the lines of traditional scholastic and rationalistic theology'.¹²⁸ Therefore, it seems that we have good reason to think that Kant's concern for leaving open the possibility of God's existence, our ability to cognize God, and the need for us to live as if he is there is indicative of a *desire* for a type of realist faith, not in the sense that we have knowledge that God is there, but in the hope that God is there because his existence matters for the ultimate well-being of reason. Nevertheless, if this account of the development of the transcendental theology is accurate, it likewise would be correct to hold that Kant's philosophy does not *support* in any obvious way either theological realism or non-realism. Since we can have no theoretical knowledge of God's existence or non-existence (which is required for a realist or non-realist stance), to live in the moral life is to make the existential decision to live [practically] as a theist despite theoretical ignorance.

With this in hand, we still face the question, how far can the development of Kant's rational foundations for theology be pressed and what are their limits? This

¹²⁵ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 24.

¹²⁶ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 26.

¹²⁷ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 27.

¹²⁸ Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 150-151.

question is what I take to be the central importance of Wood's charge to Kant interpreters (noted in Chapter One). He writes, 'there is an area of Kant's philosophical thought—itself badly neglected by responsible scholarship— ... This area of thought is Kant's investigation of rational religious faith'.¹²⁹ So far in this study, we have seen that Kant's transcendental theology of the first *Critique* yields the idea of God the *ens realissimum*. According to Wood, Kant's transcendental methodology yields a rationalist conception of God much in line with traditional rationalist theologies. Kant's development of this idea in his moral philosophy yields the postulation of God endowed with knowledge and free volition, and who governs the world wisely. This postulation, according to Green, provides the core conception of God (or moral theology) at work in the human religious consciousness. Kant's judicial theology then yields the possibility of an existential faith in God the divine moral judge who intelligently designed the world and enables human beings to live in the world in a meaningful way. Davidovich calls this kind of theology 'contemplative'.

Through this series of developments Kant's rational foundations for theology become progressively more significant to the study of religious faith. However, it is only the third phase of this development that justifies the writing of *Religion* as an original contribution in line with the tenets of Kant's critical philosophy. Clearly, the writing of *Religion* makes little sense from the point of view of Strawson's 'principle of significance'. All talk of human dispositions, the divine being, the prototype of perfect humanity is meaningless speculation if all we have is empirical realism (without the transcendental idealism portion). If we grant Kant's intention to develop his transcendental theology in the direction of moral faith, *Religion* might legitimately be understood as an amendment to the moral philosophy itself. Although this understanding of *Religion* is common in the field of Kant studies and appears to have some support in the text itself, it does have the significant drawback of revising some of the most crucial tenets of the moral philosophy. Ought no longer implies can in *Religion*, for example, if

¹²⁹ Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 1-2.

radical evil is understood to be a principle which chastens and amends the reciprocal relationship of freedom and the moral law in practical reason.

My working theory is that the issue of meaning is, for Kant, caught up in giving some account of the whole of human experience, and this is primarily a third *Critique* issue. When facts and values do not add up to produce the Highest Good (where the Highest Good is understood to be a state of affairs in which human happiness is directly proportional to human virtue), this appears to be evidence against the meaningfulness of the world. Added to this general dilemma of verifying the meaningfulness of the world in the face of particulars, Kant senses another even deeper problem with an existential faith in God and the meaningfulness of the world. In *Religion*, Kant introduces the concept of 'radical evil' in making the case for human moral depravity. With the presentation of moral depravity, *Religion* introduces a threat to the meaningfulness of our world at the very ground of the transcendental theology. For even if the world is the work of an intelligent designer and we may hope that evils will be reconciled by the divine judge in the world to come, humanity's collective fate before that judge is inevitable condemnation for an innate moral corruption. How can there be moral hope if this is the inevitable outcome?

Here the importance of our above understanding of cognition takes on significance as a starting point for approaching *Religion*. Radical evil and the question of moral hope (i.e., meaning in the face of radical evil) opens the door for cognition to press its understanding of God into service in order to find a rational remedy for human depravity and a critically satisfying answer to the question of hope. It seems reasonable to expect that if Kant felt reason is able to cognize anything of God beyond designer and judge that would support an existential faith commitment to God, we should find such developments within this work. The remainder of this dissertation offers an interpretation of *Religion* built on the understanding of cognition and faith outlined above. Once again, the issue of coherence, which Michalson has aptly laid before us, is crucial to keep in mind. If *Religion* is found to rest on irreconcilable inconsistencies, as Michalson claims it is, then no cognition sufficient for faith can be established—this would violate the requirement of systematic unity. If, however, humanity, God, and the

world can be cognized in a way that is coherent and flows from prior commitments of the critical philosophy, then one final stage of the development of Kant's rational foundations for religious faith will be complete.

The interpretive line that we will follow approaches *Religion* as an exploration of cognition that furthers Kant's transcendental theology in the face of radical evil and the light of moral hope. There are three key features about this interpretation that are noteworthy. First, this interpretation emphasizes the centrality of Kant's notion of the moral disposition. The moral disposition represents an assumption on Kant's part based on human dignity that lies at the very heart of his philosophical programme. This assumption initially appears in the first *Critique*. Kant presents the disposition as a feature of humanity that is pivotal to the stability of the moral faith: 'rational belief is grounded on the presupposition of moral dispositions' (A829/B857). However, until *Religion*, the disposition represented an unexamined presupposition on Kant's part. This is why Silber, for example, suggests that the development of the disposition is 'the most important single contribution of the *Religion* to Kant's ethical theory'.¹³⁰ The exploration of *Religion* which follows (especially in the treatment of Books One and Two) concurs with Silber's assessment of the importance of the disposition to Kant's argument in *Religion*, and understands the book to be largely an exploration of the implications of this concept.

A second noteworthy feature of this interpretation is that, based on internal features of the text (especially the problem of Book One and its rejoinder in Book Two), it argues that Kant's notion of 'humanity' or the 'human species' is best understood as a Platonic concept of *species*. This Platonic understanding of Kant may seem strange on first blush; however, it should be noted that numerous Kant interpreters, including Michalson, have recognized this aspect of Kant's philosophy, even if relatively few have made very much of it. Michalson states in his *The Historical Dimensions of Rational Faith*, 'it does not seem altogether odd to speak of Kant's religious outlook as a

¹³⁰ John R. Silber, 'The Ethical Significance of Kant's *Religion*' in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, Trs. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), cxiv-cxv.

synthesis of Platonism and Christianity'.¹³¹ He goes on to enumerate other interpreters who recognize this, including such interpreters as J. Bohatec, Michel Despland, and Friedrich Paulson. Thus, throughout any interpretation of Kant's position in *Religion*, one needs to keep in mind the distinction between when Kant speaks of the human individual versus humanity universal in this more Platonic sense. Very often, the latter is mistaken for the former, when emphasizing the Platonic sense instead would have made more sense of the passage under consideration. This insight will be carried throughout the interpretation of *Religion* that follows and is the key feature of the text to keep in mind to understand how Kant's *Religion* overcomes Michaelson's central objections. The farther an interpreter moves away from the Platonic emphasis in *Religion*, the more inconsistent Kant's philosophy of religion appears to become.

The third has to do with structure. In the Second Preface, Kant points out his vocational commitment to the perspective of the pure philosopher in the context of two experiments that he says are being performed in the book. In the first experiment, Kant assesses the extent to which 'revelation can at least comprise also the pure *religion of reason*' (6:12). He tells us that 'the philosopher, as purely a teacher of reason (from mere principles *a priori*), must keep within the inner circle [of reason alone], and, thereby, also abstract from all experience' (6:12). In short, the first experiment is to abstract from all possible experience what is essential to natural religion or religion within the boundaries of reason alone; the second experiment is to examine one example of a so-called 'revealed' religion to see to what extent it matches up with religion rationally conceived.¹³²

¹³¹ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of Rational Faith*, 117.

¹³² There are various ways in which one might be able to identify the structure of Kant's arguments in his first experiment. Despland separates them into two views based on the moral and religious intent that may lay behind Kant's arguments. One view sees Kant's turn to religion as a remedy for the problem of radical evil. *Religion*, on this view, provides a statement of Kant's philosophy of religion revolving around the issue of human depravity. The other sees the moral/religious community as Kant's attempt to overcome the individualistic standpoint of the moral philosophy. On this view, Kant finds the moral philosophy wanting in the 1790's because of a gap that emerges in the concept of the Highest Good. Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*, 182.

Kant's transition into the second experiment appears most clearly in the introductory paragraphs of the First Part of Book Four. Having argued that 'a religion can be *natural*, yet also *revealed*, if it is so constituted that human beings *could and ought to have* arrived at it on their own through the mere use of their own reason' (6:155), Kant turns to 'consider a revealed religion as yet *natural*, on the one hand, but on the other hand, a *learned* religion; ... [and] test it and be able to sort out what, and how much, it is entitled to from the one source or the other' (6:156). Kant then proposes more specifically to offer an assessment of revealed religion as expressed in New Testament Christianity: 'In our case this book can be the New Testament, as the source of the Christian doctrine of faith. In keeping with our intent, we now wish to expound the Christian religion in two sections—first, as natural religion, and then, second, as learned religion—with reference to its content and the principles found in it' (6:157). The language referring to a *test* and a prior *intent* indicate that Book Four marks the turning point in *Religion* to the second experiment. Kant assumes from this point forward and throughout the rest of the Book that his conception of natural religion has been adequately articulated and that, with it, he is ready to assess the merits and demerits of the Christian religion. The interpretation of *Religion* offered here in summary and in the next chapter, focuses on the first experiment as the development of Kant's rational foundations for religious faith. The second experiment is addressed, but only in a more survey form, which is meant to confirm and apply the offered interpretation of the first experiment.

The next chapter is an exegetical presentation and partial defence of Kant's *Religion*, Books One through Three. The presentation is largely expository in nature, and the defence refers specifically to Section Four, which deals with Michalson's objections to *Religion*'s coherence and the resolution to these objections inherent within the interpretation. This exposition of *Religion* is admittedly difficult to follow as it works its way through the most complex details of this classic text. Therefore, the fourth and final section of this chapter is a summary statement of the interpretation to follow and is meant to be used as a reference tool for navigating the intricate exegesis of Books One, Two and Three in Chapter Four.

IV. A Hypothesis for Interpreting *Religion*: The Transcendental Union Thesis

This brings us to the hypothesis for understanding *Religion*, which I call the ‘Transcendental Union Thesis’. This hypothesis understands Books One through Three of *Religion* to consist of presentations of three types of union: the union of the human species (Book One), the union of moral converts and the Prototype (Book Two), and the union of the ethical community (Book Three). As the term Transcendental Union Thesis indicates, the hypothesis is not indicative of theoretical grounds for rational religious belief; instead, Kant’s entire discussion in *Religion* is understood to be a continuation of the development of his transcendental reflection on the foundations for religious belief that first surface in the first *Critique*. In other words, these unions are not ontological, but transcendental—they are part of an argument for the necessary cognitive conditions for the possibility of rational religious faith in the face of specific threats to moral hope.

In reference to Book One, this hypothesis involves a movement in hermeneutic emphasis away from an examination of the individual, which Michalson takes to be imported from Kant’s moral philosophy, to a transcendental analysis of a single moral disposition that belongs to the whole human species. Rather than this analysis referring to human individuals collectively, I understand Kant’s analysis of the human species to be reflective of a more Platonic concept of species, one cognized as a single universal from which the individual derives their nature. Kant’s focus is thus on the human disposition universally conceived and the subsequent moral peril that arises from his analysis of this disposition. In Book Two, this hypothesis specifically refers to belief in the reality and availability of a possible union between human persons and the disposition of the prototype of perfect humanity. This union of human beings with the prototype’s disposition is possible only by way of an act of moral faith, wherein humanity’s corrupt disposition is abandoned in favour of an adoption of the prototype’s good disposition at the moment of conversion. This union, I suggest, is at the heart of Kant’s argument for moral hope in *Religion* and crucial for understanding Kant’s philosophy of religion in a consistent fashion. In Book Three, this hypothesis refers to

banding together (or union) of persons under the good principle. This tangible union of individuals presents a vision of hope in the form of a people of God, who, united under the prototype's disposition, seek to form an ethical commonwealth.

The hypothesis being presented here thus understands the notion of union to provide shape and direction to Kant's entire argument. Specifically, the concept of union forms the neck of an hourglass-shaped argument in Books One, Two, and Three of *Religion*.¹³³ It is a central feature of the formulation of the problem of radical evil in Book One as Kant establishes the human predicament as one related to the whole of humanity (or humanity as a species); it is a central feature of the formulation of the solution to human depravity in Book Two as this solution revolves around the union of human persons and the disposition of the prototype; and it is a central feature of Kant's vision projected in Book Three as this vision depends on a unified ethical commonwealth as a people of God. With this before us, I turn now to a summary of the first three Books of *Religion* according to this hypothesis.

Synopsis of Book One of Religion

In the opening of Book One of *Religion*, Kant probes the question of the moral nature of humanity as a species; that is, whether humanity is by nature good, evil, both good and evil, or neither good nor evil. In the opening paragraphs of Book One, Kant deductively eliminates two possibilities, namely, that humanity is neither good nor evil, and that humanity is partly good and partly evil. Regarding the first, Kant shows that the moral law is a sufficient incentive for action, one that is positively and necessarily present in human reason. In order for humanity to be morally neutral (i.e., not positively disposed to the moral law), humanity would have to first intentionally and decisively silence the moral law. Such an action is equivalent to being evil, however. By Kant's lights, then, there is no such thing as moral neutrality. Regarding the view that the

¹³³ Michel Despland argues that major sections of Books One, Two, and Three of *Religion* form the heart of Kant's project, while Book Four and many of the closing remarks of each Book merely apply the religious findings of reason to religious communities with specific reference to Christianity. Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*, 183-84.

human species might be partly good and partly evil, Kant submits that this possibility requires the will to hold simultaneously two determinants of the power of choice (i.e., the moral and some other incentive). Yet, to hold two determinants of choice in tandem would be tantamount for Kant to an inversion of the moral order of incentives. Allowing a non-moral determinant to be a governing incentive along side the moral means, in essence, that the exclusive authority of the moral as the supreme incentive has been usurped. Such an inversion is the very definition of evil. For these reasons, there can be no such thing as a moral duality in the Kantian paradigm.

The deductive elimination of these two possibilities narrows Kant's inquiry to an either/or: Humanity as a species is *either good or evil*. With the narrowing down to only these two possibilities, Kant establishes that the species must have a universal disposition. The alternative is that individuals determine their own moral standing, which requires that the species be morally neutral. Kant has already shown such neutrality to be impossible, however. While Kant does not, in these introductory arguments, establish whether humanity is good or whether humanity is evil, he does ascertain the validity and necessity of a universal moral disposition in the human species.

With this established, Kant moves on to argue for how we must cognize the moral nature or disposition of humanity. By definition, to speak of a *moral* disposition means: (1) that it is rooted in freedom (an essential point for establishing moral culpability and imputability), and (2) that it relates to maxim-making. The status of the moral disposition as a *universal disposition*, however, implies two further points: (1) that the disposition must be cognized as innate in the individual (i.e., present from the individual's very first use of freedom, lest we assume a moment of moral neutrality), and (2) as such, this moral disposition does not merely relate to maxim-making in general, but represents the first (or universal) ground of all maxims—whether good or evil.

Understanding the consistency of Kant's argument depends upon seeing the introduction of freedom as a continuation of his discussion of the universal disposition

of the species rather than a new discussion centered on the individual. The latter movement would be a rupture in his argumentative flow, whereas the former represents simply a feature of the cognizing process of the moral disposition of the species. If we maintain a universal moral disposition (as Kant argues we must), we must also posit an accompanying notion of *freedom universal* in keeping with Kant's former plan for cognizing the disposition as *moral*. This freedom universal explains how the human disposition earns a moral status and imputes this status to the individual. Kant confirms this point by highlighting the biblical narrative of The Fall wherein Adam determines the moral bend of the species. Kant affirms the truth of the Adamic narrative in an a-historical sense, taking Adam to be a pictorial representation of the freedom universal. The transcendental character of moral cognition indicates that the freedom universal does not stand in time in a single historical figure, but must be thought of as standing outside of time and has made its choice from this vantage point. The disposition's innateness speaks of its presence in the individual to whom, as part of the species, the universal is passed, while the role of freedom and imputation resides in the freedom universal.

Kant's argument does not in its initial stages indicate whether the human disposition is good or evil, but it is clear where he is headed, namely, that humanity is evil by nature. But the road to this conclusion must first go through question of necessity: *Can we admit that the human species is evil by nature, but not evil by necessity?* Kant addresses the relationship between humanity's predispositions and propensities as a way of showing how we can affirm a dispositional bend to the species without making such a bend necessary to the very concept of the species. Kant outlines three basic predispositions in humanity (viz., animality, humanity, and personality) that encapsulates the range of incentives for the exercise of freedom, from humanity's baser instincts all the way to the more lofty reverence for the moral law. According to Kant, each of these predispositions is inherently good, though not immune to perversion. The importance of presupposing these predispositions to be good in their original state, for Kant, rests in the danger of finding them to the contrary. If evil can be simply attributed

to a natural or original predisposition (e.g., animality), then a subsequent evil nature would be necessary for humanity, and thereby neither imputable nor rooted in freedom.

The inherent goodness of humanity's predispositions makes way for Kant's discussion of propensity as manifest in three forms of moral evil (viz., frailty, impurity, and depravity). Each of these forms of corruption represents what Kant calls an inversion of the moral order of incentives. Each of the incentives found under the heading of humanity's predisposition to the good is sufficient, when considered alone, for determining the actions of humanity. There is an appropriate prioritization of these incentives, however, which when violated is moral corruption. Humanity ought to subordinate all incentives to the incentive of the moral law; and when any incentive (e.g., one found under the heading of animality) is raised to a level equal with or greater than the moral law, the moral order of incentives is inverted, the disposition is corrupted, and human beings example a propensity to evil. Since it is self-evident in Kant's eyes that humans do not act solely according to the moral law, we must infer that the ground of all maxims, i.e., humanity's universal moral disposition, is corrupt, having adopted into its supreme maxim an inverted order of moral incentives. In this way, Kant is able to assert that humanity as a species has a predisposition to good, but in its prioritization of the incentives can be, and apparently is, evil in disposition. Kant avers that the species is reasonably established to be evil insofar as it bears an inverted order of moral incentives, but it is not necessarily so insofar as its incentives need not be disordered by definition.

Synopsis of Book Two of Religion¹³⁴

At the opening of Book Two, Kant introduces the antithesis of our corrupt humanity, established in Book One, namely, humanity in its full moral perfection. Cognition commends belief in such a perfect humanity under the presumption that the

¹³⁴ According to Gordon Michalson: 'With the doctrine of radical evil and the related account of moral regeneration, we find Kant discovering the limits of his own Pelagianism'. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 7. Contrary to Michalson, this 'original predisposition to good' does not necessarily indicate Pelagianism. Rather, Kant's discussion of this in Book One seems to point to more of a Thomistic notion of what the will desires is good.

world is meaningful and created by God. In Kant's view, only such a perfect humanity is pleasing to God, and therefore, only an example of perfect humanity could constitute an object of divine pleasure sufficient to cause God (who is supremely concerned with the moral) to create the world. And since it is evident that our innate, corrupt disposition clearly falls short of this ideal, we must presume the existence of a being who does possess such a pristine disposition. This being, Kant names 'the prototype' (*Urbild*).

This moral prototype is cognized by Kant as both an eternal divine being, and a participant in human nature: The prototype is a divine-human being. Kant submits that this union of divinity with humanity is constitutive of a divine condescension wherein the prototype, or the divine Son of God as Kant calls him, willingly took on humanity of his own accord. The reason Kant conceives of the prototype in this way is because Kant is unable to conceive of our evil humanity willingly throwing off its own corruption and elevating itself to the standard of holiness; and therefore, Kant submits the divine-human union in the prototype can be cognized no other way than as a divine being who willingly takes on human nature.

Kant's pursuit of an answer to the question of moral hope under the rubric of human cognition of God bids him to avoid leaving the prototype as a stagnant ideal. Given that a person's disposition is empirically inaccessible, our understanding of the disposition depends on the outward display of the inward moral bend. Thus, our understanding of the prototypical disposition, Kant suggests, also depends on us cognizing a picture of moral activity that reflects the prototype's inward dispositional perfection. For this reason, Kant posits a transcendental, non-temporal history of the prototype. This narrative is much like the gospel narrative of Jesus of Nazareth, but unlike a strictly historical narrative, the prototypical narrative is a type of non-history commended through reason alone: It is how we must cognize the prototype, not what we have observed about him through some set of historical events. As such, the transcendental narrative, suggests Kant, is universally valid and accessible to all. Now simply because Kant bids us to a type of transcendental non-history, this does not mean that the cognized narrative could not be manifest in history. To the contrary, Kant argues that an historical manifestation of the prototype must be possible. However, since the

prototypical disposition is empirically inaccessible, there arises an epistemic problem: We could never know that an individual was the prototype. And it is for this reason that Kant contends that the required prototype must always to be sought only in reason.

Now in the face of humanity's dispositional corruption and subsequent moral peril, the prototype grounds moral hope. As established in Book One, the human individual begins with a corrupt disposition, displeasing to God, which belongs to the human species universally conceived. As a result, the human individual is in need of a new disposition if she is to become well pleasing to God. The prototype alone possesses a disposition that pleases God, and therefore, Kant submits, it is only the adoption of this prototypical disposition that can give us hope of being found pleasing before the divine judge. Such an adoption is possible because of the Son of God's condescension in taking on humanity; thus, the prototypical disposition is available to the human individual. Moral conversion, then, is a revolution in disposition wherein the convert adopts the prototype's disposition in the place of the innate, corrupt disposition, and in this way moral hope is secured: With this ideal disposition now present within the convert, there is good reason to hope that God (who judges the heart) will count the convert as pleasing.

Kant does not presume this solution to radical evil is without its difficulties, however. Instead, he raises three problems facing the application of moral conversion, two of which are epistemological in nature, while the third concerns the anatomy of moral hope. The two epistemological problems result from the disposition's empirical inaccessibility. This inaccessibility prevents us (or anyone else) from knowing our true dispositional bend. Hence, we face two questions: (1) Can even God judge our disposition? and (2) Can we ever be assured that our disposition has improved? The first question is easily resolved: Kant presumes that while we may not perceive our dispositional bend, the perfect judge, who judges the heart, must know our disposition. In the second question, we face a pragmatic issue: While Kant feels a modicum of moral uneasiness is healthy, he acknowledges that without any assurance of dispositional change, despair seems inevitable and perseverance impossible. Kant's solution seeks a balance where assurance is secured, but not with a certainty that gives way to

complacency. Essentially, Kant suggests one must exercise moral faith, following the prototypical example, and after a time, examine whether their life shows evidence of moral improvement. If there is such evidence, one may reasonably presume their disposition has improved, but if, despite one's best efforts, there is morally stagnation or regress, they can entertain no hope of ever improving. Therefore, moral faith entails both inevitable uncertainty (given empirical limitations) and reasonable hope, or lack thereof (given the empirical evidence).

Kant's third difficulty regards the question of how the dispositional revolution serves to secure moral hope and satisfy divine justice. There are three aspects of the convert's predicament that this dispositional revolution serves to remedy: (1) the infinite moral debt incurred by the convert's original dispositional corruption, (2) the finite moral debt incurred through particular transgressions by the convert, and (3) the convert's lack of positive righteousness before God. By fleshing out the dynamics of how the convert's adoption of the prototypical disposition serves to address each of these failings, Kant is able to show the anatomy of how moral hope/redemption is secured.

Regarding the convert's original dispositional debt, we find that such debt is, according to Kant, infinite because the corruption resides in the disposition itself: It is the disposition that gives rise to all corrupt maxims. In this light, there is nothing salvageable about the disposition, and justice can only be satisfied with its death. A judicial difficulty emerges, however, as one considers the distinction between the pre-conversion individual (i.e., the old man under the corrupt disposition) and the post-conversion individual (i.e., the new man under the prototypical disposition). While the old man deserves death, this penalty is inappropriate to the new man; yet, the old man and the new man are both physically represented by a single individual. How then is God to delve out justice? Here Kant shows the initial significance of the dispositional revolution. Since the old man and new man are titles based on dispositional affinities, the dispositional revolution of conversion is death to the old man: The old man is the human individual under the corrupt disposition, the abandonment of this disposition in favor of the prototypical disposition marks the death of the old man—the individual is

no longer united to the corrupt disposition. Thus, according to Kant, conversion itself satisfies justice's demand regarding the old man's infinite moral debt.

While this conversion (or death) satisfies the infinite debt of the old man, however, the new man still retains debt for particular transgressions during the process of "sanctification"—if we can use that term. This represents the second feature of the convert's predicament, and thus, the second hurdle for moral hope. Where the resolution of the convert's infinite, dispositional debt centers on the dispositional revolution, the resolution here involves the suffering of the prototype. Post-conversion failings are distinct from pre-conversion failings because they do not arise from the disposition, but from weakness amidst the post-conversion process of moral improvement—the convert, by definition, has abandoned the corrupt disposition. Post-conversion debt is, therefore, finite because it concerns the particular transgression, not the dispositional nature itself. As such, this debt may be paid for by another—namely, the prototype. The dispositional union between the convert and the prototype provides the basis for atonement in that there is already a moral union between convert and prototype: The convert is united to a once foreign disposition (*viz.*, that of the prototype) with its merits, and the prototype is equally united to once foreign moral debts (*viz.*, those of the convert). In this light, the prototype may suffer in payment for the convert's finite moral debt.

Once both infinite and finite debts have been resolved, there still remains the third and final problem. While the infinite and finite debts no longer provoke displeasure in God, this is at some remove from establishing the convert as positively pleasing to God: The convert has a need for positive righteousness. And while an individual may seek to fill this moral lacuna with good deeds, Kant is clear that such deeds can never exceed our moral duty. Thus, Kant again points to the union between the convert and prototype as the source of positive righteousness—a source hinted at earlier in this summary. Just as the demerits of humanity's corrupt disposition are imputable to the individual, so the merits of the prototype's disposition are imputable to the convert—the convert's new disposition is pleasing to God. Moreover, insofar as the prototype has willfully undergone a form of suffering not required by duty and without any personal benefit, the prototype has acquired a surplus of righteousness. In the convert's union to

the prototype, this excess of righteousness is imputed to the convert. Therefore, with all debts paid and divine pleasure secured, hope reaches its fullness for the individual.

Synopsis of Book Three of Religion

At the opening of Book Three, Kant highlights a conflict that exists within the moral convert. Kant suggests that while a given individual may undergo a revolution in disposition, abandoning humanity's corrupt disposition for the disposition of the prototype, this dispositional revolution does not erase the influence of the evil principle. Rather, the prototypical disposition only provides moral freedom. The human individual, who is otherwise bound under the corrupt disposition, may adopt the prototype's good disposition and live under its dominion. Nevertheless, both dispositions reside in humanity considered universally, and the convert must combat the evil principle by clinging to the good disposition.

This combat sets the tone for Book Three. The moral convert bears the responsibility to undo this evil, but the question of Book Three is how. Kant suggests that what places the convert in danger of moral regress is not primarily the convert's raw nature, but is his communion with other human beings. Kant thinks it inevitable that humans that begin with a corrupt disposition as innate, when brought together, will naturally corrupt one another. Book Three centres on overcoming the negative effects of the communal context on moral progress and hope. Kant's solution to this type of contextual moral regress involves an intentional banding together of individuals with a view to the prevention of evil and the promotion of the good. To combat the evil principle, the moral convert must unite with other converts under the good principle. Only by establishing such an ethical community can we hope that the good principle will win the day over evil.

Kant's vision for the ethical community has three main features. First, it must be constituted under non-coercive laws; in other words, those who are united under the moral law must be allowed to adhere freely to the moral law. Second, the ethical community proper is the totality of all ethical societies. Since the duties of virtue concern the entire human race, individual ethical societies do not constitute the ethical

community on their own. Third, this ethical community (or kingdom) has need for a ruling authority. Kant's description of this authority (e.g., the authority must know the most intimate parts of humans and be able to exercise true justice accordingly) leads him to conclude that God himself must oversee the ethical community. This threefold picture of the ethical community, Kant admits, is an ideal that may not be attained by individual human effort, but the task of instantiating such a community is a duty of a special kind, namely, one that belongs to the human species. For this reason, only individuals who are united (specifically in the form of a visible church) in the hope that God himself will one day establish the ethical community can hope to carry out this duty.

Kant insists that a true church must have a universally valid foundation, and this emphasis leads into Kant's discussion of pure religious faith. For Kant, a pure religious faith is a faith that has its roots in reason and the moral law. This type of faith is distinct from a purely historical faith. Pure religious faith is built on a rational, and thereby universally valid, foundation, whereas historical faith requires that humans have access to particular facts that are contingent. Thus, only pure religious (or rational) faith can found a universal church. Despite Kant's claim that pure religious faith's moral/rational foundation is the only sufficient foundation for the true church, he does not suggest that rational faith can be established without an accompanying historical faith. This need for the historical is specifically due to human weakness that feels a need for revealed religion in order to be satisfied. Given this felt need, ecclesiastical faith, while not part of pure religion, must serve as a vehicle for pure religious faith.

Here there arises the interplay between ecclesiastical faith and pure moral faith. According to Kant, there are many different kinds of so-called revealed faiths, but only one religion. Kant claims that various faiths can meet with the same true religion and serve as its vehicle; hence, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity do not represent disparate religions but only disparate faiths. Kant is careful not to assert that all these faiths *are* vehicles for true religion, but only that all faiths *can be* vehicles for religion. For Kant, the key to this relationship is that the faith in question has to be interpreted and re-interpreted until the moral doctrines are brought to the fore.

It is in this interpretive process that the biblical scholar becomes important for Kant. Kant admits that human weakness feels a need for a sacred text to serve as an authority for the community. Thus, there is a comparable need for scriptural scholars who draw from the holy texts the pure moral doctrines. The scriptural scholar is central to Kant's picture of how human weakness (which demands a holy book) and pure rational religion come together: The human demand for sacred scripture gives rise to the additional demand for scholars who examine the origin, language, and historicity of scripture in order to pull from the text the official understanding of the church community. When these scriptural scholars draw from the text the pure moral doctrines, humans become able to embrace rational religion amidst their felt need for a sacred or revealed text.

It is important to understand that the pure religious doctrines of which Kant speaks do not merely concern moral behaviour, but Kant's dispositional philosophy as well. Saving faith, for Kant, is faith in the good disposition. Two conditions characterize this faith: the hope of being absolved of transgressions before the divine judge and the hope of a conversion to a new life conformable to duty. The two conditions add up to one faith and belong together necessarily—as seen in Book Two. Thus, the pure moral doctrines, which the biblical scholar must explicate, include Kant's dispositional philosophy of Books One and Two.

It must be understood that this emphasis on rational religion does not necessarily preclude the presence of the historical in a rational faith. Rather, Kant's position centers more on *the role* of the historical in a rational faith. According to Kant, one may be legitimately awakened to the prototype by way of an empirical example (e.g., Jesus of Nazareth), and such a person would be set on the path of pure moral faith just as if they were awakened to rational religious faith through good life conduct. However, if one makes the empirical manifestation *the condition* for faith, such a faith becomes contingent, no longer universally accessible, and thus no longer rational. Therefore, rational religion must not merely possess the prototypical truths but hold these truths as necessary.

For the purpose of Book Three, Kant is particularly concerned with the church that he sees as the example of rational religion, namely, Christianity. While Christianity arose out of Judaism, Kant denies that Judaism shared the universal seed of rational religion. To Kant, Judaism is not a religion at all. It emphasizes ceremonial laws, political solidarity, and genealogies. Essentially, Judaism is concerned with external conduct, not the disposition, thinks Kant, and thus, it is not a rational religion.¹³⁵ The importance of this point is that, for Kant, Christianity is understood to have latched hold of Judaism as its vehicle and then dispensed with this vehicle in just the sort of way Kant commends. Christianity sought, for the sake of human weakness, to draw a link between it and the Jewish faith, but it replaced ceremonial law with a concern for the disposition, replaced earthly concerns with the after life, and did away with hollow rituals.

Kant admits that Christianity in some forms can diverge from rational religion by making the historical the condition of faith. When this possible divergence is combined with the various blemishes of Christian history, including strife, division, and persecution, it would seem that Christianity is not a rational religion, but a dogmatic one. Based solely on the political history, Kant admits, there is nothing to commend Christianity as true religion. Nevertheless, for Kant it is clear—presumably due to the similarities between Books One and Two and the teachings of the New Testament—that Christianity in its pure form was instantiated as a pure religious faith. And for this reason, Kant contends that the present is the best point in church history, as now there are those who sow this seed of true religious faith, which he hopes will free religion from arbitrary dogmatic and ecclesiastical disputes, and one day unite human beings in a visible representation of the kingdom of God.

¹³⁵ Kant's understanding of Judaism will seem erroneous to most modern readers who are familiar with the Jewish faith. For our purposes in this dissertation, Kant's accuracy on this point is less important than the role it serves in his philosophy of religion. Thus, we will not be concerned with correcting his understanding of Judaism, but only with understanding it in the context of his arguments.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN EXEGETICAL PRESENTATION AND PARTIAL DEFENCE OF KANT'S RELIGION: EXPERIMENT ONE

I. Book One: The Human Disposition and the Problem of Depravity

As we now move into an expository treatment of Book One in support of the summary previously given, it should be noted that I will not have the opportunity in the space provided to cover every paragraph. For example, I omit 6:36-44 from the expository analysis, since (as I understand it) this is merely a reiteration of arguments made in earlier sections of Book One. We will be focusing here on what I take to be the thematic heart of Kant's argument, consisting of three exegetical points of focus. The first two points are found in Kant's opening arguments (6:18-26 and 6:20-26, respectively).¹ These arguments set the stage for Kant's assessment of the human predicament that follows. There are two discernable lines of argumentation in his Introduction. The first is Kant's argument for a universal moral nature of humanity as a species that must be either good or evil. The second is Kant's argument for how we must cognize this universal moral disposition. These two lines of argumentation set the agenda for Kant's discussion in 6:26-35, which is the subject of the third exegetical segment. Whereas 6:26ff. is often thought to represent the most substantial part of Kant's argument, I argue that it exists for a more specific purpose, namely, to analyze the relationship between good predispositions and dispositional corruption in preparation for Kant's eventual declaration that humanity is evil by nature.

Religion 18-26 (*Humanity's Universal Moral Nature*)

At the opening of Book One of *Religion*, Kant begins by pronouncing a 'complaint as old as history, even as old as the older art of poetic fiction' that "the

¹ Kant refers to these opening arguments later in Book One as the 'Introduction' (6:36), identifying them as established points of reference for his analysis. Henceforth, Kant's opening arguments in 6:18-26 will be referred to as the 'Introduction'.

world lieth in evil” (6:18). He contrasts this ancient lament over humanity’s ‘decline into evil’ (6:18), with the ‘[m]ore recent ... heroic opinion ... that the world steadfastly ... forges ahead in the very opposite direction, namely from bad to better’ or that at the very least ‘the human being [has] the predisposition to move in this direction’ (6:18-20). Kant suggests that while this optimism may be an accurate assessment of certain cultures in terms of civil advancement, it does not seem to be an accurate assessment of the moral direction of humanity. Kant highlights ‘the moralists, from Seneca to Rousseau’ as those who hold such optimism and submits that they clearly ‘have not drawn this view from experience’ (6:20). Quite the contrary, argues Kant, ‘we may presume that it is ... just an optimistic presupposition’ (6:20).

Despite his initial dismissal of the moralist’s optimism regarding human nature, Kant does not move forward presumptuously or in a reactionary way toward the opposite extreme of moral pessimism. Rather, he is aware that there are various ways of conceiving the moral nature of humanity. For example, ‘the question arises whether a middle ground may not at least be possible, namely that, as a species, the human being can neither be good nor evil, or, at any rate, that he can be the one just as much as the other, partly good, partly evil’ (6:20). The exploration of these ‘middle ground’ possibilities constitutes Kant’s initial inquiry into human nature. His elimination of these possibilities in the arguments to follow will leave Kant with the conclusion that humanity as a species must be either good or evil. Kant’s strategy is not one of a simple appeal to experience, nor can it be, for in order to declare a human being to be evil, one must be able to observe his maxims, which ‘we cannot do ... unproblematically even within ourselves; hence the judgment that an agent is an evil human being cannot reliably be based on experience’ (6:20). Instead, Kant’s inquiry takes the form of an analytic investigation complete with assumptions and inferences.

Kant’s inquiry as one regarding ‘the species’ (6:20) could be construed as bringing an assumed universality to bear at the outset. However, Kant’s analysis of the middle ground position that humanity is ‘neither good nor evil’ (6:20) provides a kind of sub-argument against the possibility that human nature is an individual rather than universal affair. If moral nature is individually determined, then good and evil are not

characteristics of the species. Consequently, if it can be shown that this middle ground position (i.e., that humanity as a species is morally neutral) is problematic, then a universal moral nature in humanity would be established. Kant identifies moral neutrality with what he calls the 'rigorist's criteria' (6:23; cf. 6:22), which holds that the species must be morally neutral so that the individual can, by way of 'the absolute spontaneity of the power of choice (of freedom)', determine his own moral standing by what he personally '*has incorporated ... into his maxim* (has made ... into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself)' (6:24). Kant's treatment of this middle ground position represents the portion of his investigation that determines whether or not there is a universal moral nature. Kant gives two arguments *against* this possibility and *so for* the necessity of cognizing a moral disposition that belongs to the species as a whole, i.e., a universal moral disposition.

The first of Kant's arguments against moral neutrality appears in a footnote in 6:23. In this argument Kant contends that an indifference to the moral law ultimately becomes equal to a malevolent resistance to the moral law. Moral indifference, thinks Kant, would only be possible 'if the moral law in us were not an incentive of the power of choice' (6:23). However, since it is foundational to Kant's philosophy that 'the law is incentive' for the human species (cf. 6:27f. on the predisposition to personality), Kant concludes that 'the lack of the agreement of the power of choice with it [the moral law] ... is possible only as a consequence of a real and opposite determination of the power of choice, i.e. of a *resistance* on its part' (6:23). This resistance by the power of choice to the moral law signifies not neutrality, but a volitional movement against the moral law. Such resistance to the good can only be dubbed evil. Thus, Kant concludes that moral neutrality is simply impossible as it ultimately defaults to resistant malevolence.

The second argument, appearing in 6:24, is also rooted in the universality of the moral law, but takes on a slightly different dynamic. The former argument is stated in the negative (highlighting neutrality as resistance to the moral law), whereas this latter argument states it as a positive (neutrality as an elevation of competing incentives). Kant again begins with the premise that 'the moral law is itself an incentive in the judgment of reason' (6:24). If the moral law does not alone determine one's actions (as would be

the case for a neutral as opposed to good species), it indicates that ‘an incentive opposed to [the moral law] must have influence on the power of choice of the human being in question’ (6:24). Such opposing incentives can only obtain such influence, however, when the individual ‘incorporates the incentive (and consequently also the deviation from the moral law) into his maxim (in which case he is an evil human being)’ (6:24). In other words, one can only misprioritize moral incentives by choosing to usurp the natural place of the moral law, i.e., to elevate an opposing incentive to a competing status. Therefore, ‘it follows that [the deviant’s] disposition as regards the moral law is never indifferent (never neither good nor bad)’ (6:24).

Having eliminated the possibility that the species can be thought of as morally neutral, thereby establishing the universality of humanity’s moral disposition (whatever its moral bend), Kant moves on to consider the only other middle possibility, namely, that humanity as a species is both good and evil, or is good in part and evil in part. However, Kant’s argument against this moral duality is set forth in 6:24-25 (and a parallel is later reiterated in 6:36), in which he contends that the very notion of moral duality leads to contradiction. His argument builds upon the simplicity (or indivisible nature) of the moral law—to accept the moral law is to accept it without qualification. If one ‘is good in one part, he has incorporated the moral law into his maxim’ (6:24); and yet, if one is also ‘evil in some other part’ (6:24-25), we would need to maintain that ‘the moral law of compliance with duty in general is a single one and universal’ (6:25). Thus, ‘the maxim relating to [the moral law] would be universal yet particular at the same time: which is a contradiction’ (6:25). In this way, this second of the two middle ground possibilities is also eliminated.

To this point, although not yet bringing us to the actual nature of humanity’s disposition, Kant has moved us away from moral neutrality and moral duality to an either/or position: Humanity as a species is *either good or evil*. He has hinted at his favour for dispositional corruption by referring to the moralist’s position as ‘just an optimistic presupposition’ (6:20), but he continues his strategy in Book One of resisting any kind of premature conclusion. Rather, he closes the Introduction to Book One with the preliminary conclusion that we must cognize the moral disposition not as belonging

to individuals but to the species. This universal moral disposition must also be thought of, not in terms of neutrality or duality, but in terms of good or evil: '[B]y the "human being" of whom we say that he is good or evil by nature we are entitled to understand not individuals (for otherwise one human being could be assumed to be good, and another evil, by nature) but the whole species' (6:25). In short, Kant is satisfied that he has reached, through careful consideration and elimination of the possibilities, the human disposition universally conceived and morally fixed.

After providing clear arguments against moral neutrality and duality in reference to the species, Kant does something unexpected. He backs away from an unequivocal acceptance of his own conclusion, suggesting that this conclusion (while not resting on anthropological research) cannot be held as *proven* unless anthropological research demonstrates that there is no individual that stands as an exception to the dispositional bend we ultimately ascribe to the species (whether good or evil). As Kant puts it, 'this can only be demonstrated later on, if it transpires from anthropological research that the grounds that justify us in attributing one of these two characters [i.e., good and evil] to a human being as innate are of such a nature that there is no cause for exempting anyone from it, and that the character therefore applies to the species' (6:25-26). This disclaimer may be mere epistemological humility on Kant's part, but in light of the context of *Religion* as a whole, it seems likely that it is motivated by more important reasons.

First, if Kant's argument for a universal, morally fixed disposition is sufficient to draw a conclusion regarding the disposition of any individual, then Kant destroys the hope of a Christic redeemer. We may conclude, for example, that Jesus of Nazareth is not the sinless redeemer he claimed to be. Like all individuals, he is part of the human race, and therefore his disposition is fixed. If humanity is good, Christ is also good but not unique in this regard (a strikingly naïve conclusion), and if humanity is evil, Christ too is evil and cannot be our redeemer (a conclusion that Kant thinks cannot be known or in any way determined; cf. 6:63). Yet, as the argumentative thrust of Book One moves toward establishing the problem of humanity's moral corruption, the solution of which hinges on the prototype of perfect humanity set forth as our redeemer in Book Two, the complete elimination of the possibility of a morally distinct redeemer would

ultimately be detrimental to Kant's project. Second, as is well known, Kant roots moral hope in Book Two in a revolution of disposition, one that is conceived. Yet, any hope of having laid hold of an alternative disposition is impossible if Kant's argument gives license for us to draw dispositional conclusions regarding all individuals. We cannot hope that we have laid hold of an alternative good disposition, for we know from the above arguments that our disposition is evil without exception. Therefore, Kant must provide this disclaimer to prepare for moral hope in Book Two.

Religion 20-26 (*Cognizing Humanity's Moral Disposition*)

Returning to the Introduction with a different focus, we now examine Kant's understanding of how this universal nature or disposition (as previously established) must be cognized. Kant's first point regards the term 'nature'. He recognizes that the notion of a universal moral nature appears to lend itself to a concept of unruly desire that overshadows freedom, *forcing* individuals to act in a given manner. That is, *nature* is usually taken to be 'the opposite of the ground of actions [arising] from *freedom*' (6:21). Kant affirms that, when taken in this way, the term *nature* indeed 'stand[s] in direct contradiction to the predicates *morally* good or *morally* evil' (6:21) for, as Henry Allison has argued, the moral law and freedom imply each other.² However, this juxtaposition of the terms *moral* and *nature* does not move Kant to a type of outright Pelagianism (as some have suggested).³ Indeed, Kant's arguments to this point would prevent such a view since Pelagianism, with its emphasis on human freedom, comes very close to the rigorist's criteria previously refuted. Yet this similarity to the rigorist's criteria does not mean that Kant ignores Pelagian concerns for moral freedom and responsibility, only that his view (as will be touched on below) is more of a novel philosophical synthesis of Pelagian and Augustinian perspectives than a capitulation to either system.

Because the disposition is regarded as *moral*, we must hold, says Kant, that the disposition 'itself always be a deed of freedom' (6:21). Without such a view, the moral

² Allison, *Idealism and Freedom*, 114-118.

³ Michalson, Jr., *Fallen Freedom*, 7.

'use or abuse of the human being's power of choice ... could not be imputed to him ... [or] be called "moral"' (6:21). In other words, if we are to maintain that humanity's disposition is properly predicated as *moral*, and that it represents something for which human beings are culpable, 'the ground of evil cannot lie in any object *determining* the power of choice through inclination, not in any natural impulses' (6:21). This rootedness in freedom also indicates grounding in 'a rule that the power of choice itself produces for the exercise of its freedom, i.e., in a maxim' (6:21). Therefore, maintenance of a soft-determinist view of freedom, for example, in which the will is determined by 'natural impulses' (choosing what it wants and yet determined in what it wants), would be inadequate in Kant's view. In short, the designation of the disposition as *moral* implies a rootedness in *freedom*, a rootedness in freedom implies that the disposition is grounded in a *maxim*, and the grounding of the disposition in freedom and in a maxim implies that it is *imputable*.

This discussion of freedom could lead some to believe that Kant has switched from a discussion of 'the species' (6:20) to a discussion of individual autonomy. However, as Kant continues, he gives every indication that his inquiry regards the species considered universally. The disposition represents a foundation, or what Kant calls a 'subjective ground', for the individual's exercise of freedom. This universal base is antecedent to all individual uses of freedom, but it remains distinct from these individual manifestations. It is only their ground: '[B]y "the nature of a human being" we only understand here the subjective ground ... of the exercise of the human being's freedom in general ... antecedent to every deed that falls within the scope of the senses' (6:21). This subjective ground represents, not the individual's personal will, but rather a common universal power of choice for the species, which is the basis for the individual's adoption of various maxims and exercise of freedom. Kant asserts, 'Whenever we therefore say, "The human being is by nature good," or "He is by nature evil," this only means that he holds within himself a first ground ... for the adoption of good or evil (unlawful) maxims, and that he holds this ground *qua* human, universally' (6:21). The power of choice is not an individual diverse ground, but a single universal ground for the species that individual humans hold *qua* human. As Kant reiterates at the close of the

Introduction, 'by the "human being" of whom we say that he is good or evil by nature we are entitled to understand not individuals ... but the whole species' (6:25).

Since Kant's argument (already highlighted above) shows that the human species must be either good or evil (6:23f.), Kant is required to move to a position that is at least partially Augustinian in nature. Pelagianism (like the rigorist's criteria) requires at least a moment of moral neutrality *for the individual*, and thus must conceive *of the species* as being morally neutral so that such a moment is available for each individual. In doing away with such moral neutrality, Kant, amidst his affirmation of the Pelagian concern for freedom, ultimately must seek to hold the importance of freedom in tandem with the more Augustinian notion of the human species sharing a common disposition. To use Kant's language, 'We shall say, therefore, of one of these [two] characters [i.e., good and evil] ... that it is *innate* in him [the individual]' (6:21). In accord with an Augustinian perspective, this innateness indicates that the dispositional bend (whether good or evil) is 'the ground antecedent to every use of freedom given in experience ... and is ... present in the human being at the moment of birth' (6:22). Yet, in accord with the Pelagian concern for culpability, this bend is *moral* and so we must hold that 'the human being is alone [the dispositional bend's] author ... which must itself again lie in the free power of choice' (6:22). To make sense of this tension, we must distinguish between 'the free power of choice', which concerns the species, and the individual's 'use of freedom given in experience', which is 'innate' (6:22). To be consistent, Kant must place the freedom that chooses the disposition outside of the individual and inside the universal moral disposition.

While Kant highlights this concept of freedom universal prior to eliminating moral neutrality and duality, it is after these arguments that the rationale behind this point comes into sharpest view. Having narrowed the logical possibilities regarding the moral disposition to the either/or of good and evil in reference to the species, Kant has established that the disposition must be a single disposition that all individuals share. Its universality is not merely a type of commonality in which all individual dispositions are found to be alike, but rather a single disposition that belongs to humanity as a species. Since the species *must* be either good or evil, it must therefore bear a single disposition

that is the subjective ground for all individuals within the species. The use of freedom that answers the Pelagian concern is not the individual's will exercised following a time of moral neutrality but of freedom universally conceived. It is freedom universal that we share as members of the species, and it is the disposition chosen by freedom universal that we as individuals bear as innate. As Kant puts it, '[The disposition] has not been earned in time ([he who harbors it] has been the one way or the other *always, from his youth on*). The disposition ... can only be a single one, and applies to the entire use of freedom universally' (6:25).

The coming together of the notion that the disposition 'must be adopted through the free power of choice' (6:25) and the innateness of this disposition as 'present in the human being at the moment of birth' (6:22) is found in this concept of freedom universal. Kant submits in 6:31 that individual actions are 'performed in accordance with [the supreme] maxim'. This maxim, while innate to the individual, 'is adopted in the power of choice' (6:31), i.e., by freedom universal. Because this adoption '*precedes every deed*' (6:31) by the individual, this grounding maxim ultimately serves as 'the formal ground of every deed' (6:31). The adoption of the supreme maxim by freedom universal, while 'not ... earned in time' (6:25) (i.e., in a historical context), is nevertheless 'an intelligible deed' in keeping with the cognizing of the moral disposition: 'The former [i.e., the adoption of the formal ground of every deed] is an intelligible deed, cognizable through reason alone apart from any temporal condition; the latter [particular manifest vice] is sensible, empirical, given in time (*factum phenomenon*)' (6:31). For this reason, Kant calls the non-temporal adoption of the supreme maxim by freedom universal '*peccatum originarium*' (original sin), which indicates that freedom universal is not found in a single historical individual (e.g., Adam) but has chosen the dispositional bend for the species in a non-temporal way prior to any individuals' physical birth and subsequent exercise of freedom. We may note in this light Kant's emphasis on 'the moment of birth' (6:22) when speaking of innateness, as contrasted with his emphasis on the species, cognition, and non-temporality in reference to the choosing of the dispositional bend. The power of choice conceived

universally, then, provides the place where both the free and universal elements of the moral nature are found.

This process of cognizing the disposition does eventually reach certain limits at which Kant is forced to appeal to a level of inscrutability: ‘he holds within himself a first ground (to us inscrutable)’ (6:21). However, inscrutability is not appealed to in the face of contradiction, but rather, the appeal only comes in reference to the nature of freedom itself, i.e., ‘why I have adopted an evil maxim and not a good one instead’ (6:22) or ‘the cause of this adoption’ (6:25). It is in this aspect of freedom and freedom’s relationship to maxims that inscrutability is finally brought to bear, despite the fact that ‘we cannot avoid asking about it’ (6:25). While the supreme maxim’s adoption itself may be inscrutable, Kant’s analysis of the disposition is far from being dependent on inscrutability in its constitution. He presents the necessary features of the disposition as dictated by reason: it applies to the species, must be morally fixed, must be innate, must be rooted in freedom (universally conceived), and it must be imputable.

Religion 26-35 (*Good Predispositions and Moral Corruption*)⁴

In 6:26, Kant focuses on what he calls human ‘predispositions’ (*Anlagen*). These predispositions are an inextricable (or *original*) feature of the human species, i.e., they ‘belong to the possibility of human nature’ (6:28). According to Kant, these predispositions serve as ‘elements of the determination of the human being’ (6:26). In other words, each of the diverse incentives that determine the human being’s power of choice (e.g., respect for the moral law, ambition, compassion, etc.) falls under some larger predispositional heading, three of which—animality, humanity, and personality—Kant defines relative to the level of cognitive aptitude it requires. The first, the predisposition to animality, Kant defines as basic self-preservation, which is constitutive of a ‘merely *mechanical* self-love ... for which reason is not required’ (6:26). The second, ‘[t]he predisposition to humanity’ (6:27), also falls under the rubric of self-love

⁴ Kant’s treatment of the topic of predisposition and corruption goes beyond 6:26-35. In 6:36-39 Kant reiterates what he feels has been established on the topic. The exegesis here will draw occasionally on 6:36-39 for support, but because of its redundancy, the exposition undertaken here will not dwell there.

as a predispositional tendency to 'evaluate one's own happiness relative to others'. Unlike animality, however, this predisposition requires a certain level of discursive reasoning as it '*involves comparison* (for which reason is required)' (6:27). The third of these, '[t]he predisposition to personality' (6:27), is simply 'the susceptibility to [have] respect for the moral law *as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice*' (6:27). This predisposition exists for the sole purpose of provoking obedience to the moral law—a unique feature of the human species. Of all humanity's predispositions, this predisposition is uniquely rooted in reason and thus embodies 'the idea of humanity considered wholly intellectually' (6:28).

Beneath these three headings (animality, personality, and humanity) are found the incentives that determine the power of choice. Kant submits that each of these predispositions is good in its original state in the sense that it stands in agreement with the moral law. By this, Kant does not simply mean that these predispositions avoid conflict with the moral law but, to the contrary, that they in fact bid conformity to the moral law. In this sense, the original *state* of goodness is less related to an implicit ontology and more like an original function: 'All these predispositions in the human being are not only (negatively) *good* (they do not resist the moral law) but they are also predispositions *to the good* (they demand compliance with it)' (6:28). In this light, Kant's claim indicates that humanity has within its very nature (or very possibility) predispositions that testify to and, in this sense, serve as a guide for the moral law. For as these predispositions 'belong to the possibility of human nature' (6:28), they cannot be stripped from the human person; thus, there is an immutable testimonial within humanity to what human beings ought to be.

It may seem at this point that Kant has answered the question regarding humanity's dispositional bend. If the very possibility of human nature requires the presence of good predispositions, then it would seem that humanity as a species is good in disposition. However, such is not Kant's intent for, in the midst of describing these predispositions, he highlights various ways these good predispositions may be perverted and turned into vices. For example, the predisposition to humanity, with its tendency to compare, may move from a search for '*merely equal worth* [with others]' (6:27) to 'an

unjust desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others' (6:27). Hence, humanity's predispositions, while good, are not incorruptible. Kant's notion of predispositions here seems to be reflective of a type of Thomistic scheme. In his *Treatise on Law*, Aquinas submits that actions are always set in motion by reason for the sake of obtaining a certain good (specifically related to felicity), and the concern of the moral law is to order human reason in such a way as to guide human beings to this good in an appropriate manner. Kant's account echoes this notion in reference to the Highest Good: The good that is sought by humans can only be found in obedience to the moral law, yet humans can seek their desired good through unlawful means, and such a misdirected search gives rise to vice. To put it another way, evil is not done for evil's sake but represents a perverted quest for some good. Kant confirms this interpretation most clearly in 6:37: 'The depravity of human nature is therefore not to be named *malice*, if we take this word in the strict sense, namely as a disposition ... to incorporate evil *qua evil* for incentive into one's maxim ... but should rather be named *perversity* of the heart, and this heart is then called *evil* because of what results'.

For Kant, the importance of establishing the goodness of humanity's predispositions regards the issue of necessity. If moral evil can simply be blamed on a certain predisposition (e.g., the predisposition to animality), it 'makes the human a purely *animal* being' (6:35) and strips humanity of its moral freedom and culpability. If the statement *he is evil by nature* is derived 'from the concept of the human being in general' (6:32), i.e., from a predisposition that belongs to the possibility of human nature, 'then the quality [evil] would be necessary' (6:32). The notion of *necessity* moves in contradiction to the notion of *freedom* and moral *culpability*. For this reason, Kant's excavation of reason must show that evil is 'not a natural predisposition but something that a human being can be held accountable for' (6:32). If the human being is found to possess a propensity to *moral* evil, such evil must be recognized as having its roots in freedom not merely in physical propensities (cf. 6:35f.): 'Every propensity is either physical ... or moral ... In the first sense [i.e., physical propensity], there is no propensity to moral evil, for the latter [i.e., moral propensity] must originate from freedom; a physical propensity ... to whatever use of freedom, be it for good or evil, is a

contradiction. Hence a propensity to evil can only attach to the moral faculty of choice' (6:31). For this reason Kant delays his conclusion regarding the moral disposition of humanity: humanity's original predispositions are good and free of blame for moral evil—even if humanity's moral disposition is not.

Having established how good predispositions can logically coexist with corruption, Kant is able to move on to discussion of the nature of moral corruption without placing such vice in the category of necessity. He introduces moral corruption in his transition from the topic of predisposition to the topic of propensity. Propensity, according to Kant, refers to the working out of the dispositional bend of the species (whether good or evil). He reiterates that humanity's moral propensity (*propensio*) must be clearly 'distinguished from a predisposition' (6:29). He also acknowledges that a propensity, like a predisposition, 'can indeed be innate' (6:29); however, a *moral* propensity must 'be thought of (if it is good) as *acquired*, or (if evil) as *brought* by the human being *upon* himself' (6:29). In other words, *moral* propensity must be rooted in the human being's (in the sense of the species) freedom as opposed to humanity's predispositions (which are good) or strictly physical propensity (which is not *moral*). The rootedness of the moral disposition in freedom [universal] has already been thoroughly treated in the above examination of 6:20-26. Suffice to say that Kant believes he has disarmed the problem of necessity in his treatment of predispositions as contrasted with the nature of corruption, and is therefore ready to address the nature of the moral disposition without concern.

What should be clear from the interpretation thus far is that nowhere has Kant made a declaration regarding the dispositional bend of the human species, and therefore his initial discussion in the section on propensity is merely an act of defining what he considers to be the 'different grades' (6:29) of corruption that would exist if humanity's disposition were evil. Kant provides three of these: frailty (*fragilitas*), impurity (*impuritas*), and depravity (*vitiositas, pravitas*). Frailty speaks of a general weakness, which discovers that while the moral law seems 'objectively or ideally' (6:29) the greatest of incentives, in practice it seems 'subjectively' weaker than other incentives. Impurity speaks of the unfortunate tendency of the heart not to treat the moral law as 'its

sufficient incentive, but on the contrary ... [to need] still other incentives besides it in order to determine the power of choice' (6:30). As Kant summarizes it, 'actions conforming to duty are not done purely from duty' (6:30). Depravity—the most severe grade of corruption—speaks to 'the propensity of the power of choice to maxims that subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others (not moral ones)' (6:30).

Each of the above corruptions exemplifies what Kant later, in 6:36, indicates is a misprioritization of the moral order of incentives (those found under the heading of humanity's predisposition to the good). Ideally, all incentives should be prioritized in such a way as to secure the moral law's place as supreme incentive, and when this is not done, the moral ordering of incentives is overturned: '[T]he human being (even the best) is evil only because he reverses the moral order of his incentives in incorporating them into his maxims' (6:36). The corrupt human being 'incorporates the moral law into those maxims, together with the law of self-love' (6:36). However, because these two laws cannot 'stand on an equal footing' (6:36), it follows that 'one [i.e., the moral] must be subordinated to the other [i.e., self-love] as its supreme condition' (6:36). Since the moral law ought to, without qualification, be the supreme incentive, 'this reversal of incentives ... [is] contrary to the moral order' (6:36).

Again, it must be remembered that Kant's discussion of moral propensity is still in the context of an investigation of the species, specifically with a view to answering the question of its dispositional bend. Therefore, we must be careful to recognize that Kant has not redirected his argument; rather, as demonstrated in 6:18-26, his is undoubtedly a universal, as opposed to individual, inquiry. As shown above, Kant begins his arguments in Book One centred on the human species, and his conclusion in 6:32 is also centred on the species: "He is evil *by nature*" simply means that evil applies to him considered in his species'. Thus, it must be remembered that the inversion of incentives, if reflective of the human being, is a dispositional corruption rooted in the will universal. This interpretation is essential to Kant's consistency, for he assumes that the mere defining of the three grades of moral corruption (*corruptio*) which exemplify this type of inversion is sufficient to establish as evil the moral disposition of humanity *as a whole*.

This sufficiency is precisely what Kant infers immediately following his definitions of frailty, impurity, and depravity: ‘the propensity to evil is here established (as regards actions) in the human being, even the best’ (6:30). Kant does not feel it necessary to go into ‘the formal proof ... of the multitude of woeful examples that the experience that the human *deeds* parades before us’ (6:32-33), nor does his argument appear to require an appeal to particular human deeds; for Kant, it is common sense that humans do not act according to the moral law alone as sufficient incentive.⁵ And since it is evident that human beings do not act solely according to the moral law, it is equally evident that the ground of all maxims (i.e., the supreme maxim adopted by the will universal) must be corrupt—we are simply left with no other option. It is the fundamental nature of this dispositional flaw that gives rise to Kant’s well-known declaration that this corruption is *radical*: ‘This evil is *radical*, since it corrupts the ground of all maxims’ (6:37).⁶

II. Book Two: The Prototype’s Disposition and Moral Conversion

This section provides an expository interpretation of key portions of Book Two of *Religion*. Once again, we will not have the opportunity in the space provided to cover every paragraph. Instead, we will be focusing on the thematic heart of Kant’s argument, where his case for moral hope comes into sharpest relief. The first such section, 6:60-66, focuses on the prototype of dispositional perfection presented through the process of cognition as a necessary ideal if the world is to have meaning. In this section, Kant establishes the prototype’s significance for us as human beings and also fleshes out the

⁵ Kant does list some of these historical ills in 6:33-34. As apparent from the flow of Kant’s argument set forth above, these ‘formal proofs’ from experience are not the basis for his conclusion that humanity is evil by nature.

⁶ The accuracy of the interpretation defended above is confirmed in 6:41-44 where Kant examines the biblical account of the Fall. Kant suggests that such a narrative is helpful when conceived of as a non-historical picture of the universal will and choosing of the disposition, or a type of transcendental narrative ‘without regard to the condition of time’ (6:41). Rather than being an appeal to biblical language when all philosophical resources have run out, as it is in Michalson’s interpretation (Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 117), it is used to illustrate the truths of reason.

particulars of how we must cognize this prototypical ideal. In the next section, 6:62-71, Kant explains the details of what moral faith (or practical faith in the Son of God) looks like and the degree of assurance we may have regarding our having secured dispositional redemption. Finally, we focus on 6:66-76 in which Kant fleshes out the significance of the union that takes place between the convert and prototype in the appropriation of the prototypical disposition. It is in this section that Kant lays out the anatomy of moral conversion and the subsequent relationship between the prototype and those who have adopted his disposition, which grounds the hope of becoming pleasing to God. With this sketch in hand, we turn to 6:60-66.

Religion 60-66 (*Cognizing the Prototype*)

At the beginning of Book Two, Kant introduces what he calls '*Humanity ... in its full moral perfection.*' Such humanity embodies the very antithesis of our corrupt nature (established in Book One), and is, to Kant's mind, the only reason why God would create the world. Kant submits that morally perfect humanity is '[t]hat which alone can make the world the object of divine decree and the end of creation' (6:60). Even though he gives little explanation for why he thinks so, it appears that for Kant only such humanity could incite God (who is supremely concerned with the moral) to create via his pleasure with it: 'from [*Humanity in its full moral perfection*] happiness follows in the will of the Highest Being directly as from its supreme condition' (6:60), and thus, 'In him God loved the world' (6:60). The perfect humanity referred to here must (given Kant's argument for corruption in Book One) possess a disposition distinct from our own, one that exhibits the moral perfection our humanity lacks. This dispositionally ideal humanity Kant refers to as 'the prototype' (6:61). Given that such an ideal is needed to retain the meaningfulness of the world, Kant presses ahead in cognizing the prototype, which indicates that he takes the meaningfulness of our world to be axiomatic, most probably on the basis of what Michalson calls 'the principle of proportionality'.⁷

⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 38.

The prototype, Kant tells us, has existed within God from all eternity and is not created (indicating both its transcendence and non-temporality). Kant's assumption is that the prototype is linked to the very being of God; i.e., insofar as God is necessarily eternal, so too is this perfect humanity: 'This human being, alone pleasing to God, "is in him from all eternity", the idea of him proceeds from God's being; he is not, therefore, a created thing' (6:60). The argument throughout Book Two indicates that the prototype is cognized not merely as a type of humanity but as a type of divine-humanity. The prototype is 'God's only begotten Son, 'the *Word*' (the *Fiat!*) through which all other things are, and without whom nothing that is made would exist' (6:60). He is a 'divine human being [who] had actual possession of his eminence and blessedness from eternity' (6:64). Unlike humanity's corrupt disposition in Book One, the prototype, as divine, (apparently) possesses its dispositional perfection as an inherent and eternal property of its being.

The divine-human nature of the prototype, including its inherent and eternal perfection, sets up the basic concept that grounds the entirety of Book Two. The prototype, Kant tells us, is our only hope for overcoming the dispositional corruption of Book One: 'only in him and through the adoption of his disposition can we hope "to become children of God", etc.' (6:60-61). Thus, the prototype is not an ideal merely 'presented by reason for emulation' (6:61), but is 'the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity' (6:61). The disposition of the prototype is presented to us in reason and is made available for adoption. Moral hope depends on us adopting, or appropriating (6:66), the disposition of the prototype through moral faith: 'In the *practical faith in this Son of God* ... the human being can thus hope to become pleasing to God (and thereby blessed); that is, only a human being conscious of such a moral disposition in himself ... is entitled to consider himself not an unworthy object of divine pleasure' (6:62). The disposition of the prototype 'alone [is] pleasing to God' (6:60), and therefore, moral hope rests on incorporating the prototype's disposition into our person.

It is important to understand that, for Kant, the prototype is not an ideal that can be thought of as an inherent member of humanity, but is an ideal available to humanity as the result of an act of divine grace. Kant is clear that 'we are not [the prototype's]

author' (6:61), and we should instead hold that 'that *prototype* has *come down* to us from heaven, that it has taken up humanity' (6:61). In other words, the prototype's humanity (and subsequent accessibility to humanity) is not an inherent feature of its own being but should be cognized as something that the divine Son of God willingly assumed in order to make available to our own corrupt species a disposition in full moral perfection. Note, however, that this is not incarnation in the sense of traditional Christian theology as a temporal, historical appearance but rather a non-temporal, primordial incarnation in which the divine Son of God takes on humanity conceived Platonically, His disposition is implanted in the human species and therefore available for adoption by the human individual. It is this primordial incarnation that is the condition for the creation of our world and is discovered in cognition. This top-down access to the good disposition emerges for Kant because, whereas he finds it inconceivable that 'the *human being, evil* by nature, would renounce evil on his own and *raise* himself up to the ideal of holiness' (6:61), it is not inconceivable that the divine Son of God has condescended to us and as such is a provision of divine grace. 'This union with [humanity] may therefore be regarded as a state of *abasement* of the Son of God.... The human being ... who is never free of guilt ... [is] hence unworthy of the union of his disposition with such an idea, even though this idea serves him as prototype.' (6:61). And since Kant has already established in Book One that humanity, though corrupt, is not evil by necessity, he finds no conflict in holding that the ideal of holiness 'take up humanity—which is not evil in itself—by *descending* to it' (6:61). Therefore, Kant presents the prototype as a 'divine human being [who] had actual possession of his eminence and blessedness from eternity' (6:64).

As this talk of condescension may indicate, Kant's cognizing of the prototype does not leave the prototype as a mere stagnant ideal. Rather Kant submits that we must have an accompanying account of the moral activities of the prototype:

We cannot think the ideal of a humanity pleasing to God ... except in the idea of a human being willing not only to execute *in person* all human duties, and at the same time to spread goodness about him as far wide as possible through teaching and example, but also though tempted by the greatest temptation, to take upon

himself all sufferings, up to the most ignominious death, for the good of the world and even for his enemies (6:61; emphasis added)

The prototype's purpose, namely, 'to deliver [his enemies] from eternal damnation' (6:64), shows that Kant's thinking on the prototype is more dynamic than mere condescension. The particulars of this account, for Kant, are rooted in the utter perfection of the disposition itself: '[H]uman beings cannot form for themselves any concept of the degree and the strength of a force like that of a moral disposition except by representing it surrounded by obstacles and yet—in the midst of the greatest possible temptations—victorious' (6:61). Since the empirical cannot yield the disposition itself, such an account of the prototype's activity is needed in order to cognize the full depth and complexity of the prototype's moral perfection. Thus, 'the abasement' of the Son of God, of which Kant spoke earlier, points not merely to his union with our humanity, but also of the suffering he endures: '[though] not bound to submit to sufferings, he nonetheless takes these upon himself in the fullest measure for the sake of promoting the world's greatest good' (6:61).⁸

It should be noted here, however, that this prototypical narrative is not, for Kant, an actual history. Having identified the prototype as 'presented to us by reason' (6:61), and as an ideal to which conformity is part of 'our universal human duty' (6:61), Kant indicates that the prototype is necessary—i.e., the prototype is not contingent on historical happenings. Kant draws out more clearly in 6:115 of Book Three this difference between necessary and contingent beliefs. There, Kant distinguishes between a religion grounded in an historical event, which 'carries ... the consciousness of its contingency', and a religion grounded in reason, which 'can be recognized as necessary'. The account of the activities of the prototype presented here in Book Two is a non-temporal narrative; it is how we must cognize the prototype, not what we identify about the prototype from having experienced a particular history. As Kant puts it, 'the required prototype always resides only in reason' (6:63). For him, the prototype

⁸ This righteous suffering of course, contrasts with the human individual who, in his moral guilt, 'can regard himself as responsible for the sufferings that come his way' (6:61).

necessarily resides in reason because (1) the prototype (with his narrative) must be universally accessible if elevation to this prototype is to be a universal human duty, and (2) since the prototype is a dispositional ideal, 'outer experience yields no example adequate to the idea; as outer it does not disclose the inwardness of the disposition but only allows inference to it' (6:63). Therefore, cognition gives us access to the disposition in a way experience cannot, also providing a non-temporal narrative that, as a necessary feature of reason, is 'perfectly valid for all human beings, at all times, and in all worlds' (6:66).

Kant argues against the *need* for (although not the *possibility* of) a particular historical manifestation of the prototype in 6:62-66 by drawing on the ought-implies-can-principle: '[the prototype] has complete reality within itself. For it resides in our morally-legislative reason. We *ought* to conform to it, and therefore we must also *be able* to' (6:62). The prototype, as the picture of what we ought to become, bears a link with the moral law; and thus, conformity to his image, for Kant, falls under the category of duty. For this reason, Kant submits that if we must first establish an example from experience of someone who is able to conform to the prototypical ideal in order to validate the idea, we would need to likewise demand such an example of the moral law in order to validate its authority: 'If we had to demonstrate in advance that it is possible to be a human being conforming to this prototype ... we would have to entertain reservations about allowing even to the moral law the authority of unconditional and yet sufficient determining ground of our power of choice' (6:62). Clearly, for Kant, it is evident *prime facie* that 'even if there never had been one human being capable of unconditional obedience to the law, the objective necessity that there be such a human being would yet be undiminished and self-evident' (6:62). Consequently, the validity of the prototypical ideal, in like manner, retains the same type of validity: 'There is no need, therefore, of any example from experience to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us; the idea is present as model already in our reason' (6:62). To demand such an outward experience is only to confess what Kant calls 'moral *unbelief*' (6:63).

To be sure, Kant's concern for guarding against the prototype's being made contingent on a historical appearance is not meant to defeat the possibility of such an appearance. On the contrary, after arguing against the *need* for an empirical manifestation of the prototype, Kant does submit that such a manifestation must, nevertheless, be *possible*.⁹ He moves from the ought-implies-can-principle to the claim that 'an experience must be *possible* in which the example of such a human being [pleasing to God] is given' (6:63; emphasis added). Kant, of course, qualifies this by noting that this possibility exists only 'to the extent that one can ... ask for evidence of inner moral disposition from external experience' (6:63), for clearly, as already stated, 'as outer it does not disclose the inwardness of the disposition but only allows inference to it, though not with strict certainty' (6:63). Therefore, there is a balance in Kant's thinking: The *required* prototype, as a universally valid dispositional ideal, resides always only in morally-legislative reason, while the ought-implies-can-principle indicates that a manifestation must be *possible*—at least, to the extent that outward deeds give evidence of an inward disposition.¹⁰ This assumption does not mean, suggests Kant, that if we find a historical individual who perfectly emulates the prototype (e.g., Jesus of Nazareth), that we would presume him to be the prototype. On the contrary, 'we would have no cause to assume in him anything else except a naturally begotten human being (because he too feels to be under the obligation to exhibit such an example in himself)' (6:63). In other words, since it is human duty to conform to the prototypical ideal, we should not think that one who emulates the prototype is unique. This does not mean 'that we would thereby absolutely deny that he might indeed also be

⁹ This marks a clear difference between the non-temporal narrative of the prototype in Book Two and the non-temporal pseudo-narrative of our human universal's choosing of the corrupt disposition (paralleled with the Adamic narrative of the Fall; see 6:41-44). In Book One the disposition has been chosen and its effects are present in this world already among human individuals; there is no need for a hypostatization in a particular individual. Whereas the prototype's non-temporal narrative may very well be manifest in history, both narratives are cognized and non-temporal, but the prototypical one retains the possibility of empirical manifestation.

¹⁰ Kant suggests that the prototype incarnate 'though in fact totally human, would nonetheless be able to speak truly of himself as if the ideal of goodness were displayed incarnate in him.... For he would be speaking only of the disposition which he makes the rule of his actions but which, since he cannot make it visible as an example to others in and of itself, he places before their eyes externally through his teachings and actions: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?"' (6:65-66).

a supernaturally begotten human being' (6:63), but given that it is our duty to conform to such an image anyway, the quandary itself 'from a practical point of view ... is of no benefit to us' (6:63).¹¹

Hence, the picture we have of the required or cognized prototype is that he is an eternal divine being who has taken on human nature, presented himself to us for emulation, and endured all manner of suffering for our salvation; the idea of him resides first and foremost, not in history, but in our morally-legislative reason, and is therefore universally valid—though an empirical manifestation of this ideal in history must be possible. Kant's solution to human depravity is that human beings adopt the disposition of the prototype and conform to his image. This solution provides a number of clear connections between Kant's line of thought in Book One and his discussion of the prototype in Book Two. In Book Two, the prototype is cognized not merely as an individual, but as a type of humanity—a cognized universal of human moral perfection.¹² As such, his incarnation is not a temporal, historical incarnation, but a non-temporal transcendental incarnation in the form of a perfect disposition implanted in humanity universally conceived. The prototype's disposition, as a perfect disposition, is the antithesis of our corrupt disposition in Book One. By placing the prototype within God, Kant places the prototype (like our corrupt human universal of Book One) outside the empirical or 'apart from any temporal condition' (6:31). However, the prototype

¹¹ In fact, such a 'hypostatization in a particular human being' (6:64) may only hinder our practical pursuit, says Kant, if we were to realize that such a historical individual's 'unchanging purity of will [was] not gained through effort but [was] innate.' Certainly, 'the thought that this divine human being ... willingly divested himself of [his eternal blessedness] for the sake of plainly unworthy individuals ... to deliver them from eternal damnation—this thought must attune our mind to admiration, love and thankfulness toward him' (6:64); however, 'he himself could not be presented to us as an example to be emulated' (6:64). Kant is aware that this dual nature could be construed as doing damage to the prototype's role as exemplar. Kant affirms that the prototype's divinity, which makes him immune to moral failing, is not a suitable example. However, since the prototype is equally part of humanity, it is our legitimate duty, says Kant, to seek to elevate ourselves to his moral perfection: '[The] idea of a conduct in accordance with so perfect a rule of morality could no doubt also be valid for us, as a precept to be followed' (6:64).

¹² Kant does refer to the prototype as a 'human being' (6:60), but it seems that in the context of his argument, this is in keeping with his language of Book One, in which he moves between speaking of humanity as a species and the human being as a reference species: 'by the 'human being' of whom we say that he is good or evil by nature we are entitled to understand not individuals ... but the whole species' (6:25).

bears a disposition that, like our corrupt disposition, can be present in and affect the moral propensity of human individuals; yet, unlike our corrupt disposition, the prototype's disposition is not innate to the individual. It must be adopted in place of the corrupt disposition. Human hope thus rests on a revolutionary exchange of disposition: ours for that of the prototype.

Religion 62-71 (*On Moral Faith*)

In Book Two, 6:62, we find the first mention of moral faith or what Kant calls 'the *practical faith in this Son of God*'. In the context of Kant's argument, this phrase refers specifically to the pragmatic application of our need to appropriate the prototype's disposition in order to be found pleasing to God. On this score, the primary means of appropriation, it seems, is duty itself: '[I]t is our universal human duty to *elevate* ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i.e. to the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity' (6:61). Since *disposition* (as stated above) is beyond our ability to observe, even in ourselves (see 6:63), our quest to appropriate the prototypical disposition must be worked out in our moral life: *In my search to lay hold of the prototype's disposition, I must seek to live a life (or cultivate a character) that reflects such a perfect disposition.* This quest becomes the pragmatic import of the cognized non-temporal narrative of the prototype. Such a narrative provides a picture of what the prototypical disposition outwardly looks like in all its purity, and thus a picture of the type of character we must seek to cultivate. Therefore, while 'In the *practical faith in this Son of God* ... the human being can thus hope to become pleasing to God (and thereby blessed)', certainty of such moral hope requires that we believe that our disposition is of such a kind that, if subjected to the same type of temptations, trials, and suffering we cognize the prototype as undergoing (e.g., spreading good as far and wide as possible, enduring every temptation, undergoing the most ignominious death, etc.), we would bear up underneath such things and emulate the prototype's example perfectly. This litmus test, which compares the outward evidence with the inward disposition, can alone give complete assurance:

only a human being conscious of such a moral disposition in himself as enables him to *believe* and self-assuredly trust that he, under similar temptations and afflictions (so far as these are made the touchstone of that idea), would steadfastly cling to the prototype of humanity and follow this prototype's example in loyal emulation, only such a human being, and he alone, is entitled to consider himself not an unworthy object of divine pleasure (6:62).

At first glance, such a standard would seem to be a barrier to moral hope. Given that Kant himself acknowledges that the 'human being ... is never free of guilt even when he has taken on [the prototype's] disposition' (6:61), it must be asked how a human being might ever say with confidence that he has taken hold of the prototypical disposition?

This difficulty for moral hope Kant addresses in 6:67-71. It is a concern related to what Kant calls '*moral happiness*' (6:68), or 'the assurance of the reality and *constancy* of a disposition that always advances in goodness (and never falters from it)' (6:67). Kant highlights the common desire for internal assurance of having already procured redemption and final perseverance—typically along lines that parallel the Pauline concept of the Holy Spirit testifying with the believer's spirit that the convert is already a child of God (cf. Rom. 8:16). The desire for (and perhaps even pursuit of) such a witness is essentially, to Kant's mind, a search by the convert to 'feel of himself that he can never fall so low as to regain a liking for evil' (6:68). The difficulty with such a self-assuring solution is, of course, that 'one is never more easily deceived than in what promotes a good opinion of oneself' (6:68). Yet even more problematic is that Kant feels that such an assurance is of little moral motivation, since 'the constant "seeking after the Kingdom of God" would be equivalent to knowing oneself already in possession of this kingdom' (6:67-68). It is better, thinks Kant, for human beings to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling", to use Paul's phrase (6:68; Phil. 2:12).

Kant acknowledges that certainly 'without *any* confidence in the disposition once acquired, perseverance in it would hardly be possible' (6:68). However, given his contention that 'a human being's inner experience of himself does not allow him so to fathom the depths of his heart' (6:63), such confidence is not as unshakeable as one

might prefer. Confidence, for Kant, can only be based on an account of the outward evidence that ‘allows inference to [the inward disposition]’ (6:63). To use Kant’s words, ‘We can ... find this confidence ... by comparing our life conduct so far pursued with the resolution we once embraced’ (6:68). Assurance must be based on an evaluation of personal moral progress. This evaluation yields two possible results. First, one may find that ‘from the time of his adoption of the principles of the good ... [he] has perceived the efficacy of these principles on what he does, i.e. the conduct of his life as it steadily improves, and from that has cause to infer ... a fundamental improvement in his disposition’ (6:68). Such improvement gives cause to hope that ‘he will no longer forsake his present course’ (6:68) and ‘if after this life another awaits him, that he will persevere in [the good principle]’ (6:68). In short, ‘he can legitimately assume that his disposition is fundamentally improved’ (6:68). This outcome contrasts with the observation for one who despite ‘repeated resolutions to be good ... has always relapsed into evil’ (6:68). Such an observation can only rouse ‘conscience to judgment’ (6:69). Thus, while we cannot observe the disposition itself, in Kant’s scheme, moral improvement or regression gives legitimate testimony of the inward disposition.¹³

Kant is clear that the type of moral improvement required to procure confidence of dispositional improvement is not indicative of moral perfection. Certainly, an individual possessed of personal perfection would be ‘entitled to consider himself not an unworthy object of divine pleasure’ (6:62). However, Kant makes apparent that even the one who observes moral improvement and has legitimate grounds to think that he will ‘come ever closer to his goal of perfection’ (6:68), cannot expect to attain perfection. Such a goal is simply not attainable in Kant’s mind: ‘[he] can ... reasonably hope that in this life he will no longer forsake his present course ... and come ever closer to his goal of perfection, though it is unattainable’ (6:68). Therefore, the convert, while having a

¹³ The moral convert and the moral reprobate represent two trajectories, or what Kant calls ‘either a blessed or a cursed eternity’ (6:69). The blessed eternity being a picture of steady moral improvement rooted in the adoption of the prototypical disposition and subsequent conformity to that image, and the cursed eternity being a moral degeneration, unable to subdue the evil that is rooted in the corrupt disposition of our evil human nature or disposition.

reasonable hope that a genuine change of disposition has occurred, still faces moral failings. In the face of such transgressions, moral progress that points to dispositional change may serve as comfort, but it cannot make one '*absolutely assured of the unchangeableness of ... [their] disposition*' (6:68). As Kant states, 'we cannot base this confidence upon an immediate consciousness of the immutability of our disposition' (6:71). In short, the convert may take comfort based on an improved life, but comfort is not certainty; it is only a reasonable hope based on the outward evidence of an improved inward disposition.

Religion 66-76 (*The Anatomy of Moral Hope*)

Under the section titled 'Difficulties that Stand in the Way of the Reality of this Idea and Their Solution', Kant sets forth three potential difficulties for the application of the prototype to moral hope. The first difficulty is straightforward and easily resolved; it simply concerns the question of how we can hope to be judged pleasing based on our inward disposition if our outward deeds are not perfect. Kant's answer is simply that we will be 'judged by him who scrutinizes the heart' (6:67). Thus, while the particular 'deed is *every time ... defective*' (6:67), the '*disposition* from which it derives and which transcends the senses' is what is judged by God, and therefore 'a human being can still expect to be *generally* well-pleasing to God, at whatever point in time his existence be cut short' (6:67; cf. 6:60-61)—provided he has, in fact, adopted the prototype's disposition. The second difficulty Kant raises concerns moral happiness, already addressed in the previous section. The third difficulty, however, is where Kant draws out the particular dynamics of how dispositional conversion satisfies divine justice and grounds moral hope. It is on this third difficulty that we will focus for the remainder of our expository treatment.

Kant phrases this third difficulty as follows: '[E]very human being, even after he has entered upon the path of goodness, [is] still a reprobate in the sentencing of his entire life conduct before a divine *righteousness ...* however steadfastly a human being may have persevered in such a disposition ... *he nevertheless started from evil*' (6:72). This starting point speaks of the evil nature or disposition, which is innate in every human

individual, i.e., 'present in the human being at the moment of birth' (6:22).¹⁴ The difficulty this presents for moral hope resides in the unfortunate reality that this original debt 'is impossible for [the convert] to wipe out' (6:72). Kant gives three reasons for this impossibility. First, even if the convert perseveres in the good disposition to such a degree as to avoid incurring new debts, it is not 'equivalent to his having paid off the old ones' (6:72). Second, the convert cannot produce through the 'future conduct of a good life, a surplus over and above what he is under obligation to perform each time' (6:72), for the convert's 'duty at each instant is to do all the good in his power' (6:72). Third, dispositional evil 'is not a *transmissible* liability which can be made over to somebody else ... [It is] the *most personal* of all liabilities, namely a debt of sins which only the culprit, not the innocent, can bear' (6:72). It is apparent that this non-transmissible liability refers to the dispositional debt of sin, for Kant states that it cannot be transmitted 'because the evil is in the *disposition* and the maxims in general (in the manner of *universal principles* as contrasted with individual transgression)' (6:72). Kant's solution to this tripartite difficulty has three corresponding features that lay bare the anatomy of moral hope: (1) the resolution of infinite dispositional guilt through moral conversion itself, (2) the vicarious suffering of the prototype for finite non-dispositional guilt, and (3) the imputation of the prototype's surplus of righteousness to the convert.

Regarding dispositional evil, Kant notes that the moral debt resulting from such corruption is not like a financial debt or even a particular legal transgression in a human court—such debts are finite and transferable. In contrast, dispositional debt cannot be transferred and is infinite. The transgression 'in the manner of *universal principles*' (6:72) ultimately 'brings with it an *infinity* of violations of the law', for this dispositional corruption gives rise to the individual's propensity to evil—it is 'the subject of all inclinations that lead to sin' (6:74). It is for this reason that such corruption 'brings with it ... an *infinity* of guilt ... because the evil is in the *disposition*' (6:72). As a result, Kant

¹⁴ Kant later states this expressly: 'this original debt ... that precedes whatever good a human being may ever do (this, and no more, is what we understood by radical evil; cf. Section One)' (6:72).

explains, ‘every human being has to expect *infinite* punishment and exclusion from the Kingdom of God’ (6:72). Kant’s resolution to this infinite dispositional guilt comes to light as he considers the divine judge who ‘knows the heart of the accused’ (6:72). While one may think that the easy solution here would be to condemn the perpetrator, Kant suggests that God, who knows the inwardness of the disposition, cannot mete out justice so simplistically. The punishment of the corrupt disposition cannot be rightly extended to and carried out upon the convert who has adopted the prototype’s disposition. The convert, in his new disposition, is ‘a human being well-pleasing to God’ (6:73), even though in his former disposition he was ‘the subject of God’s displeasure’ (6:73). God must carry out justice, but the deity can no longer carry out the punishment germane to the old man, for such a penalty would fall only on the new man.

Kant submits that since justice was executed ‘neither *before* nor *after* conversion’ (6:73), ‘the punishment must be thought as adequately executed in the situation of conversion itself’ (6:73). In other words, if justice is to be rendered, then the ‘*punishment* whereby satisfaction is rendered to divine justice’ (6:74) must be rendered in ‘the very concept of moral conversion’ (6:73). Kant defines conversion in Pauline terms as “‘the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new’” (6:74; Col. 3:9-10). In the context of Book Two, this language refers specifically to the dispositional revolution in which the convert abandons the corrupt disposition of our humanity in order to adopt the disposition of the prototype. This revolution is not indicative of two acts ‘separated by a temporal interval’ but of two sides of the same coin: ‘conversion is ... a single act, since the abandonment of evil is possible only through the good disposition that effects the entrance into goodness, and *vice versa*’ (6:74). Therefore, while the convert is ‘[p]hysically ... still the same human being ... in the sight of a divine judge ... he is *morally* another being’ (6:74). The old man’s identity was wrapped up in the individual’s union with the corrupt disposition; in abandoning such a disposition for a new disposition (and thus a new identity), the old man is put to death. The convert’s (or new man’s) identity was defined by a wholly distinct disposition, and thus, ‘[t]he emergence from the corrupted disposition into the good is in itself already sacrifice (as “the death of the old man”, “the crucifying of the flesh”)’ (6:74; Gal.

2:19).¹⁵ Punishment for the infinite dispositional debt is thus rendered at the moment of conversion with this execution of the old man, i.e., the usurping of the old disposition.¹⁶

Conversion, while satisfying the infinite dispositional guilt, still leaves the matter of particular transgressions that arise after conversion.¹⁷ Since such particular failings arise after the revolution of disposition, and thus presumably out of a type of weakness amidst moral progress rather than the disposition itself, the infinity of dispositional guilt does not apply; and therefore, such debts are finite. For these Kant indicates the prototype may suffer: 'And this disposition which he has incorporated in all its purity of the Son of God—or (if we personify this idea) this very **Son of God**—bears as *vicarious substitute* the debt of sin for him, and also for all who believe (practically) in him' (6:74). It is often recognized that the disposition 'bears as *vicarious substitute*' the debt of sin for the convert in this passage, but what is often missed is that 'disposition' here does not merely refer to a new inclination in the convert, but is a reference to the being from whom the convert's new disposition is adopted, i.e., the prototype.¹⁸ Kant makes this

¹⁵ Kant's language may serve to confuse some readers regarding what he is claiming here. His use of biblical language (especially the crucifying of the flesh) is often used in Protestant circles in reference to the daily mortification of the flesh (i.e., the process of sanctification) and thus may lead some readers to understand Kant as speaking of the convert's daily battle against the flesh (e.g., Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 93-94). However, given that Kant has in view here the moment of conversion, and has made plain that the problem in view cannot be resolved post-conversion, this interpretation is highly unlikely. Instead, we should probably understand Kant to be referring not to the daily mortification of the flesh, but to the unique death of the old man at the moment of conversion, in which the old self is put to death by way of being replaced by the new man.

¹⁶ In this interpretation, justice is not found in the 'long train of life's ills' that follows, as many have argued. See Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 117. These ills, while undertaken by the new human being 'simply for the sake of the good,' 'are still fitting punishment for someone else, namely the old human being,' and cannot serve as a vehicle for justice as they are post-conversion ills, which Kant has already established cannot be a vehicle for justice. Michalson recognizes the difficulty with placing justice in such ills, but treats this simply as inconsistency on Kant's part rather than a deficiency in his own interpretation. See Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 119.

¹⁷ The question of why those undergoing a dispositional revolution continue to sin is rather ambiguous in *Religion*. It is not entirely clear whether the evil principle is still present but no longer dominant (cf. 6:73) or whether the evil principle is a remaining contextual influence due to the life of the convert amidst those of the corrupt disposition (cf. 6:93), or perhaps a mix of both of these options. Ultimately the particulars on this score are beyond the scope of this paper and of little relevance to understanding the dynamics of Book Two that concern us here.

¹⁸ Such a statement seems peculiar if one understands the disposition simply to be a change of heart in the convert. In that case, Kant would be suggesting that the convert's sudden change of heart bears his debt of

plain in both his reference to practical belief ('believe (practically) in him'), which parallels his earlier language of the practical faith in the Son of God, and in his naming of the prototype as the personification of the good disposition: 'And this disposition ... or (if we personify this idea) this very **Son of God**' (6:74). Thus, the disposition which the convert 'has made his own' provides the link between the convert and the prototype that makes it possible for the prototype to bear (or atone for) the convert's remaining non-dispositional failings—and not only those of the convert, but also the failings of all who believe practically in him (i.e., adopt his disposition): '[A]s *savior*, he satisfies the highest justice through suffering and death, and, as *advocate*, he makes it possible for them to hope that they will appear justified before their judge' (6:75).

Finally, with all debts paid, there is still the convert's need for positive righteousness before the divine judge. It is key to understand here that Kant retains, from Book One, the notion of moral imputability between the individual and his disposition. Just as the demerits of the corrupt disposition have been cognized as imputable to the individual (cf. 6:21; 31), so Kant assumes that this same imputability applies to the convert's appropriation of the prototypical disposition. He suggests that the convert's adoption of the prototype's disposition enables the imputation of the prototype's righteousness to the convert. Thus, the convert's adoption of the prototypical disposition not only pays for the convert's debt of sin (both infinite and finite), but allows the prototype's surplus of righteousness or 'surplus over the merit from works' to be found within or 'imputed to' the convert, thereby providing more than mere moral acceptability, but positive righteousness with which the deity is well pleased (6:75).

sin, which (it would seem) one would have to take poetically—since the new disposition takes the place of deeds before God, this change of heart metaphorically takes the role of a Christ figure for the convert. (Gordon Michalson, for example, understands the passage in this way. See Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 120.) However, this interpretation makes little sense of the claim that the disposition accomplishes this end not only for the convert, but also for 'all who believe in him' (6:74). Can it be that Kant is really suggesting that one can find atonement by believing in someone else's change of heart? Either this common interpretation is correct and Kant's thinking here is even more hopelessly absurd than often suggested, or Kant is actually commending faith in something other than ourselves, e.g., the prototype.

III. Book Three: The Ethical Commonwealth and the Establishment of Kant's Vision of Hope

As we now move into an expository treatment of Book Three, it should be noted once again that we will not have the opportunity in the space provided to cover every paragraph. Rather, the examination will centre on what I take to be the thematic heart of Kant's argument, which consists of three exegetical focus points. The first is found in 6:93-101. Here, Kant highlights the need for the moral convert to unite with other moral converts in an ethical community, and provides a picture of what this community must look like. One of the key features of this community is its universality, which gives way to Kant's discussion in 6:102-124 of pure rational religion—the focus of the second exegetical section. Kant suggests that only rational religion is a sufficient foundation for a universal church, and thus, he lays bare the particular nature of rational religion and its necessary relationship to ecclesiastical faith. Finally, in 6:124-147, Kant turns to his case for Christianity as rational religion, and it is this argument that occupies the third exegetical section. I will argue that here Kant seeks to demonstrate that Christianity in its pure form exemplifies the very rational religion he commends.

Religion 93-101 (*The Need for and Nature of the Ethical Commonwealth*)

Having established in Books One and Two of *Religion* that humanity bears a common corrupt disposition that must be replaced by the prototype's good disposition if humans are to have moral hope, Kant moves in Book Three to the more practical dimensions of moral faith/sanctification. He opens Book Three by highlighting the internal moral conflict that exists within the convert, an opening that re-emphasizes that the dispositional revolution discussed in Book Two does not obliterate the influence of the evil principle on the moral convert. Whereas the prototype has come down to humanity and made available to individuals a good disposition, this new disposition only promises moral freedom by providing an alternative disposition. The human person, who is otherwise bound under the corrupt disposition, now has available a good disposition, namely, the disposition of the prototype. The human individual may adopt this new disposition and thus live under its dominion. Yet, Kant is clear, the redemptive work of

the prototype does not erase the evil disposition in the human species, and thus, does not eliminate its influence on the human individual. As Kant states at the close of Book Two,

So the moral outcome of this conflict [between the good and the evil principle] ... is not really the *conquering* of the evil principle—for its kingdom still endures ...—but only the breaking up of its controlling power in holding against their will those who have so long been subject to it, now that another moral dominion ... has been revealed to them as freedom (6:82-83).

In conversion, the new disposition ‘has the upper hand over the evil principle’ (6:73), but nevertheless, both the good and evil dispositions reside in humanity (universally conceived). Hence, the convert, despite having adopted the new disposition, is ever pressed by the evil principle and must resist this evil, persevering in the good. Kant describes this internal moral conflict in battle-like terms in the opening of Book Three: ‘[E]very morally well-disposed human being must withstand in this life, under the leadership of the good principle, against the attacks of the evil principle ... and assert his freedom which is constantly under attack’ (6:93). The moral convert bears the responsibility to seek to undo evil, yet the question of how to extricate oneself from evil resonates throughout Book Three: ‘[The convert] is *bound* at least to apply as much force as he can muster in order to extricate himself from [the evil principle]. But how? That is the question’ (6:93).¹⁹ The importance of this question is tied directly to moral hope. If faith in the prototype, which grounds hope, is wrapped up practically in the throwing off of evil, Kant’s argument must still answer the practical question of how the moral convert is to ‘remain forever armed for battle’ (6:93).

¹⁹ This internal moral battle, Kant suggests, is the convert’s ‘own fault’ (6:93). On this point, we must take Kant to be referring to his earlier contention in Book One that the evil bend of the disposition, while chosen by the human universal prior to any exercise of individual freedom, is, nevertheless, imputable to the individual as part of humanity—the innateness of the disposition to the individual does not eliminate culpability. Thus, the convert, despite having adopted the good disposition, is under the attack of the evil disposition; but this conflict exists only because humanity (universally considered) chose the evil disposition. It seems this is the type of fault Kant has in view.

As Kant engages this question, he suggests that an examination of ‘the causes and the circumstances that draw [the convert] into this danger and keep him there’ (6:93) indicates that the tendency to moral regression does not come ‘from [the convert’s] own raw nature, so far as he exists in isolation, but rather from the human beings to whom he stands in relation or association’ (6:93). In other words, ‘malignant inclinations ... assail his nature, which on its own is undemanding, *as soon as he is among other human beings*’ (6:93). Because it has already been shown in Book One that all human beings prior to conversion are naturally under the dominion of the evil principle (i.e., they bear an innate corrupt disposition), Kant thinks it inevitable that humans will corrupt one another. This negative communal influence is not necessarily due to the overtly depraved character of those the convert is in community with (i.e., it is not ‘necessary to assume that these are sunk into evil and are examples that lead [the convert] astray’ (6:94)), but rather, moral stifling and even regression is simply the inevitable result of the convert being amidst a community composed of the dispositionally corrupt: ‘[I]t suffices that they are there, that they surround [the convert], and that they are human beings, and that they will mutually corrupt each other’s moral [predispositions] and make one another evil’ (6:94).²⁰ Thus, those who are converted to the good principle are under the inevitable threat of evil merely by being a part of humanity in association with humanity. Kant’s problem in Book Three centres on overcoming the negative effects of the communal context on the practical faith in the prototype, and on the subsequent negative effects on moral hope.

Kant’s solution to this type of contextual moral impediment involves the establishment of ‘a union which has as its end the prevention of this evil and the

²⁰ The substitution in the above quote (i.e., changing ‘disposition’ to ‘predispositions’) is representative of an exegetical decision to side with the Hudson/Green translation. Assuming the interpretation of Book One previously defended is correct, the human disposition has already been said to be corrupt prior to any exercise of freedom; along this same train of thought, it is unlikely that Kant intends to root dispositional corruption in communal interaction that takes place within time (especially when translating it in the singular, ‘disposition’, which would point to the common universal disposition). Kant has just previously made mention of the originally good predispositions as the place in which corruption does not reside (a point he has already argued for in Book One), making a movement to a discussion of the communal perversion/corruption of these predispositions a natural progression of his argument.

promotion of the good' (6:94). This union is envisioned as 'an enduring and ever expanding society, solely designed for the preservation of morality by counteracting evil with united forces' (6:94). In other words, to combat the moral degeneration that occurs amidst the dispositionally corrupt and persevere in the good so as to secure moral hope, the moral convert must unite with other moral converts in the form of a community to successfully overcome the evil principle. Without such a communal effort, the convert would be ill equipped to persevere in the good principle: 'If no means could be found to establish a union which has for its end the prevention of this evil and the promotion of the good in the human being ... however much the individual human being might do to escape from the dominion of this evil, he would still be held in incessant danger of relapsing into it'. (6:94). Only with such a dominion 'can we hope for a victory of the good principle over the evil one' (6:94); and without it, '[i]nsomuch as we can see ... the dominion of the good principle is not otherwise attainable' (6:94).

Prior to going further into his argument, Kant sets forth some basic definitions that set the stage for his discussion of the nature of this united ethical community. First, Kant distinguishes between what he calls the *state of nature* and the *civil state*. The state of nature is a type of private self-governing, in which 'each individual prescribes the law to himself ... Each individual is his own judge' (6:95). This private self-governing contrasts with the civil state, in which 'laws are public' (6:94). Next, Kant distinguishes between the *ethical* and the *juridical*. The ethical denotes humans ruled by the laws of virtue. Such laws are non-coercive—those ruled by them choose to be ruled by them. The juridical, on the other hand, involves laws 'which are all coercive laws' (6:95); thus, political rule falls under this rubric.

With these definitions in place, Kant's subsequent definitions of the *ethico-civil*, the *ethical state of nature*, and the *juridico-civil* follow naturally. The *ethico-civil* (or ethical community) is an association of non-coerced human beings united under the laws of virtue, which are made public. It is here that the union of individuals for the promotion of the good must reside. This term contrasts with the *ethical state of nature*, which, even though it also refers to the human being under the laws of virtue in association with other human beings, denotes a condition in which each individual is his

own judge and ‘there is no effective *public* authority with power to determine ... what is in given cases the duty of each individual’ (6:95). It is into this category that the moral convert apart from the community falls. The *juridico-civil* moves away from the guide of virtue and instead ‘is the relation of human beings to each other ... under *public juridical laws* (which are coercive laws)’ (6:95). Political governances would fall under this rubric.²¹

The importance of these definitions to Kant’s argument is that they lay bare what ‘a union which has for its end ... the promotion of the good’ (6:94) must look like by definition. There are three main features of the ethical community which Kant sets out. First, we find that individuals, all of whom begin in an ethical state of nature even if under the rule of the *juridico-civil* state, cannot be forced to enter into an ethical civil state by any ruling power, for by definition one cannot be *coerced* into an ethical civil state of *non-coercive* laws. As Kant puts it, ‘it would be a contradiction (*in adjecto*) for the political community to compel its citizens to enter into an ethical community, since the latter entails freedom from coercion in its very concept’ (6:95). Thus, the ethical community must be one that is composed of individuals united under the good principle without coercion.

Second, we find that ‘since the duties of virtue concern the entire human race, the concept of an ethical community always refers to the ideal of a totality of human beings, and in this it distinguishes itself from the concept of a political community’ (6:96). In other words, individual ethical societies do not constitute the ethical community, for each particular ethical society shares a common unifying principle with all other ethical societies, namely, virtue or the good principle. Thus, the ethical community proper is the totality of all such ethical societies. To use Kant’s words, ‘each partial society is only a representation [of an absolute ethical whole]’ (6:96).

²¹ Kant also speaks of a juridical state of nature, which is, by definition, the self-governing individual’s wielding of coercive laws, the result of which, Kant tells us, ‘is a state of war of every human being against every other’ (6:96-97). We may liken this to an almost Hobbesian state of nature. For our purposes here, however, this juridical state is not of particular relevance.

Third, we find that the ethical community as a union of individuals under a common principle is rightly called a kingdom, and thus, there is a movement in Kant's thinking to a presiding authority over that kingdom. It is here that Kant identifies the ethical community with a people of God. This movement is based first on the need for an authority able to unite individuals in a way that mere human effort cannot; thus, the instantiation of an ethical community 'will need the presupposition of ... a higher moral being through whose universal organization of forces of single individuals, insufficient on their own, are united for a common end' (6:98). We also find that the notion of the civil state demands a public lawgiver, i.e., 'someone other than the people whom we can declare the public lawgiver of an ethical community' (6:99). Kant ascribes three necessary characteristics to this lawgiver: First, his laws must be part of his 'prior sanction', not merely conjured by his will. Second, the lawgiver must know 'the most intimate parts of the dispositions of each and everyone' (6:99). And third, he must be able to 'give to each according to the worth of his actions' (6:99), i.e., exercise true justice. Kant concludes that 'this is the concept of God' (6:99), and '[h]ence an ethical community is conceivable only...as a *people of God*, and indeed *in accordance with the laws of virtue*' (6:99).

This threefold picture of the ethical community, Kant admits, is an ideal that is 'never fully attainable'; it stands as the central component of the philosophical representation of the Highest Good. The task of instantiating such a community is, nevertheless, still a duty of the human species, even though the effort to do so is 'greatly scaled down in human hands' (6:100). This duty is unique, however, in that it is not a duty of the individual, as is moral law, but a duty of the human species: 'For every species of rational beings is objectively ... destined to a common end, namely the promotion of the highest good as a good common to all' (6:97). In this light, it is apparent that the fulfilment of this duty cannot come about by individual effort, but instead must come about through 'a union ... into a whole toward that very end' (6:97-98). And ultimately, even with such a union, Kant submits that it is beyond our ability to know whether the instantiation of such a union is within our power, and, for this reason, this duty 'differs from all others in kind and in principle' (6:98).

Given this knowledge gap, Kant contends that the convert must believe that God himself is the one who will establish the ethical community. This is not to say, however, that the convert has license to be idle regarding the formation of the ethical community, letting each 'go after his private moral affairs and entrust to a higher wisdom the whole concern of the human race' (6:100). On the contrary, Kant submits that each person must 'conduct himself as if everything depended on him' (6:101), for only in so doing can we hope that God 'will provide the fulfillment of his well-intentioned effort' (6:101), i.e., the formation of the ethical community. In short, while the duty to form the ethical community belongs to the species, the individual must move toward this end as if it were an individual duty, clinging to the hope that God himself will instantiate the ethical community.

The practical implications of this movement toward the ethical community are worked out in Section Four, in which Kant suggests that the idea of a people of God (or ethical community) can only be realized in the form of a church. Kant distinguishes, however, between the invisible, visible, and true church. The *invisible church* is a type of universal church composed of 'all upright human beings under direct ... moral divine-governance' (6:101). This church encompasses the totality of converts and ethical communities.²² The *visible church* is a congregation of people under the good principle, which exemplifies an imperfect manifestation of the ethical community. The visible church 'displays the (moral) kingdom of God' to whatever extent the invisible church is actualized in nature and represents the practical means for the individual to press forward in bringing to pass the ethical community. The *true church* is a synthesis of the invisible and visible church and must, according to Kant, consist of the following requisites: (1) *Universality*: it must be 'founded on principles that necessarily lead it to universal union'; (2) *Purity*: its drive must be purely moral; (3) *Relation Under Freedom*: the relations within the community and with the political community must be

²² Kant suggests that the invisible church is beyond experience, but does not state his rationale for this definition precisely. It would seem that it is either because the disposition is beyond experience and so the church's members cannot be identified with certainty, or because we do not experience the whole of the moral upright at any one time.

rooted in freedom; and (4) *Immutable Constitution*: it must be rooted in laws that are immutable, not fallible creeds that lack authority (6:101-102).²³ Each of these distinctions, as we will see in the sections to follow, point to rational religion as the sole foundation sufficient for the true church.

Religion 102-124 (*Ecclesiastical Faith as the Vehicle of Pure Religious Faith*)

In Section Five, Kant moves from the idea of the church to its ground in what he calls 'pure religious faith' (6:102). Pure religious faith is a faith that has its roots in reason and the moral law; it is a rational faith. This type of faith, Kant suggests, must be distinguished from a purely historical faith, which finds its roots in a particular series of historical events. Because the former (i.e., pure religious faith) is built upon a moral/rational foundation, Kant suggests that it can be 'convincingly communicated to everyone' (6:103), for humans universally retain these testimonies in reason. Historical faith, on the other hand, requires that humans have access to the particular/contingent facts, which face the challenge of showing their historical 'credibility' (6:103). This *universal verses contingent* feature of these two faiths is the primary distinction between them. Kant writes, 'So if the question How does God wish to be honored? is to be answered in a way that is universally valid for every human being, *each considered simply as a human being*, there is no second thought that the legislation of his will might not be simply *moral*. For a statutory legislation (which presupposes a revelation) can be regarded only as contingent' (6:104). For this reason, only pure religious (rational/moral) faith can, according to Kant, found a universal church.

Despite Kant's claim that pure religious faith's moral/rational foundation is universally valid, he does not suggest that such a faith can be established without an accompanying historical faith. Rather, he contends that 'due to a peculiar weakness of human nature, pure faith can never be relied on as much as it deserves, that is, [enough] to found a Church on it alone' (6:103). According to Kant, rational faith needs a

²³ This list does not represent an exact quote of Kant's titles, which are as follows: '1. Universality... 2. Its make-up (quality), i.e. purity... 3. Relation under the principle of freedom... 4. Its modality, the unchangeableness of its constitution' (6:101-102).

historical counterpart in an ecclesiastical form to achieve its aim of becoming the religion of humankind. While ecclesiastical faith is not part of pure religion, 'in the molding of human beings into an ethical community, ecclesiastical faith naturally precedes pure religious faith' (6:106). Kant uses the metaphor of a 'vehicle' (6:106) to explain this relationship: 'a statutory *ecclesiastical faith* is [sic] added to the pure faith of religion as its vehicle and means for the public union of human beings promoting it' (6:106). This relationship is needed not because of inadequacy on the part of rational faith, but, as already indicated in the above quote, because of a weakness on the part of human beings.

For Kant, the moral is the only sure divine revelation, and 'a morally good life is all that God requires of [humans] to be his well-pleasing subjects in his Kingdom' (6:103). Nevertheless, humanity in its weakness has difficulty understanding (or perhaps believing) the fulfilment of its duty to be sufficiently pleasing to God. Subsequently, there arise various amoral rituals that men imagine 'they must perform for God' (6:103) directly in the manner one honours the human 'lord[s] of this world' (6:103). Such rituals are the basis for what Kant calls 'a religion of *divine service* instead of the concept of a purely moral religion' (6:103). It is this felt need for amoral (and therefore non-rational and non-universal) acts of service that gives rise to the subsequent felt need for a revelation of the particular services the deity requires. Kant suggests that, because of this particular felt need in humans, for rational religion to be palatable, scripture must act 'as a revelation to present and future generations ... [and] must be the object of the highest respect' (6:107).

This need for scripture is again not an indication of an inadequacy in rational faith, but only of the weakness of humanity: humanity feels the need for divine revelation beyond the moral law in the form of a sacred text. As a result, Kant notes, scripture has a kind of intrinsic value for humanity: 'A holy book commands the greatest respect even among those ... who do not read it' (6:107), and thus, 'no subtle argument can stand up to the knockdown pronouncement, *Thus it is written*' (6:107). A religious faith based on an authoritative scripture has greater stability than a social or political religion, for example, that is diffused the moment 'the state breaks down' (6:107).

However, since the worth of a given scripture must, according to Kant, still be weighed according to the strictures of reason, the best holy book would be one that contains the 'purest moral doctrine of religion' (6:107).

We begin to see here in the centre of Book Three an important interplay between ecclesiastical faith and pure moral faith. Kant's way of unpacking the relationship between the ecclesiastical and the moral is through an analysis of what he calls 'revealed faith'. According to Kant, there are many different kinds of so-called revealed faiths, but only one religion. In one rather remarkable passage (6:107-108), Kant claims that various faiths can meet with the 'one and the same true religion' and serve as its vehicle. Thus, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity do not represent disparate religions, but only disparate faiths. Kant argues that most people do not profess religion, but profess instead an ecclesiastical faith. He is careful not to assert that all these faiths *are* vehicles for religion, only that all faiths *can be* vehicles for religion. As we will see, Kant later contends that Judaism in and of itself does not contain rational religion. It is only after Judaism is reformed into Christianity that it actually becomes a vehicle for pure rational religion. While Kant's case study on Judaism will be examined in more detail in the next exegetical section, suffice it to say for the moment that Kant's test of a faith is whether and to what extent it 'harmonizes with the universal practical rules of a pure religion of reason' (6:110). The concern is not the theoretical elements of various ecclesiastical faiths, but only that which 'work[s] toward the fulfillment of all human duties as divine commands' (6:110). In the drive toward the purification of ecclesiastical faith into that which could be identified with moral faith, universal principles of morality must be used as the supreme interpreter of any given holy book or set of religious beliefs.

Kant acknowledges that such a criterion may lead to a forced interpretation of a given religious text in the attempt to see if it can be raised to the level of religion, but he suggests that this phenomenon is not new. Rather, it is 'how all types of faith ... have always been treated, ... teachers ... kept on interpreting them until, gradually, they brought them ... in agreement with the universal principles of moral faith' (6:110-111). After giving a number of examples of historic reinterpretations of religious faith along moral lines, ranging from the Greeks to the Hindus (see 6:111), Kant suggests that this

observation should not offend against the literal aspects of a given faith's texts, because the moral truth brought to the fore in the reinterpretation is more deeply rooted in human beings than the images being reinterpreted. Moreover, 'we [cannot] charge such interpretations with dishonesty' (6:111), but rather, such interpretations need only to 'assume the *possibility* that [the authors of scripture] may be so understood' (6:111). Whether or not Kant is warranted in the adoption of this hermeneutic of sacred texts, his point is clear: the particular historical meaning is distinct from that which 'is to make better human beings' (6:111), and since the historical meaning 'contributes nothing to this end' (6:111), Kant submits that 'one can do with [the historical] what one wills' (6:111).

This hermeneutic guides Kant's account of how the human need for revelation and pure rational religion come together. This human demand for sacred scripture gives rise to the additional demand for scriptural scholars, defined by Kant as those who examine the origin, language, historicity, and the like of the sacred 'to preserve the authority of a church based on holy Scripture ... even if such scholarship establishes nothing more than that there is nothing in the Scripture's origin which would make its acceptance as immediate revelation impossible' (6:112). Such scholarship serves to reinforce the faith of 'those who fancy that they find in this idea [of revealed Scripture] a special strengthening of their moral faith and, therefore, gladly accept it' (6:113). This type of scholarly endeavour draws on resources inaccessible to the layperson (e.g., ancient languages) and pulls from the text 'the understanding of the church community' (6:113).²⁴ When this understanding of the role of scriptural scholarship is combined with Kant's rational religion, we find the hermeneutical meeting place of the rational and the historical. According to Kant, only 'the *religion of reason* and *scholarship*' (6:104) constitute legitimate expositors of scripture; therefore, the task of interpreting the sacred scripture has as its goal 'the transformation of the ecclesiastical faith for a given people at a given time into a definite and self-maintaining system' (6:114). In other words, as scriptural scholars seek to draw from the text pure moral doctrines and present these as

²⁴ It is because of this role that Kant calls scriptural scholars the 'trustees of a sacred document' (6:113).

the textual understanding of the church community, humans become able to embrace rational religion within their felt need for a sacred text because rational religion is presented to them via the sacred text.²⁵ Hence, Kant calls ‘the authority of Scripture ... the worthiest and ... only instrument of union of all human beings into one church’ (6:112).

Prior to any further discussion, it is important to understand that there is a natural and smooth progression in Kant’s thinking on moral faith throughout *Religion*. Kant’s notion of pure moral religious doctrine does not merely include the moral philosophy of the second *Critique* and *Groundwork*, but also refers to the doctrines of dispositional corruption and redemption from Books One and Two.²⁶ Ultimately, for Kant, only faith rooted in the ‘morally good disposition’ constitutes *saving* faith. Kant clearly indicates throughout Book Three that Book Two is an integral part of rational religion, and we must also note that the dispositional hope of Book Two assumes the dispositional corruption of Book One. According to Kant, ‘[s]aving faith holds two conditions for its hope of blessedness’ (6:116). The first is the hope of being absolved of transgressions before the divine judge—i.e., ‘the lawful undoing (before a judge) of actions done’ (6:116)—and the second is the hope of a conversion to ‘a new life conformable to its duty’ (6:116). Both find their culmination in Kant’s prototypical theology of Book Two. Therefore, faith in the prototype ‘refers, *in itself*, to a moral idea of reason’ (6:119), to use Kant’s words; and thus, faith in the prototype is part of the pure moral faith of Book Three.²⁷

²⁵ While Kant admits that the authority of the scriptural scholar is perhaps suspect given human nature, any weakness ‘can be made good through public freedom of thought’ (6:114); as scholarly insight undergoes scrutiny and becomes open to better insight, ‘they can count on the community’s confidence in their decisions’ (6:114).

²⁶ While this point comes up explicitly in 6:116f., Kant has already hinted at the importance of his dispositional philosophy in his discussion of the church as that which bears ‘the constitution of a household’ (see 6:102).

²⁷ Here Kant engages in a discussion related to the Lutheran/Kantian distinction of the order of faith in absolution of sins and the movement toward a changed life. Kant admits that if humans believe that their sins are absolved, it will produce a great willingness to engage in moral striving. However, there are two main difficulties with this type of connection. First, it is impossible, to Kant’s mind, to think that a rational human being who knows he deserves punishment could think himself to be completely absolved of all

Nevertheless, this emphasis on rational religion does not necessarily preclude the presence of the historical in a rational faith. Kant's position has more nuance than a mere dismissal of the historical; he focuses on *the role* of the historical in the establishment of rational faith. Specifically, when considering faith in the prototype, it does not matter whether one is awakened to the prototype that resides in reason by way of an empirical manifestation (e.g., Jesus of Nazareth) or by way of contemplating pure life conduct as the only way to please God (e.g., Books One and Two of *Religion*); both are set on the path of pure moral faith, for both involve faith in the prototype. There can, however, be a rift between these two if one makes the empirical/historical manifestation *the condition* for faith. In this case, saving faith would not be universal (and therefore not rational), since the historical is only accessible to a few and the empirical does not provide direct access to the disposition. As Kant puts it in 6:119:

The living faith in the prototype ... refers, *in itself*, to a moral idea of reason ... By contrast, faith in this very same prototype *according to its appearance* ... is not, as *empirical* ... one and the same as the principle of a good life conduct (which must be totally rational); and it would therefore be something quite different to wish to start with such a faith and derive a good life conduct from it... However, in the appearance of the God-man the true object of the saving faith is not what in the God-man falls to the senses, or can be cognized through experience, but the prototype lying in our reason which we put in him (since from what can be gathered from his example, the God-man is found to conform to the prototype), and such a faith is all the same as the principle of a good life conduct—Hence we do not have two principles here that differ in themselves, so that to start from the one or the other would be to enter on opposite paths, but only one and the same practical idea from which we proceed.

guilt merely by believing the 'news of a satisfaction ... rendered for him' (6:116). To expect such faith from a person is unreasonable, according to Kant. Second, if the knowledge of this satisfaction rendered for transgressions is found in a historical event, then this starting point of the faith is contingent and non-universal. In such a historically rooted (or theoretical) faith, Kant notes that belief in absolution is a duty placed on humans, and the subsequent life conduct is a matter of grace; but in the moral life, good life conduct is a duty, and faith in absolution is a matter of grace that follows in the working out of our duty.

In other words, rational religion must not merely possess the prototypical truths, but hold these truths as necessary, lest they diverge from rational religion.

At the very end of Division One, Kant recaps the centrality of the moral, the ecclesiastical as the vehicle, and the hope that true religion will one day cast off all empirical grounds of determination and rule over all. This philosophical vision includes the abandonment of the distinction between laity and clergy, as both are privy to the truths of moral reason; this final state is, for Kant, envisioned as being the will of God who will ultimately rule over the ethical state 'inadequately represented and prepared for in the past through the visible church' (6:122). However, this vision is not a merely moralistic vision, as traditionally assumed. Already apparent from the centrality of Kant's dispositional philosophy in Books One and Two and the importance of the church in the journey of moral faith is that Kant's vision is a vision of faith and community. Thus, to truly understand the particular nature of this vision, we turn in the third exegetical section to Kant's view of Christianity as a rational religion.

Religion 124-137 (*The Rational Merits of Christianity and Kant's Historically Expanded Vision of Victory*)

In the second half of Book Three, Kant moves from the philosophical to the historical representation of the gradual establishment of the dominion of the good principle on earth. He argues that we cannot expect from empirical religion a universal history regarding religion (i.e., true religion). Ecclesiastical faith as a public affair purports to give such a history, but is limited by 'the restraining conditions of religious faith to which it must necessarily conform' (6:124). Kant, in anticipation of his later *Conflict of the Faculties*, holds that the narrative of history must consist of a conflict between faiths of divine service and moral faith, and while human beings in their weakness may be inclined to exalt the former over the latter, only the latter can truly make a person better. This conflict is not a war, however, but more of an engaging critical comparison. 'Hence we can expect', writes Kant, 'a universal historical account only of ecclesiastical faith, by comparing it, in its manifold and mutable forms, with the one, immutable, and pure religious faith' (6:124).

For Kant, the history of various ecclesiastical faiths is not unified, for a history can only find unity if restricted 'to that portion of the human race in which the predisposition to the unity of the universal church has already been brought close to its development' (6:124), i.e., to those who share an internal commitment to universal/rational principles of the good. Without the universal guiding light of pure religious faith, the church would be in a constant state of war and forever prone to schism. Kant is therefore only concerned with the history of the true church, the one that brings peace to purely ecclesial conflicts by embracing the principle of unity afforded by a rational faith. For the purpose of his project in Division Two of Book Three, then, Kant focuses on that church 'which from the beginning bore within it the germ and the principles of the objective unity of the true and *universal* religious faith' (6:125). For Kant, Christianity in its purified form is that church.

Kant's case for beginning with Christianity centres on his denial that Judaism shares this universal seed of rational religion. According to Kant, Judaism only 'provided the physical occasion for the founding of this church (the Christian)' (6:125). Kant asserts rather forcefully that '[s]trictly speaking Judaism is not a religion at all' (6:125). He highlights the emphasis in Judaism on ceremonial laws, political solidarity, and blood descent, and suggests that its moral laws were merely '*appended* to it...[and] do not in anyway belong to Judaism as such' (6:125). The laws of Judaism, according to Kant, are concerned with external conduct, not the disposition, and, far from being concerned with universality, are exclusivist and ruled by a God hostile to all other peoples. Nevertheless, in Kant's account, these features are not forwarded as unique to Judaism, but rather, Kant holds a similar position on the faith of 'most other people'. He avers that other ancient religions' 'doctrine of faith equally tended in this direction' (6:127). Thus, all pre-Christian religions lack the seed of universal religion.

The importance of showing that Judaism and the other pre-Christian religions do not rise to the level of rational religion speaks to Kant's desire to bring clarity to his earlier claim that any faith can, in fact, be a vehicle for rational religion. In Kant's mind, although there are many possible candidates for a historical faith that might precede pure religious faith, only those candidates onto which rational religion actually latches serve

as a vehicle for pure religious faith. This is the very point of contact between rational faith and historical faith. According to Kant, Christianity laid hold of Judaism as its vehicle and then dispensed with it in the precise way Kant suggests rational religion ought to do. Thus, the story of the universal church begins with Christianity: 'We cannot, therefore, begin the universal history of the Church ... anywhere but from the origin of Christianity' (6:127). Christianity in its purest form, as the example of rational religion that has taken hold of a historical faith and used it as its vehicle, therefore provides Kant with a tangible illustration of the reinterpretation of ecclesiastical faith into a pure religion. For the sake of human weakness, Christianity sought to draw a link between it and the Jewish faith, but it replaced Jewish law with a concern for the disposition, its earthly concerns with the afterlife, and its ritualistic concerns with freedom from the law. Thus, 'the new faith ... was to contain a religion valid for the world' (6:127).

Kant admits that Christianity in some forms can demand the historical and make it a condition for faith, thus distinguishing itself from rational religion: '[T]o this teaching there are nonetheless added in a holy book miracles and mysteries, and the propagation of these is itself a miracle requiring historical faith' (6:129). Moreover, this emphasis on that which is only historically verifiable (e.g., miracles), in combination with the various blemishes in Christian history (i.e., strife, division, persecution, hierarchies, etc.), would seem to indicate that Christianity is not pure religion but a historical dogmatic religion. Kant's response to this history emphasizes that it was 'a learned public from whom the history of the political events of the time has been transmitted to us' (6:130). Kant has in mind here the Romans, and the point is that their records do not recognize the religious revolution of Christianity happening in their midst, only the political results.²⁸ Based solely on this political history, Kant admits there is nothing to commend Christianity as true religion. Nevertheless, he contends (presumably due to the overwhelming similarities between the doctrines of Books One

²⁸ According to Kant, it is only 'later, after more than one generation' that they investigate Christianity's nature (but not its origin). Therefore, we do not have a record of the moral nature of Christianity's adherents until after 'Christianity developed a learned public of its own' (6:130).

and Two and the teachings of the New Testament) that regarding the religious origin of Christianity, 'the fact still clearly enough shine[s] forth from its founding ... Christianity's true first purpose was none other than the introduction of a pure religious faith, over which there can be no dissension of opinions' (6:131). It is only 'because of a bad propensity in human nature' that the vehicle for this pure moral faith eventually gave way to these political atrocities (6:131).²⁹

Toward the end of Book Three, Kant shows how the New Testament, even in its apocalyptic vision, fits with rational religion—specifically, the battle between the good principle and the evil principle. Kant uses the Christian apocalyptic narrative, with its expulsion of enemies and so on from a visible Kingdom appearing 'under the governance of [God's] representative vicar', in such a way that 'the *end of the world* constitutes the conclusion of the story' (6:134). The Kingdom of God was manifest in Christ through morality, for it was Christ who bid his disciples to lay hold of the good by like behaviour and band together with others of like mind.³⁰ However, Christ warned that happiness could not be expected on earth, only trials; the great reward of those who embrace the good awaits them in heaven. The final triumph of the church is depicted as the separation of good and evil, the end of earthly life, and a victory in which the church has overcome all obstacles and entered into immortality. It also involves the damnation of its external foes, and the salvation of those in the church, now made citizens of Heaven. This image, says Kant, 'is a beautiful ideal of the moral world-epoch brought about by the introduction of the true universal religion and *foreseen* in faith in its completion' (6:135). Therefore, Kant concludes that these images (e.g., the Anti-Christ, the millennium, the nearness of the end) 'all take on their proper symbolic meaning before reason' (6:136).

²⁹ Kant maintains that '*the present*' is the best point in church history, as now there are those who sow the seed of 'true religious faith'; and Kant hopes that when it grows, it will unite human beings as 'the visible representation ... of the invisible Kingdom of God on earth' (6:131).

³⁰ Kant does not use the name Christ in his discussion of the historical origin of Christian, but only 'the teacher of the Gospel' (6:134). However, it is apparent from his use of this title that it is meant to refer to Jesus of Nazareth, even though, to be sure, we do not (like many interpreters) take Kant's reference to the prototype to be a reference to Jesus of Nazareth.

IV. Objections to the Coherence of *Religion* and Their Solutions

Before we are able to affirm the expository interpretation of the previous three sections and the promise of my three-part hypothesis for interpreting *Religion*, it is important to consolidate and deal on a case-by-case basis with the specific exegetical challenges made in the previous chapter. There, as one follows Kant's train of thought (or various trains of thought) throughout *Religion*, myriad potential conundrums or wobbles present themselves. Gordon Michalson presents a comprehensive case for the incoherence of Kant's philosophy of religion (and by extension its usefulness in providing a rational foundation for theology) by raising crucial questions regarding the coherence of each book in *Religion*. To determine whether or not these objections are merely obstacles to be overcome or in fact defeaters of Kant's entire project in *Religion*, it will be helpful here to summarize these objections relative to the parts of *Religion* at which they are aimed. Michalson's challenges to Kant's programme in *Religion*, ones that remain even after the analysis of the previous chapter, can be boiled down to two for each of the first three books of *Religion*. Dealing with the objections in this systematic way will help us throughout this section as we determine the merits of my hypothesis for interpreting *Religion*.

Objections to Book One and Their Solutions

Regarding Book One, Michalson is particularly concerned with the way in which Kant defines and inter-relates a complex array of concepts. These include the predisposition to good, propensity to evil, humanity being evil by nature, radical evil, and the principle of the Highest Good (proportionality); each of which have a central place in the initial stages of Kant's narrative. Michalson thinks the way in which Kant begins *Religion*, by focusing on the predisposition to good and the propensity to evil, is incoherent. This general concern for the coherence of these concepts is compounded by the various ways in which evil is imputed to humanity in Book One. Two primary questions emerge when evil is considered relative to humanity in the context of *Religion*: 1) How can Kant maintain a coherent position (and thereby justify the position that

humans are evil by nature) given his starting point of a distinction between the original predisposition to good and a propensity to evil? 2) How also does Kant likewise defend the position that evil is innate and yet brought on by ourselves? Michalson is thus concerned with the consistency of the concepts and the coherence of the argumentation in Book One.

The interpretation of Book One in the first section of this chapter is strikingly different from that of Michalson in *Fallen Freedom*. According to Michalson, Kant's argument in Book One is as follows: Kant puts forward the idea of the original predisposition as an ontological claim about 'basic human nature as it is prior to any exercise of human freedom'.³¹ It is an ontological thing basic to all human beings, which is present in individuals prior to any free activity; it is the '*something*' of the disposition that precedes any exercise of freedom. Since, for Michalson, Kant is ultimately concerned with maintaining individual autonomy in the face of radical evil, the human disposition must be conceived of as being originally good. Without what Michalson calls this 'seed of goodness', humanity is left with no moral options in the face of natural incentives. Michalson collapses the argument for the original goodness of the individual's predisposition into an account of the primordial nature of the human disposition—thus, for him, the predisposition and disposition, for all intents and purposes, become one and the same. This integration is of principal significance for his interpretation of Book One. Kant's subsequent argument for the propensity to evil in human beings is thought by Michalson to be merely a formal one; it analyzes various ways of defining humanity and morality and concludes that evil is a tendency that no human seems capable of resisting.³² In Michalson's view, Kant provides empirical evidence that humans do in fact commit evil to shore up his formal argument. However,

³¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 38.

³² Radical evil, on Michalson's interpretation, is a new idea for Kant that, when placed alongside the claims of his moral philosophy, plunges his philosophy of religion into a downward spiral. Michalson puts it this way: 'The entire account of radical evil toward which Kant is moving is in fact based on the insight that there is an inevitable pattern connected with our willing of evil maxims, and the notion of the propensity is Kant's way of transcendently delineating this pattern without allowing its inevitability to turn into outright necessity'. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 41.

since Kant knows full well that he cannot move in a critically satisfying manner from empirical manifestations of evil to declarations regarding the nature of the human disposition, he is thus driven to a strategy that links the empirical to the formal analysis of the various patterns of human behaviour as an indirect argument for human depravity.

In short, according to Michalson, the entire discussion of a predisposition to good and propensity to evil leads Kant to make the very complex and convoluted inference that human beings are 'evil by nature'.³³ Since for Michalson Kant's argument hinges on appeals to empirical observation, it cannot accomplish what Kant needs it to accomplish, namely, the establishment of the universality of radical evil in human nature. No matter how many examples one forwards of individual instances of evil, one can never arrive at declarations regarding the species, which is precisely what Kant does in Michalson's interpretation.³⁴ If, following Michalson, we understand Kant to be starting with an overriding concern for individual autonomy, and so understand Kant's philosophy of religion to be presenting a forensic analysis of the human condition along the above lines, then Kant's philosophy of religion does appear to give way to a number of conundrums. Yet, despite the legitimacy of these concerns, within the interpretation provided above, these difficulties are curtailed and in many cases simply resolved. Michalson's emphasis on individual autonomy and the ontological status of the predisposition to the good, I suggest, exacerbates these difficulties. When Kant's argument is understood according to a movement in our thinking that emphasizes the species and the cognition of its moral disposition, the elements of Kant's argument—such as the disposition, predisposition, propensity, innateness, and freedom—all find an appropriate place.

As we have seen, Kant's arguments do not begin with a declaration that human beings were originally created good and then became evil through some individual or societal action. Instead, Kant's inquiry strictly concerns the question of whether the

³³ Michalson argues that Kant arrives at 'a frustrating conceptual logjam at the point where [he] wants to link innateness and the propensity to evil'. Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 67.

³⁴ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 69.

species (as opposed to the individual) bears a moral disposition. His subsequent derivations are that humanity does bear a moral disposition, this moral disposition must be cognized as a single disposition belonging to the whole species, and this disposition must be either good or evil—it cannot be morally grey. Therefore, we arrive at Kant's discussion of the original predisposition to good, not as a way of understanding the nature of humanity in any primordial or ontological sense, but as another step in a transcendental assessment of human cognition concerning the disposition of the human species, namely, the step of addressing the question of necessity: *If the disposition is corrupt, is it necessarily so?* Kant's turn to the predisposition, rather than representing the ontological feature of his argument, serves a purpose that aligns him closely with Augustine and Aquinas: We must think of this universal human disposition (if corrupt) as not seeking evil for evil's sake, but as having inherently good predispositions that have been perverted in their search for good.

Michalson's first objection, which he takes to be the most difficult problem with Kant's philosophy of religion, is that Kant wants it both ways. That is, he wants the disposition to be comprised of both the predisposition to good and the transformative propensity to evil. One key distinction between the interpretation presented in this chapter and the one suggested by Michalson centres around how the predisposition to good is understood. In Michalson's interpretation, Kant's reference to the predisposition is really a reference to the primordial disposition. It represents its original state of goodness, one that is made corrupt by the free and inscrutable choice of humans to act according to the evil principle. I have argued, however, that the predisposition to good is not a thing at all. Rather, human predispositions are rubrics under which the diverse incentives that determine the power of choice fall. They provide a description of human incentives and the declaration that these incentives, considered on their own, are good. Nevertheless, these incentives have a proper or moral order that, if not adopted by the moral disposition, constitutes corruption. According to this understanding, there is no conflict between good predispositions and an evil propensity. The former refers only to the inherent goodness of the incentives that belong to the very possibility of human

nature, whereas propensity speaks of the dispositional bent of humanity that results from the moral or immoral prioritization of these incentives.

Michalson's second objection concerns Kant's declaration of evil as both innate to human beings and something brought upon us by our own freedom. The reason Michalson finds this tension to be problematic (at best) is his paradigmatic emphasis on individual autonomy. However, when viewing Kant's project with an emphasis on the species (as established in Kant's Introduction), the consistency of Kant's vision again becomes apparent. The human propensity to evil is the first real indication of the dispositional bent of the species. As already argued at length above, the freedom which chooses the dispositional bend (and subsequent propensity) is not an individual will, but the will universal as part of the cognized moral disposition. The disposition's rootedness in freedom is not a concern of individual autonomy. Rather, the need to ground the disposition in freedom emerges in the process of cognizing the disposition, thus giving rise to the concept of the will universal, which belongs to the species. The propensity is chosen by the will universal and in this sense is rooted in freedom and imputable; for the individual who is born into the species, however, the chosen dispositional bend is innate. The movement in Kant's thinking on depravity is clearly away from the individual concern for autonomy (or what Wolterstorff calls 'rights and obligations'³⁵) to the cognition of the disposition of humanity as a species and the nature of its propensity to evil. Thus, we may understand Kant's emphasis on the disposition as rooted in freedom to be compatible with the innateness of the dispositional bend, for the former refers to the cognition of the species, while the latter refers to the individual as part of the species.

The interpretation defended in the first section of this chapter provides a fruitful paradigm shift for understanding Kant's argument in Book One of *Religion*. Understanding Book One as an analysis of the dispositional unity of the human species according to cognition (i.e., whether there is dispositional unity, and if so, what is its nature) removes the force of Michalson's conclusions. It shows that, although Kant *may*

³⁵ Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, 'Conundrums in Kant's Rational Religion' in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, 44.

be charged at points with constructing a somewhat convoluted argument, the argument itself is essentially consistent. Where Michalson understands Kant's argument to be a forensic examination of individual human dispositions that eventually yields a wobbly doctrine of human depravity concerning the whole species, I understand Kant to be performing a transcendental exploration into the unified disposition of humanity that is aimed at establishing the nature of religious belief for rational human individuals. Kant's conclusion, one that I have shown is substantially supported by argumentation rather than empirical appeal, is that human beings must believe that they share in one unified disposition and that this disposition has a problem—humanity is evil by nature—the solution to which requires that we read on into Book Two.

Objections to Book Two and Their Solutions

Once again, we will limit the scope of this section to the main criticisms levelled by Gordon Michalson against the coherence of Kant's argument in Book Two. Michalson puts forward two main problems: First, there is the conundrum that Kant's philosophy of religion seeks to hold human freedom/self-determination in the context of the need for divine grace. In Book Two, Kant appears caught in a dilemma of simultaneously declaring the need for human beings to be both the stoic heroes of their moral regeneration and the saintly recipients of divine grace in their moral deficiencies. The argument of Book Two of *Religion*, contends Michalson, shakes Kant's bedrock moral assumption of the *ought-implies-can* principle. Radical evil threatens to undo this dictum because, Kant tells us, humans who are 'evil by nature' are incapable of raising themselves to a level of moral virtue pleasing to God. (For ease of reference, we will call this moral self-determination versus divine grace problem, the 'stoic-saint dilemma'.)

The second major problem Michalson sees in Book Two is what appears, from Michalson's interpretation, to be a convoluted account of moral regeneration. The specific area of concern is what he calls the 'before and after' problem. Key to this problem is the issue of timing: *How can God be just to a person, who, over the spectrum of time, represents two morally distinct people (i.e., the old man and the new man)?* Michalson argues that Kant's account of regeneration combines divine justice and

human identity over the life-long journey of moral transformation in a way that results in a fragmented understanding of the human person and gives a convoluted account of moral hope. To address these two concerns, for the remainder of this subsection, I will lay out how the understanding of Book Two argued for above dispels these difficulties.

Simply put, the stoic-saint dilemma arises when it is held that humans must be responsible for their own moral standing before God, while at the same time only God's grace can make up for their moral deficiencies. If we are morally deficient, and it is God's grace alone that makes us pleasing to the divine judge, in what sense can we say that we are responsible for satisfying the demands of the moral law? Once radical evil and divine grace are admitted into the Kantian paradigm, what is left of human autonomy, according to Michalson, is only 'the lingering "seed of goodness" [which] assures the sheer logical possibility of moral renewal'.³⁶ In Michalson's interpretation, this seed of goodness provides the hope that 'some as yet unspecified act or set of acts will transform this logical possibility [i.e., moral renewal] into a real possibility'.³⁷ Therefore, moral regeneration or conversion, according to Michalson's interpretation, means 'the transformation of the underlying disposition—from evil to good'.³⁸ Such a transformation requires a re-reversal of the order of incentives and a subsequent restructuring of the affected disposition, all of which must be done under human power along with divine cooperation. In the end, Michalson contends that Kant does not possess the critical resources necessary to address this problem inherent in reason.

In the above interpretations, Michalson is correct in seeing a shift of sorts in Kant's philosophy, but this shift does not begin with radical evil. Rather, it begins as Kant examines the moral disposition. The emphasis here should be on how he *examines* the disposition and not on the *disposition* per se. Kant indicates in the first *Critique* that his moral philosophy must assume a moral disposition: 'rational belief is grounded on the presupposition of moral dispositions' (A829/B857). Therefore, the notion of a

³⁶ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 77.

³⁷ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 77.

³⁸ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 77.

disposition, does not, in and of itself, indicate a shift in Kant's thinking. Yet, prior to *Religion*, the disposition constituted an unexamined presupposition in Kant's philosophy. Given the emphasis in Kant's moral philosophy on the morally autonomous individual, reason pressed ahead under the assumption that freedom is unhindered—*ought implies can*. However, as Kant examines the implications of the moral disposition in *Religion*, new insights emerge.

As shown in Section One, Kant's Book One deductively argues that the very notion of a moral disposition requires that the human species be either good or evil; there is no such thing as moral neutrality, and hence, there is no such thing as an individual acting independent of dispositional influence. Insofar as Kant's arguments in Book One point to the conclusion that humanity's dispositional bent is evil, moral freedom is placed in danger. As Michalson rightly points out, individuals who are evil by nature cannot make themselves pleasing to God, for humanity is bound under the evil principle. Thus, Kant's arguments in Book Two demand an alternative disposition (i.e., the disposition of the prototype) to make genuine moral freedom, progress, and hope possible. In other words, Kant's demand that we be the stoic heroes of our moral character cannot be met by humans who have available to them only a corrupt disposition. If we are to progress morally, we must be able to lay hold of and walk in a different disposition, but this alternative disposition is only available to humanity as a result of divine grace in the prototypical condescension. In other words, humans are only able to be stoic heroes because the divine prototype has graciously made available to humanity his good disposition, and, in that disposition, moral freedom. Kant makes this clear in 6:82-83, in which he uses the Christian picture of humanity bound under Satan through sin and the redemption of humanity by Christ as an illustration of the two opposing dispositions:

So the moral outcome of this conflict [between the good and the evil principle], on the part of the hero of the story (up to his death), is not really the *conquering* of the evil principle—for its kingdom still endures ...—but only the breaking up of its controlling power in holding against their will those who have so long been subject to it, now that another moral dominion (since the human being must be

subject to some dominion or other) has been revealed to them as freedom, and in it they can find protection for their morality if they want to forsake the old one.

We find, then, an amendment to Kant's thinking on moral freedom, and, by extension, his thinking on anthropology. Through an examination of the moral disposition, it has become apparent to Kant that "the human being must be subject to some dominion or other" (6:83). There is no such thing as the autonomous individual if by this we mean the individual functioning apart from a moral disposition. Hence, if the human being who is bound under the evil disposition is to be morally free (i.e., able to become the stoic hero), then an alternative good disposition must be available, and Kant tells us this good disposition exists only because of divine grace and the condescension of the prototype. Grace, for Kant, is not divine assistance with every decision we make, but rather the presence of the prototypical disposition in humanity, available for adoption, which makes possible our abandonment of our corrupt disposition. Thus, grace enters into Kant's thinking not as a foreign concept, but as the only concept capable of maintaining human freedom in light of the dispositional predicament in which humans find themselves.

Regarding the 'before and after' problem, Michalson's interpretation argues that Kant's account 'culminates in the paradox that an act having no relation to time produces a moral agent who is materially different "after" the act than "before"'.³⁹ Essentially, this observation brings to the fore that Kant, as understood by Michalson, mixes timelessness and time in his account of the moral individual. The evil disposition is chosen through a decision that is not made in time, while the moral agent converts to good *after* such a decision, indicating temporal succession. Since, according to Michalson, Kant has provided no metaphysical connection between moral conversion and temporal succession, humans must in a sense re-convert at every decision-making moment: 'every free act is for Kant a "conversion"'.⁴⁰ Conversion in this sense is not a moment in which the individual definitively changes but refers to any and every change

³⁹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 85.

⁴⁰ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 85.

of heart in which the good is chosen over evil. This interpretation, argues Michalson, causes Kant's account to fall into a crisis of personal identity.

Considered over time, the person who made the first moral choice (though not one made in time) to adopt an evil disposition is 'numerically' different than the person who makes the later choice[s] to become good again. Even if we can grant that Kant is able to account for the difference between the original human being who possesses a predisposition to good and the same human who is evil by nature in having succumbed to the propensity to evil, we still cannot account for the same human being who later embraces the good again. The individual becomes more than merely an old and new man divided by a definitive decision in time; he ends up consisting of a series of moral individuals (viz., the original man with the seed of goodness, the corrupt man who is evil by nature, and the moral agent who converts to the good at various times), some of whom are related to time, others not. Michalson explains it thus:

On the one hand, the very idea of regeneration or conversion ... suggests two distinct moral agents, a fallen and a redeemed one; while, on the other hand, morality's noumenal insulation from the effects of time suggests just one moral agent, due to Kant's inability to discriminate between 'before and after' when he considers the agent as an intelligible ... being. In the first instance, the resulting conceptual problem concerns the integration of the two different selves under a theory of personal identity that allows us to say that the regenerated agent really is the 'same' person ... as the guilty one. For if we cannot do this—if ... we end up with two metaphysically distinct agents—it ultimately becomes unclear how we are intelligibly to relate the issues of fall and regeneration.... And in the second instance, the problem concerns showing that the agent was sufficiently different at one point (in time?) than at another for the very idea of moral conversion to have meaningful application'.⁴¹

⁴¹ Michalson, *Fallen Freedom*, 87.

According to Michalson's interpretation, each of these moral individuals serves a necessary role in Kant's account, but to hold all in tandem fragments the human person and makes Kant's account of fallenness and redemption unintelligible.

Key to understanding how the interpretation presented here overcomes Michalson's 'before and after' problem is to recognize the marked differences in the interpretations of both Books One and Two. Michalson's understanding of *Religion* adopts the traditional assumption that Kant's arguments are centred on the morally autonomous individual. Thus, all Kant's talk of the species in Book One represents talk of how human individuals by and large tend to act when considered collectively. For this reason, Kant's discussion of the disposition, according to Michalson's interpretation, is also focused on the individual. The non-temporal choosing of the disposition speaks of the individual's decision to abandon the good and so become corrupt. The fallen freedom that results under the rubric of 'radical evil' is a personal fall that every individual as an individual undergoes. The 'seed of goodness' that remains, represents Kant's way of preventing this fall from obliterating all hope of moral renewal. The individual is able to draw on this dormant resource in order to scale the walls of depravity and arrive at moral redemption. Conversion speaks of an individual's change of heart that moves one in this direction; thus, every such change of heart constitutes a conversion all its own.

This individual-centred picture of *Religion* is in stark contrast to the interpretation argued for above. Michalson's interpretation (and subsequently his 'before and after' objection) produces six interpretative presuppositions/decisions that one simply need not affirm: (1) the human species is a reference to how individuals tend to be collectively, (2) the disposition is an individual affair, (3) the fall that gives rise to radical evil is an individual fall that every individual undergoes, (4) the predisposition to the good is a seed of goodness that makes room for moral renewal, (5) moral conversion is an autonomous decision to do good, and (6) the individual undergoes numerous moral conversions. All these presuppositions emerge out of Michalson's principal interpretive decision on the nature of the human disposition and are challenged by the Transcendental Union Thesis.

The fundamental shift between Michalson's interpretation and the one presented here, as already stated, is a shift in focus away from the autonomous individual to an examination of the species considered universally. Rather than viewing Kant's analysis of the species as a reference to human individuals collectively as they tend to behave, we must understand Kant's analysis of humanity (the species) to be reflective of a more Platonic concept of *species* in which it is cognized as a type of single universal from which individuals derive their nature.⁴² Kant's question in Book One is whether the species, thought of in this universal sense, possesses a moral disposition, and if so how this disposition must be cognized. This interpretative shift means that the dispositional corruption of Book One is not a personal fall undergone by every individual, but a single non-temporal fall of the will universal that belongs to the species. The individual possesses the corrupt nature innate to participants in human nature.⁴³

The importance of this hermeneutic shift for understanding Kant's account of moral conversion and hope in Book Two cannot be overestimated. Conversion is not a simple decision to do good but a revolution in disposition. The corrupt disposition, which is innate to the human individual *qua* human, is abandoned by the moral convert in favour of the prototypical disposition. The metaphysical distinction between the convert before and after conversion resides in the individual's standing relative to his disposition. The old man is identified as the individual having the corrupt disposition innate to the human individual *qua* human; the new man is identified as the individual having the prototypical disposition adopted at conversion. Rather than the individual consisting of an originally good individual, a fallen individual, and a regenerate individual, given this interpretation, there is only the convert before and after conversion. Prior to conversion, the individual possessed a corrupt disposition innately as part of the human species. At conversion, this disposition is abandoned in favour of a

⁴² See A822-823/B850-851.

⁴³ Kant's discussion of the predisposition to the good is not a seed of hope for moral renewal (hope does not appear until Book Two), but is only intended to show that humanity, while corrupt, is not corrupt by necessity. Human predispositions are good, but, with the inversion of the moral order of incentives, these predispositions become perverted and give rise to an evil nature.

new disposition, thereby giving way to a new moral identity. The moral progress that follows does not represent numerous conversions, but one moral activity reflective of the dispositional shift that took place at the point of conversion. The convert's identity as human is retained; it is only the convert's moral identity as defined according to his disposition that changes.

Michalson, like other theologically negative interpreters of Kant on religion, understands Kant's argument in *Religion* to be intently focused on human individuals and fundamentally concerned with understanding the God-humanity-world relationship according to the issue of 'rights and obligations'.⁴⁴ What I have argued is that Kant is less concerned with developing his moral theory in this way than with addressing the question of moral hope in the only way consistent with all three standpoints of his critical philosophy. What we cannot know from a theoretical or practical standpoint, we must look for in human cognition because the question of hope and the stability of reason itself demand it. According to Kant's argument in *Religion*, we must believe that we are indebted to God for good moral standing, for without the provision of the prototype we have no choice regarding our standing before him—we stand condemned. Book Two argues, however, that God has provided hope. Grace is an ever-present provision in human beings by virtue of their being human, and it is embodied in the person and work of the prototype (our moral archetype and judicial advocate). This hope is accessible to a genuine faith that results in moral conversion. With the two-fold thesis of Book Two—namely, that (1) the convert is united to the disposition of the prototype and is therefore pleasing to God and (2) the prototype is united to us and thereby takes on what is displeasing to God in the convert—divine justice is upheld, individual freedom is established, and human hope is secured. Far from being incoherent, this

⁴⁴ See, most notably, Philip Quinn, 'Saving Faith from Kant's Remarkable Antinomy' in *Faith and Philosophy* 7:4 (1990), 418-433, and Wolterstorff, 'Conundrums in Kant's Rational Religion'.

thesis presents a critical and creative transcendental paradigm for understanding the argument of Kant's *Religion*.⁴⁵

Objections to Book Three and Their Solutions

Michalson illustrates what he takes to be tensions in Kant's arguments in Book Three by focusing on the method of biblical interpretation one finds there. In Kant's engagement with the Bible, Michalson senses the presence of a circularity that dictates the entire procedure. Unpacking this engagement yields the first of Michalson's two main objections to Kant's Book Three argument, which we will address in this concluding portion of this section. For Kant, the moral interpretation of the biblical text always takes precedence over what the author might have consciously meant to convey. When Kant then shows that there is in fact moral meaning in the text, there is no guarantee that it was the author's intention and not some completely foreign meaning: 'Consequently, any inquiry into Kant's rationale for deriving moral meaning from a historical text comes full-circle back to the problem of the imposition of potentially foreign meaning *on to* the text'.⁴⁶

Michalson believes there is a vicious kind of circularity in Kant's biblical hermeneutic, a charge he summarizes in a passage on Kant's biblical hermeneutic and the experimental nature of Kant's inquiry into the merits of Christianity:

The reason Kant's method of interpretation proves so unsatisfactory is that it betrays the circularity of his approach in *Religion*.... If Kant is committed to the

⁴⁵ Keeping this understanding of Book Two in mind allows one to see a synthetic movement reminiscent of the third *Critique* in Book Three of *Religion*. The victory of the good involves the gradual transition of ecclesiastical faith into an ethical commonwealth. In both divisions of Book Three, entitled 'Philosophical representation of the victory of the good principle in the founding of a kingdom of God on earth' (6:95) and 'Historical representation of the gradual establishment of the dominion of the good principle on earth' (6:124), we find Kant establishing a picture of hope for the ongoing history of humankind from the standpoint of teleological judgment. Kant's vision is that human beings who possess the good disposition, who share a common union in having been united with the prototype, must band together as a whole to form an ethical community. Such a community alone can provide the natural context conducive to the hope of moral progress promised in Book Two. This vision involves the need for a visible church because of the particular weakness of human beings when brought together in nature and the inevitable time necessary to see it to fruition.

⁴⁶ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 90.

presupposition that the rational elements—however few—reside implicitly in any historical faith embraced by rational beings, then his experimental inquiry into revealed religion “in light of moral concepts,” with the aim of seeing whether this “does not lead back to the ... pure rational system of religion,” loses its innocent and experimental character. The result of such an experiment is a foregone conclusion, given Kant’s theory of practical reason. There is of course the possibility that certain particular historical faiths, like Christianity, may more completely approximate the religion of pure reason, but Kant seems committed to the claim that any historical faith whatever must contain at least a minimal aspect of rational religion.⁴⁷

For Michalson, Kant’s theory of biblical interpretation is illuminating insofar as it reveals the prior commitments that guide Kant’s entire approach to historical religion. ‘Every interpreter carries presuppositions’, suggests Michalson, ‘but in Kant’s case, the presuppositions involved tend to predetermine not only the questions he asks the texts, but the answers he gets’.⁴⁸ What Kant accomplishes in Book Three is not an expansion of his moral religion, which is already fixed according to the mandates of practical reason, but the moral reduction of biblio-historical Christianity to moral religion: ‘Thus, the ‘method’ by which Kant discovers the moral core of an historical faith is in fact an offshoot of his theory of practical reason, and this guarantees in advance the discovery of that same moral core’.⁴⁹ Michalson’s first major problem with Kant’s position in Book Three is thus the problem of circularity.

There are a number of presuppositions that Michalson brings to this objection which the interpretation of *Religion* previously presented simply does not affirm. First, Michalson presumes that the pure moral doctrines, which Kant suggests make up rational religion, are those of the second *Critique*. However, it is my contention that the pure moral doctrine of which Kant speaks, while including his earlier critical writings, also includes crucial clarifications of and advances in the moral theory he presents in

⁴⁷ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 90-91.

⁴⁸ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 91.

⁴⁹ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 91.

Books One and Two of *Religion*. As I understand it, Kant's arguments preceding Book Three are meant to provide two of the key features that a truly rational religion must contain in light of the question of hope. These two key features are the hope of moral absolutism and genuine moral progress, both of which, Kant suggests in 6:118-120, are necessary components of saving faith. Based on the above exegesis, these features indicate that Kant's prototypical theology of Book Two—a theology which is set up, of course, by his examination of dispositional corruption in Book One—is a necessary part of rational religion.

Second, Michalson suggests that Kant presupposes that all religions (or, more accurately, all faiths) contain a seed of rational religion. In other words, Michalson presumes at the outset that Kant is working under a pluralistic assumption. However, as I have suggested, Kant's claim that there are faiths of many different kinds but only one religion is not equivalent with arguing that there are many faiths all of which contain the seed of the same religion or are somehow linked to the same religion. Judaism, for example, represents a faith that, in Kant's view, does not contain the seed of rational religion. Thus, while Kant acknowledges that any faith can be a vehicle for rational religion, this potential is not a guarantee that every faith is a rational religion; a faith must be made to contain the pure moral doctrines if it is to rise to the level of religion, which will only occur over time through an ongoing reinterpretation of its sacred text.

Thirdly, there is a clear difference between the interpretation of *Religion* according to my hypothesis and Michalson's interpretation over the understanding of how Kant approaches Christianity. I do not see Kant reinterpreting Christianity with a view to turning it into a rational religion, but rather, after examining in Books One and Two what a rational religion must hold regarding corruption and moral hope, Kant concludes that Christianity in its pure form is a rational religion because it contains these elements. As we saw in the above exegesis, Kant begins by showing Judaism to be a strictly political faith. The importance of this designation is that Judaism represents, in Kant's view, a faith that lacks the seed of pure moral religion. Kant takes Christianity to have latched onto Judaism as its vehicle in order to introduce rational religion. This act on the part of Christianity means to Kant that Christianity itself stands as the original

manifestation of rational religion. Assuming this understanding is correct, Kant does not presuppose that all faiths contain rational religion and then reinterpret Christianity in such a way as to show that it does contain rational religion, but rather, quite the opposite. Books One and Two set up the criteria for evaluating whether a religion is rational. These criteria, in turn, give rise to Kant's two main conclusions: that Judaism is not a rational religion, and that Christianity, with its understanding of the corrupt disposition and the prototypical redemption, is a rational religion. Pure Christianity took Judaism as its vehicle, thus marking the beginning of the universal history of pure religious faith.

These changes make for a very different picture of Book Three than the one for which Michalson has argued. Because Kant does not presuppose the presence of rational religion in all religions and then proceed to reinterpret Christianity in such a way as to force rational elements to emerge, the so-called circularity of Kant's argument disappears. Rather, Kant establishes the parameters of rational religion, acknowledges that historical faiths can be a vehicle for rational religion (although, as merely contingent/empirical faiths, they are not necessarily vehicles), and proceeds to test faiths according to these parameters. This procedure leads him to the conclusion that Judaism (and other pre-Christian religions) is not a rational religion, but Christianity in both form and function is a rational religion that does precisely what Kant has suggested religions ought to do.⁵⁰ As we turn our sights toward Book Four in the next chapter, we find that Kant will temper his endorsement of Christianity, but only insofar as impurities have been added to its rational core (see Section One of the next chapter).

Michalson presses his objections to Kant's Book Three arguments one step further. Even if we grant that Kant can in fact relate historical faith and moral faith in the way described above, "The question which remains concerns the fate of this historical "vehicle" once the moral element has been located and appreciated. It is here that we begin to touch upon the extremely crucial issue of whether or not an historical faith is

⁵⁰ In this light, we can anticipate that what Kant is up to in Book Four is not the obliteration of Christianity from the religious scene, but the stripping away of all elements that fall outside of the rational features of Christianity and endanger its purity and place as a rational religion.

somehow religiously necessary for Kant'.⁵¹ This question constitutes the crux of Michalson's second objection to the argumentative flow of Book Three, what we might call 'the problem of necessity'. It appears that there is a sense in which Kant takes historical faith to be necessary to the moral advance of the human race, and yet at the same time he holds that historical faith is not necessary for rational religion. In Michalson's words, 'however strong a case one might make for the "constructive" aspect of Kant's view of an historical faith, it can never warrant replacing the religion of the second *Critique* with a religion of revelation'.⁵² Like practical reason itself, rational religion is self-sufficient. Nevertheless, there exists a strong undertow in the currents of Kant's argument that seems to make the need for historical faith transform itself into the necessity of historical faith. The irony, of course, is that Kant clearly advocates a time in the future where historical faith will no longer be needed.

What precisely is Kant trying to accomplish by moving historical faith toward rational necessity in terms of salvation while at the same time holding firm to the conviction that only rational faith is in fact necessary? Michalson thinks there are but two possibilities: 'On the one hand, the necessity of an historical faith might be understood to mean the reliance of human salvation upon a particular historical event or series of events'.⁵³ This theory of necessity brings Kant precariously close to the same problem that Michalson highlights in his assessment of the problems associated with Book Two. Michalson takes this first kind of necessity, namely, on the historical event, to be an uninteresting option in the context of Kant. It is either a foreign element that can evolve into a problematic issue in the context of Kant's rational limitations, or merely a conviction outside the bounds of philosophical inquiry. As Michalson notes, 'Kant is

⁵¹ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 115. According to Kant, 'The compatibility of a moral religion and an historical faith remains intact as long as we view the latter, not as an end in itself, but as the sensuous expression of the ideas contained in the former.' Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 115. Michalson refers to this expression under Kant's notion of schematization (see 110-113).

⁵² Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 116.

⁵³ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 116.

ultimately committed, not to the soteriological efficacy of anything contingent, but to the absolute reality and validity of something universal'.⁵⁴

The other possible meaning of necessity is more interesting to Michaelson. He writes, 'But on the other hand, the necessity of an historical faith can be taken to mean the reliance of man upon revealed religion *up until* the time he is of sufficient intellectual maturity to appreciate a religion of pure reason'.⁵⁵ Moral religion is Kant's ultimate 'goal', and historical religion (or what Michaelson calls 'historical and ecclesiastical forms') is necessary to the achievement of moral religion. Michaelson's interpretation of Kant holds that any historical religion will do just fine so long as the goal of rational religion is kept in sight: 'The exact nature or content of these forms is immaterial; what is important is that we go through the stage represented by historical religion in order to reach the ultimate goal'.⁵⁶ The vision of Kant's rational religion supported by Michaelson's interpretation is one of a purely moralistic society in which all formal (i.e., ecclesiastical) religion is disbanded. The problem of necessity remains in this vision insofar as there is no clear indication as to why such a historical faith stage is required. It seems there is a big difference between such a stage preceding rational religion and saying that it is in fact required for rational religion. Cogently traversing the logical gap between these two claims appears inexplicable.

This second objection obviously splits into two different forms, both of which, I contend, miss the point of why Kant holds to the *necessity* of ecclesiastical faith. Regarding the first form, certainly if Kant is simply saying that rational religion is self-sufficient (i.e., it does not need ecclesiastical faith) and at the same time that rational religion needs ecclesiastical faith, then we have a rather serious difficulty for Kant's argument in Book Three. As should be noted, however, Kant indicates that ecclesiastical faith is necessary due to human weakness, a weakness not traceable to the moral law but

⁵⁴ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 117.

⁵⁵ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 116. This second option appears 'to echo the Enlightenment's preoccupation with a "progressive" view of human history' and resonates with a number of Kant's comments in *Religion* (117).

⁵⁶ Michaelson, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, 118.

to the human need for the appearance of authority. Kant suggests that sacred texts bring veneration, even by those who do not read them, and that nothing echoes with greater authority than the declaration *it is written*. In Kant's view, humans feel the need for an authority in the form of a sacred text, not because the moral law lacks inherent authority, but only because humans are more reluctant to embrace such authority without the venerated text.⁵⁷

In short, the need for the ecclesiastical falls not to the moral law, but to the human who, out of weakness, is reluctant to embrace pure moral doctrine without the declarative authority of a scripture. Here we may draw on an analogy. We may, for example, envision an academic dean of a university. This figure retains inherent authority in the role of dean, and therefore, does not need an expensive suit or impressive office to exercise that authority. However, without such external symbols of authority, a student may be reluctant to believe in, and act appropriately in light of, the authority of this figure. What this analogy brings to the fore is the fact/value divide in Kant. What drives Kant's inquiry into rational religion in the first place is the separation between nature and freedom. Kant is clear that rational religion is grounded in morality and does not need the empirical in order to be self-authenticating. However, because of our sensuous natures and our intuitive trust in the rightness of a correlation between the empirical and the moral, we need a correspondence between the empirical and the moral in order for the moral to take hold of our whole person.⁵⁸

Regarding the second understanding of *necessity*, there is a key difference between Michalson's understanding of Kant's ultimate vision for rational religion and the one presented here. Rather than a strictly moral society in which ecclesiastical faiths

⁵⁷ This need for the sacred text is, of course, what gives way to Kant's understanding of the role of the biblical scholar as one who has as his job to establish, through resources inaccessible to the lay person, the authoritative interpretation of the text and the subsequent beliefs of the church; in this role, what the biblical scholar should seek to draw from the text is the pure moral doctrine (i.e., moral freedom, dispositional corruption, and prototypical salvation).

⁵⁸ In short, the moral law does not need the ecclesiastical in order to be authoritative, but humans need the appearance of authority in the form of the sacred text and the scriptural scholar in order to see and embrace that authority.

are done away with, the vision I have forwarded as Kant's is one in which rational religion retains much of the appearance of revealed religion. Kant, for example, retains the notion of a church, both particular and universal, as well as the presence of scripture and the scriptural scholar who expounds the pure moral features of the venerated text.⁵⁹ Moreover, insofar as Christianity in its pure form represents a rational religion that has already latched on to a historical vehicle and done away with it (e.g., the Pauline rejection of the Jewish ceremonial laws as still being valid), Christianity, with its scriptures and their emphasis on dispositional corruption, prototypical redemption, and moral renewal, is a rational religion. Hence, the picture of rational religion provided by this interpretation is not a purely moral society at all, but one in which the church, united under God and his prototype according to a holy text that expounds the pure moral doctrines, still exists in Kant's eschatological vision. What Kant does away with are dogmatic division, political religion, and an emphasis on the historical as the condition for faith. In the end, what is exalted are the universally valid features of the religion that moral reason in combination with cognition has brought to light, and the vision of hope that the ethical community strives to attain under the good principle.

⁵⁹ In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant argues that philosophy must always be prepared to keep the conflict going (7:33).

CHAPTER FIVE

APPLICATIONS OF KANT'S RATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR FAITH

I. Confirming the Transcendental Union Thesis: Book Four of *Religion*

Having shown the promise of my hypothesis for understanding Kant's account of rational religion in Books One, Two, and Three of *Religion*, the purpose of this chapter is to consolidate the work of the four previous chapters by making application of Kant's rational foundations for religious faith to the church and academy. To this end, this section will first focus on Book Four of *Religion*, in which Kant makes the transition from natural and rational religion to a consideration of learned and revealed religion. Book Four can be likened to a Kantian version of Ockham's razor; i.e., using the fully worked out rational religion of Books One to Three, Kant carves out the contours of what, from a transcendental vantage point, can be reasonably believed to be true and enduring about a particular historical faith. Again, Kant's focus is on unity, necessity, and universality, and his target in Book Four is New Testament Christianity. Book Four has a purpose that makes it, at least in part, distinct from the other three Books, and, for this reason, it was not included in the analysis presented in the previous chapter. It is the main part of Kant's second experiment, and, as such, there is very little in Book Four that is new to Kant's account of rational religion (provided, of course, that one understands the previous three books within the framework of transcendental union).

What is new in Book Four is the way that Kant applies his account of rational religion to historical faith, and the implications this has on the eventual application of his philosophy of religion in the university of learning more broadly considered. Book Four sets up Kant's application of rational religion to a living historical faith in two ways. First, he summarizes the philosophical grounds for rational religion already established in the previous three books, and second, he sets up his inquiry such that these grounds serve, both positively and negatively, as criteria by which to assess the historical dimension of the Christian faith. Whether or not one agrees with Kant, that his philosophical grounds for religion are derived not from history or experience but from

reason, is not at issue here. His argument is that the rational principles of religion follow from a careful inspection of cognition in the view of the question of hope. Kant's movement in Book Four toward the application of his understanding of rational religion to historical religion and, by extension, to theology proper is supported in the First Preface of *Religion*; it is also later confirmed in *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Each of these dimensions of Book Four will be explored below with a view to articulating the ground and framework of theology according to Kant. We will also examine an ongoing debate about Book Four concerning whether Kant, using his own terms and arguments, is properly called a 'rationalist' or a 'pure rationalist' (6:154-155). I will show that this debate dissolves under my hypothesis when a careful examination of the context reveals that Kant might best be thought of as both (and more).

In *Conflict*, which is the main topic of Section Two, Kant makes explicit application of his philosophical grounds for theology (i.e., rational theology) in the academy. Of particular interest is the way Kant applies his philosophy of religion to the discipline of theology proper. We will examine the distinction between the disciplines of theology and philosophy with a view to clarifying Kant's philosophical framework for theology and showing how Kant thought this framework could best be erected and his vision implemented. I argue that *Religion*, particularly Books Three and Four, provides the basis for properly understanding Kant's position on theology in *Conflict*. Given the understanding of Kant's rational theology and theology proper that emerges, I rehearse the reasons why Kant explicitly supports the maintenance of the perspectival distinction of the disciplines as an essential part of realizing his plan, as outlined in Book Three. In short, if there is to be a reasonable hope for humankind, then Kant believes there must be a university structure conducive to the eventual establishment of a universal religion. Kant's eschatological vision of hope and the application of his vision are found in Books Three and Four of *Religion*, respectively. Philosophy and theology must always remain in conflict, thinks Kant, because rational religion needs theology (unmixed and pure) for two reasons: first, because of its awakening and deepening properties, and second, because of human weakness. The awakening and deepening are directly related to Kant's analysis of history in Book Three, while human weakness is related to the need

for the appearance of authority in Book Three and Kant's emphasis on the condition of the unlearned in Book Four.

Turning now to Book Four of *Religion*, we find that it offers little that is new in terms of Kant's vision, but instead gives a more forthright picture of this vision as it is applied to the Christian faith in particular. I will not provide the type of thoroughgoing exegetical treatment of Book Four that I provide in the previous chapter on Books One through Three, but more of a thematic summary of Book Four based on three ways it serves to confirm the interpretation of Kant's rational religion argued for in the previous chapter. If my understanding of Books One through Three is valid, we would expect to find three things in Book Four: First, that Kant would reiterate various features of his rational religion, and that this reiteration would be in keeping with the foregoing assessment of Books One through Three. Second, that Kant's practical application of his rational religion would include a treatment of Christianity that is reflective of the vision for religion set forth in Book Three. That is, elements of Kant's rational foundations for theology of Books One and Two would be exalted and the peripheral cultic features of the faith (in part derived from the Jewish faith that serves as vehicle) would be downplayed as unimportant (if not outright harmful should they be exalted over the rational elements). Third, that the interpretation rendered here would continue to overcome any remaining anomalies within Book Four.

It is my contention that all three of these confirming features are found in Book Four of *Religion* and so will serve as a basic outline for my treatment to follow. I first highlight and summarize those areas in Book Four in which Kant either assumes or reiterates his previously established rational theology, and show how such reiterations are in keeping with my analysis in the previous chapter. Following this, I give an overview of Kant's application of his rational vision to the Christian faith. In this overview, I highlight in particular how Kant exalts the rational features of the Christian religion, as well as his warnings against counterfeit service and enthusiasm in which the cultic features are elevated above the moral/rational features, turning the Christian religion into the Christian faith. Finally, I show how the interpretation afforded by the

original hypothesis helps clarify an issue that has lingered in Kant studies regarding Book Four, namely, whether Kant is a rationalist or a pure rationalist.

Echoes of Books One Through Three in Book Four

Kant's rational foundations for theology as set out in Books One through Three are reiterated periodically throughout Book Four. The first instance appears at the very opening of Book Four in Kant's review of what he feels has been established in Book Three. Applying a bold scriptural claim to his own period of history, he asserts that the kingdom of God is at hand because the principles that ground it in reason, Kant believes, have already taken root 'even though the complete development of its appearance in the world of the senses is postponed to an unseen distance' (6:151). Moral converts must unite with a view to establishing this visible kingdom, and the establishment of this union is a duty of a special kind. Whereas such corporate unity may take place apart from deliberate effort owing to '*accidental agreement* of all in a common good' (6:151), true hope requires proactive measures (or '*special organization*' [6:151]) to resist the evil principle. For insofar as humanity is innately corrupt, it is inevitable that 'human beings ... otherwise tempt each other to serve as tools [the evil principle]' (6:151). This special organization represents a community under God '**as a Kingdom of God**' (6:151), and must be brought about through religion in a public setting, which, according to Kant, requires a church. Such a church must comprise those of a good disposition (i.e., moral converts), which from a human perspective must be presupposed in its members since the actual nature of the disposition is empirically inaccessible. Yet, for this very reason, he who knows the disposition must form the invisible church: 'God must himself be the author of his Kingdom' (6:152). This divine agency does not indicate that humans can be complacent, but instead, that we must seek to make ourselves fit for this kingdom (and therefore must know what is required, whether such knowledge is awoken through reason or scripture) and must work toward its instantiation with trust in the providential hand: 'God himself is in the last instance the author of the *constitution* as founder, whereas human beings, as members and free citizens of this kingdom, are in all instances the authors of the *organization*' (6:152). This picture is clearly in keeping with my previous treatment of Book Three.

In 6:157-158, Kant begins by again reiterating a number of points from Book Three in preparation for his treatment of Christianity as natural religion. Interestingly, Kant suggests that freedom, God, and immortality are rational features of true religion and are subsequently universally communicable. This suggestion is, of course, reminiscent of the first *Critique* in which Kant passed over these topics for the sake of brevity, but it seems that in *Religion* he feels that such topics have since proven themselves to be in the purview of rational religion. Kant reiterates that there is a need for ministers (or teachers to the church) who convey the pure moral/religious doctrines.¹

The importance of this formalized visible representation of the church (with teachers prominently placed) is that the universal church is not yet realized and, according to Kant, can neither preserve itself or be realized without a visible church body. This observation brings Kant to the instantiation of Christianity in which Jesus exemplifies this point. According to Kant, Jesus is the first teacher of the pure religious doctrines (e.g., dispositional revolution, immortality, etc.); thus, Kant posits, if we test Christianity we will find within the teachings of Jesus much, if not all, of what is essential to rational religion. Even if we find that amoral statutes were included in Jesus' teachings, we cannot, submits Kant, in any way deny his authority as the founder of rational religion (for it may well be, and likely is the case, that such teachings were added to Jesus' teachings).² In many ways, this is far too effective an argument: it means any inconvenient material is removed in advance (no matter what it is), making it appear pointless to read the texts. However, as will be shown below, Kant has a specific purpose in mind for the biblical scholar that makes the task of biblical exegesis meaningful from the point of view of Kant's philosophy of religion.

¹ For the remainder of this chapter, we will use the term 'pure religious doctrine' to signify the essential tenets of Kant's rational foundations for religious belief (e.g., dispositional depravity, prototypical redemption, etc.) from Books One, Two, and Three of *Religion*. These are summarized in detail in Section Three of this chapter.

² Conversely, Kant is also clear that we should not take the authority of Jesus to mean that all are bound under amoral statutes that were added to his instruction (see 6:158).

In Kant's transition to Christianity as learned religion, he emphasizes the point that communicability is the measure of a religion built on reason (6:163-167; cf. 6:155). This is, of course, reminiscent of Kant's emphasis in Book Two on the prototype of reason as universally valid for all people of all times and in all worlds, as well as Kant's distinction in Book Three between a religion contingent on historical events and a religion that is universally accessible and valid due to its rational foundation. However, in Book Four, Kant returns to examine the notion of human weakness in a way that requires the work of the biblical scholar. Here, it becomes clear that this human weakness is the weakness of the unlearned public who cannot immediately grasp the pure religious doctrines using mere reason and need the apparent authority and clarity of the biblical scholar to make these doctrines intelligible. Therefore, while rational religion is universally accessible and valid, it is not universally communicable since not all are learned. Thus, Kant returns to the need for scriptural scholars who utilize their erudition to decipher and communicate the features of the religion as contained in a sacred text. For this reason, the given text is 'a sacred possession trusted to the care of the *learned*' (6:163). Kant goes on to reiterate the rational principles of Books One and Two (e.g., man's dispositional corruption, the need for dispositional redemption, etc.) as that which defines natural religion and represents the pure religious doctrines that the biblical scholar ought to bring to the fore:

Of the evil that lies in the human heart and of which nobody is free; of the impossibility of ever retaining ourselves justified before God on the basis of our life-conduct and yet of the necessity of such a valid justification before him; of the futility of substituting ecclesiastical observances and pious servile works for the lack of righteousness and yet of the inescapable obligation to become a new man: [of all this] everyone can be convinced through his reason, and to be convinced of it is part of religion (6:163).

We have here again Kant's reiteration of the corruption of Book One, the hope of Book Two, and the exaltation of reason and of the ecclesiastical in Book Three. Moreover, we have Kant's reiteration of the need for the biblical scholar as one who expounds these doctrines from the sacred text for the sake of the unlearned.

In 6:166-167, Kant reiterates his understanding of the emergence of the Christian faith that is in keeping with the account of Book Three outlined in the previous chapter. Kant suggests that Judaism was a faith, not a religion, built upon cultic practices contained in a text accessible only to those who knew the Hebrew language. Christianity, however, was so bound to reason that it could be propagated 'even without historical scholarship, at all times and among all peoples' (6:167). Kant admits that Christian teaching weaves the pure religious doctrines amidst the teachings and history of Judaism, but suggests that this was only due to Christianity's circumstances. Ultimately, this weaving did not commend the cultic practices or consider them necessary to religion, but instead exemplifies Christianity's use of Judaism as vehicle. Hence, whenever such cultic references emerge in the Christian teachings, there is included scholarship and reinterpretation of the Jewish tradition.

These few key portions are the more explicit reiterations in Book Four of Kant's transcendental theology from Books One through Three. In a more extensive treatment, we might also note Kant's emphasis on how 'reason does not leave us altogether without comfort with respect to the lack of a righteousness of our own (which is valid before God)' (6:171), and the continual return to the disposition both as that which must be solidified (or 'render[ed] permanent' [6:171]) in order to obtain moral hope, and as the basis for justification before God (e.g., 6:152, 159, 160, 169, and 171). Ultimately, Kant's use in Book Four of his previously established transcendental theology serves to confirm the above understanding of Books One, Two, and Three insofar as the presumed backdrop for Book Four is a picture identical to the above understanding of Kant's transcendental theology. What we will see, as we turn to Kant's application of this vision to Christianity, is that these elements (i.e., the corrupt disposition, the need for a dispositional revolution, the prototype, etc.) emerge not merely in reiteration, but they are continually put forward as the positive features of the Christian faith that ought to be exalted and held as what make it an enduring universally valid faith and the measure of what is peripheral (and thus may be severed).

*The Application of Kant's Vision to Christianity*³

Kant's vision in Book Three of *Religion* builds upon the pure religious doctrines of the earlier books and the biblical scholar putting forward these same truths via an exposition of the sacred text. This vision sets the stage for Kant's initial discussion (at the very beginning of Book Four, just after a summary of the Book Three vision) of true versus counterfeit service that, once understood, makes plain his latter treatments of that which truly serves the church; namely, that which is in keeping with the pure religious doctrines and avoids counterfeit service. Kant's argument is as follows: Because the true church is the invisible church—for only the invisible is composed of all true converts and free from false converts—it follows that the servants of the true church are not necessarily those of the ecclesiastical order, but those under the dominion of the good disposition. This does not mean that those in the order of the ecclesiastical are therefore necessarily engaged in counterfeit service. Rather, as long as the given church is engaged in the matters of exalting the pure religious doctrines in the manner outlined in Book Three, its ecclesiastical representatives serve the true church and the good principle. However, counterfeit service can emerge when those serving amidst the ecclesiastical order exalt the rituals over the pure religious doctrines. When this is done, i.e., when the cultic/historical features of a faith are exalted and presented as requirements for humans to become pleasing to God, there emerges what Kant calls counterfeit service (*Afterdienst*). In such a case, the ecclesiastical representative ultimately hinders the process of duty, downplaying the pure religious doctrines and leading people away from the good principle to a religion of service. Such counterfeit servants ultimately hinder the work of God rather than further it:

By a 'counterfeit service' (*cultus spuriosus*) is meant the persuasion that we are serving someone with deeds which, in fact, go counter to his intention. This comes about in a community when that which has value only as means for satisfying the will of a superior, is given out to be, and is substituted for, what

³ Kant's vision is already Christian (although not orthodox) long before it gets applied to Christianity. However, Kant has in mind the distinction between the rational and the empirical, and the presumption of the primacy of the former. It is to Kant's understanding of this distinction that the title refers.

would make us well-pleasing to him *directly*, and the superior's intention is thereby frustrated (6:153).

In the context of religious service, the one whose will is frustrated is clearly God. As we will see, the concern in Book Four is weeding out what constitutes counterfeit service and what constitutes true service in the visible church by discerning what in a particular religion (in the context of Book Four, Christianity) is rational, universally valid, and therefore required as duty, and what falls outside this sphere as superfluous and may be weeded out as such.

Beginning with that which is rationally accessible to all and therefore in keeping with true service to the church, we find Kant highlighting in 6:157-163 features of Christianity that parallel his transcendental theology laid out in Books One through Three. Kant looks at various points of the teachings of Jesus in order to show their congruence with the pure religious doctrines. He highlights Jesus' denial of the civil, statutory ordinances as morally efficacious, and instead points to Jesus commending the disposition which is pleasing to God. In support of this point, Kant highlights Jesus' teaching that the inner sins of the mind or the heart are just as serious moral failings as those of the outer man (e.g., Jesus' equation of a lustful glance with adultery, or anger with murder; see Matt 5:21-22). Kant also notes that Jesus regularly cited Jewish law, but would then declare in its place the pure religious doctrines: 'You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you' (e.g., Matt 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 38-39, and 43-44). This indicates, to Kant, that Jesus was not affirming Jewish tradition, but using it, we might say as a vehicle, for the pure religious doctrines. Kant considers Jesus' words about the wide gate that leads to destruction and the narrow gate that leads to life (Matt 7:13-14) to be an indication of how easily the dispositional doctrines may be misinterpreted and distorted into a religion of service; yet, he nevertheless requires that the inward disposition be demonstrated by outward deeds (cf. Matt 5:16).

Kant goes on to list various other features of the teachings of Jesus that he feels are conducive to the pure religious doctrines: Jesus commends duty as the supreme incentive (cf. Matt 25:35) and denies self-interest as a legitimate incentive, suggesting

instead that holiness was what should be pursued (6:161); he commends moral faith by indicating that complacency may hinder the attaining of the good disposition; he indicates that to be moral does not mean a person will be happy (6:161); and while he does suggest future rewards in the next life, he indicates that those who pursue the good for the sake of duty are better than those who pursue the good for the sake of future reward (6:161-162; cf. Matt 25:35).⁴ In addition, Kant emphasizes that we have in Jesus an example from experience of the prototypical ideal: as far as the outer testimony can provide sufficient proof of an inward disposition. Kant suggests that the good disposition is ‘a capital entrusted to [Jesus]’ (6:161) and that, in Christianity, ‘a prototype for us to follow (so far as human beings are capable of it) has been made visible in an example’ (6:162). Hence, Christianity is ‘a complete religion, which can be proposed to all human beings comprehensibly and convincingly through their own reason’ (6:162)

Switching to Christianity as a learned religion in 6:163-167, we find confirmation of our understanding of the relationship between philosophy and the scriptural scholar laid out in Book Three. In preparation for this discussion, Kant reiterates a point made in the opening of Book Four, namely, that communicability is the measure of whether a religion is natural or learned. This point is in keeping with Kant’s claims throughout *Religion* that only rational religion that is not contingent upon a particular history can be communicated convincingly to all; in contrast, learned religion centres around a text that requires erudition to grasp its teachings, resulting in a need for scriptural scholars who use erudition to decipher and communicate the features of the religion as contained in a sacred text. Thus, the given text is ‘a sacred possession trusted to the care of the *learned*’ (6:163).

Kant does not present this feature of learned religion as a negative point, but uses it to amplify his earlier claims from Book Three. He argues that the learned and the rational cannot be separated. Whereas the pure religious doctrines are universally valid

⁴ Kant suggests that such eschatological motivations may lead to faulty thinking, e.g., seeking moral prudence over moral duty. For instance, if rewards are likely in the future, then perhaps chastening may simply be endured (rather than heeded) until then. Therefore, the true elect, according to Kant, are those who act for duty without thought of reward.

and accessible to all insofar as they are rooted in reason, not all are learned. This is part of the weakness of which Kant spoke in Book Three that creates the need for revelation, or we might say the need for a sacred text that may be interpreted for the sake of the unlearned. If a religion is to be valid for all the world, vis-à-vis both the learned and the unlearned, there arises a need for learned religion and an opportunity for the biblical scholar to communicate via his erudition and treatment of the text the pure religious doctrines. In Kant's words:

universal human reason must be recognized and honored as supreme commanding principle in a natural religion within the Christian doctrine of faith; whereas the doctrine of revelation, upon which a church is founded and which stands in need of scholars as interpreters and preservers, must be cherished and cultivated as a mere means, though a most precious one, for giving meaning, diffusion, and continuity to natural religion even among the ignorant (6:165).

Thus, in keeping with the vision of Book Three as explained earlier in this dissertation, Christianity should not merely be revealed with laity blindly following behind, but should be built on universal reason and have biblical scholars excavating its scriptures in support of such reason as a means for communicating these truths to the unlearned.

In contrast to this vision for religion, there is that of counterfeit service. As indicated in my treatment of Book Three, a faith diverges from the path of true religion when the historically contingent features of the faith are exalted as the condition for faith. Such a faith is not universally valid, nor does it give the moral doctrines their rightful place. Kant's notion of counterfeit service is an extension of this insight. Those who purport to serve the church but exalt the ecclesiastical features of a faith over the rational are not truly serving the church (at least not the true church). Those who engage in this kind of counterfeit service, Kant suggests, are not serving but taking the dominion of the church. Rather than treating the contingent faith as a vehicle for true religion, however, those who dwell merely in counterfeit service treat the vehicle as an end in itself and an indispensable feature of the faith. Thus, in a Christianity of counterfeit

service, Judaism is viewed not as a vehicle but as part of the necessary structure of Christianity.⁵ Priest-craft is the constitution of a church built on such service and enthusiasm that hinders true religion. Such a church results in a ruling clergy with articles of faith, and it dispenses with both reason and biblical scholarship. It dictates the will of God to the laity and imposes service counter to the will of God.

Anthropomorphism, suggests Kant, is at the heart of the appeal of counterfeit service. In anthropomorphism, the deity is envisioned as a worldly ruler who must be appeased; therefore, the notion that he can be appeased becomes palatable. Hence, the primordial origin of cultic service is rooted in fear and powerlessness. It is this notion of service before an anthropomorphized deity that grounds Kant's notion of enthusiasm, for, according to Kant, when one seeks to appease the deity in this way, one is seeking to prompt the release of grace and even perceive and take comfort in its presence. However, to say anything beyond this about its presence or how it is produced is to claim to cause or perceive the super-sensible, which is enthusiasm.⁶ Kant's concern is to keep Christianity from becoming a religion of service in which the servants of the church ultimately wield authority, hinder the pure religious doctrines that show one how to truly become pleasing to God, and lead people into amoral rituals in an attempt to appease the deity as if he were a kingly ruler. It is for this reason that Kant returns continually to the point that '[o]nly those whose intention is to find this service solely in the disposition to good life-conduct distinguish themselves from those others by crossing over into an entirely different principle' (6:176), reminding us again of the two different religious paths laid out in Book Three.

What we find in Kant's engagement with Christianity guided by his vision for religion is precisely what we would expect to find if the understanding of Books One through Three argued for previously are accurate. Kant's investigation of Christianity as

⁵ Kant argues that it is incoherent to say that Christians are not bound to Jewish law but should nevertheless view that law (or the book which contains it) as sacred, indispensable revelation.

⁶ Kant suggests that such an attempt to prompt supernatural effects on the world by ritualistic practices is, for all intents and purposes, the very definition of sorcery.

natural religion exalts the dispositional philosophy and transcendental theology of Books One and Two, and points to Jesus as a picture of the prototype. Kant's engagement with Christianity as learned religion exalts the importance of a sacred text as the grounds of a church and the need for biblical scholars to engage that text. His treatment of these topics brings into sharp relief the weakness of the unlearned that creates the need for an authority that may be believed and from whom the pure religious doctrines may be understood. This notion builds on Kant's emphasis on a religion valid for the whole world, even for the unlearned and conceptually challenged. Even Kant's treatment of the way Christianity may diverge from true religion and may be made into a religion of service brings to the fore the importance of the proper prioritization of history and reason, the divergent paths that emerge if this priority is inverted, the problems with treating a faith as more than a vehicle, and the various practices (e.g., anthropomorphism) that ground the appeal of counterfeit service and make it a danger. This picture is in keeping with the exegetical doctrines of Books One, Two, and Three and the problem-solution-vision structure, argued for previously, of Kant's main argument in *Religion*.

Overcoming Old Problems: Kant—Rationalist or Pure Rationalist?

With the affirmation of the interpretation so far provided, we turn to our third level of confirmation, namely, an examination of old problems in order to shed new light on them. The particular problem we will focus on is the much-debated question of whether Kant considers himself a rationalist or a pure rationalist. As noted in Chapter Two, Allen Wood argues that 'Kant is plainly a rationalist because he is simply an agnostic about supernatural revelation'.⁷ John Hare presents a competing case—that Kant is a 'pure rationalist'. He gives three reasons: 'The first question to ask is why Kant should have introduced the category of pure rationalist at all.... The second reason is that the term 'pure rationalist' is the sort of phrase we should expect Kant to use as honorific.... Third, Kant sees special revelation as a "vehicle" in God's dealings with

⁷ Wood, 'Kant's Deism', 11.

human beings'.⁸ For Hare, Kant is best described as a pure rationalist, because such a one 'accepts special revelation but nevertheless does not think that its acceptance is without qualification necessary to religion'.⁹ Even though the definition of the rationalist seems to be broadly in keeping with Kant's rejection of naturalism and supernaturalism, Hare argues that the designation of pure rationalist is simply a better fit for Kant and makes the most sense of the text as it stands. Thus, it is worth taking a closer look at the passage in question.

Kant introduces at the beginning of Book Four the basic division between revealed religion and natural religion. Those adhering to the former, as already indicated in Book Three, hold that the services God requires are made known only through revelation (*Offenbarung*), whereas those subscribing to the latter hold that moral duty, as presented by reason, is all God requires. It is the latter, i.e., the one who holds 'natural religion as alone morally necessary' (6:154), that Kant dubs *the rationalist*. Following the basic distinction between those who hold to revealed religion and the rationalist, Kant lists three other titles, namely, the naturalist, the pure rationalist, and the super-naturalist. One could interpret these labels as being distinct from and in addition to the rationalist, which is true of both Wood and Hare, for example. In this light, the question emerges *which of these four positions represents Kant?*¹⁰

A way of making sense of this paragraph that takes into account the strength of the arguments on both sides is to understand these three titles (i.e., the naturalist, the pure rationalist, and the super-naturalist) as representative of three sub-categories of the rationalist. Hence, Kant begins by introducing the broad distinction between revealed religion and natural religion in order to identify with *the rationalist* as broadly conceived, but he then provides three positions on the role of revelation relative to the instantiation of true religion which the rationalist may hold: (1) He may deny the very

⁸ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 42-43.

⁹ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 44-45.

¹⁰ We say four rather than five headings because Kant does not assign a label to the one who holds to revealed religion. He only introduces the distinction between natural and revealed religion and then provides a designation for the one who holds to the former.

possibility of revelation and be dubbed a *naturalist*; (2) he may allow for the possibility of revelation in the instantiation of the true religion but suggest that it is not required for religion, and so be dubbed a *pure rationalist*; or (3) he may hold that religion cannot be established without revelation (i.e., that revelation is necessary for the instantiation of true religion) and be called a *super-naturalist*.¹¹ Given such an interpretation, each of these three positions is a rationalist position. They each hold that duty (rather than revealed acts of service) is sufficiently pleasing to God, yet they differ in regard to their stance on the role revelation plays (or does not play) in the instantiation of true religion.

In defence of this understanding of the structure of Kant's argument, we may note the contrast between the no-nonsense, matter-of-fact way that Kant introduces the rationalist definition and the conditional way he introduces the next three definitions. In regard to the rationalist, Kant simply asserts 'Anyone who declares natural religion as alone morally necessary ... can also be called *rationalist*' (6:154). He then switches to the conditional when discussing the next three distinctions:

If he denies the reality of any supernatural divine revelation, he is called *naturalist*; **should he**, however, allow this revelation, yet claim that to take cognizance of it and accept it as actual is not necessarily required for religion, then he can be named *pure rationalist*; but, **if he** holds that faith in divine revelation is necessary to universal religion, then he can be called *pure supernaturalist* in matters of faith (6:154-155; bold emphasis added).

As commonly acknowledged, there is some justification for understanding Kant here as providing three additional categories beyond the rational. Given the way, for example, he typically loads a section of text with terminology and definition, this section appears to be simply another example of Kant distinguishing between concepts on the same level of philosophical reflection. This perception is especially true when these four

¹¹ One may wonder whether there is any real difference between the super-naturalist and the one who holds to a revealed religion. The difference resides in their position on the works required by God. The super-naturalist believes that what is morally required by God is duty, but that revelation is still required for the establishment of a religion; whereas the one who holds to revealed religion not only holds that revelation is required, but holds that it is required because the works God requires cannot otherwise be known.

distinctions are taken in isolation from the whole text and evaluated in strictly analytic terms. If the shift to the conditional indicates that the personal pronoun 'he' is not meant to play the same role as 'anyone' in the previous sentence, but rather to refer back to the rationalist as broadly conceived, then there are three subsets of the rationalist rather than three more possibilities beyond merely that of the rationalist.

Regardless of how the pronoun reference issue is resolved, there are still three textual points that speak for understanding the shift to the conditional in this way. First, the naturalist, the pure rationalist, and the super-naturalist are identified and distinguished from one another by their disparate stances on the possibility and subsequent role of revelation in the instantiation of true religion. The rationalist, however, is not defined relative to this issue. The rationalist is only identified as one who holds to natural religion as opposed to revealed religion, i.e., a religion of service; however, the rationalist's stance on the role revelation may or may not play in the instantiation of true religion is not specified. This omission seems to indicate that the rationalist should not be categorized with the positions to follow as one of *four* stances on the role of revelation in the instantiation of true religion, but should be set apart as a main rubric under which the following *three* positions fall. The second indication is in the paragraph that follows to be dealt with more in-depth momentarily. For the moment, suffice to say that Kant turns to examining which of these *three* possibilities is the truly rational position, so indicating that while the basic division between natural and revealed religion (or a religion of service) is clear, there still remains a question regarding the rationalist's position on revelation as it relates to the eventual instantiation of true religion. While Kant clearly falls under the category of *the rationalist* (as assumed by many traditional interpreters), the question remains: *Which form of rationalist is Kant?* To put the question another way, *What is Kant's position on the role of revelation relative to the instantiation of true religion?*

It is when Kant himself sets out to give an answer to this question that the third indication is presented. According to Kant, the rationalist 'must of his own accord hold himself within the limits of human insight' (6:155). He then dismisses outright the naturalist position, suggesting that to deny the very possibility of revelation cannot be

done within the limits of human insight: 'Hence he will never deny in the manner of a naturalist' (6:155). It should be noted that this refusal to deny the possibility of revelation represents a consistent feature of Kant's thinking and a relatively common position for the time. In his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, for example, Kant asserts that 'no human being can hold it impossible that ... God might have given to it, in a higher revelation, certain truths' (28:1119). Thus, Kant is left with the pure rationalist and the super-naturalist as the remaining rational positions. While it seems that Kant regularly leans in the direction of the pure rationalist, he asserts that it is beyond the purview of human reason to make a final determination on whether revelation is merely possible but not needed for the instantiation of religion or is both possible and necessary to the instantiation of universal religion: 'Hence he will never ... contest the intrinsic possibility of revelation in general or the necessity of a revelation as a divine means for the introduction of true religion; for no human being can determine anything through reason regarding these matters' (6:155). In other words, we cannot say with certainty, concerning the instantiation of true religion, that revelation may play a role but is not required, or that revelation must play a role because true religion cannot be instantiated without it. Kant concludes, 'The point of dispute can therefore concern only the reciprocal claims of the pure rationalist and the supernaturalist in matters of faith' (6:155).

Having reached this point of dispute between what one 'either accepts as necessary and sufficient, or only as accidental, to the one and only true religion' (6:155), Kant chooses a different angle for approaching religion, namely, 'according to the characteristic that renders it capable of *external communication*' (6:155).¹² Here Kant introduces the distinction between *natural religion* and *learned religion*. The former, Kant suggests, constitutes that of which 'every human being can be convinced through

¹² We may note that Kant states, 'If religion is divided not according to its first origin and inner possibility (for then it divides into natural and revealed)' (6:155), indicating that his discussion preceding this change of focus falls under the basic division between natural and revealed religion. This distinction stands as further evidence that in the entire preceding discussion, the rationalist, naturalist, pure rationalist, and super-naturalist do not represent major distinctions but minor sub-categories that only help flesh out the natural/revealed distinction.

his reason' (6:155), whereas the latter constitutes that of 'which one can convince others only by means of erudition' (6:155). The importance of this distinction is that, since it is beyond the limits of human reason to mediate between the pure rationalist and the supernaturalist (a point also confirmed in this paragraph: 'from the origin of a religion alone we cannot draw any conclusion regarding its suitability or unsuitability to be a universal religion of humanity' [6:155]), the measure of a given religion's suitability for true religion falls to this question of communicability. We can, thinks Kant, decide a religion's suitability for being the universal religion of humanity 'on the basis of [a religion's] constitution as universally communicable, or not; the first property [i.e., religion as universally communicable] constitutes, however, the essential characteristic of the religion which ought to bind every human being' (6:155).

However, Kant does not suggest that there is an insurmountable gap between the natural and the learned. Rather, he indicates quite clearly that 'a religion can be *natural*, yet also *revealed*' (6:155). Such a religion is one that 'human beings *could and ought to have* arrived at ... on their own through the mere use of reason' (6:155), yet, because 'they *would* not have come to it as early or as extensively as is required' (6:155), the public revelation of its doctrines proves beneficial. Thus, with the introduction of such a religion, 'everyone can henceforth convince himself of its truth by himself and his own reason' (6:156). In such a case, the religion rightfully bears both titles: 'the religion is *objectively* a natural one, though *subjectively* one-revealed; hence it truly deserves also the first title' (6:156). The difference between a religion which is both natural and revealed and a religion which 'cannot be considered but as revealed' (6:156) is that the former could persevere even if the revelation were lost and entirely forgotten, whereas the latter requires that the record be preserved 'in a totally secure tradition or in holy books as records, [or] it would disappear from the world; and a supernatural revelation would have to come about, either one publicly repeated from time to time or one continuously enduring within each human being' (6:156). With this distinction, Kant makes clear that what revelation adds to is natural religion. Since religion (both in a pure form and in a form of divine service) is always derived from the concept of 'an obligation under the will of a *moral* lawgiver' (6:156)—i.e., it seeks to answer the

question *what does God require?*—the very concept of religion ‘is one of pure reason’ (6:156).

For this reason, when approaching the topic of religion, Kant must assume that ‘every religion in part at least, even a revealed religion, must also contain certain principles of natural religion’ (6:156). For, at the very least, all religions, even ones of service, assume a moral lawgiver whom they are seeking to please. While not all religions rise to the level of rational religion (e.g., Judaism and other pre-Christian faiths), all emerge out of certain basic principles of pure reason. It is on this basis that Kant sets up his two-part test of revealed religion: ‘We too shall therefore consider a revealed religion as yet *natural*, on the one hand, but on the other hand, as *learned* religion’ (6:156). The point of this, of course, is to test revealed religion against the framework for rational religion in Books One through Three in order to evaluate the [rational] quality of a revealed religion relative to this framework. To use Kant’s words once again, ‘we shall test [revealed religion] and be able to sort out what, and how much, it is entitled to from the one source or the other’ (6:156). The comparison between the rational framework derived through cognition and the claims of the revealed faith serves to make clear how much of the revealed religion in question is in keeping with natural religion (i.e., beliefs that reason tells us we must hold) and how much falls to learned religion (i.e., beliefs that must be derived through erudition). Kant submits that such a test is best carried out upon a specific example of religion and on a specific holy book that is ‘one among a variety of books dealing with religion and virtue accredited to a revelation’ (6:156). To this end, Kant centres on Christianity and the New Testament: ‘In our case this book can be the New Testament, as the source of the Christian doctrine of faith. In keeping with our intent, we now wish to expound the Christian religion in two sections—first, as natural religion, and then, second, as learned religion—with reference to its content and the principles found in it’ (6:157).¹³

¹³ Kant makes clear that he does not want to ‘intrude into the business of those to whom is entrusted the interpretation of this very book ... or to challenge their exegesis based on scholarship’ (6:157). However, Kant is also clear that examining a holy book with the aim of discerning what falls to natural religion is not antithetical to biblical scholarship, for the biblical scholar ‘proceeds toward one and the same end as

This way of understanding Kant's introduction to Book Four helps clarify not merely where Kant stands relative to the rationalist versus the pure rationalist (or more accurately, which type of rationalist Kant is—a pure rationalist or a super-naturalist), but also clarifies the purpose of engaging in the question to begin with. Kant ultimately views the treatment of which type of rationalist reason bids us be as beyond the purview of reason and thus unfruitful; therefore, he moves to the topic of communicability in order to establish the appropriate approach to religion as either learned or natural. This shift is in keeping with our suggestion that what is important to Kant is universal validity and communicability.

II. Philosophy and Theology in *The Conflict of Faculties*

Assuming this interpretation of *Religion* is accurate, it is reasonable to ask what kind of reception Kant expected his philosophy of religion to have with its readership. Given the rigor of Kant's arguments—arguments that expound a completely new account of religion and theology under strict rational/transcendental guidelines and that commend not only a certain interplay between philosophy and theology, but also seek to example it in Book Four—one might think that Kant's hope was for theology simply to submit to the clear teachings of reason. However, Kant is not naïve in his vision. In the Preface to the First Edition of *Religion*, he gives a glimpse of his expected reception of *Religion* and suggests that this reception is a part of the book's intended purpose. Kant indicates that his rational religion is in keeping with his occupation as a philosopher, and he presents it to the theologian as such. This presentation is not presumptuous; it does not indicate that Kant believes the theologian would or should simply accept it. Rather, Kant's plea is simply that the theologian hear the voice of the philosopher and then engage in dialogue. His expectation is that outright opposition will occur in some cases, but that this is necessary and good. Kant writes:

the philosophers, namely the moral good' (6:157). For more on this, see our treatment of Book Three in previous chapters.

For the sciences profit simply from being set apart, insofar as each science first constitutes a whole by itself; only after that shall the experiment be made of considering them in association. Now whether the theologian agrees with the philosopher or believes himself obliged to oppose him: let him just hear him out. For in this way alone can the theologian be forearmed against all the difficulties that the philosopher may cause him. To conceal these difficulties, however, or indeed to decry them as ungodly is a mean expedient that will not wash; to mix the two [disciplines] and for the biblical theologian to direct only the occasional fleeting glance at [philosophy], constitutes a lack of thoroughness where in the end nobody knows exactly how they stand in the whole with respect to the doctrine of religion (6:10-11).

We see here the seeds of *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Kant is clear that his philosophical programme represents the philosopher's position on religion. The theologian belongs to a separate discipline, one that ought not to be confused with philosophy, but ought, nevertheless, to engage philosophy. This engagement ought to ensue, Kant believes, even if it unearths fundamental disagreements and outright opposition to the claims of the other. The fact that Kant singles out the theologian in the hope that he will be heard out indicates that *Religion* is written, at least in part, to the theologian; and the fact that Kant's states that *Religion* is not written for the lay person but for the academic indicates that it is submitted in an interdisciplinary context within the academy. Kant affirms this understanding of the purpose of *Religion* in his Introduction to *Conflict*, especially in the letter to the King. In addressing *Religion* (at least in part) to the theologian in an academic context, Kant is inviting engagement and promoting conflict.

Religion is thus not the end of theology, but a philosophical statement that places demands on theology. From this vantage point, it presents itself as the whetstone of theological virtue, one that employs reason and conflict in a quest to understand the nature and extent of reasonable belief. The hypothesis for understanding *Religion* presented at the end of Chapter Three would therefore be incomplete without a treatment of Kant's vision of conflict. For Kant's transcendental theology is not an end in itself, but represents a philosophical gauntlet thrown down so that theology might one day

realize its true form. For this reason, it is important to provide an overview of *Conflict* with a view to better understanding the role Kant's transcendental theology is intended to play relative to the discipline of theology proper.

Conflict is a compilation of three separate essays written shortly after the publication of *Religion*. The First Part or essay, entitled 'The Conflict of the Philosophy Faculty with the Theology Faculty', contains Kant's final statement on the relationship of philosophy and theology. The Second and Third Parts were added to the original essay in order to give the book its structure of three higher faculties (i.e., theology, law, and medicine) in relation to one lower faculty (i.e., philosophy) and comprise a book of four distinct portions (including also a lengthy Introduction). We will focus here on the Introduction and the First Part. The Introduction contains information meant to orient the reader on how to interpret Kant's philosophy of religion relative to his vocational commitments to philosophy and its impact on Christianity, as well as to justify the publication of *Religion* and *Conflict*. The First Part of *Conflict* was written shortly after the publication of *Religion*, sometime between June and October of 1794.¹⁴ It carries the doctrines of Kant's philosophy in general and philosophy of religion in particular into the sphere of an academy dominated by church authority and with specific reference to Kant's context in a Prussian religious state.

The immediate question for our purposes is whether or not *Conflict* adds anything significant to our analysis of *Religion* by way of extension, modification, or confirmation. There are a wide variety of opinions on this matter. On the one hand, some interpreters think the text should not be placed into the seminal corpus of Kant's critical writings because it is irrelevant to understanding his philosophy. Clement Webb, for example, downplays the importance of *Conflict* with a single sentence: 'There is much that is interesting in the discussion; not however much which for our present purpose throws further light upon [Kant's] views'.¹⁵ For Webb, *Conflict* does little more than

¹⁴ Allen W. Wood, 'Editor's Introduction' in *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 235.

¹⁵ Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, 169.

reiterate Kant's philosophy of religion in a different format. Bernard Reardon concurs, suggesting that *Conflict* 'adds nothing of significance to what had been more fully said before'.¹⁶ Other interpreters admit *Conflict* into the seminal corpus of Kant's critical writings, but in a way that links it decisively to his political context. Peter Byrne suggests that *Conflict* is more a political treatise than a philosophical one. As a political treatise, it does not refer to theology in general, but to theology 'Prussian-style'.¹⁷ The point is that Kant never intended his discussion of the relationship between philosophy and theology to be true of the universal tasks of these disciplines, but only true of Prussian academic philosophy and its relationship to the Prussian state-church. For Byrne, there is no indication in this text that Kant means to support the viability of the discipline of theology as an independent source of information about God; instead Kant is consistent only insofar as he intends to uphold the role of the state-church. Susan Shell adds that *Conflict* exhibits Kant's 'central strategy: to play upon the government's desire to rule, in order to bolster the independence of the scholarly community vis-à-vis church censorship'.¹⁸ Its arguments are meant to hasten the day that the lower faculty of philosophy would replace the higher faculties.¹⁹

On the other hand, *Conflict* has much in the way of context and content-related evidence in support of its relevance and significance in Kant's thinking. Unlike *Religion*, sometimes challenged in its role as a principal source of information about Kant's philosophy because it was written during a time of censorship, *Conflict* was published after J. C. Wöllner's edict of censorship had been lifted.²⁰ When taken in conjunction

¹⁶ Reardon, *Kant as Philosophical Theologian*, 157.

¹⁷ Personal correspondence, March 2002.

¹⁸ Susan Meld Shell, 'Kant as Educator: Reason and Religion in Part One of the Conflict of the Faculties', in *Kant's Legacy: Essays in Honor of Lewis White Beck*, ed. Predag Cicovacki (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 335.

¹⁹ Shell, 'Kant as Educator', 345.

²⁰ Palmquist refers to a number of interpreters who approach *Religion* on this basis. He cites Michalson, for example, for affirming the view that 'Kant keeps one wary eye on the Prussian censor'. He also cites Walsh who suggests that Kant may have intentionally included 'much vagueness and many instances of camouflage in his expression'. Both of these claims go directly against Kant's repeated emphasis on *sincerity* in religious matters. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion*, 192-193.

with Kant's well-known concern for religious sincerity, these facts suggest with some measure of assurance that the ideas contained in *Conflict* are Kant's actual thoughts on religion and theology rather than an appeasement of the political authorities. Perhaps the best evidence for the importance of *Conflict* to Kant's thinking, however, is the text itself. It is arguably among the most accessible of all Kant's texts. Its overall structure is clear and well crafted; it discusses the role of philosophy in the 'learned community of the university' and the way philosophy should relate to the higher faculties of theology, medicine, and law. Even though *Conflict* is the result of Kant's quick assembly of three separate essays emphasizing philosophy's relationship to each of these areas respectively, it coheres well with ideas expressed in his other works of the 1790s, especially *Religion*. There is continuity between these two writings that suggests a continuous and uninterrupted train of thought in Kant's philosophy throughout the period from 1793-1798.²¹ Although the usefulness of *Conflict* as a resource for understanding Kant's position on religion and theology may or may not be discernable on the basis of the above considerations alone, the text itself clearly has important things to say about Kant's position on the roles of philosophy and theology proper, and these will be the focus of my remarks to follow.

Kant on the Interdisciplinary Role of Philosophy

Much has been made of Kant's letter to the King placed in the Introduction to *Conflict*. Frequently, this letter is taken as a way for Kant to justify his publication on the topic of religion after he had told the King that he would not publish on this topic again. Yet this assumption overlooks an even more important theme, namely, the vocational difference between philosophy and theology at the heart of *Religion* (7:8-9):

Since ... I make no appraisal of Christianity, I cannot be guilty of disparaging it.

In fact, it is only natural religion that I appraise ... But when reason speaks, in

²¹ It is important to note that *Conflict* was not translated into English in its entirety until Mary Gregor's translation in 1979. This fact could explain, in part, why the widespread dissemination of Kant's philosophy of religion has been so entrenched in the traditional interpretation. If the majority of English-speaking readers did not have access to the whole of Kant's writings until recently, it is not hard to imagine why the part of his philosophy having to do with religion would be so poorly interpreted.

these matters, as if it were sufficient to itself and as if revealed teachings were therefore superfluous (an assertion which, were it to be taken objectively, would have to be considered a real disparagement of Christianity), it is merely expressing its appraisal of itself ...

Pervading Kant's arguments to justify the writing of *Conflict*, we find confirmation for understanding *Religion* based on the philosophical standpoint of the entire work. Even if we assume that one of his main reasons for adding the letter is simply to justify the publication of *Conflict*, it still matters that underlying this justification is Kant's sincere desire to be heard on how to understand his philosophy of religion in general and *Religion* in particular.²² In this introductory letter, Kant explains why he chose to entitle his work *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*: '[It] was to prevent a misinterpretation to the effect that the treatise deals with religion *from* mere reason (without revelation). That would be claiming too much, since reason's teachings could still come from men who are supernaturally inspired. The title indicates [sic] that I intended, rather, to set forth as a coherent whole everything in the Bible—the text of religion believed to be revealed—that can *also* be recognized *by mere reason*' (7:6). Kant identifies the central features of his philosophy of religion with Christianity and reiterates that his task in *Religion* was to articulate those beliefs on which philosophy and theology can be in agreement (or in one accord). He goes on in the letter to spell out at least two areas in which this is true, one having to do with the merits of the purely rational nature of his inquiry and the other having to do with rational faith and the content of human cognition.

Regarding the rational in *Religion*, Kant writes, '[Reason] is merely expressing its appraisal of itself—not in terms of its [theoretical] ability [but] in terms of what it prescribes us to do insofar as it alone is the source of the *universality, unity, and necessity* in the tenets of faith that are the essence of any religion' (7:9). These three

²² There appears to be a reciprocal relationship between *Religion* and *Conflict*: *Conflict* helps interpretation of *Religion* and *Religion* helps an understanding that, whatever particular political and academic concerns are present in *Conflict*, they are relevant to religion and theology in a sense larger than Kant's immediate historical context.

words cover much ground in Kant's argument in *Religion* and testify to what Kant believes he has accomplished in *Religion*. More to the point for our purposes is the fact that Kant explicitly links these points to the common ground that can be found between faith and reason. This linking is not only consistent with the hypothesis previously articulated and defended, but also suggestive of a *telos* to Kant's thinking that informs every aspect of his project in *Religion*. Faith and reason, for Kant, come together in freedom, immortality, and God. Of all the ideas left over from traditional metaphysics, these alone are inherently rational and therefore universally communicable. Kant writes in *Religion* that 'we can sufficiently convince every human being of [natural religion based on God, freedom and immortality] and everyone can expect its effect at least, as duty. This religion possesses the great prerequisite of the true church, namely the qualification for universality, inasmuch as by universality we mean validity for every human being' (6:157). Unity and necessity are likewise concepts in *Religion*, as seen in the previous chapter, that fund every aspect of Kant's argument. Unity is at the very heart of the hypothesis that I have employed to interpret the first three Books of *Religion*, while necessity is a key concept in the advancement of human cognition towards an answer to the question of moral hope.

Concerning the more specific content of faith, Kant points out that reason has rational needs and theoretical deficiencies that find a clear utility for revelation. As previously noted, Kant has in mind the centrality of revelation in the sense of the moral law and the ground that it provides for rational religion, but, in Kant's estimation, revelation and religion in this sense might never have been arrived at, at least not in a timely and thorough fashion, without revealed religion. This potential inability is what I take to be 'the *theoretical* deficiency which our pure rational belief admits it has' (7:9). For this reason, Kant leaves room, as we saw in Book Three, for the assistance of some type of supernatural revelation in guiding natural religion to the realization of its pure religious doctrine: 'a religion can be *natural*, yet also *revealed*, if it is so constituted that human beings *could and ought to have* arrived at it on their own through the mere use of their reason, even though they *would* not have come to it as early or extensively as required, hence a revelation of it at a given time and a given place might be wise and

very advantageous to the human race' (6:155). In this way, historical faith based on such a supernatural revelation provides an avenue for discerning moral revelation in a theoretically timely and thorough manner. Kant thinks that the link between the theoretical and the moral established by the working together of human cognition and rational faith is the reason why revelation (however it is arrived at) must finally point to a common (i.e., universal, unified, and necessary) rational religion. For Kant, true revelation (by whatever name) must finally lead to this destination. Rational religion, Kant argues, is the touchstone for the truth of revelation insofar as it resolves for the sake of faith and reason 'the questions, for example, of the origin of evil, the conversion from evil to good, the human being's assurance that he has become good, etc.' (7:9).

For Kant, philosophy is rooted in reason and the conviction that people have the right and duty to think for themselves about the issues that matter most. Despland relates the conflict of natural and revealed religion in *Religion* to the conflict of the philosophical and theological disciplines in *Conflict*. Natural religion, from the point of view of philosophy, is 'religion pure'. Revealed religion, from the point of view of theology, is 'religion applied'.²³ Clearly, the conflict between philosophy and theology, for Kant, is consistent with these features: 'The biblical theologian proves the existence of God on the grounds that He spoke in the Bible, which also discusses his nature ... [and] must ... count on a supernatural opening of his understanding by a spirit that guides to all truth' (7:24). In contradistinction, 'the philosophical faculty must be free to examine in public and to evaluate with cold reason the source and content of this alleged basis of doctrine' (7:33). When Kant writes of theology in *Conflict*, he is writing about the field of inquiry where God's Word and Spirit are the presumed authorities. When Kant writes of philosophy, he is writing about the field of inquiry where reason and freedom constitute the standpoint of authority. From the point of view of the state (insofar as it is related to the church), theology must remain the higher faculty, but from an insider's point of view within the academy, philosophy must be given pride of place.

²³ Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), 119.

In the end, the result will be for the betterment of humanity insofar as the prospects of arriving at true religion will be enhanced.

Kant on the Interdisciplinary Role of Theology

The majority of *Conflict* is concerned with a necessary dispute between philosophy and theology over the many questions of religion, and Kant clearly wants to ensure that the two vocations are never conflated. Theology, according to Kant, is one of the university's higher faculties. Like law and medicine, theology establishes its norms and bases its authority on the best available writings in the field. Since theology's writings are understood to be authoritative (as a revelation of God), Kant refers to the discipline of theology as the queen of the sciences, and, as Kant famously put it, the only question left is whether philosophy carries the torch before her or the train behind. In this sense, theology serves both the interest of the government and the will of God, although not necessarily in a pure way or at the same time (7:17–24). In *Conflict*, Kant uses the terms theology and biblical theology synonymously.²⁴ In the constitution of pure theology, 'there is no human interpreter of the Scriptures authorized by God, [the theologian] must rather count on a supernatural opening of his understanding by a spirit that guides to all truth than allow reason to intervene and (without any higher authority) maintain its own interpretation' (7:24).

Theology proper, according to Kant, is rooted in the faith that God has spoken and the conviction that what God has said and done, as it is written, provides a

²⁴ Interestingly, in light of developments after Kant, a synthesis of biblical and systematic theology might actually be closer to what he means. Galbraith recommends that we understand Kant's distinction between philosophy and theology, not in the way described above, but in different contemporary terms. She draws attention to the fact that philosophical theology and philosophy of religion are terms Kant used synonymously. Her argument is that, since the university, as it is broadly conceived today, does not identify theology as being essentially revealed theology, Kant can be thought of as a theologian or, as she puts it, a kind of 'closet theologian'. Theology today, according to Galbraith, is essentially what Kant called philosophical theology. Whether or not she is right about the nature of contemporary theology is not at issue; what is at issue is the specific nuance of how Kant defined theology in *Conflict*. Elizabeth Cameron Galbraith, *Kant and Theology: Was Kant a Closet Theologian?* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1996), 63-64. For further clarification of the distinctions between rational and biblical theology, see *Kant's Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (28:993-1001). For Kant, 'there are no kinds of theology but those of reason and revelation' (9:999).

trustworthy perspective on reality. This does not mean, however, that theology provides an independent source of information about God that threatens to undo reason and the vocation of philosophy. As already stated with regards to *Religion*, just as anything *known* is, for Kant, the product of the synthesis of intuitions and concepts, everything *believed in rationally* must be rooted in the moral and cognized for the sake of hope. In the context of *Conflict*, theology must be upheld, not because it promises religious data that cannot be gleaned from reason, but because theology promises to hasten the day that rational religion will become all that it is supposed to be and eventually the religion of the land. What *Conflict* provides Kant's philosophy of religion is the context for completing the development of his transcendental theology. Rather than promoting stagnation by putting theology into a theoretical, moral, aesthetic, or religious box, his philosophy of religion is placed into the dynamic and moving environment of the university. The conflict of the disciplines promotes the evolution of theology for the sake of true religion.

Personifying the disciplines of philosophy and theology in *Conflict*, Kant notes, 'I am here only speaking of the pure (*purus, putus*) biblical theologian, who is not yet contaminated by the ill-reputed spirit of freedom that belongs to reason and philosophy. For as soon as we allow the two different callings to combine and run together, we can form no clear notion of the characteristic that distinguishes each by itself' (7:24). At first glance, it may not be obvious why Kant believes the distinction between philosophy and theology entails a necessary conflict. Initially, as, for example, in the conflict in the first *Critique*, the dispute may be fuelled by a challenge to the veracity and viability of the other's perspective.²⁵ This definition of conflict is frequently attributed to the meaning of *Conflict* despite textual evidence to the contrary. The philosopher maintains the

²⁵ At least two kinds of conflict can be found in the first *Critique*. The first kind is not directly related to theology. Conflicts of this kind are primarily among philosophers and are an important focus of the 'Transcendental Doctrine of Elements'. The Transcendental Doctrine of Method, on the other hand, has as a principal concern the dispute between the perspectives of philosophy and theology. This second and smaller part of the first *Critique* focuses on philosophy in its role as the lower faculty of learning moving human understanding toward 'a complete system of pure reason' (CPR A707/B736). This part makes a somewhat rhetorical argument for the perspective of philosophy over, and very often against, all other perspectives.

perspective of reason and freedom, and the theologian maintains the perspective of Word and Spirit. When philosophy and theology disagree in their assertions, and these assertions cover the same conceptual space, conflict for self-preservation ensues. At a deeper level, however, the dispute involves the intentional use or abuse of authority. Kant explains the general nature of the dispute as follows: ‘there will be a conflict between the higher and lower faculties which is, first, *inevitable*, and second, *legal* as well’ (7:32).

Since theology, for Kant, gains its authority because it is presumed to be of divine origin and as such is sanctioned by the state, it has an authority that is inevitable and legal. However, this authority, if left unchecked in the hands of human beings, just as inevitably oversteps its limits and trespasses on the territory of philosophy. When this happens, as it did in Kant’s context, the philosopher’s job is to use reason to challenge the authority and content of theology. Because philosophy and theology come together in the context of the human predicament and rely on human discourse for their public exposition, disagreement is inevitable. Kant’s contention, however, is not that this relationship should become entrenched and bitter, but that it should be proactive and engaging: ‘this conflict of two parties ... is not a war’ (7:35), but, instead, they are ‘united in [their striving toward] one and the same final end (*concordia discors, discordia concors*)’ (7:35). The conflict Kant writes about is a *civil* conflict that leads toward the final end of humankind. As already noted, this final end is a rational religious vision in which humankind is united into a Kingdom of God or ethical commonwealth. Only by understanding and applying the ground rules for this conflict, however, can civil war be avoided and the continual progress of the human race toward its final end be assured.

Philosophy and Theology: The Rules of Conflict

In the section ‘On the legal conflict of the higher faculties with the lower faculty’, Kant lays out the ‘formal procedures for such a conflict’ (7:32–35). These four procedures comprise the ground rules for a civil conflict of the faculties. The first rule for philosophical and theological conflict is as follows: ‘This conflict cannot and should

not be settled by amicable accommodation (*amicabilis compositio*), but (as a lawsuit) calls for a verdict' (7:33). If a theology is unable to challenge and chasten philosophy by offering a vision of history and hope worthy of our rational commitment, then one should side with what is confirmed in the rigors of critical philosophical reasoning. This does not mean, however, that one ought to dispense with theology altogether. Kant's affirmation of theology is rooted in his conviction that we need theology for the propagation of rational religion. The philosophical side of the dispute should be against only one manifestation of theology at a time (not theology in general, but, in Kant's case, theology Prussian-style). The same is true of philosophy. If a theological perspective on the world, God, and ourselves is more cogent than its philosophical counterpart, if it resonates with our deepest moral instincts and longings for hope, then that particular conception of philosophy should be reconsidered. The aim of a verdict is not to dispense with the discipline per se, but to progress toward truly rational religion through conflict. If one theology is rejected, according to Kant, the philosopher must find a new one. Important to note, of course, is that in Kant's estimation this discussion does not preclude the priority of the rational over the historical. What it confirms is that whatever the theologian gleans from the historical can only be held out as truth if it can be reasonably asserted that we should have thought of it ourselves.

Kant's second rule for philosophical and theological conflict confirms this line of thinking: 'This conflict can never end, and it is the philosophy faculty that must always be prepared to keep it going' (7:33). Here, the importance of theology to Kant is noteworthy. If any particular manifestation of theology is unable or unwilling to maintain conflict with philosophy, then it is incumbent on the philosopher to do theology on behalf of the theologian. For Kant, theology is the task of mining through the 'Word of God' in the conviction that God's Spirit will lead us to all truth. The only way we could ever rationally believe the truth as such, however, is if it resonates with what Kant calls 'rational religion'. This kind of priority is a product of Kant's deepest philosophical instincts. Nevertheless, for Kant, theology is so important to the philosophical task as it pertains to religion that a good philosopher should even be willing to adopt the role of theologian in such a way that history and the church may

actively chasten philosophy. Philosophy needs theology, so much so that, if theologians were to stop doing their job, philosophers would have to do the job for them. Without the historical, it would be impossible to know when, and at what depth, the truths of rational theology might ever be so established.

The third rule for conflict relates to context: ‘This conflict can never detract from the dignity of the government’ (7:34). According to Kant, it is always crucial to realize that religious liberty is directly proportional to civil liberty. If we are not prepared to support government in its endeavours to maintain open rational discourse at all times, then we cannot hope the human race will progress. For Kant’s religious vision to get off the ground, a civil state must be established and maintained. If the government, as protector of the people, is not held in high esteem, then open rational discourse will be impossible. Even though theology is—both in Kant’s specific historical context and in his general way of thinking—authorized and supported by the state, the fate of any particular manifestation of theology cannot detract from the dignity of government. For Kant, there is a reciprocal relationship between the state and theology proper, and philosophy’s job is to make sure that whatever particular manifestation of theology is predominant has been critically examined so as not to detract from the stability of the rule of law.

The fourth rule for conflict concerns the evolution of human thinking towards truth and confirms Kant’s optimism towards the enduring work of theology, law, and medicine: ‘This conflict is quite compatible with an agreement of the learned and civil community in maxims, which, if observed, must bring about the constant progress of both ranks of the faculties toward greater perfection’ (7:35). It is Kant’s vision that a truly civil society be a progressive and learned people—a morally free people to be sure, but a people under God with eternity in their hearts. This vision is borne out by Kant’s faith in human freedom and reason and the testimony of reason and freedom to this effect. For Kant, religion must be inherently rational, and his principal concern is that there be established social and political structures that will enhance, rather than hamper, the eventual establishment of his eschatological vision for religion. Without rational rules and civil structures, philosophy would revert to a mere solitary and Socratic

discipline and never be champion of the transition to true universal religion that Kant takes to be central to its vocation.

These rules for the civil conflict between philosophy and theology constitute a clear and emphatic account of how philosophy and theology are to be engaged. Thus, *Conflict* is a progressive step in the fulfilment of Kant's *role* as a philosopher. Kant often challenges the biblical theologian, not because the theologian's perspective is necessarily flawed, but because it is, yet ideally should not be, in conflict with essential elements of his rational theology. Kant also holds that the opposite is true: the theologian ought to challenge the philosopher when their arguments and conclusions disagree. This confrontation might occur over the proper interpretation of scripture (as it often is in *Conflict*), but it can also be over what it means to think rationally about religion. In the court of public reason and the recesses of personal belief, the philosopher and theologian draw closer together in the truth by confronting one another in humility. This proximity is important, because the philosopher and the theologian, whether they know it or not, are aiming at the same goal. So Kant does not dismiss the biblical theologian, who implores us to search the scriptures to find eternal life, by asserting that 'the only way we can find eternal life in any Scripture whatsoever is by putting it there' (7:37); instead, he challenges the theologian to refute the assertion that what reason demands and what God demands have one and the same final aim.

Shell draws the following conclusion: 'Against the Mosaic-messianic faith in God's promise as literally written—a belief that stands behind the traditionally Christian view that 'historical faith is necessary to salvation'—Kant proposes an 'evangelical-messianic faith' that is consistent with and preparatory to the moral transfiguration of the Gospel'.²⁶ In *Conflict*, this evangelical-messianic faith is set in a dynamic picture of a religious dialogue between philosophers and theologians. Like a dramatic performance with two actors rehearsing in a lively and provocative way, philosophy and theology engage in intense dialogue. Stage left the philosopher can be heard shouting 'the

²⁶ Shell, 'Kant as Educator', 358-359 (cf. 7:66).

philosophy faculty must be free to examine in public and to evaluate with cold reason the source and content of the alleged basis of doctrine [of Scripture]' (7:33). Stage right we 'hear biblical theologians cry out in unison against the very idea of a philosophical interpretation of Scripture' (7:44). In the midst of the play, which Kant sets up within the walls of the Prussian academy, the expectation is that the depths of true theology will be plumbed and the coming of the Kingdom of God will be hastened. Kant clearly holds that the conflict is so important to the interests of philosophy that it is the philosopher's primary task to ensure it is maintained. As a philosopher, Kant recognizes that 'the Scriptures contain more than what is in itself required for eternal life' (7:37); they also promote empirical religion as the necessary vehicle for true religion and are the bearer of the 'canon of religion ... called pure religious faith' (7:37).

CONCLUSION

From the outset, the goal of this dissertation has been to present an account of Kant's transcendental theology and defend it against the charge of incoherence. Despite the various attempts of theologically affirmative interpreters, it is apparent that there still remain weaknesses in past interpretations that have sought to establish rational foundations for religious faith in Kant's philosophy. As Gordon Michalson aptly shows, there is what appears to be a fundamental incoherence in Kant's most thoroughgoing theological work, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and in many ways it is the remedying of this incoherence that serves as the litmus test for theologies that purport to be truly Kantian. Even though there remains a fundamental inability of theologically affirmative interpretations to meet this challenge (despite a variety of helpful insights), our goal here has been to return to Kant's critical philosophy in search of a platform from which to move forward in understanding his transcendental theology.

In our search for Kant's resources for transcendental theology, it was necessary to face the troublesome fact that Kant's theoretical philosophy, though difficult to articulate in a completely satisfactory way, clearly prohibits knowledge of God in the sense of a synthesis of intuition and concept: no intuition could be sufficient to the conception of God afforded by reason. It is not that God can be shown not to exist, quite to the contrary, one of Kant's expressed purposes for writing the first *Critique* was to silence the sceptic on this score. Nevertheless, an intuition of God as the sum of all predicates is a logical impossibility. Our investigation made it apparent that any effort to raise religious faith to the level of knowledge ultimately overextends itself and violates Kant's theoretical philosophy.

In this light, it became evident that, while any attempt to raise religious faith to the level of knowledge is wrongheaded, Kant's philosophy is not cut off from all types of meaningful religious faith. Discourse about and belief in God find an aperture in Kant's theoretical philosophy in the form of human cognition when we recognize the occasional distinction between knowledge and cognition. Where knowledge requires

intuition and concept in synthesis, cognition requires only concept. Human cognition allows reason to get God in mind. We can think God and consider the world as God's creation, even though we have no corresponding experience of God. Yet, the movement of transcendental theology to objective validity in a way that matters to faith requires a transition to moral reasoning.

Here the importance of Kant's commitment to meaning comes to play a central role in our understanding of Kant's notion of faith and living as-if. When nature and freedom are considered simultaneously, which according to Kant they must, a teleological gap opens up in the critical analysis of reason. The gap between nature and freedom creates space in Kant's philosophy for the question of meaning to be raised. Permeating Kant's critical writings is the irrefragable conviction that the world is meaningful and that belief in God (despite the lack of determinable objective reality in this belief) is the only reason why the world would ultimately make sense. What this link between meaning and God indicates is that Kant's denial of knowledge of God in the first *Critique* is a simultaneous denial of knowledge that the world is meaningful. Therefore, Kant's notion of faith is tantamount to an existential leap of moral faith: We are left with a choice to live as if God is there or to live as if God is not there. From the theoretical vantage point, a decision cannot be made; from a practical vantage point, however, we must postulate God's existence if morality is to make sense.

The development of transcendental theology beyond merely God the postulate of the moral life to God as the object of moral and religious faith directly correlates to the conviction that the world is meaningful; and as we saw, this is at the centre of Kant's engagement with the problem of radical evil. Thus, we approach *Religion* as an examination of the question of meaning and moral hope via cognition. The thesis is that Kant's *Religion* is best understood according to the rational warrant for belief in the dispositional unity of the human species (i.e., the problem of *Religion* is primarily formulated as a corporate as opposed to individualistic affair), the available union of human beings with the disposition of the prototype (i.e., the solution of *Religion* is bound up with the possibility of putting off the old disposition and putting on a new one), and the unification of human beings converted to the prototype and devoted to

pursuing the good by banding together in a tangible way to form an ethical community (i.e., the vision of *Religion* is the eventual consummation of history in an Ethical Commonwealth—a people of God devoted to the good).

In Books One and Two of *Religion*, Kant makes the transition from belief in God as a postulate to belief in God as the prototype of humanity in answer to the question of hope. This move is very much related to his moral ground for belief as it pertains to the moral disposition. Having concluded that the moral disposition is universally corrupt (i.e., evil by nature), the only way to answer the question of hope is by reference to the concepts of divine grace and moral redemption. The question underlying this entire discussion is whether Kant has the resources to deal with the problem of radical evil. This points the way to a solution in the form of the divine-human disposition of the prototype. In Kant's thinking on the prototype we see the nature and extent of his fully mature transcendental theology, and as such it provides a framework for rational theology.

The whole of Kant's engagement with the human disposition, the problem of radical evil, moral hope in the prototype, and so forth provides a basic structure for what Kant believes rational theology (or the content of belief held in the midst of the existential leap of faith) must look like. These beliefs can now be laid out in the form of a list:

- 1) Humanity as a species has a universal moral disposition that, as moral, must either be good or evil.
- 2) The universal moral disposition of humanity is evil by nature, but not by necessity.
- 3) There exists an ideal humanity (i.e., the prototype of perfect humanity).
- 4) This ideal humanity exists because of the divine Son of God who condescended to assume the human state.
- 5) The prototype is the God-man whose disposition is well-pleasing to God.

- 6) This prototype's disposition is distinct from our corrupt disposition and is available for adoption by human beings.
- 7) Moral conversion is the simultaneous putting off of the old disposition of humanity and the putting on of the new disposition of the prototype.
- 8) Moral conversion is pursued through an act of moral/religious faith that renounces evil and commits to the good.
- 9) As a result of moral conversion, there is a bi-lateral moral relationship between the convert and the prototype that atones for our moral failings and provides positive righteousness.
- 10) Only those converted to the good principle of the prototype are morally free and have moral hope.
- 11) The corrupt disposition still threatens to undo moral converts unless they band together in the form of an ethical community.
- 12) This community must take the form of a visible church.

This list is not exhaustive, but it represents the central components of Kant's framework for rational religious belief emerging from his critical analysis of human cognition and the question of hope.

The pragmatic application of Kant's theology provides a picture of Kant's combination of rational and learned religion, and shows what can go wrong if the rational and the historical components are not rightly prioritized. The ecclesiastical component of Kant's argument (as well as the conflict between the faculties of philosophy and theology) comprises the filling out of this framework. In Books Three and Four of *Religion and in Conflict*, Kant outlines the seminal features of historical faith, on the one hand, and the discipline of theology proper, on the other. Theology in this sense is not an independent source of information about God, but instead is the science of 'some alleged revelation'. It is founded on the written word and yet is in constant dialogue with the standards of truth provided by rational theology. It is the responsibility of the scriptural scholar to safeguard the written word, all the while

recognizing that morally viable faith is rooted in the tenets of rational religion. The scriptural scholar, whether consciously acknowledged or not, is to give external authority to the tenets of rational religion, and through the scriptural scholar, rational religion takes hold of historical faith as its vehicle and realizes the measure of authority needed to bridge the gap between the moral law and our sensuous natures. This general account of Kant's framework for rational theology essentially represents the fulfilment of *Religion's* initial experiment: i.e., the all-important philosophical component of his religious worldview. The framework for theology that emerges is one indebted to Kant's notions of possibility, postulate, and prototype.

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