


Research Article

Kant's Copernican Revolution and the Viability of Christian Realism

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Abstract: Kant reduces the range of pure reason to the phenomenal realm. This is a consequence of his Copernican Revolution. If his move is correct, Christianity is forced to either (1) push all of its claims to the phenomenal, or (2) persist in its affirmation that they are noumenal. The former, seems to safeguard its reasonableness but only at the cost of becoming subjective and private. This option entails self-contradictions due to the indispensability of claims like the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ being objectively true, and of Christianity's imperative to evangelize. This option is consequently unreasonable. On the other hand, the latter avoids the former's self-contradictions. We ought to assert these truth claims since they correspond to reality in itself, and we ought to evangelize because the truth of the Gospel applies universally to all human beings. However, it is still open to the charge of unreasonableness in its failure to proportion its claims to the range of reason. All attempts to prove Christianity's correspondence with noumenal reality presuppose propositions that could be nothing but our subjective impositions into reality like the principle of causality. Whatever option it takes, therefore, if Kant is correct, Christianity has to be unreasonable. Arguably, Christianity exhausts the set of possible religions that a reasonable person could take today. Even if it does not, religion still is premised on propositions which themselves could be nothing but our impositions to reality. If Kant is correct, faith and reason are therefore mutually exclusive, contra Aquinas and Wojtyla. This paper shows that if religion is to maintain its claim of being reasonable, it has to direct all of its intellectual powers in refuting Kant's reduction of reason's range to the phenomenal. If it neglects such task, Christianity will self-destruct. Intrinsicly bound up to Christianity is the primacy of reason (logos), so Christians who live up to their identity would have to abandon Christianity. If it does not neglect such task, but fails in its attempts to refute it, then it will just prove its atheistic critics are right – religion is for the irrational, after all.

Keywords: Kantian epistemology; Christian realism; fideism; philosophy of religion, Cartesian certainty

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1. Introduction

In my modern philosophy class of the former dean of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary in the academic year 2022-2023, Fr. Jose Conrado Estafia, whose primary research area is Stein's engagement to Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, I could recall my excitement when we had to study Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. I knew beforehand of the daunting nature of the task, but such fear was accompanied by the awareness that if anything is worth knowing at all, it would not be unconnected to the relationship between mind and world, which is a topic Kant's First Critique tackled head on.

In the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant (1998) introduces his revolutionary idea, often referred to as the "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy. This idea fundamentally alters the way we think about the relationship between human cognition and the objects of our experience. Kant begins by addressing the traditional philosophical assumption that our cognition must conform to the objects. This view suggests that our knowledge and understanding are shaped and constrained by the way objects exist independently of us. According to this perspective, to gain knowledge about objects, we must observe and analyze them as they are, external to and unaffected by our cognitive faculties. Kant observes that all attempts to extend our knowledge a priori (i.e., knowledge independent of experience) under this traditional assumption have failed. In his words, "all attempts to

find out something about them [objects] a priori through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing” (Kant, 1998, Bxvi). Philosophers have struggled to gain a priori knowledge about the nature of objects because, if cognition must conform to objects, it implies that our concepts are always secondary and reactive to the way things are, rather than proactive in shaping our understanding.

To address this issue, Kant proposes a radical shift in perspective: what if, instead of assuming that our cognition must conform to objects, we assume that objects must conform to our cognition? This means that the way we perceive and understand objects is not solely dependent on the objects themselves but is instead shaped by the inherent structures and capacities of our cognitive faculties. Kant likens this shift to the revolutionary approach of Copernicus in astronomy. Copernicus challenged the geocentric model, which placed the Earth at the center of the universe and posited that the celestial bodies revolved around it. Instead, Copernicus proposed that the Earth revolves around the Sun, which led to a more accurate understanding of celestial motions. Similarly, Kant suggests that by reversing the traditional assumption and considering that objects must conform to our cognition, we might achieve greater success in metaphysics. Kant argues that this new perspective would better accommodate the possibility of a priori knowledge about objects. If the objects of our experience conform to the structures of our cognition, then it is possible to have knowledge about them prior to and independent of actual experience. This knowledge would be rooted in the way our minds are structured to perceive and understand the world. This proposal is a thought “experiment” which Kant suggests can provide for metaphysics some scientific character (Kant, 1998, Bxix). By proposing that objects conform to our cognition, Kant opens the door to understanding how we can have a priori knowledge of objects. This perspective suggests that certain fundamental aspects of objects—such as space, time, and causality—are not properties of the objects themselves but are instead forms and categories imposed by our cognitive faculties. These forms and categories structure our experience and make a priori knowledge possible.

In the context of Kant’s Copernican Revolution in philosophy, the assertion that “thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (Kant, 1998, A52/B76) gains profound significance. In that class of Fr. Estafia, the students, primarily composed of seminarians although with me, the lone non-seminarian intruder, the professor provided an extended exposition of this said line from the aforementioned work of Kant. We struggled to craft an accurate translation of the said line into Boholano speech. When Kant states that “thoughts without content are empty,” he argues that pure concepts or categories of the understanding, when detached from sensory experience, lack concrete meaning. They become mere abstract ideas without any reference to the actual world. The second part of the line, that “intuitions without concepts are blind,” asserts that sensory perceptions without the application of concepts remain unorganized and unintelligible. They are mere chaotic impressions without any structured understanding (Kant, 1998, A52/B76).

Kant argues that for knowledge to be meaningful, it is essential to (1) make concepts sensible, that is, concepts must be grounded in sensory experience to have content and relevance. This means integrating abstract ideas with perceptual data. Additionally, it is necessary to (2) make intuitions intelligible. This means sensory data must be organized and interpreted through the application of concepts. This structuring allows us to understand and make sense of what we perceive. Kant continues that neither sensibility nor understanding can function independently to produce knowledge. The understanding cannot intuit or perceive, and the senses cannot think or conceptualize. It is only through their union that knowledge arises. This union involves the understanding structuring and interpreting the sensory data provided by sensibility, turning raw perceptions into coherent experiences (Kant, 1998, A52/B76).

The professor of that class, Fr. Estafia, was a student of the late Romualdo Abulad at the University of San Carlos. In *Kant and Postmodernism*, Abulad (1998) explicates Kant’s stance on the boundaries of human knowledge and the nature of reality. Kant contends that human understanding is confined to phenomena, the world as it appears to us, rather than the underlying reality or “things-in-themselves” (noumena). He suggests transitioning from traditional ontology to a more modest “analytic of the pure understanding,” emphasizing the limitations of metaphysical speculation beyond human cognition (pp. 41-42). Kant argues that even if noumena exist, our comprehension of them relies on pure forms of intuition and concepts, such as space, time, and categories of understanding. Abulad, echoing Polanyi, reinforces Kant’s view that all human knowledge, including scientific understanding, is inherently subjective, shaped by the limitations of our cognitive faculties.

Historical reactions to Kant's philosophy from the perspective of religious thought vary significantly, reflecting diverse interpretations of Kant's ideas and their implications for theology. Permit me to give a surface-level overview as I am yet to read the primary sources on these matters. Schleiermacher, often considered the father of modern Protestant theology, sought to reconcile Kant's emphasis on human subjectivity and the limitations of reason with religious experience. Schleiermacher (1996) argued that religious knowledge is grounded in feeling or intuition, rather than rational understanding alone. For him, religion is primarily a matter of the heart, a feeling of absolute dependence on the divine. In this view, faith transcends reason, but it is not irrational; rather, it operates on a different plane of human experience. Influenced by Kant's critique of reason, Kierkegaard (1983) questioned the adequacy of rational proofs for religious beliefs. He famously argued that faith involves a "leap" beyond reason, a subjective commitment to the paradoxes of Christian doctrine. Kierkegaard's existentialist approach highlights the tension between reason and faith, asserting the importance of personal engagement and commitment in religious belief. In his view, faith cannot be reduced to rational comprehension but requires a passionate commitment to the divine. Barth responded to Kant by emphasizing the transcendence of God and the limitations of human reason (Barth & Gollwitzer, 1962). He rejected attempts to ground theology in human experience or rational speculation, viewing them as inadequate foundations for religious belief. Instead, Barth emphasized the importance of divine revelation as the basis for Christian faith. For Barth, faith transcends reason, but it does not contradict it; rather, it supplements and surpasses human understanding. In his theology, Barth sought to uphold the sovereignty of God while acknowledging the significance of human reason within its proper limits. This brings us to the more general question of Christianity's reasonableness.

Christianity's reasonableness has been a topic of theological inquiry for centuries, with various perspectives offered by key figures in Christian thought. It would be overkill to even attempt to summarize all of the discussions here. Aquinas, in his seminal work *Summa Theologica*, argued for the compatibility of faith and reason. He developed a robust theological framework that synthesized Christian doctrine with Aristotelian philosophy, affirming that reason could complement and illuminate matters of faith. Pope John Paul II emphasized the harmony between faith and reason in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason). He argued that faith and reason are complementary ways of knowing, each contributing to a deeper understanding of truth. In the contemporary scene, Craig, a contemporary Christian philosopher, defends the reasonableness of Christianity through philosophical arguments such as the Kalam cosmological argument and the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He engages in debates and writes extensively on topics related to Christian apologetics. Plantinga offers a sophisticated defense of religious belief through his theory of Reformed epistemology. He argues that belief in God can be rational even without evidence or argument, as it may be properly basic for individuals within a Christian context. Swinburne provides rational arguments for the existence of God based on the principle of credulity and the principle of testimony. He contends that belief in God is reasonable given the available evidence and the coherence of Christian doctrine. On the other side, J.L. Mackie presents critiques of religious rationality, including the problem of evil and the challenge of religious diversity. He argues that the existence of suffering and conflicting religious claims undermines the rationality of religious belief. These contemporary thinkers engage in ongoing debates about the reasonableness of Christianity, contributing to a rich dialogue between defenders and critics of religious faith. Reading and debating these have been my personal preoccupation in my spiritual journey, as I had undergone a series of turnarounds in my religious outlook, but that is a topic for another paper.

Religious assertions often prompt philosophical inquiries into their objectivity and subjectivity, dissecting various dimensions of religious belief. Philosophical discussions on miracles delve into defining them, establishing criteria for identification, and assessing their compatibility with natural laws. David Hume (2007), for instance, contends that miracles, by defying natural order, are inherently implausible and lack sufficient evidence to override established scientific principles. Religious traditions frequently assert historical events and figures, prompting scrutiny of historical evidence, source reliability, and alternative interpretations. Debates ensue over the historical accuracy of religious narratives, such as the life of Jesus Christ in Christianity. Philosophical contemplation grapples with the challenge of expressing transcendent truths about the divine using human language. Scholars explore the limitations of language, employing analogies, metaphors, and symbolism to convey ineffable concepts inherent in religious discourse. Hume's skepticism scrutinizes miracles,

arguing their violation of natural laws renders them highly improbable and inadequately supported by testimonial evidence. His critique underscores the subjective nature of religious claims by highlighting empirical limitations. Dawkins (2006) emphasizes the scientific improbability of religious assertions. He contends that naturalistic explanations offer more credible accounts of the universe's origins and structure, challenging the objectivity of religious worldviews. Scholars like N.T. Wright staunchly defend religious realism, asserting the objective validity of religious claims. Wright (2003) presents historical evidence supporting Jesus' resurrection. Scholars rigorously analyze and critique religious assertions, complicating the issue of the objectivity and subjectivity inherent in religious convictions.

Kant's (1960) *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason* arose from his initial plan to write a series of essays on Christian doctrines. When one of these essays faced censorship, Kant combined them into a single volume, positioning it as a philosophical rather than theological work to navigate scrutiny. Despite leading to eventual censorship, it was successfully published. Primarily, Kant inquires into the interface between historical faith, predominantly Christianity, and pure rational religion. He aims to discern the common ground and disparities between these realms, with a particular focus on delineating genuine religious tenets from mere cultural constructs. Kant endeavors to utilize the insights gleaned from philosophical examination to distinguish authentic religious principles from those rooted in tradition or societal norms (Pasternack & Fugate, 2022).

Kant (1960) endeavors to harmonize reason and religious belief by asserting that moral principles inevitably lead to religious faith (Preface, pp. 1, 5). He argues that reason and Scripture are not only compatible but fundamentally aligned (p. 11), indicating a mutual reinforcement between rational analysis and religious texts. Kant emphasizes the primacy of virtue over grace, positing that moral effort should precede divine grace (p. 190). This view places moral effort at the forefront, with divine grace following as a consequence of virtuous living. He further elaborates that those who genuinely strive to fulfill their duties may hope that any deficiencies will be supplemented by divine wisdom (p. 159; cf. p. 130), highlighting a complementary relationship between human endeavor and divine assistance.

The concept of the highest good is central to Kant's philosophy, as it cannot be realized by individuals alone, yet they feel a duty to work towards it, necessitating belief in a moral Ruler of the world who aids in achieving this goal (p. 130). Kant interprets Holy Scripture as a narrative that represents the moral struggle within humans through personifications of good and evil, akin to a legal battle before a supreme judge (p. 73). Kant asserts the inherent goodness of natural inclinations (p. 51) and maintains hope for moral redemption even for those with a corrupted heart, as long as they possess a good will (p. 39). He criticizes clericalism for its close resemblance to paganism (p. 168) and insists that religious narratives must be taught to promote morality (p. 123). He downplays the intrinsic authority of the Bible, considering it a book that has fallen into men's hands and suggesting that traditional faith might be something that chance has tossed into our hands (pp. 98, 100).

Kant advocates for interpreting Scripture in the interests of morality, even if this interpretation appears forced, as it should support moral incentive over literal meaning (p. 101). He acknowledges the importance of ecclesiastical faith as the only instrument capable of uniting people into one church (p. 103) and considers the possibility that such unity cannot be maintained without a holy book and an ecclesiastical faith based on it (p. 123). Kant asserts pure reason will ultimately prevail over historical and empirical religious practices, leading to a pure religion of reason that will rule over all (p. 112). He emphasizes the need for human effort in moral endeavors, asserting that man must act as if everything depended on him to hope for divine support (p. 92; cf. pp. 149ff). Despite the weakness of human nature, Kant contends that a church cannot be established solely on pure faith (p. 94), underscoring the necessity of a structured religious community to support moral development.

Abulad (1998) highlights Kant's enduring relevance in the postmodern era, particularly through his critique of pure reason. Abulad notes a common tendency towards selective critical thinking today, wherein individuals critique only ideas that differ from their own beliefs, failing to subject their own beliefs to the same scrutiny. Kant's critique of pure reason, however, stands out for its comprehensiveness, challenging all knowledge and assumptions without exception. This aligns Kant with other critical thinkers throughout history, including Descartes, Bacon, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Derrida. Abulad suggests that this critical approach is essential for the postmodern consciousness, which questions all knowledge and assumptions without attachment. Religion often becomes a target for postmodernists due to its deeply ingrained beliefs, which may hinder the emergence of a more profound understanding of Christianity. Abulad speculates on the possibility of freeing oneself from

these beliefs to allow for a more perfect form of Christianity to unfold, transforming beliefs into enriching pointers to the Kingdom. Ultimately, Abulad acknowledges that history will determine the outcome of such transformations, expressing hope for the success of contemporary prophets who envision a broader vision beyond current limitations.

Critiques of Kant's reduction of reason span various philosophical traditions, offering a broad spectrum of perspectives. Again, this is only a very surface-level sketch, as it can take an entire paper to discuss each, and I do not have the relevant expertise. Neo-Kantian philosophers like Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp argued that Kant's abstract individualism overlooked the communal and historical contexts essential for moral consciousness, while Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert emphasized the dynamic nature of human values and knowledge. From other traditions, Nietzsche criticized Kant's suppression of individuality through universal moral laws, and Hegel highlighted the neglect of historical consciousness. Marx argued that Kant's abstraction ignored material and social conditions, Wittgenstein challenged the notion of universal rationality rooted in practical language use, and Habermas reinterpreted reason as a social and communicative process. These critiques collectively suggest that Kant's framework, while foundational, requires expansion to accommodate a more comprehensive understanding of human reason and moral development.

Theological responses aimed at reconciling faith and reason post-Kant have been multifaceted, with scholars like Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and John Henry Newman offering significant contributions. Rahner (1992), in his work *Foundations of Christian Faith*, emphasizes the compatibility of faith and reason by proposing a transcendental approach that posits God as the condition of possibility for human knowledge. Von Balthasar (1983 for the first volume of seven), through his theological aesthetics expounded in *The Glory of the Lord*, suggests that beauty serves as a bridge between faith and reason, allowing for a deeper apprehension of divine truth. Newman, in *The Grammar of Assent*, explores the role of personal conviction and intuitive apprehension in religious belief, advocating for a nuanced understanding of faith's rationality. These theologians, while building on Kantian insights, offer theological frameworks that engage with contemporary challenges to faith and reason, providing rich resources for dialogue between theology and philosophy.

If Kant's reduction of reason is accepted, it fundamentally reshapes the relationship between faith and reason, impacting both religious and secular perspectives. From a religious standpoint, accepting Kant's reduction means acknowledging the limits of rational proof in matters of faith, leading to a shift towards a more experiential or existential understanding of religious beliefs. This perspective may emphasize the importance of personal religious experience over logical arguments, prompting a deeper exploration of faith as a subjective encounter with the divine. Given my background as a former member of a Catholic apologetics organization, I am not blind as to how this could really seem to be abandonment of orthodoxy and embrace of lukewarmness. On the other hand, secular philosophers may interpret Kant's reduction as reinforcing the autonomy of reason and promoting skepticism towards religious claims that cannot be empirically verified. This could lead to a greater emphasis on scientific inquiry and rational discourse in addressing existential questions traditionally addressed by religion. This coincides with the popular embrace of self-help literature, a phenomenon that hurts the pride of many academics who want to be read by the public but are read less.

In terms of case studies or examples, Kant's critique poses significant challenges to specific religious doctrines such as the resurrection, creation, and divine intervention. For instance, in the case of the resurrection, Kant's emphasis on moral reasoning and the limitations of empirical evidence may lead to skepticism regarding the historical authenticity of the resurrection accounts in the Christian tradition. Similarly, Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena raises questions about the compatibility of the biblical creation narrative with scientific understandings of cosmology and evolution. Moreover, Kant's critique of miracles and divine intervention challenges traditional religious interpretations of supernatural events, prompting theologians to reconsider the role of divine agency in the world in light of rational scrutiny. Overall, Kant's reduction prompts a reevaluation of religious beliefs in light of philosophical critique, inviting both defenders and challengers to engage in nuanced theological and philosophical discourse. Nevertheless, the weight of abandoning Christian realism, or at even religious realism in general, is not negligible, as is expressed by Paul:

14 if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. 17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:14-19, RSV)

An earlier version of this paper has been presented at the 6th De La Salle University - Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (August 2021). Its earlier title was “Blind Faith or No Faith at All: Kant’s Copernican Revolution Entails Christianity’s Reducibility to the Unreasonable. I think it is time, after some years hopefully lent me a little maturity, to get these preliminary thoughts published open for engagement and critique. After all, iron sharpens iron.

2. Materials and Methods

Having discussed the background of the issue and having hammered on the gravity of the question of Christian realism and the potential threat wrought by Kant’s Copernican turn, this paper uses the philosophical methodology of presenting an argument by explaining what it means, exploring rebuttals, and launching counter-arguments. Stated a little formally, the argument of this paper runs thus:

Premise 1: Kant’s Copernican Revolution reduces the range of reason to the phenomenal realm.

Premise 2: If the range of reason is limited to the phenomenal realm, then Christianity must either:

(Option 1: Abandon Christian Realism) Push all its claims to the phenomenal realm, which leads to self-contradictions and unreasonableness because essential claims like the resurrection are supposedly revealed to be objective and evangelism requires a certain dogmatic content to be spread.

(Option 2: Retain Christian Realism) Affirm that its claims, at least the most central ones, are noumenal, which also leads to unreasonableness because it fails to proportion its claims to the range of reason.

Premise 3: Either option taken by Christianity results in unreasonableness if Kant’s reduction of reason’s range is correct.

Conclusion: Therefore, if Kant’s Copernican Revolution is correct, Christianity (and by extension, religion) is reducible to the unreasonable.

If Christianity cannot maintain its claim of being reasonable, it will self-destruct, making Christian realism untenable given that Christianity intrinsically upholds the primacy of reason (logos). If Christianity fails to refute Kant’s reduction of reason, it validates the view that religion is irrational, unless there are other religious systems that are about as argumentatively rigorous as Christianity. But the author is of the opinion that Christianity has the strongest argumentative edge already among mainstream organized religions. Therefore, for Christianity to sustain its reasonableness, it must refute Kant’s reduction of reason; otherwise, it will prove atheistic critics correct and demonstrate that religion, at least mainstream organized religion is irrational.

3. Results and Discussion

The central argument is constructed on three premises that systematically lead to the conclusion that if Kant’s reduction of reason to the phenomenal realm is correct, Christianity faces a profound challenge to its claim of being a reasonable faith.

3.1. Premise 1: Reduction of Reason to the Phenomenal Realm

To fully understand the challenges Kant’s framework poses to Christian theology, it is essential to first explore his reduction of reason to the phenomenal realm. Kant’s Copernican Revolution confines the scope of pure reason to the phenomenal world, excluding any knowledge of the noumenal, or things-in-themselves. This foundational shift implies that human cognition is limited to appearances and cannot access ultimate realities directly. While debates about Kant’s personal beliefs abound among scholars, such interpretative issues are beside the point for the substantive discussion at hand. The crux of the matter lies in the implication of Kant’s philosophical framework *as construed in this paper* on the relationship between faith and reason, particularly within Christian theology.

Of course there has been pushback. Pope John Paul II, for instance, seems to command

a change in method, namely, the prioritization of metaphysics over epistemology as a strategy to bridge mind and world, but did not justify such move. We might even be able to subject John Paul II's command to Edward Feser's (2008) critique of the philosophical assumptions of the figures of the Enlightenment as "problematic methodological stipulation into a discovery, since the issue itself is whether the method corresponds to how reality really is. Refusal to raise the critical question simply because one cannot accept its conclusion, sounds so much like blind faith. As Clarke (1994) writes:

I appreciate Gilson's insistence on a direct realism of knowledge and the futility of trying to deduce in some way the reality of the world outside the subject from anything like a Cartesian cogito, still we cannot just ignore the great epistemological struggles of modern philosophy over realism as though they never happened and left no mark on the Western philosophical consciousness. (p. 3)

To counter Kant's reduction, some philosophers like Moreland and Craig (2017) offer alternative views on the nature of knowledge and certainty. When articulating their epistemology to counter the reduction of reason to the phenomenal realm, Moreland and Craig argue that "[k]nowledge does not require total [Cartesian] certainty," so mere possibility of error without grounds does not count against knowledge." Hence, if Kant's reduction of the range of reason is no more than a logical possibility, then we can have epistemic certainty that our conclusions in Christian apologetics are of the noumenal realm itself. However, that mere logical possibility does not entail epistemic possibility is not that persuasive if Kant's (1998) reduction of reason's range to the phenomenal is not simply a logical possibility that he opens, but proposition that he proves, as he claims to have done (Bxii).

Are there problems with option 1? It seems that there are. To reiterate, first, it seems to go against the Christian claims about objective reality, like the Gospel itself which St. Paul speaks about "of first importance" in 1 Corinthians 15, which include the historicity of the crucifixion, death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, what is believed merely subjectively seems necessarily private, that is, cannot be justly obligated to be held by others other than the believing subject. This is true even for the beliefs of the apostles about Christ, including the Gospel itself. But if Christianity is Christianity at all, it has to take the words of Christ seriously, of which the commissioning of the apostles to publicize the Gospel they believe in is part (Matthew 28:19-20), including the punishment to those who do not believe (Mark 16:16). This position is thus self-contradictory, and thus holding to it nevertheless would be a faith that is unreasonable; one that is blind.

By restricting reason to the phenomenal realm, Kant challenges the traditional understanding of rationality and knowledge acquisition. This shift has profound implications for Christianity, as it necessitates a reevaluation of how religious claims are understood and justified in light of the limitations imposed by Kantian epistemology. Thus, the reduction of reason to the phenomenal realm serves as a pivotal premise in the argument, highlighting the need for Christianity to address the challenges posed by Kant's philosophical framework in order to maintain its intellectual coherence and relevance.

3.2. Premise 2: Christianity's Response Options

Given the constraints imposed by Kant's epistemology, Christianity faces two possible response strategies." The first option is to push all of its claims to the phenomenal realm.¹⁵ The second option is not to reduce its claims to the phenomenal. The first option entails relegating all claims, including miracles and the resurrection, to the phenomenal realm, resulting in internal contradictions and undermining Christianity's objective truth claims. Descartes' demand for Cartesian certainty and Abulad's skepticism further challenge Christianity's assertion of objective truth. Conversely, retaining Christian realism affirms essential claims in the noumenal realm but risks unreasonableness by surpassing reason's justificatory bounds. Babor's ambivalence and Pope St. John Paul II's emphasis on objective truth underscore the complexity of reconciling faith with reason within Kant's framework. Ultimately, Christianity grapples with the tension between blind faith and rational skepticism, as Kant's critique of Cartesian certainty prompts believers to confront the limitations of reason in apprehending divine truths.

3.2.1. Abandon Christian Realism

This option entails reinterpreting all Christian claims, including miracles and the resurrection, as purely phenomenal events. However, this approach results in self-

contradictions. For instance, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is traditionally understood as an objective, historical event, central to Christian faith. Reducing it to a subjective phenomenon undermines its objective truth and compromises the imperative to evangelize, which requires a solid, dogmatic foundation. Thus, this option renders Christianity unreasonable due to internal inconsistencies. Nevertheless, this option is still worth thinking about. This reinterpretation aligns with the Cartesian demand for absolute certainty, a perspective that has significantly influenced modern philosophical thought. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes (2015) wrote:

Since reason already convinces me that I should abstain from the belief in things which are not entirely certain and indubitable ... it will be enough to make me reject them all if I can find in each some ground for doubt. (Chapter IV)

We call this absolute certainty that Descartes thinks to be that which rational animals are entitled to hold “Cartesian certainty.” Even if Descartes is long gone, Abulad (2017) “[t]his skeptical attitude has never thereafter left us.” We could see a lot of continuity between his thought and that of Kant. Regarding the existence of God, Abulad (2017) wrote that “To one who has faith, anyway, no proof is necessary, but our students need also to know that no proof is possible” (p. 9). In his view, what Aquinas realized after his vision which made him think all he wrote was straw:

That revelation, I imagine, produced in St. Thomas the certitude which no intellectual argument could possibly replace, making it even more emphatically correct to say that no proof is indeed possible, that even the most formidable argument is straw compared to that revelation which is a sheer gift, not anything acquired naturally by, albeit coming as a result of, man’s effort. (p. 14)

What, then, is our only access of God? It is by means of entry into a Bergsonian subjective, personal, mystical consciousness (Abulad, 2005). It is not by attempts to prove He exists noumenally as the first principle of all things, as said above. In fact, “[t]he search for the principle of knowledge ends with the realization that there are no principles, that all the so-called principles belong to us and not the thing itself” (p. 14). If we could know God at all, it would not be by means of proofs from reason, since Kant’s antinomies of pure reason show that reason at the same time proves that God does not exist. Time has come when reason has itself deconstructed reason. Consequently, belief in God is by means of faith alone. For Abulad, even the most basic proposition upon which all of Christianity rests, namely that “God exists,” is pushed to the phenomenal realm. How much more for all other Christian doctrines all of which are based upon the existence of God? The skepticism inherent in Descartes’ demand for Cartesian certainty and Christianity’s failure to meet that standard seem to force Christians to abandon claiming that Christianity is true, not just for them or subjectively, even intersubjectively, but extra-mentally.

Attempts to counter Craig’s point that mere logical possibility does not entail epistemic possibility is worthless if Kant’s reduction of reason’s range to the phenomenal is not simply a logical possibility that he opens, but proposition that he proves, as he claims to have done.⁶⁷ His accusation of a performative self-contradiction to the postmodernist does not refute their argument itself, even if it does show the hypocrisy of the person holding it. In any case, therefore, Craig’s attempt to defend the Christian faith from the charge of blindness still seems to fail.

3.2.2. Retain Christian Realism

This option involves maintaining that essential Christian claims are noumenal. However, asserting noumenal claims without the capacity for reason to access the noumenal realm fails to proportion these claims to the limits of reason. This leads to unreasonableness as it demands belief in claims that exceed the bounds of what reason can justify.

Confidence that Christianity is *extra-mentally* true, that its claims correspond to the *noumenal realm*, seems to be intrinsic to the Christian religion. It is the certainty that the First Vatican Council is referring to when it says “If someone has said that the one true God, our creator and Lord, cannot be known by the natural light of human reason with certainty through those things that have been made, let him be anathema.” It is what Saint Paul means by “clear perception” when he says that “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have

been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

Let us turn to a contemporary of Abulad, the late Dr. Eddie Babor of Holy Name University. Babor (2007b) thinks that God’s existence can be proven by reason, as is clear when he writes in his book that “God’s existence cannot only be proven but can be demonstrated” (326). What is the finest way of demonstrating it? Aquinas’s Five Ways. As Babor (2007b) states, “The finest a posteriori demonstration of God’s existence is the celebrated Thomistic Five Ways” (p. 323). He also seems to think that God’s existence is somehow independent from human belief, and thus noumenal, as he also writes, “God’s existence is neither conditioned nor determined by man’s belief” (p. 324). So it is evident from these texts that Babor is at minimum a realist about theism. It is not yet made clear, however, if this realism extends to Christianity, and most particularly to Catholicism.

In stark contrast to Abulad’s fideistic approach, Msgr. Joseph Clifford Fenton presents a robust defense of Christian realism. Fenton refuses to push the claims of Christianity to the realm of the phenomenal. In *Laying the Foundation*, Fenton (2016) insists that “that a doctrine which is revealed in the sense in which she speaks of revelation could not be fully demonstrated as credible apart from these external motives or criteria” (chapter 6). How could something that is merely phenomenal be external to us? Implied therefore is Fenton’s affirmation of Christianity’s claims to be more than phenomenal. Fenton thinks that “[r]ather than honoring God, a man would commit an offense against Him were he to believe without reason that some statement had been communicated by the Creator.” (chapter 1). Fenton’s position is diametrically opposed to fideism, which seems to be held by Abulad. Fenton further writes:

A demonstration of rational credibility would be to no purpose, unless it were visible in the light of natural reason as such. In other words, a man need not possess the gift of divine faith in order to see that the content of that faith is something which he can accept prudently with the assent of divine faith. A man must have the gift of divine faith in order connaturally and perfectly to accept with certainty the teachings contained in the body of divine revelation. But he does not stand in need of any gift of faith in order to be able to demonstrate and to realize that the acceptance of this doctrine is perfectly in harmony with the tendencies and the demands of his own human nature. (chapter 1)

For Fenton, we can know that God exists through observation and the application of the principle of causality (chapter 4). Metaphysical reasoning shows the possibility of miracles (chapter 1) and reliability of divine revelation, if any (chapter 6). We then test claims of divine revelation if they really are impossible by natural power alone, which therefore have to be divine. Historiographical research enables man to judge sources of historical data pointing to Christianity being truly divinely revealed. Historical study shows Catholicism to be the original and true Church that Jesus founded (chapter 19). All these can be known with a “certain judgment is made without fear or danger of the contradictory proposition being true” (chapter 1). Fenton does not only assert the certitude of his claims. The bulk of his book is dedicated to demonstrating such claim of certitude. In any case, it should have been clear by now that Fenton chooses option 2.

Craig (2008) emphasizes the distinction between knowing and showing the truth of Christianity. He writes that “in answering the question ‘How do I know Christianity is true?’ we must make a distinction between knowing that it is true and showing that it is true. We know Christianity is true primarily by the self-authenticating witness of God’s Spirit. We show Christianity is true by presenting good arguments for its central tenets.” (p. 58) Nevertheless, let this not distract us from Craig’s affirmation that certain Christians claims, including the resurrection, happened objectively at some point within history. After marshalling various lines of evidence, Craig (1981) argues they together “point with unwavering conviction to the same unavoidable and marvelous conclusion: Jesus actually rose from the dead” (chapter 5).

While Craig differentiates between knowing and showing the truth of Christianity, this option still faces opposition from postmodernist views. Against those whom “neo-Kantian postmodernists” of which Abulad seems to be one of, who assert “that there is in some sense a thing-in-itself, an external reality. ... [but] that we have no way to get to reality and, since we know nothing about it, reality itself is a useless notion and, for all practical purposes, can simply be ignored,” Moreland and Craig (2017) argue that they perform what they deny, making their position self-refuting. Postmodernists “appear to claim that their own assertions about the modern era, about how language and consciousness work, and so forth are true and rational, they write literary texts and protest when people misinterpret the authorial intent in



their own writings, they purport to give us the real essence of what language is and how it works, and they employ the dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism while claiming superiority for the latter. In these and other ways postmodernism seems to be self-refuting” (chapter 6).

Building on this dialogue, Pope St. John Paul II exemplifies somebody who seeks “to reconcile reason with faith.” Karol Wojtyła, or Pope St. John Paul II (1998), emphasizes that Christianity makes certain “objective” and thus noumenal truth claims: “The second aspect of Christian philosophy is objective, in the sense that it concerns content. Revelation clearly proposes certain truths which might never have been discovered by reason unaided, although they are not of themselves inaccessible to reason. Among these truths is the notion of a free and personal God who is the Creator of the world, a truth which has been so crucial for the development of philosophical thinking, especially the philosophy of being” (no. 76).

Pope St. John Paul II (1998) affirms the noumenal character of central Christian claims, and that “in reasoning about nature, the human being can rise to God” (no. 19). The confidence that this could be done, including in all conclusions arrived philosophically, however, has been recently threatened. He states that how “[r]ecent times have seen the rise to prominence of various doctrines which tend to devalue even the truths which had been judged certain. ... In short, the hope that philosophy might be able to provide definitive answers to these questions has dwindled. (no. 5). Since he substantially agrees with Kant’s point we need to acquire certitude, we must locate the cause of this decrease in confidence and if possible, mend it. He locates its beginnings in Descartes, who, by making subject, not being, the focus of inquiry, has basically preempted Kant’s Copernican Revolution. Pope John Paul II (2005) writes:

we have to go back to the period before the Enlightenment, especially to the revolution brought about by the philosophical thought of Descartes. The cogito, ergo sum (I think; therefore, I am) radically changed the way of doing philosophy. In the preCartesian period, philosophy, that is to say, the cogito, or rather the cognosco, was subordinate to esse, which was considered prior. To Descartes, however, the esse seemed secondary, and he judged the cogito to be prior. This not only changed the direction of philosophizing, but it marked the decisive abandonment of what philosophy had been hitherto, particularly the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and namely the philosophy of esse.” (pp. 8-9)

What was that which the philosophy of being (esse) that prioritizing it over the cogito is better for philosophy, and thus eventually for the return of confidence in reason’s access to God? It is its feature that, Pope John Paul II (1998) thinks, it “is based upon the very act of being itself, which allows a full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole, surpassing every limit...” (no. 97). In other words, because *esse* is simpler than the categories of phenomena and noumena in that it transcends both, it is able to encapsulate both and thus conclusions based on it are not limited to just one of the two categories. Consequently, if God is proven to exist based on reasoning from esse, the question of whether He does so only in the realm of the phenomena or the noumena becomes moot, thereby recovering the certainty of reason’s capacity to know God.

Not all noumenal claims of Christianity, however, seem to be demonstrable by Aquinas’s metaphysics of esse. Some of its claims, in fact, seem repugnant to its implications, one of which is God’s wisdom. The cross seems contrary to the Wisdom of God, and hence may be a stumbling block for faith. Pope John Paul II writes that ““The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up...” However, reason’s plumbing into its depths eventually sees that (1) it actually happened, and (2) and it is actually fitting for an all-wise God, makes the cross at the same time “also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth. Here we see not only the border between reason and faith, but also the space where the two may meet” (no. 23). For Pope John Paul II, we do not have to abandon reason so we can make room for faith. Faith enhances reason by prompting it to explore avenues it wouldn’t have considered on its own. It is not enclosed upon itself as phenomena are. It breaks into the world.

3.3. *Premise 3: Resulting Unreasonableness*

The tension between these two options culminates in the final premise, which explores the inherent unreasonableness of either stance if Kant’s framework holds true. Whether Christianity opts to abandon or retain its realism, it inevitably confronts unreasonableness if

Kant's framework is correct. The attempt to reconcile faith with the limits of reason either collapses into self-contradiction or overextends the claims of reason. Interestingly, Babor's own reflections illustrate the complexity and internal conflict within this philosophical discourse between options 1 and 2. This perplexity is evident when Babor (2007a) writes:

For a philosophy to be a philosophy, it should be based on reason and sustained by critical awareness or critical thinking. Philosophy has no place for God; it cannot accommodate faith. The moment faith is given a room to act as a binary of reason, reason would collapse to the recesses of faith. (p. 15)

Whereas Babor has been cited earlier to have stated that Aquinas' Five Ways demonstrate the existence of God, we will now see him saying that Scholasticism, of which Aquinas is a key part, is not a serious philosophy because it is based on faith. To Babor (2007a), "Scholasticism is not a serious philosophy. It rather uses philosophy in order to hide its true identity. ... But can we really know God? Meister Echart prefers to call God Divine Nothingness" (p. 27). He also states, "We don't have access to know who really God is. That is why we believe in God—the very essence of faith, anyway, is to believe in something we are not sure of. The act of Scholastics are encroachment in the holy quarters of the divinity of God. Augustine and Aquinas are more of theologians than of being true-blooded philosophers" (p. 25). What does Babor really believe? It is hard to tell. But I bet it is option 1 – the pushing of all of the knowledge-claims of reason about God to the phenomenal, leaving access to God in Himself to faith alone. This judgment is based on his words in his paper wherein there is less motivation to defend Aquinas than those in his book, for he uses his book as a textbook in a Catholic university, namely Holy Name University, wherein he himself says "Scholasticism enjoys so much prominence" (p. 25).

Another way to reconcile those texts from Babor is to take him as willing to grant noumenal knowledge of the existence of God, but not of any religious doctrine premised on it, perhaps due to the Gap Problem (Pruss, 2009). After all, the Catholic faith may just be at a phenomenal since it asserts a lot more than the existence of God, including dogmas. This is, perhaps, hinted by the conclusion of his paper in which he strikes his final blow against "Scholastic" or even "Catholic Christian philosophers," and "Hail to the thinkers who dared to think without fear despite the medieval mandate of the Church which has the power to control her faithful about what to think, what to feel, and what to do." To him, "postmodernism is...a blessing in itself to all of us since it unrelentingly and unmitigatingly deals a rebellious blow against a structure whose main line of command is to believe in a centralized power of administration, management, and monopoly of knowledge" (pp. 24-26). This is almost like Kant's (1992) motto of the Enlightenment—*Sapere Aude!* Kant defines immaturity as the incapacity to employ one's understanding without external assistance, attributing it not to a lack of knowledge but to a deficiency in resolve and courage. His famous imperative "*Sapere Aude!*" ("Dare to know!") epitomizes the essence of enlightenment, urging individuals to embrace intellectual autonomy. Kant identifies laziness and cowardice as the primary factors perpetuating immaturity, leading individuals to persist in dependence even after liberation from external constraints. He critiques the guardians who foster this state of dependency, ensuring that individuals perceive the path to maturity as hazardous and arduous. Stop listening to the clergyman who tells you not to argue but only to believe. After all, if religious claims are in the realm of what is unknowable, what is faith in what others have claimed about it, but blind?

What Immanuel Kant seems to have shown is that this Cartesian certainty is impossible, especially when it comes to the existence of God. If we know the Catholic faith, or the Christian faith in general, is false, and yet we still choose to believe it, then our faith is irrational, or in other words, blind. Kant, despite his efforts to salvage causality from Hume, the bankruptcy of the religious system that hangs on it. If Kant was right, then we are forced to choose: blind faith, or no faith at all?

4. Conclusions

Ultimately, Kant's impact on the discourse about faith and reason leads us to a crucial juncture, necessitating a choice between blind faith and intellectual autonomy. The paper concludes that, under the constraints of Kant's reduction of reason, Christianity—and by extension, religion—is rendered unreasonable. This outcome challenges the intrinsic Christian commitment to the primacy of reason (*logos*) (John 1:1). Therefore, Christianity



must actively refute Kant's limitation of reason to preserve its rational foundation. Failure to do so would vindicate atheistic critiques and signify that mainstream organized religion is inherently irrational.

This analysis underscores the imperative for further research to explore strategies for reconciling faith with reason within Kant's constraints. Future inquiries should delve into alternative responses while considering the broader implications of Kant's philosophy on religious discourse. Such endeavors will enrich theological dialogue and deepen our understanding of the relationship between faith and reason in contemporary discourse. The issues tackled in this paper are nested in the wider issues of the relation between mind and world—a field of research that is in its peak productivity due to players beyond philosophy and theology, most of which fall under cognitive science.

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