

THINKING THE END IN ITSELF: A CRITICAL STUDY OF FIRST PRINCIPLES IN  
PLATO, ARISTOTLE, THE BIBLE, AND KANT

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## Dissertation Abstract

What is truth? What is untruth? Or is there no truth or untruth? Is the mind trapped, as Hume concludes, between false reason and no reason? In my dissertation I show that Hume's conclusion is inevitable only when we reduce moral reason, founded on the biblical ideal of love, to the law of contradiction and sense perception, the twin engines of ancient Greek teleology.

To defend the above, I argue that there is no consciousness of either truth or untruth in ancient Greek thought. That is why its two greatest expositors, Plato and Aristotle, teach that human beings are ignorant of the end in itself, the highest good (or *telos*) that all men seek. For the end is, in itself, not relative (related) to consciousness which is not (the) good but to appearance only. The ancient Greeks, I show, have no alternative but to employ deductive logic and inductive logic as the indemonstrable bases of demonstration. This leads them into inescapable contradictions.

Kant demonstrates that sense perception and logic are each worthless unless they serve moral ends. This insight, he shows, is biblical. "Christianity" reveals that the truth cannot be thought except as existing and cannot exist except in thought. For the "categorical imperative" to love your neighbor (the stranger, your friend, your enemy ...) as yourself by treating her as you would want her to treat you, i.e., always as an end and never as a means, is *a priori*. This means, Kant sees, that there is no possibility even of *thinking* of anything that is absolutely good, in the world or out of it, except a good will.

In the dissertation that follows I distinguish between two incommensurable ontologies: the ancient Greek, in which human beings are ignorant of the end in itself, and the biblical, in which the moral will is the end in itself. I show that to conflate these standpoints is to conflate reason with logic and sense, bad will (evil) with ignorance, and, in so doing, to create the contradictions that necessarily follow whenever we seek the truth in things that we cannot will.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In this dissertation I shall examine the first principles of Plato and Aristotle (Chapter 2), the Bible (Chapter 3), and Kant (Chapter 4) in order to defend the general thesis that modern ideas and values rest on the moral and ontological foundation of the Bible, i.e., the golden rule that human beings are, and must be respected as, ends and beginnings in themselves. Modern thought is not grounded in ancient pagan teleology, where, I shall argue, human beings are not ends or beginnings in themselves and, therefore, do not regard themselves as such. To fulfill this project, I shall examine the fundamental structure of ancient pagan teleology through the lenses of its two leading expositors, Plato and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> I shall show that Aristotle, notwithstanding his critique of Plato, undertakes to demonstrate, like Plato, on the bases of the principle of contradiction and sense perception, both of which, I maintain, are the pillars of ancient teleology, that human beings are not ends in themselves but are, rather, for the sake of an end. In the metaphysics of both Plato and Aristotle, it is impossible for human beings either to think their existence or to exist in their thought because thought is an appearance that is relative to the individual and is not in itself, whereas existence is understood to be in itself and is not an appearance that is relative to thought. At the same time, for Plato and Aristotle, thought and existence (human beings and the end in itself) are dependent on each other despite their necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Providing a sustained defense of the connection between Plato and Aristotle and other ancient teleological thinkers, e.g., in the ancient Mesopotamian, Indian, Chinese, Greek, and Roman traditions, would take me far beyond my present purposes in the present study. Thus, I have chosen to limit my comments to noting the essential features of this connection, as required.

opposition. Plato holds that the principle of contradiction necessitates that appearances have an essence in order to appear, i.e., that the essence is of appearances, while he also insists that this essence is separate from appearances because it is not itself an appearance. Similarly, Aristotle argues that all actions, choices, and movements must aim at a final and complete end that is itself unmoved. Otherwise, actions, choices, and movements have no end (purpose, reason, or fulfillment). The end in itself is central to the definitions of actions, choices, and movements but is defined in opposition to actions, choices, and movements. For both Plato and Aristotle, then, the essence of appearances, i.e., the end in itself, is opposed to its appearances while, at the same time, it is not knowable except through them. Thus, I shall argue that Plato and Aristotle depict human beings as dependent on appearances, which, qua appearances, cannot exist, in order to think existence that, qua existence, cannot appear. This means that human beings are dependent on reproducing contradictions in their thought when they try to escape from the contradictions of their thought by way of the principle of contradiction.

In light of the above, I shall show that biblical thought is fundamentally to be distinguished from the teleology of the ancient Greeks, i.e., that it is not teleological, because human beings are regarded as free ends (beginnings) in themselves. In the “Old” and “New” Testaments,<sup>2</sup> the biblical peoples, by whom I

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this dissertation I use the common expressions “Old Testament” and “New Testament” to refer to the Hebrew Bible and the second part of the Christian Bible, respectively. By these terms I do not mean, or want to imply that, the Old Testament has either greater or lesser

mean the ancient Israelites<sup>3</sup> and early Christians, are conscious of their freedom and so of their fundamental moral obligation to treat all persons as ends in themselves and not as means to a higher end. For they comprehend that their most important duty is to love God above all others, the God whose highest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself and so to treat her<sup>4</sup> as you would want her to treat you, simply because she is human and has dignity. This moral law does not exist in ancient teleology, where the notion of right is an appearance that is determined on the basis of nature, i.e., personal preference, self-interest, power, rank, or birth. I shall argue that what the golden rule of biblical morality expresses is the ontologically and morally necessary relationship between thought and existence. To *think* the moral law is to *exist* as an end and not as a contradictory appearance of nature, and to *exist* as an end entails the obligation to *think* the moral law. To think and to exist as a beginning and as an end, and not as a means to an end, is to be responsible for treating oneself and, equally, others, as such, because the dignity of all persons is justified on the same ground. I shall argue, then, that what the Bible demonstrates is that a higher end than a moral life, i.e., an end that is outside of or apart from the necessary relationship between thought and existence, is inconceivable. Or again: the Bible teaches that the

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significance than the New Testament but *only* that it precedes the New Testament in time. When I speak of “the Bible” in general, I mean the Old and New Testaments taken together.

<sup>3</sup> I include the Jews in the designation “ancient Israelites.” For the technical differences between these two terms, see Harold Bloom’s *The Book of J* (translated by David Rosenberg. New York: Random House, Inc., 1990), pp. 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> I have used masculine and feminine pronouns interchangeably throughout this dissertation when referring to the individual human being in general, i.e., irrespective of his or her gender, in order to facilitate ease of expression.



fulfillment of the necessary relationship between thought and existence, i.e., the end in itself, is and must be the moral life.

It is on the basis of this biblical insight that Kant explores in his transcendental (or “critical”) philosophy the issue of how necessary existence, as found in the synthetic *a priori* propositions of scientific and moral reason, is possible. He demonstrates that scientific knowledge (of causally determined objects in nature) and morality (in human relationships) presuppose “transcendental conditions” that lie outside the limits of formal (Aristotelian) logic and sense perception and, therefore, I shall argue, outside of pagan teleology. He shows that there can be no science or morality without the idea of freedom, which expresses the necessary relationship between thought and existence to be the end in itself. For, Kant argues, both logic and sense perception are empty and blind, i.e., contradictory, when taken as the principal instruments of, or sufficient conditions for, truth. The person who employs the law of contradiction as a first principle for demonstration cannot demonstrate that her premises are true – for the needle in the compass of logic points in the direction of natural preference which, because relative to the individual, points in all directions; and the person who relies on outer sense cannot demonstrate that what appears must be as it appears and not otherwise. It is for this reason that Kant makes central to his project the critique of the nature and limits of logic and sense experience from the standpoint of “pure reason,” i.e., the consciousness of being an end. For, he shows, it is only insofar as human reason distinguishes between formal logic and sense experience, and then between itself and these modes of cognition, that we can

establish that when we trespass beyond the fixed boundaries of logic, experience, and/or reason, we confuse means and ends and contradict both ourselves and one another to our individual and collective detriment. The insight that we can express ourselves as ends and live up to what it means to be human only insofar as we ground our judgments in the necessary relationship between thought and existence, i.e., in the idea of freedom, and, therefore, in the moral law, is, I argue, equivalent to the recognition that Kant's critical revolution, which shows necessary existence in modernity to be inconceivable on the basis of logic and sense, rests on a biblical foundation.

The structure of this dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 2, "Ancient Greek Metaphysics: the End in Itself in Plato and Aristotle," I shall show that, in the writings of both Plato and Aristotle, thought contradicts existence. Human beings cannot think their divine, immortal, undifferentiated, and unchanging end (form or *telos*) because it exists in itself. Yet, this end in itself constitutes their essence, definition, or soul; it is their goal, reason, and principle, what Aristotle calls the "unmoved mover" of all action, choice, and movement. According to both philosophers the essence or end of changing things cannot itself change or else changing things would have no essence or end and nothing could exist or appear, be or become, which is absurd. I thus characterize the "relationship" between thought and existence as found in Plato and Aristotle to be between "inseparable contradictories" or "dependent opposites." Since existence is opposed to appearance while, at the same time, it is what appearances are in themselves, it is, in principle, impossible for human beings to attain the end for which they strive.

For existence cannot be thought and thought cannot exist. There can be no relationship between thought and existence because human beings are not viewed as ends, or beginnings, in themselves.

Since the end in itself as depicted in Plato and Aristotle – and, I argue, in ancient Greek teleology in general – is simultaneously opposed to and identical with its appearances, the notion that the human being “is” identical with the end in itself bears no relationship to the biblical and critical conception of human beings as ends in themselves, in which the necessary relationship between thought and existence is constituted by the power of human beings to will their existence on moral grounds. In ancient Greek epic poetry, tragedy, philosophy, and history, human beings are ignorant of what things are in themselves and have no power over fate, the gods, nature, and so over the ultimate beginning and end of their own lives. For this reason, the formal identity of the human being with his soul restates the inexorable opposition between them, i.e., that human beings are means and not ends. What follows from the ontological opposition between, and identity of, thought and existence is, first, that the content of thought is limited to contradictory appearances, i.e., to inner and outer perceptions, and, second, that one cannot judge these appearances from a position of being independent of them except through the purely formal operation of the mind, i.e., the principle of contradiction. Aristotle indicates that human beings must begin and end with what is familiar, i.e., with the “facts of perception.” He observes, however, that these facts are the opposite of the end in itself, an end that, more than anything else, is man. Because the human being is ignorant of that at which he aims, his judgments

about it are merely logical (formal) and lead to contradiction. For what is (to him) is not (to those who oppose him). Kant shows that the highest success of logical judgment is freedom from contradiction with itself; logic cannot avoid falling into contradiction with the judgments of others.

It is because Aristotle sees that perception cannot supply necessity that he upholds the law of contradiction, together with its variant formulations, the laws of identity and the excluded middle, to be the most certain and indisputable principle for demonstration. He notes, however, that the law of contradiction is itself indemonstrable. His position is not that there is no demonstration of this principle outside of this principle because it is a necessary presupposition for demonstration. Rather, his position is that it is not possible to explain why the principle of contradiction is the first principle for demonstration without being carried away in an infinite regress in which there can be no demonstration at all. In the former case, the principle of contradiction is a necessary condition for demonstration. In the latter case, it is the basis, i.e., the sufficient condition or instrument, for demonstration. On the one hand, it must be the sufficient condition for demonstration because the facts of perception cannot demonstrate anything. On the other hand, human beings must begin with the familiar facts to establish the premises of their thought. Otherwise, the law of contradiction leads to contradiction with the available facts.

In the *Apology*, Plato's Socrates<sup>5</sup> proclaims on the divine authority of Apollo that the one thing that he knows is that he knows nothing *at all*. It is for this reason, he argues, that Apollo has declared that he (Socrates) is the wisest of all men. When Socrates positions himself as a good example for others because he – unlike even the greatest politicians, poets, and craftsmen – recognizes that all examples of the good in itself are worthless; when he teaches that no human being, including himself, can have anything worthwhile to teach because human wisdom is opinion, not knowledge, and has no valid currency; and when he demonstrates that the highest task of a living man is to train for death, but that death is a mere episode in the unending metamorphoses of appearances, an episode that leads back to life; in these cases, his speech is at once consistent and contradictory. That is, he is consistent with the ontological contradiction between thought and existence, a contradiction that expresses the limit of human wisdom to be “knowledge” *that* one is ignorant, but not *what* one is ignorant of. This consciousness is shared among the Homeric heroes and is celebrated in Greek tragedy.

For Plato, the highest object of love is the end in itself that alone is the source of all value. It is loved because it is in itself, i.e., because human beings cannot comprehend what they love. Socrates demonstrates on this basis that one cannot possess what one loves or love what one possesses. For one to love, to desire, to search for the end entails that one cannot find it; if one could find it, it

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<sup>5</sup> In this dissertation I make no distinction between the position of Socrates and the position of Plato or between Socrates and Plato.

would be an appearance and not the unchanging and immortal object that one desires. Thus, the end in itself is loved *because* it does not relate to anything (there is nothing that can relate to it) and *because* it cannot be thought (thought does not exist). Hence, we see that the reason that Socrates seeks knowledge ("of" form) is that it is impossible for him to attain it; his search is motivated by his consciousness that he is in contradiction with what he searches for. It is because the end in itself transcends the contradictory appearances of consciousness that, on the one hand, it is sought but that, on the other hand, it cannot be found.

I shall argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, Aristotle's teleology is fundamentally indistinguishable from Plato's teleology. For Aristotle, like Plato, argues on the basis of three axiomatic principles: (1) the ontological opposition between, and identity of, thought and existence; (2) the formal logic of contradiction; and (3) sense perception. These three engines, I hold, are what drive the train of ancient teleological thought in general along a closed circular track. Since thought and existence are dependent contradictories, to speak about one is to be contradicted by the other. Aristotle points out the contradictions of Plato in much the same way as Plato points out the contradictions of Socrates and his opponents. He sees, for example, that, if form cannot relate to particular things, then it cannot be the essence of particular things and that, if it is the essence of particular things, then it must be subject to the same reversals as the particulars. He sees, as Plato sees, that the opposition between thought and existence leads to contradiction; but he, like Plato, is not able to overcome the contradictions that he sees because in his own teleological system the

consciousness of contradiction is itself contradictory. His “seeing” thus expresses his blindness and ignorance.

Aristotle defines the unmoved mover that is the final, complete, self-sufficient end of, and reason for, all action, choice, and movement as thought thinking itself – thinking thinking thinking – a notion that does not admit of any relationship among the subject, the subject’s thought, and the object of thought, all of which are indistinguishable. The end in itself cannot be an object of thought. Further, since the reason that things are done is the same as that for the sake of which they are to be done, it is not possible for one to choose one’s final end or to deliberate correctly about how to attain it. Rather, it is an object of wish, loved for its own sake, i.e., “without qualification” and not for how it appears. In Aristotle, as in Plato, human beings aim at an end that they can neither conceive nor conceive being without. Thus, thought is dependent on being contradicted by the end that cannot appear in order to avoid being contradicted by appearances that have no end. The ontological contradiction between thought and existence in both Plato and Aristotle leads to a total dependence on the law of contradiction that shows that all things both are and are not at one and the same time. Hence, teleological thought is trapped in the excluded middle and discloses logic itself to be a contradictory appearance.

In Chapter 3, “Why Biblical Metaphysics is Not Teleological: an Examination of Core Biblical Ideas,” I shall argue that the Bible is a polemic directed against pagan teleology from a standpoint that is free of necessary contradiction. I maintain that, in the Bible, treating oneself and others with dignity, i.e., as ends and

not as means to an end, fulfills the covenant between human beings and God in totality. For the biblical basis of truth is neither the law of contradiction nor the appearances of nature but love, a love that is comprehended not as natural feeling but as moral will. I shall argue for this position by examining the meaning of love, sin, idolatry, repentance, creation, God, covenant, miracle, eternity, the resurrection of the dead, and the kingdom of God as found in the Old and New Testaments. None of these concepts is teleological or found in ancient teleological systems of thought.

The consciousness that human beings are divine ends, i.e., the image of God, is the fount of Jewish and Christian morality. The command that you must love your neighbor as yourself, even if she is a stranger to you, is defended by the Hebrew prophets who teach that social justice, not ritual observance, is the essential concern of the Law. Knowledge of God is not expressed in bowing one's head but in the serious and committed effort to be faithful to oneself and others in everything that one does.

Jesus teaches that the two greatest commandments of the Law and the Prophets are love of God and love of neighbor and that each is "like" the other. (In the Gospels, the "neighbor" includes not only the friend and the stranger but also the enemy.) He "sums up" the connection between love of God and love of neighbor in the golden rule: in everything that you do, relate to others as you would want them to relate to you. Paul teaches the same: he writes that all of the commandments in the Law are "summed up" in the principle of love of neighbor; love is the criterion for faith and, he proclaims, is sufficient to fulfill the Law. I shall



argue, then, that, in both the Old and New Testaments, human beings are envisioned to be ends in themselves from a perspective that is inconceivable through the categories of ancient teleology. In ancient teleology love in human relationships is a natural appearance that is fundamentally indistinguishable from hatred; for it expresses one's opposition to the end in itself, an end that cannot be shared and in relation to which everyone is a means. The biblical idea of love is completely different. It is not determined by natural feeling (in terms of which there is no clear or sustainable difference between friends and enemies) and it constitutes a critique of the view that the law of contradiction (according to which enemies are not loved) is a sufficient ground for the discovery of truth.

At first glance, many of the biblical narratives, both Jewish and Christian, might appear to resemble myths that are common to the Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, and other neighboring populations. However, the fact that these narratives, when viewed within the framework of biblical thought as a whole, are enveloped by, and subsumed under, a constellation of ideas that expresses the necessary relationship between thought and existence suggests that the biblical authors and editors self-consciously appropriated these myths in order to express their independence from them. Indeed, the Bible itself counsels against a purely literal, i.e., unspiritual, reading of its narratives. For not only does it interpret and critique itself but its attack on pagan teleology is also an attack on the conflation of pagan teleology and biblical morality, i.e., on idolatry. To be sure, the most important issue is not what particular stylistic devices the authors use to communicate their ideas but, rather, what the content is of the ideas they

communicate. The facts that the biblical authors and editors interweave teleological narratives with values that are not teleological and that the golden rule is regarded as the highest principle of truth and interpretation indicates, again, that biblical myth is an appropriation, and not an imitation, of pagan myth and is unlike, for example, Roman myth, which is an imitation, and not an independent appropriation, of Greek myth. The strategy of appropriating pagan myths in order to subvert a literal reading of them reveals in and through this transformative process that an authoritative consciousness hovers above (and beneath) the surface of the uncreated and uncreative letter to which it gives meaning and through which it communicates meaning.

When I examine the idea of sin, I shall argue that it is only from the biblical perspective of moral truth that evil is revealed to be sin – against oneself, others, and God. What distinguishes the biblical conception of evil from the teleological conception of evil is that, in the teleological conception, evil is ignorance of the good in itself (and is thus both identical with and opposed to what is good relative to the individual), whereas, in the biblical conception, evil is the willful evasion of moral responsibility. In ancient teleology there is no sin because there is no idea of freedom as moral obligation; the inevitable consequence is that people treat one another as means and not ends. It is in the Bible that we find the paradox that, while there is no sin without freedom – for without freedom there is no perversion of freedom – sin manifests lack of freedom, i.e., freedom turned against itself. It is not ignorance but the refusal to acknowledge sin under the pretense of ignorance, or under the pretense of a concept of morality one knows in one's heart is not

moral, that is in the Bible called the sin against the spirit. It is the one type of sin that cannot be forgiven because the sinner here chooses not to acknowledge that there is any wrong to forgive and so not to repent for her sin. From the biblical standpoint, true freedom is expressed in one's commitment to atone for one's sins through repentance.

The strident call to repent charges the individual as wholly responsible for her sins because she has chosen them. To repent is to acknowledge that no one except oneself is to blame for the immoral choices that one has made. This acknowledgment demands sincere remorse of the kind that leads to a fundamental change in how one thinks and lives such that one demonstrates that one has learned from one's mistakes, has taken the required steps to repair the wrong as far as is possible, and has become a better person as a result. Here, the sins of the past are not taken to be a determining ground for the will and, therefore, for the future. The future is not a blind, karmic effect; rather, it must be created anew through the power of freedom.

In my analysis of the biblical idea of creation I indicate that the two accounts of the creation of the world with which Genesis opens contradict both themselves and one another explicitly at the surface of the literal narrative. I argue, however, that when we read these accounts closely in relation to each other and in light of the ethics of interpretation that I show is developed in the Bible as a whole, we are then able to see that they do not refer to a time of cosmological beginnings that cannot be thought. Rather, what these accounts teach is that human beings are free, knowing good and evil, and are, therefore, responsible for the creation of the

world at each and every moment. In fact, it is because the human being is not an effect of inner or outer natural or supernatural causes but is, rather, intimately involved in creating the world through the choices that he makes, that he is exalted, in both Genesis 1 and 3, as the image and likeness of God. This position is supported by the creation account in the Gospel of John, in which the God that creates all things is the "Word." The Word, the consciousness of the Word, is that through which all things have come into being. I argue that the consciousness of the Word/God is the essential spirit of the Ten Commandments: it is the Ten Words, the tenfold word that commands love of God and love of the neighbor and that Jesus and Paul crystallize in the golden rule which, they claim, sums up the Law and the Prophets. (The boldest expression of the connection between [the Word] God and love is in 1 John: "God is love.") I take the position, then, that what the creation accounts communicate is, first, that all things come into existence through human beings who are aware of themselves and one another as the true light of the world, i.e., as beginnings and ends in themselves, and who, therefore, are aware that nature is not a beginning and end in itself, i.e., a creator. I shall argue that it is human beings who must create all things in nature at each and every moment by giving a meaning to them that is consistent with, and that supports, human dignity. Second, the creation accounts reveal (communicate) that, because those who do not know God have no knowledge of good and evil, pagan contradiction is not sin, evil, untruth, or even error. Rather, it is the empty, dark, and formless void of teleological consciousness in which, to repeat, the

appearances of evil are indistinguishable from the appearances of the good because all appearances are opposed to the good in itself.

The fact that the biblical authors conceive of themselves as having the authority, right, and, indeed, the obligation, to proclaim the standpoint of God demonstrates quite decisively that they do not think of God as a cosmological beginning and/or teleological end. It is because the idea of God is inseparable from the consciousness that moral life in this world is the highest good that the command to worship God is so often coupled with an excoriation of natural and supernatural idols, all of which, the Bible shows, impugn human dignity. I shall argue that the idea of God in the Bible expresses the maturing vision that human beings have of their own existence as ends and not means. God is not an immortal and unchanging substance but an idea whose content is revealed through metaphors, metaphors that express the manner in which the biblical people understand, represent, and struggle to come to terms with the truth of their own lives. True, God is an ideal to which no human being is equal; but the relationship between God and human beings is not hierarchical but covenantal. God and human beings are subject to the same moral standard. The story of this covenantal relationship, a relationship that is described variously as a marital bond, as the bond between parent and child, and as the bond between friends, is the story of how human beings see and judge themselves from a standpoint that transcends formal logic and nature. It communicates that the self-consciousness of the necessary relationship between thought and existence is the cradle of true

life and that the biblical people are free from the fatal contradictions of pagan teleology, a freedom that the Bible depicts as a miracle.

I shall argue that the stories of miracles in the Bible are metaphors that communicate and affirm the power of love and that they do not imply or refer to a supernatural power that can effect impossible outcomes in nature. The miracle of the resurrection from the dead is no exception. I shall attempt to reconcile Paul's remarkable claim in 1 Corinthians 15 that, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then faith is futile, with his fundamental teaching that love is the sole criterion of faith. I note instances in his other epistles in which Paul works with a metaphorical idea of death (which he connects to sin) and contrasts it with true life as the righteous life that overcomes death through repentance. I examine what it means for Paul to bind the idea of resurrection from the dead to the consciousness that all human beings must die and, also, to the idea, the ideal, of the kingdom of God in which death will be destroyed when moral life, i.e., love for self, others, and God, is universal.

In discussing the resurrection, Paul describes the kingdom of God as the world in which human beings are not dead but, rather, alive in Christ, such that "God is all in all." In and through this vision Paul depicts a kingdom of ends that both he and Jesus, not to mention the Book of Revelation, speak of as a world that is beyond, although near to, the world that surrounds them. It is not of the world under Roman occupation in which the Jews who hungered and thirsted for righteousness, the peacemakers, were persecuted by the Romans who viewed them within their social hierarchy as meek, poor, foolish, and weak. The Gospels

describes life in the kingdom of God as “eternal” not because it is everlasting but because it transcends the world in which birth, rank, honor, and natural power define who and what a person is. Eternal life expresses moral life to be without a teleological end because it is an end in itself. It resurfaces as a postulate of moral reason in Kant’s daring discussion of “immortality” as the necessary relationship between freedom and God.

Once I have shown in Chapter 2 that the first principle of ancient Greek teleology is that human beings are not beginnings and ends in themselves and that, therefore, the mind is dependent on formal logic and natural perception, both of which, when taken as sufficient conditions for truth, lead to contradiction; and once I have shown in Chapter 3 that biblical thought is not only not teleological but is also opposed to pagan teleology, and this because its core ideas are rooted in the consciousness that human beings are ends in themselves and are, therefore, obligated to will their existence on moral grounds; I shall then proceed to argue in Chapter 4, “Kant’s Critical Revolution: Human Beings are Ends in Themselves,” that necessary existence in what Kant calls the “theoretical” (scientific) and the “practical” (moral) realms is grounded on the biblical (“Christian”) idea of freedom and its moral and ontological presuppositions, and not on the formal logic of contradiction and/or natural perception.

Kant declares that the fundamental purpose of his critical project is once and for all to place metaphysics on a secure path by demonstrating that the key to the solution of all metaphysical problems, theoretical and practical, is the power of human beings to think (will) their existence. He sees that tradition of metaphysics

has, for the most part, followed the path of ancient teleology in depending on sense perception and logic as the principal instruments for their investigations. The result is that metaphysics has become a “dialectical” battleground of “mock” combats, i.e., it is contradictory, and that metaphysicians are either unable to detect the errors for which they are themselves responsible or, alternatively, they are unwilling to account for and address these errors, choosing instead to rest content in exposing the contradictions of their opponents.

Kant presents the essential problem with which he is concerned in the question: “[h]ow are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible?” He sees that “analytic *a priori*” (Aristotelian) logic establishes conclusions that necessarily follow from given premises, but that it cannot establish whether its premises are true, and that “synthetic *a posteriori*” judgments are drawn from real experience, but that experience only tells us what appears to be and not what is or what must be. Synthetic *a priori* judgments, on the other hand, express necessary existence. The question that needs to be addressed, then, is *how*, not *if*, judgments of this kind are possible. What constitutes their possibility? What are the transcendental grounds, the grounds that fall outside the limits of teleological cognition, that allow for the possibility of the question of how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible? What allows for the success of the sciences? What is the foundation of moral necessity? In order for Kant to demonstrate that formal logic and (sense) experience are empty and blind unless disciplined by moral reason, it is necessary for him to establish the nature and *a priori* limits of logic, possible experience, and reason.



Only then can he demonstrate that the mind creates nothing but confusion and contradictions insofar as it does not respect the limits of each sphere.

Kant shows that Aristotelian logic is a closed and complete system of the formal rules of thought; it can produce no insight because it is limited to deducing whether or not given judgments agree with the principle of contradiction. If the law of contradiction is employed as an “organon,” i.e., as a sufficient condition for truth, it leads to contradiction. In so doing, it annihilates itself.

In Kant’s critical philosophy, the field of “possible experience” refers to causally determined objects in nature. In the doctrine of “transcendental idealism” Kant consigns all empirical objects to “appearances” and distinguishes them from “things in themselves” which, he makes clear, cannot be known. The reason that he maintains that things in themselves are unknowable is *not* that human consciousness is an appearance that is opposed to what is in itself; this position is what Kant calls the “dialectical” “illusion” of ancient teleology, against which he distinguishes his own position “as a **critique of dialectical illusion**” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 86/A 62). The reason that Kant maintains that things in themselves are unknowable, I argue, is that *the thing in itself is human self-consciousness*. It cannot be known as an object of nature because nature can be known only through it, and the necessary condition for possible experience cannot itself be an object of possible experience. It is because the mind is the free cause of itself, an end in itself, that it can know that nature is not free but must conform to the categories of the mind, categories through which nature is itself conceptualized as the sum total of that which can be a possible experience *for us*.

Once Kant establishes the nature and limits of logic and experience (and with it, theoretical knowledge) and shows, first, that using Aristotelian logic as an organon leads to contradiction and, second, that objects of possible experience are not things in themselves, he is then able to show that the fruitfulness of logic and experience presupposes the idea of freedom and, therefore, the categorical imperative, which is identical to the golden rule: treat all persons at all times as ends in themselves and never as means to an end. In the categorical imperative, the mind must not conform to nature; nature must conform to the mind. The fulfillment of the moral law is the autonomy of reason, i.e., the self-determination of reason through the consciousness of its moral necessity which cannot be thought except as existing as the end in itself. Thus, Kant demonstrates that the moral law is the first principle, the categorical imperative, of both reason and the Christian faith, a faith that Kant calls the “pure religion of reason.” (While he does not see clearly that Christianity is itself rooted in the Jewish religion, I defend this position in Chapter 3.)

I shall explore the biblical bases of Kant’s transcendental philosophy more fully by examining the postulates of practical reason, which Kant defends as necessary presuppositions for the consciousness of the moral law. In interlocking the synthetic *a priori* ideas of God, freedom, and immortality, Kant signifies that God and immortality have the same moral and ontological status as freedom: they cannot be thought except as existing, together, and cannot exist except in (being) thought, together. Kant absolutely rejects the notion that God is a first or a final cause; this is not a Christian, or a rational, idea at all and it contradicts both

science and morality (and so thought and existence). He argues that in the Christian idea of God is found nothing but what is required for the possibility of willing the moral law and, therefore, a kingdom of ends. Hence, he claims that what it means to be faithful to the God of Christianity is to fulfill one's obligations to oneself and others, no more and no less. Pretending to serve God in any other way is "religious delusion" and "counterfeit service." Consistent with this position, to repeat, Kant denies validity to the notion that the soul is a simple, unchanging, everlasting substance. "Immortality" does not refer to the concept of the soul as a simple substance but to the time that is necessary to fulfill the moral law. This idea of time, I maintain, expresses the metaphysical distance (connection) between human beings and God (and also between thought and existence). It is a distance that prevents human beings and God from being ontologically identified with themselves and one another and, therefore, from being ontologically opposed to the thing in itself. Immortality is found only in the consciousness of freedom, i.e., in the necessary *relationship* (distance and connection) between thought and existence (and between human beings and God). It is the time of what may be called "infinite existence" conceived as the trial of endless spiritual testing and moral struggle that expresses the essentially human. It is, therefore, entirely consistent with the biblical idea of eternal life in the covenant.

Thus I argue that Kant's critique of uncritical (dogmatic, irrational, pseudo-teleological ...) metaphysics follows the biblical polemic against teleological metaphysics and shows that moral life is that than which nothing greater can be conceived: it is the "supreme" and "highest" good and is the "condition" of every

other good. It is when rational persons posit an end beyond the good will, i.e., outside of what it is within the power of human beings to accomplish in and through their loving relationships with one another, that we have idolatry (or dialectical illusion) as the *forfeiture* of both faithful reason and rational religion.

The idea of freedom, Kant shows, is decisive proof that we are ends and not means and that there can be no self-subsistent existence (which cannot be thought), no thing in itself (or end in itself) either in the world (of nature) or out of it (in a supernatural world) that fatally moves us. This revolutionary insight that, because we are free, the relationship between our thought and our existence is ontologically and morally necessary, is the general answer to the question of how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible. They are possible because they are actual, and their actuality is demonstrated through the consciousness of the question and its necessary biblical presuppositions: God, freedom, and immortality.

These three chapters – on the teleology of Plato and Aristotle (Chapter 2), biblical metaphysics (Chapter 3), and Kant's critical philosophy (Chapter 4) – constitute the body of my dissertation. In them I shall defend the position that modern thought is not teleological but is, rather, rooted in the biblical idea of freedom, which expresses the necessary relationship between thought and existence to be both ontological and moral. There is no freedom, golden rule, or categorical imperative in pagan teleology because thought and existence are there ontologically opposed to, and identical with, one another. I contend, then, that, because ancient teleological thought begins and ends in necessary contradiction and not with necessary existence, it is fruitless to study modern life through the

lens of ancient teleology or ancient teleology through the lens of modern life except insofar as the latter effort allows us the opportunity to confront the inexorable contradictions that ensue. The serious examination of these contradictions shall reveal that all similarities that we pretend to discover between ourselves and the ancient teleologists are our own surreptitious interpolations. I shall now proceed to offer what I hope will be a convincing defense of this thesis.

## **Chapter 2: Ancient Greek Metaphysics: the End in itself in Plato and Aristotle**

The teleological metaphysics of both Plato and Aristotle is based upon the ontological opposition between thought and existence: thinking has no being and what has being – the end in itself that is one, unchanging, undifferentiated, and immortal – cannot be thought. I speak of this ontological opposition as “teleological” because for Plato and Aristotle human beings are not ends in themselves. At the same time, both thinkers maintain that the essence of thought is its existence (or being), what Plato calls its “form” and what Aristotle calls its “end.” Hence, I maintain that, according to Plato and Aristotle, existence is the essence (end) of thought, yet it cannot be thought and, since the human being cannot know what his essence (end) is, he cannot account for his beginnings. His thought is necessarily blind: it is left with no content other than inner and outer perceptions, i.e., what Plato and Aristotle regard as contradictory appearances, and is dependent on formal logic, whose basis is the law of contradiction (which is alternatively expressed as the law of the excluded middle or the law of identity). The fact that thought and existence are in themselves opposed to (and identical with) themselves and each other, thus leaving thought dependent on formal logic and perception, renders the limit of human wisdom in the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, we are able to see, as the “knowledge” that human life is necessarily contradictory.

Plato shows in his dialogues that Socrates is the wisest of men because he “knows” that he has no knowledge at all. He seeks knowledge – he loves wisdom<sup>6</sup> – *because* he lacks it. What propels Socrates to search for knowledge of the form is that he does not know what the form is. The core idea in Aristotle is the same: all things aim at an end that they lack in the beginning. The end at which all things aim is in itself and by itself. It is not relative to any individual and, therefore, no individual can relate to it. All seeking must therefore be in vain, i.e., it must be blind and unending. I maintain that, while Plato and Aristotle are able to point out the contradictions that ensue in human experience from the fact that thought and existence are ontological opposites (and identities), neither philosopher is able to overcome these contradictions. For the consciousness of contradiction reflects the contradiction of consciousness and is merely one more appearance that does not exist and has no bearing on existence.

I want to begin my examination of the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle by thinking about what Socrates says in his own defense at his trial. To understand the trial of Socrates, it is important to understand some basic facts about courtroom cases in ancient Athens. In *Law, Violence and Community in Classical Athens*<sup>7</sup> David Cohen offers a brilliant analysis of courtroom orations by Lysias, Demosthenes, Isaeus, and other Greek orators in order to show that the

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<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, I do not distinguish between knowledge and wisdom except in discussing passages in which this distinction is made or implied.

<sup>7</sup> Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

institutional adjudication of conflict in classical Athens reflects the pursuit of agonistic goals, i.e., self-interest, honor, and power over one's rivals. He argues that for Plato and Aristotle (and also Thucydides) conflict and civil strife are inevitable because of the nature of men. It is natural for men to desire honor and gain – and so the feeling of being superior to others – and to fear dishonor and loss – and so the feeling of being inferior to others. Those who have honor despise those who do not and those who do not have honor are resentful and envious of those who do (pp. 29-34, 66).<sup>8</sup> In Athenian society, “social relations are *essentially* evaluative and competitive” (emphasis added). Men strive to

establish their own worth by monitoring their standing vis-à-vis other men. ... Because honor is established through comparison with others it is a limited good and competition for it can take the form of a zero-sum game. One man enhances his standing at the expense of those who are his rivals; *his elevation involves their defeat* (pp. 62-63, emphasis added).

Cohen argues that since conflict is a central feature of social and political life in ancient Athens, litigation “should be seen not as separate and removed from the realm of conflict, but rather as *part* of the process of conflict itself” (p. 194). The notion, then, that the Athenian judicial system is aimed at resolving conflicts or maintaining social equilibrium could not be further from the truth. Rather, the

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I do not mention the name of the text in parenthetical references where the text that I am discussing is evident.



courts are “a natural arena” for “settling relative standing,” for “clarifying hierarchies of honor among rivals,” and for pursuing “private animosities” (pp. 78, 82).<sup>9</sup>

Cohen demonstrates that hostile parties use the legal process as a “weapon” to pursue conflict (p. 92) and that the contradictions that emerge are irresolvable. For it is through the courts themselves that violence and revenge obtain legal sanction (p. 183). Court cases produce more enmity, not less enmity, and the more disputes are settled, the more they erupt (p. 22). Trial and litigation in the Athenian judicial system are for these reasons “fundamentally alien to the contemporary [modern] ideology of judicial process and the rule of law” (p. 183). This insight is supported by the facts that (1) the judges<sup>10</sup> have no access to well-defined statutes on the basis of which to interpret objective evidence, (2) the cross-examination of witnesses is not permitted, and (3) there is no fixed standard for admissible evidence. Both the prosecution and the defense attempt to manipulate the judges’ perceptions through whatever means are available in order to achieve their own ends. For example, each party will appeal to wealth, friends, family, public service, reputation, status, etc. in order to win the judges’ favor. This strategy involves showing that the opponent is manipulative and unjust when he appeals to the same factors to win the favor of these same judges. Cohen notes

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<sup>9</sup> In places where I do not indicate in a series of citations the specific page or line reference for each citation, the references for all of the citations in the series are noted at the end of the last citation.

<sup>10</sup> The judges at Athenian trials were lay citizens who were selected by lot. Women, slaves, foreigners, and certain social outcasts could not serve as judges (p. 64).

that it is common for the opposing litigants to appeal to the judges to consider what is in their (the judges') best interest before making up their minds (pp. 112-113). It is also common for both prosecutors and defendants, if they have the money, to buy the testimony of witnesses who will say whatever they are told to say (pp. 107-108). In this connection, Aristotle maintains in *Rhetoric*<sup>11</sup> that a person who is not eloquent or who does not have money or friends will not even attempt to prosecute because he knows from the beginning that his case is lost (1373a5-7).<sup>12</sup>

Since the categories on the basis of which cases are won and lost “are readily available to manipulation by either party” (p. 104), the courtroom in ancient Athens is a stage for dramatic “rhetorical performances” in which (1) the “facts” presented by the opposing sides utterly contradict one another, (2) these opposing accounts are supported by a phalanx of witnesses from each party, and (3) both sides appeal to the judges to consider how their own interests would be best served by giving a “just” verdict. Cohen writes,

[i]t cannot be underscored strongly enough that, in principle, in an Athenian trial all the untutored judges knew about the facts of the case, *and*, to a very significant extent the applicable laws, was what the two contesting litigants chose to tell them. In that process of selecting the “available means of persuasion” litigants used the statutes as they used the other material which they represented, interpreted, manipulated,

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<sup>11</sup> All works by Aristotle cited in my study are taken from the two-volume edition of *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* (edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.) *On the Soul* is in Volume One; *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Rhetoric* are in Volume Two.

<sup>12</sup> We see here that witnesses, though “inherently unreliable,” are “nonetheless indispensable” (*Law, Violence, and Community*, p. 174).

concealed, and lied about to suit the needs of the moment (p. 180).

Because of the “structural impediments to establishing with certainty the *most basic facts*” of the case, the “controlling interpretation was what a particular group of judges, as individuals,<sup>13</sup> thought on a particular day” (pp. 176, 180, emphasis added). For this reason, the outcome of a courtroom case is much like the outcome in a game of chance.<sup>14</sup>

In light of the idea that the trial at Athens is a competitive struggle or fight (*agon*) between opposing parties, each of whom desires for himself the honor that he wants to deny to his opponent, let us now think about how Socrates defends himself at his trial, as it is depicted in Plato’s *Apology*.<sup>15</sup> Socrates is prosecuted for believing in false gods and for corrupting the youth by teaching them also to believe in false gods. He argues that, in more than seventy years, he has never taught anyone anything. Therefore, people could not have learned anything from him: “I have never been anyone’s teacher. ... If anyone says that he has learned anything from me ... be assured that he is not telling the truth” (33a-b). The reason that he is on trial is that his accusers are offended. For, as we shall see in a moment, he has dishonored them in showing them that they are ignorant like him.

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<sup>13</sup> In Athenian trials, judges are not allowed to deliberate among themselves (ft. 19, p. 176).

<sup>14</sup> Cohen makes this analogy when he considers the unusual nature of inheritance cases, in which it was “commonplace” for prowling estate hunters to cook up counterfeit claims replete with “false children, lying witnesses, fictive genealogies, forged wills, and fraudulent adoptions.” “Athenians seem to have regarded such inheritance litigation as an *agon* much like a game of chance: you come forward with a perhaps unlikely or totally fraudulent case, but you rely upon the difficulty of clarifying such cases and the clout of your supporters, and hope that the wheel of fortune stops on your number.” He observes that unlike games of chance the game does not end with the outcome of the case. For more cases may be brought forward against the victor during his lifetime (and beyond) (pp. 169-170).

<sup>15</sup> Unless I note otherwise, all texts that I cite from Plato are taken from *Plato: Complete Works* (edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

The proof that he speaks the truth is that he is on trial. Socrates thus communicates to the Athenian jurymen that it is his goodness, his guiltlessness, which creates resentment among his opponents, who are not good. The real guilt lies with his accusers.<sup>16</sup>

Socrates claims that he has never taught anyone anything or learned anything from anyone in the context of recalling Chairephon's visit to the oracle at Delphi. Chairephon asked the Pythian priestess if any man is wiser than Socrates and she answered him, on behalf of the god Apollo, that no one is wiser.<sup>17</sup> Socrates says that the oracle's reply perplexed him: "I asked myself: 'Whatever does the god mean? ... I am very conscious that I am not wise *at all*; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest?'" (21b, emphasis added.) He remarks that he conversed with accomplished politicians, poets, and artisans in order to show that he could not be wiser than they.<sup>18</sup> However, after proceeding "systematically" in his conversations with different people, he says he discovered that *no one* has knowledge of *anything* worthwhile. What distinguishes him from his interlocutor, he continues, is that his interlocutor "thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he ... [because] I do not think I know what I do not know"

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<sup>16</sup> "In an Athenian trial," Cohen observes, "the plaintiff is also the accused, in the sense that the defendant will always put the plaintiff's life, character, and reputation at stake" (p. 186).

<sup>17</sup> Chairephon's question and the oracle's answer are wholly indeterminate. Is any man wiser than Socrates in what? Socrates is wisest in what? There is no indication that either Chairephon or anyone else in the *Apology* finds anything strange in the question. It is we who see that the question is purely formal.

<sup>18</sup> The point to be noted here is that, while Socrates cannot account for what the priestess has said, for he intimates that it is the opposite of his expectation, he is compelled to accept it. For the god does not lie.

(21d). Socrates explains that, despite becoming unpopular, he continued to serve the god Apollo, who “is using my name as an example” for everyone,

as if he said: “This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless.” So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me – and I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise (23a-b).

Socrates is arguing that the reason that his accusers seek revenge against him is that he questions people on behalf of the god Apollo. Apollo himself has confirmed that he is the wisest man and Apollo does not lie. This means, Socrates is implying, that if anyone can understand the oracle’s message, it is he himself. To convict him is to declare Apollo a liar. When his opponents accuse him of not believing in the gods, they only demonstrate that it is they who do not believe in the gods. For if they believed in the gods, they would believe in him. So, again, the people who feel dishonored by Socrates and who seek revenge against him only confirm that he is right: they deserve to be dishonored. It is they who aim to dishonor him, unjustly, when they do not acknowledge that he has the divine right and, indeed, the divine duty, to dishonor them.

The fact that Socrates invokes Apollo at his trial is a simple but crucial point. Not only does it imply to the prosecutors and judges that he considers himself to be allied with the god, it shows that, at the end of his life, he is still absolutely dependent upon the gods and oracles, the same gods and oracles that, in Greek myth, reflect the fatal ignorance of human beings. (In Greek myth, human beings are fated; they are not in control of their own lives.) While Socrates depends upon

being ruled in order to establish that his position has authority, the fact that he is ruled shows that he has none. There is a close parallel, then, between the relationship that Apollo has with Socrates and the relationship that Socrates has with his fellow Athenians. Just as Socrates' honor depends upon dishonoring others – for agonistic relations are zero-sum: “his elevation involves their defeat,” to recall Cohen – Apollo's honor depends upon dishonoring Socrates. Thus, when Socrates offends more and more people and generates more and more resentment, Apollo tells him to continue doing what he is doing. The trial is the fulfillment of Apollo's wish.

As Apollo moves Socrates while showing Socrates that he is unmoved by him, Socrates wants to move his opponents while showing them that he is unmoved by them. It is for this reason that he proceeds to compare himself to Achilles, the greatest of the Greek mythic heroes and beloved of the gods (28b-d).<sup>19</sup> Socrates is here indicating that what he is doing when he talks to people is analogous to what Achilles did when he killed his enemies: he is taking just revenge against those who are unjust towards him and, therefore, against those who are impious<sup>20</sup> toward the god. Socrates sees that no judge at his trial would

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<sup>19</sup> The greatness of Achilles is a contradictory appearance; it involves his equally great reversal. For, when he kills Hektor in Book 22 of *The Iliad* (translated by Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), he dooms himself to a humiliating death at the hands of the cowardly and effeminate Paris. It is perhaps for this reason that, in Book 11 of *The Odyssey* (translated by Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), Achilles spurns the praise that Odysseus gives him and claims that he would rather be a slave of a poor man on iron rations in the world of the living than king of all the dead.

<sup>20</sup> In making the point that Athens had no authoritative interpretation of the laws, Cohen notes that the statute under which Socrates was charged was impiety (*asebeia*). The stated charge in his trial, however, is that of corrupting the youth, which, Cohen indicates, implies “sexual excess and wrongdoing” whose relation to impiety is unclear (pp. 188-189).

claim that Achilles was wrong when he chose revenge over life.<sup>21</sup> In comparing himself to Achilles, Socrates is communicating that he is not wrong for the same reason. This is what enrages his antagonists in the jury. They are not insulted by the fact that Socrates compares his trial to a war but by the fact that he thinks he is the victor.<sup>22</sup>

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*,<sup>23</sup> when Clytemnestra learns that Troy has been sacked, she compares the discordant cries in the fallen city to the mingling of oil and vinegar, "unfriendly in their separation, so the voices of captives and victors may be heard separately, in their double fortune" (321-326). There can never be any common ground between Greeks and barbarians, friends and enemies, or between free men and slaves. When Socrates implies that he is the hero of the Greeks, he suggests that those who do not acknowledge him as such are the enemies of the Greeks. For just as the Greeks could not sack Troy without Achilles – as Achilles forced them to concede before he returned to battle<sup>24</sup> – Socrates indicates that the city cannot succeed without him. He communicates to the court that he is a gift from the god and a blessing to the city, and that, in killing him, the city is killing itself (30b-31a).

Socrates, however, is contradicted by the same principles that he uses to contradict others. After all, he claims that he speaks from the point of view of a

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<sup>21</sup> In 18.115-126 of *The Iliad*.

<sup>22</sup> In contrast, Socrates' prosecutor Meletus plays to the interests of the judges. When Socrates challenges Meletus to tell the jury who helps the Athenian youth if not he himself, Meletus' mentions the judges first (24d-e).

<sup>23</sup> In *Oresteia*. Translated by Christopher Collard. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Donna F. Wilson has written an outstanding analysis of the agonistic nature of this concession – and of Achilles' agonistic responses to it – in Chapters 3 and 4 of *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

god who declares that his (Socrates') point of view is worth nothing. He wants to show that he moves others and that others do not move him, but he does this on the authority of a god who moves him but is not moved by him. He considers himself good and his inferiors not good on the ground that Apollo has used him as an example *for everyone*. The jurymen take revenge on Socrates and counter the revenge that Socrates wants to take upon them. Socrates himself has said that the god has indicated that he (Socrates) is ignorant; how, then, can he claim to speak the truth? Is he calling Apollo a liar? Or does he not believe in the gods? The majority of the judges convict him. If all men are ignorant, as Socrates says, then, because he cannot distinguish between justice and injustice, justice must be decided by the stronger.<sup>25</sup>

From the point of view of Socrates, however, a guilty verdict only confirms that those who condemned him are ignorant. When Socrates is asked what he thinks his penalty should be, he says that he should be given free meals at the Prytaneum, the prestigious hall that was used to entertain Olympian victors (36d-37a). Once again, Socrates drives home the point that he is the victorious hero in an agonistic arena in which his opponents are unheroic losers. The judges respond by sentencing him to death. For Socrates, however, the jurymen are

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<sup>25</sup> In Book 1 of the *Republic*, Thrasymachus defends the position that justice is nothing other than what is of advantage to the stronger (e.g., 338c). Socrates shows that, on this view, justice is indistinguishable from injustice, as Thrasymachus himself implies when he argues that *injustice* is profitable and that *justice is not* (e.g., 348b-c). If justice is the advantage of the stronger, then how can injustice be profitable for them? The fact that Socrates concludes the discussion in the final lines of Book 1 by claiming that he knows nothing and that he does not know whether justice is a virtue or not shows, however, that Socrates accepts the position of Thrasymachus. For if men are ignorant of what justice is, then justice is indistinguishable from injustice, i.e., justice is decided by the stronger.



doing the opposite of what they think. There is every reason to believe, he argues, that, according to what the poets have said, the dead are better off than the living.<sup>26</sup> The judges deserve blame for wanting to hurt him, but not for actually hurting him. For those who do evil cannot harm the good man (41c-e), since it is the good man who moves them and not the other way around.<sup>27</sup>

In light of the above, we see that Socrates is not fighting for justice. His fight is not based upon a fixed standard of justice but, rather, upon the fact that no one knows what justice is. Socrates is also not fighting for his life. He himself says that he is indifferent to the fact that he is going to die, for he does not know what death is. He contends that death is either like a dreamless sleep, in which case it is even better than the days and nights of a king, or else death is a relocation to a different place, in which case he would be quite happy to keep company with the heroes of Troy, spending time in the land of the dead “testing and examining people there, as I do here, as to who among them is wise, and who thinks he is, but is not” (40c-41b). In other words, if he were dead, he would not hesitate to put himself in the same position that he is in now.

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<sup>26</sup> This is the position of Achilles in *The Iliad*: he would rather die with glory than live in shame. As I noted earlier, however, he holds the opposite position in Book 11 of *The Odyssey*. It is instructive to see that the moment after Achilles claims that he would rather be a living slave than a dead hero, he inquires about the status, rank, and honor of his son and father, and he glories in hearing of his son’s successes on the battlefield (582-643). This shows that Achilles is dependent on what contradicts him and that his understanding of his contradictory situation is itself contradictory.

<sup>27</sup> As Bertrand Russell notes in *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Stratford Press, Inc., 1960), Socrates anticipates both the Stoics and the Cynics in maintaining that no one can do harm to a good man (p. 91). For both the Stoics and the Cynics, the supreme good, virtue in itself, is not affected by life (life is not affected by virtue). Thus, both the Stoics and the Cynics respond with indifference to the world. The Stoics withdraw from life because it is shameful to them; the Cynics live like dogs because nothing is shameful to them.

It would be a mistake to think that Socrates does not say what he means or mean what he says when he indicates to the judges that he does not mind being put to death. There is no indication anywhere in Plato's dialogues that Socrates has a concept of death that is substantially different from his concept of life. In fact, in the *Phaedo*, again appealing to what the poets have said, he argues that the dead come from the living and that the living cannot come from anywhere but the dead (70c-d). This endless, cyclical metamorphosis of death into life and life into death is the central idea of the myth of Er, which is perhaps Socrates' most complete account of death (*Republic*, 614b-621b). In this account, the soul is "understood" to be separate from the body.<sup>28</sup> Socrates says that when Er died, his soul left his body and arrived at a place where he saw just souls arriving, pure, from a thousand-year journey in the heavens and unjust souls arriving, parched and dusty, from under the earth. He says that upon their return the souls had to take another journey to another place and that this journey preceded their reentry into the world of the living. Meanwhile, other just souls were sent for a thousand-year journey in the heavens and other unjust souls were sent for a thousand-year journey under the earth. Life is a cycle that ends in death and death is the beginning of another cycle of life.

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<sup>28</sup> Like the poets, Socrates has no option but to discuss the soul in terms of the body because the opposition between the body and the soul reflects the opposition between thought and existence. The parallel between thought and the embodied life indicates that the content of all thought is sensible perception, i.e., appearances. Hence, it is only in terms of the categories that structure sensible perception that one can attempt to conceptualize what the soul is. Socrates' account of the soul-body separation, then, expresses a logical division that is on the one hand necessary – for human beings cannot live without a soul – and on the other hand unthinkable because the soul is separate from, and opposed to, the body, as we shall see.

About the next life, Socrates says four noteworthy things, each of which informs the others. First, a man in a previous life can live as an animal, an insect, or as something else in the next life, “and all sorts of mixtures occurred” (619e-620d). This means that the soul of a man and the soul of an insect are the same.<sup>29</sup> Second, the order in which souls choose the next life is decided through a lottery; when a particular soul’s turn comes to choose its next life, the next life that it chooses is “bound by necessity” and there is nothing that it can do to change its chosen fate (617d-e). Third, the fortunes of the dead are likely to be reversed in the next life: just souls, untrained in suffering, are likely to make bad decisions and unjust souls, having suffered themselves and seen others suffer, are likely to make good decisions (619c-d). Just as life and death metamorphose into each other, so, too, do good and bad fortune. Fourth, souls reenter the living after they have drunk from the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, and all their memories are expunged. Socrates is here indicating that people are blind to, and ignorant of, their own lives and cannot account for what happens to them.<sup>30</sup> This message is the core

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<sup>29</sup> It is because human beings and things in nature are viewed as having a common soul that human beings throughout the pagan world regard natural occurrences as omens and depend upon these omens, and the seers who interpret them, to understand their own lives.

<sup>30</sup> In Book 6 of *The Aeneid* (translated by Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Random House, Inc., 1990), the Roman poet Virgil provides an account of the cycle of life and death that is the same in all important respects to the myth of Er. When Aeneas visits the soul of his father, Anchises, in the underworld, the shade teaches him that all things – the sky, the land, the moon, the stars, men, beasts, birds, sea creatures, etc. – have a common soul from a “heavenly source.” The “free essence” of the soul is, however, “poisoned” and “clogged” by mortal bodies. Aeneas sees a throng of souls on the banks of the Lethe and asks the shade what they are doing there. The shade tells him that these souls are waiting to return to the upper world. Aeneas, perplexed by this response, asks the shade why souls would ever want to return to the “dead weight” of bodies: “[t]he poor souls, [h]ow can they crave our daylight so?” Anchises replies that once souls in the underworld have been cleansed of the stains retained from embodied life, “[t]he god calls [them] in a crowd to Lethe stream, [t]hat there unmemoried they may see again [t]he heavens and wish re-entry into

teaching of Greek tragedy, as we find expressed, for instance, in the accounts of the lives of Agamemnon, Oedipus,<sup>31</sup> and Pentheus.<sup>32</sup>

In Section 10 of Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asks if any man at all, whether he is living or dead, can be at his happy end. At the end of section 9, he recalls Priam, King of Troy, as an example of a man that no one calls happy; for in old age he suffered the “many turns of fortune’s wheel” and “ended wretchedly.” The fact that men suffer reversals of fortune makes it difficult to answer the question of whether the dead can ever be happy. For it is not clear, Aristotle writes, that the dead are safe from experiencing the reversals that befall their descendants. While it would be odd for men who are dead to suffer these reversals also, it would be equally odd if they do not. While Aristotle seems to recognize that there must be some fundamental difference between the living and the dead, he, like Socrates, cannot conceptualize what this difference could be. He makes some logical distinctions and indicates, for example, that while the future is obscure (because it changes), happiness is final (because it is unchanging), before he concludes the discussion of whether the dead suffer the reversals of the living with his “answer” to the problem at the end of Section 11: it seems that the reversals of the living *do* affect the dead, he writes, but not in such a manner as to make unhappy those who are happy (or vice-versa).

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bodies” (943-1008). This is the answer to Aeneas’ question of why souls would want to return to bodies’ dead weight: they do not know what life has in store for them.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, *Oedipus the King*. Translated by David Grene. In *Greek Tragedies: Volume 1*. Second edition. Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1991.

<sup>32</sup> See *The Bacchae*. Translated by William Arrowsmith. In *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Euripides V*. Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1968.

The reason that Plato and Aristotle do not have an idea of death as real and absolute non-existence is that, like the poets, they cannot *think* existence as the end in itself. For their first principle, we are able to see, is that they themselves do not exist except as opposed to their form, end, essence, or soul. Their notion of death, therefore, is, and must be, another contradictory appearance of life. Hence, death could be like sleep or it could be like being awake. No third possibility is mentioned, presumably because the law of the excluded middle does not allow it.

There are three engines that drive the train of Greek thought, all of which work together and reinforce one another. The first engine is the ontological opposition between, and identity of, thought and existence. In the writings of Plato and Aristotle, the belief that thought and existence are dependent contradictories is expressed as ignorance of the essence and end of things that appear; in Greek myth and drama, it is expressed in the doctrine of fate. The second engine is formal logic. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explains its three main laws. The law of contradiction is the principle that no thing, at the time in which it is what it is, can express contradictory predicates: “the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect” (1005b19-20). A cannot be not-A. The law of identity, which follows from the law of contradiction, is the principle that “a thing is itself” (1041a14-16). A is A. The law of the excluded middle, which also follows from the law of contradiction, is the principle that “there cannot be an intermediate between contradictories, but of one subject we must either affirm or deny any one predicate” (1011b23-24). A thing cannot be both A and not-A but must be either A or not-A at a given time: a third alternative is

excluded. The third engine that drives the train of Greek thought is sense perception. The human being who is ignorant of the essence (end) of things that appear must rely upon the world of changing appearances. All of the content of his thought is, and can only ever be, taken from this world. However, perceptions are relative to the perceiver and, as Aristotle argues, concern objects that are “capable both of being and of not being; for which reason all of the individual instances of them are destructible.” They belong to the realm of opinion, which “deals with that which can be otherwise than as it is,” and not to the realm of knowledge, which involves “definition” and “demonstration.” Since “demonstration and definition cannot vary ... clearly there can neither be definition nor demonstration of sensible individuals” (*Metaphysics*, 1039b20-1040a7). Since, however, perceptions are the only content of the mind, perceptual objects must be taken as “facts” and “the decision rests with perception” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109b23; *Metaphysics*, 1062b33-1063a6).<sup>33</sup> It is time to look more closely at each of these three engines as they operate in the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle.

Aristotle begins the *Metaphysics* with the assertion that “All men by nature desire to know” (980b22). In the *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, he divides knowledge into two kinds: knowledge that is relative to the human being and knowledge that is in itself. “Let us not fail to notice ... that there is a difference between arguments from and those to the first principles,” he writes. “For, while

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<sup>33</sup> Aristotle writes that the decision rests with perception unless the sense organs have been perverted or injured. However, there is no criterion for distinguishing between true and false perception that does not itself rest upon perception. Thus, a man’s attempt to defend his decisions on the basis of the facts against others who disagree with him on this same basis leads to irresolvable contradiction.

we must begin with what is familiar, things are so in two ways – some to us, some without qualification. Presumably, then, we must begin with things familiar to *us*” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a31-1095b3). Aristotle does not discuss what this object “without qualification” is from the outset, but the fact that he distinguishes it from what is familiar to us – not in terms of its appearance but in terms of its ontological being, mode of existence, or “principle” – suggests that the human being does not begin with it, that he is not familiar with it, and that he argues “to” it and not “from” it. In light of this division between knowledge that is relative to human beings and knowledge that is in itself, the question is: is the object that all men desire to know – by nature – relative to human beings? Or is it in itself?

Aristotle indicates in the opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the actions and choices of human beings are a part of a universal teleological process in which all things aim at an end that itself aims at nothing. This end is the object that all men by nature desire to know. He begins thus:

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. ... If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (*everything else being desired for the sake of this*), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and in vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good (1094a1-23, emphasis added).

The primary premise that all things must either aim at an end – or else they are aimless forever – is re-articulated at different times and in different ways in both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle writes in the *Metaphysics*,

all things are ordered together somehow, but not all alike ...  
fishes and fowls and plants; and the world is not such that one  
thing has nothing to do with another, but they are connected.  
For all are ordered together to one end (1075a15-19).

The notion that the end *is* the reason for all things indicates that, for Aristotle, it is central to the very being, essence, or definition of human reason. This point is captured in Aristotle's assertion that "*the principles of the things that are done consist in that for the sake of which they are to be done*" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b15-17, emphasis added). If there were no end, then there would be no reason, for what it means to have reason is to aim at the end, an end that Aristotle at times refers to as "the good" and as the "final cause":

*the final cause is an end, and that sort of end which is not for the sake of something else, but for whose sake everything else is; so that if there is to be a last term of this sort, the process will not be infinite; but if there is no such term there will be no final cause. But those who maintain the infinite series destroy the good without knowing it. Yet no one would try to do anything if he were not going to come to a limit. Nor would there be reason in the world; the reasonable man, at least, always acts for a purpose; and this is a limit, for the end is a limit* (*Metaphysics*, 994b11-15, emphasis added).

Aristotle also uses the terms "potentiality" and "actuality" to reassert the opposition between, and identity of, what lacks its end and the end in itself. The potential is not actual and the actual has no potential, but the potential is inconceivable without the principle of actuality.

[E]verything that comes to be moves towards a principle, i.e., an end. For that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle, and the becoming is for the sake of the end; and the actuality is the end, and it is for the sake of this that the potentiality is acquired (*Metaphysics*, 1050a7-10).



The potential, the world of becoming, has no being insofar as it lacks its finite end and is in the process of coming to be. It has being, however, when it has reached the limit of the process of its coming to be.

Again, nothing infinite can exist ... if generation and movement exist there must also be a limit; for no movement is infinite, but every movement has an end, and that which is incapable of completing its coming to be cannot be in process of coming to be; and that which has completed its coming to be must *be* as soon as it has come to be (*Metaphysics*, 994b27, 999b9-13).

For Aristotle, as for Plato, the end is both the end of all goods (i.e., the final cause), the nature of all goods (i.e., the formal cause), and the source of all goods (i.e., the first cause). Everything is judged with reference to the good and nothing has valid currency except the good (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1101b30-1102a4).<sup>34</sup>

Aristotle is adamant, however, that the good is not an object that is chosen or about which one can deliberate. Choice, he says, does not relate to the end but only to what “contributes to the end.” It “cannot relate to impossibles, and if any one said he chose them he would be thought silly.” While all choice aims at an end, the end in itself is an object of “wish,” which Aristotle classifies under the category of impossibles, i.e., as that which “could in no way be brought about by one’s own efforts.” That is, “we wish to be happy and say we do, but we cannot well say we choose to be so; for, in general, choice seems to relate to the things that are in our power” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1111b20-30). The agent who is the

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<sup>34</sup> In the Greek tragedies, human beings are dependent on that which they cannot know. See, for example, lines 160-166 of *Agamemnon*, where the chorus of Argive elders recollects the fatal predicament (or “futile burden”) of the Greeks at Aulis and sings the praise of Zeus while claiming to know nothing about him: “Zeus, *whosoever he is*, if to be called by this name is well pleasing to him, with this I address him. *I have nothing to compare though I measure all things against him – only Zeus*, if I am to cast out of my mind its futile burden truthfully” (emphasis added).

moving principle for his actions can deliberate about the things that he must do in order to attain the end, Aristotle maintains, but he cannot deliberate about the end. For since deliberation is reasoning with a view to an end, the end constitutes the nature of deliberation and is *in itself* a first principle. Thus, while “thinking is the starting point” in one respect, “thought is moved by the object of thought, and one side of the list of *opposites* is in itself ... simple and exists actually” (*Metaphysics*, 1072a29-36, emphasis added).

If one cannot deliberate about the end, which is opposed to (or the opposite of) thought while yet being the necessary object of thought, then what is the standard for right deliberation that leads to it? How is one to know if one deliberates rightly or wrongly? Aristotle takes up these questions in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book 2 he argues, on the basis of the law of contradiction, that there must be an excess, a mean, and a deficient within the continuum of excellence and that right deliberation *aims at* the intermediate that is equidistant from the extremes (1106a24-1107a7). He notes, however, that what is too much, too little, and neither too much nor too little are relative to each other and to the observer, “and all are in a sense opposed to all” (1108b12-15). In Books 3 and 4 he proceeds to define various intermediate states in terms of their extremes – e.g., courage is the mean between cowardice and rashness – before he returns in Book 6 to the question of what, precisely, is the fixed standard for right deliberation. At this point he writes that “there is a standard which determines the mean states which we say are intermediate between excess and defect, being in accordance with right reason.” He notes, however, that “such a statement, though true, is by

no means illuminating.” For “if a man had only this knowledge he would be none the wiser.” Hence, “it should be determined what right reason is and what is the standard that fixes it” (1138b18-1138b30).

In discussing this problem, Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of wisdom. He links the first to “comprehension” and “knowledge.” This kind of wisdom possesses truth about first principles “for which no reason can be given” (1142a26). (The reason that no reason can be given is that the end in itself cannot be an object of deliberation.) The second kind of wisdom is “practical.” Its objects are taken from perception and concern human affairs in general. It is deliberation to and not from first principles. Since “man is not the best thing in the world,” Aristotle writes, “it would be strange to think that ... practical wisdom ... is the best knowledge” (1141a20-21). In fact, that “practical wisdom is not knowledge is evident” because it is “opposed ... to comprehension” (1142a23-25). The reader is therefore taken by surprise when Aristotle “resolves” the problem of what is the standard of right reason as follows:

right reason is that which is in accordance with practical wisdom. All men, then, seem somehow to divine that this kind of state is excellence, viz. that which is in accordance with practical wisdom. But we must go a little further. For it [the state of accordance of right reason and practical wisdom] is not merely the state in accordance with right reason, but the state that implies the *presence* of right reason ... and practical wisdom is right reason about such matters (1144b23-28).

Earlier, Aristotle noted that the truth that right deliberation must be in accordance with right reason is not illuminating and leaves a man none the wiser. Thus, it is necessary to determine what right reason is. Here, he indicates that

right reason not only accords with practical wisdom (right deliberation), but that this accordance must also involve the presence of right reason. For it is evident that practical wisdom is not itself knowledge. The addition that Aristotle has made to the claim that right reason must be in accordance with practical wisdom amounts to the claim that right reason must involve the presence of right reason. This does not shed light on the problem of how to distinguish right reason from wrong reason, given that practical deliberation (right reason) is opposed to comprehension and knowledge (right reason). Aristotle arrives at the contradiction that he undertook to resolve because he is dependent on the end that he cannot know and, therefore, on perception and the principle of contradiction (or the principle of identity: right reason implies the presence of right reason). *His deliberation, itself identical to itself, manifests its necessary opposition to (the end in) itself.*<sup>35</sup>

The opposition between things that are familiar to human beings and the end in itself, as presented by Aristotle, is expressed by Plato as the opposition between appearances and their essence (or form). Socrates sees that all thinkable objects change relative to the manner in which they are thought. The same things appear in different ways at the same time to different people and in different ways at different times to the same people. Socrates does not claim to know, however, what these changing objects are in themselves; for he cannot distinguish between

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<sup>35</sup> To be sure, Aristotle does provide many “practical” examples of the ends of action: one exercises to be healthy, one eats to be nourished, one becomes a doctor to heal patients, and so on. However, he abandons these examples when he considers more seriously the nature of the end in itself, which is opposed to appearance altogether.

Health, nourishment, and healing are indeed ends for us in the modern world. What makes them good in themselves is that they are good for human beings, who are ends and not means. Aristotle’s position, that the end in itself is the chief good and that human beings by nature seek it because they are not ends, is entirely opposed to the modern conception.

the object that changes and the object into which it changes except at the level of sense perception, which is relative to each man. He also cannot explain change since there are as many types of change as there are changing objects. There must be something unchanging in which, he claims, a thing “participates” or “shares” in order for it to be able to change; change must participate in a sort of change that does not change if one is to be able to account for a common process in different kinds of change. If this abiding being – form – could change, it would have to be explained along with the rest of the appearances, and one could not escape an infinite regress. The essence of change is therefore unchanging. For the same reason, the essence of everything that is sensible, different, and divisible must be insensible, without difference, and one. The essence of all appearances must be the opposite of appearances. If one wants to know what an object that appears is in itself, one must think the contradiction – through the law of non-contradiction! – of how the object can appear. One must put an end to thought if one is to escape from (and reach the end of) the contradictions of thought.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates describes appearance and form as “two kinds of existences” (79a). These existences are structured according to principles that are opposed to each other. In appearance, opposites must come from their opposites. This kind of “existence,” we see, violates the law of contradiction, the law of identity, and the law of the excluded middle because changing things are what they are not, are not what they are, and both are and are not – at one and the same

time.<sup>36</sup> Socrates maintains that all change is the cyclical metamorphosis of opposites and, if things did not always turn in a circle, then nothing would change (70c-72b). To explain change in a way that is not contradictory, one must explain how change and the objects that change are unchanging (and are contradictory appearances only).

While opposites come from opposites in the world of appearance, opposites do not admit of opposites in themselves (103b). If form could admit, i.e., relate to, appearances, then it would itself be an appearance, in which case appearances would be inexplicable. We see that there is no way to relate these two types of existences together because they are defined in opposition to each other.

However, since form is the essence of appearances and appearances are the appearances of form, it is not possible to separate appearances from form, or vice-versa.<sup>37</sup> Thus, both appearances and form are inexplicable either apart from, or through, one another, as we shall see Plato himself argue in the *Parmenides*.

Socrates remembers that there was a time when he took an interest in what he calls the “natural sciences.” (This is what Aristotle calls “physics,” or “second philosophy.”) He says that he gave up this interest when he learned that they do not investigate the true causes of things. (The true cause of things for Aristotle is the subject of “metaphysics,” or “first philosophy.”) His study of the natural sciences, he continues, blinded him to such an extent that he had to unlearn what

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<sup>36</sup> All appearances violate the law of contradiction in ancient Greek thought because they are ontologically opposed to their essence. Their fundamental structure is, *essentially*, to be what they are not.

<sup>37</sup> This means that form violates the law of contradiction although it expresses the law of identity.

he thought he clearly knew before. The examples of the kinds of questions that Socrates claims he was no longer able to answer are striking. He says that he once thought that men grew because they ate and drank and that a tall man was taller than a shorter man because his body stood taller. Even clearer than this, he continues, he thought that ten was more than eight because two had been added to it. But now,

I will not even allow myself to say that where one is added to one either the one to which it is added or the one that is added becomes two, or that the one added and the one to which it is added become two because of the addition of the one to the other. I wonder that, when each of them is separate from the other, each of them is one, nor are they then two, but that, when they come near to one another, this is the cause of their becoming two, the coming together and being placed closer to one another. Nor can I any longer be persuaded that when one thing is divided, this division is the cause of its becoming two, for just now the cause of becoming two was the opposite. At that time it was their coming close together and one was added to the other, but now it is because one is taken and separated from the other (*Phaedo*, 96e-97b).

In this passage, Socrates argues that if one is one, then it cannot become two. If it becomes two, it could not have been one. If one becomes two, two becomes one, and one and two are identical.<sup>38</sup> No sum can be accounted for. If the true cause of two is addition, it cannot be division. For addition and division, coming together and coming apart, are opposites. So, too, with all other mathematical operations. It is not merely doubtful, then, that one plus one is two. It is *impossible*, just as it is impossible for a man to grow because he eats (for he grows when he does not eat and is not always eating when he grows) or for him to be taller than another by so

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<sup>38</sup> In the *Republic*, Socrates claims that all numbers are in themselves one (525b-526a).

many inches because his body stands taller by the same amount (for men appear to grow in different ways, and a father is taller than his son when he is born but may be shorter than him when he grows into a man). All the natural sciences, in seeking to explain appearances on the basis of appearances, are blind because they contradict both logic and perception.<sup>39</sup>

Socrates goes on to say that, instead of “groping in the dark,” he concerned himself with another kind of cause that he cannot demonstrate but that he is compelled to assume. The sole reason that big things are big, that numbers are numbers, etc., he tells his friend Cebes, is because of “the presence of, or the sharing in,” form. “I will not insist on the precise nature of that relationship,” he says, and will hold to “the safest answer I can give myself or anyone else. And if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error” (100d-e). Everything that is bigger is bigger because it shares in Bigness; two is two because it shares in Twoness, etc. There is no other cause of things that appear except form and, if pressed to provide a further account of the matter, he advises Cebes, it is best to

cling to the safety of your own hypothesis and give that answer. If someone then attacked your hypothesis itself, you would ignore him and would not answer until you had examined whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another. And when you must give an account of your hypothesis itself you will proceed in the same way: you will assume another hypothesis, the one which seems to you best of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable, but you will not jumble the two as the debaters do by discussing the hypothesis and its consequences at the same time, if you wish to discover any truth (101d-e).

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<sup>39</sup> Socrates has no difficulty in using numbers and mathematical operations when it suits his purposes, as he does, for example, in *Meno* (82b ff.).



Socrates cannot account for the relationship between form and appearance, but he is nevertheless compelled to explain each in terms of the other, and he goes back and forth between these two opposites. If anyone demands that the relationship between form and appearance be justified, then, in order to avoid being contradicted, one must generate a hypothesis that is better than the original one. Socrates does not elaborate upon what this other hypothesis could be because the safest hypothesis is one that conforms to the law of contradiction, i.e., one that cannot be contradicted. No hypothesis could be safer than form because form admits of no opposite, i.e., it cannot appear. If someone wants to put forward a hypothesis that he thinks is better, as the poets, artisans, and others have tried to do, then it should be brought forward for examination (logical analysis).

Socrates “knows” – at the level of appearance – that, when one begins with the opposition between thought and existence, logic will show that all appearances are contradictory. When he says that one should examine whether the consequences that follow from the primary hypothesis agree with one another or contradict one another, and that one should not jumble these consequences with the primary hypothesis, we must ask whether, for Socrates, the contradictory conclusions that follow from the contradictory hypothesis are themselves consistent or contradictory. What does Socrates mean by “agreement” and “contradiction”? What Plato’s dialogues show, time and time again, is that when Socrates’ opponent professes to have a better hypothesis than Socrates, Socrates demonstrates that the conclusions that follow from it are contradictory. He then

uses these contradictions against his opponent. When contradictions arise from Socrates' own hypothesis, however, Socrates is able to view these contradictions as proof that he is consistent. Here, too, he can use contradictions against his opponent.<sup>40</sup> The key point to note is that Socrates does not overcome the contradictions that he exposes. For the logic that he follows in order to attain knowledge begins with the premise that thought and existence are, at one and the same time, identical opposites.

Aristotle is no different from Plato in being able to expose, without being able to overcome, the contradictions that follow from the ontological opposition between thought and existence. In Section 6 of Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle notes that the form cannot be one if it is the form of particular things, which are in as many ways as they appear. Is the form isolated from the particular? If so, what meaning could it have? Or is the form expressed in the particular? If so, how could it be a thing in itself?

[I]s nothing other than the Idea good in itself? In that case the Form will be empty. But if [other things] are also things good in themselves, the account of the good will have to *appear* as something identical in them all (1096a12-1096b26, emphasis added).

From these observations, the reader may expect that Aristotle will reject the form because it cannot be thought. Yet, Aristotle draws the opposite conclusion. Just after he rejects the position that distinct and diverse goods are good because they participate in one form, Aristotle asks, “[b]ut then in what way are things called

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<sup>40</sup> This is what Socrates does at his trial. He indicates to the judges that it is because he does not have any knowledge of the good that his accusers are not good in accusing him, a good man, of not being good.

good? They do not seem to be like the things that only chance to have the same name.” His point is that, if there is no common meaning of “good” when different things are called good, then these things are called good in ignorance of what makes them good. For if the good can mean different things, then it has no fixed meaning and cannot be *the* good. Aristotle says that he will leave this question for other philosophers to work out, but he does not, in fact, let it go. He pursues the issue and writes:

even if there is some one good which is universally predicable of goods or is capable of separate and independent existence, clearly it could not be achieved or attained by man; but we are now seeking something attainable. Perhaps, however, some one might think it worth while to have knowledge of it with a view to the goods that *are* attainable and achievable; for having this as a sort of pattern we shall know better the goods that are good for us, and if we know them shall attain them. This argument has some plausibility, but seems to clash with the procedure of the sciences [that deal with particular things] ... . It is hard, too, to see how a weaver or carpenter will be benefited in regard to his own craft by knowing this ‘good itself’, or how the man who has viewed the Idea itself will be a better doctor or general thereby. For a doctor seems not even to study health in this way, but the health of man, or perhaps rather the health of a particular man; for it is individuals that he is healing. But enough of these topics (1096b32-1097a14).

To the reader, Aristotle’s train of thought has derailed. Aristotle rejects form because it is unattainable and, since it cannot be predicable of things that are attainable, it is useless for living, thinking, and acting human beings. Why, then, does Aristotle conclude that it is not probable that persons would *not* seek knowledge of the unattainable? Why would Aristotle conclude that it is plausible to think that the unattainable *is* worthwhile for helping one achieve what is attainable? How is what human beings cannot know a “pattern” for what human beings do

know? Aristotle does not answer these questions. Instead, he closes the discussion and begins the next section with the sentence, “Let us again return to the good we are seeking, and ask what it can be” (1097a15). Thus, whereas we observe serious problems that need to be addressed, Aristotle proceeds as if nothing unusual has occurred.

Aristotle is not able to overcome the contradictions that he exposes in Plato’s thought because he begins with the same contradictory premise as Plato. The *telos* of all things that all men by nature desire to know is structurally identical to Plato’s form. Aristotle offers his most sustained accounts of the *telos* in Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics*. In the former, he argues that the *telos* is the “natural ruler” of a man (1177a11-18). It is, however, not a state in which a man can be insofar as he lives, for it is whole, complete, self-sufficient, unchanging, and lacking in nothing (1097a24-1098a20 and 1176a30-1177a18).

[S]uch a life would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature [of body and soul] is its activity superior to ... [human] excellence. If intellect is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything. This would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him. It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of himself but that of something else ... since intellect more than anything else *is* man. ... Now if you take away from a living being action, and still more production,

what is left but contemplation? Therefore the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative; and of human activities, therefore, that which is most akin to this must be most of the nature of happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b27-1178b23).

We see in this account that the relationship between the *telos* and the human being is a purely logical, or formal, relation. Something divine is present in a man, and in fact *is* each man himself, but this something is too high for a man's "composite nature." It is the divine, immortal and indivisible soul that both Socrates (*Phaedo* 79b ff.) and Aristotle (Book 3, *On the Soul*) argue is separable from the body. Aristotle has, then, drawn these parallels: just as the immortal soul is greater than the mortal body, so the activity of the immortal soul is greater than the activity of mortals, and so too is the divine life greater than human life. In other words, the divine life, which more than anything is man and has authority over his lesser part, is a man's contradictory – just as the indivisible soul of all things (form) is the contradictory essence of divisible bodies (appearances). The end for human beings involves no action or production. This notion, that no man can be happy until he is dead to mortal life, is also the prevailing theme in the Greek tragedies.<sup>41</sup>

Aristotle discusses the nature of contemplation, or the blessed soul (*eudaemonia*), at the end of Book 12 of the *Metaphysics* when he deliberates about the nature of God. He argues that God cannot be otherwise than it is when it moves things that are capable of being otherwise. For, if this were not the case, one would be involved in an infinite regress in trying to explain the first cause of

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the counsel of the chorus of Theban elders which concludes *Oedipus the King*: "[c]ount no mortal happy till he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain."

motion.<sup>42</sup> Thus, it is a “first principle” that God is the “mover which moves without being moved” (1071b29-30, 1071a25-26, 1072b8-14). The life of God, the unmoved mover that is the object of all desire and thought, Aristotle continues, is the contemplative life in which the best thinking thinks in the best way about the best object. Since the divine is “that which is best in itself,” or else it would not be what it is, it follows that divine thought “shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same” (1072b18-31).

Aristotle, like Plato, does not discuss how the end can be realized in human life. His analysis of God consists in listing the predicates that are contained in the notion of God as a thing in itself, and then he offers this list as an explanation of what God is, as though he were discovering something new. Since the relationship between the notion and the predicates that necessarily belong to it is logical and not existential, Aristotle does not advance his discussion beyond a formal analysis of the notion that he wants to think about. God is the end of all action; therefore, God is immortal, unmoved, the first mover, unchanging, self-sufficient, the object of its own thought ... . Two sections after arriving at the assertion that divine thought thinks itself, Aristotle returns to the problem of what the nature of divine thought could mean. What is thought thinking itself? Is its object nothing? If so, God “is just like one who sleeps.” If God depends on something else, however, then “it

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<sup>42</sup> Aristotle is here consistent with the Eleatic philosophers who argue that, since the cause (nature) of motion is unmoved, all appearances of motion are necessarily contradictory. See, for example, Zeno’s demonstrations as discussed in H. D. P. Lee’s *Zeno of Elea: A Text, with Translation and Notes* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1967).

cannot be the best substance” (1074b15-20). Aristotle rejects both of these alternatives. God must think something and, according to the law of the excluded middle, this something must be either itself or something else. He writes,

what does it think? Either itself or something else; and if something else, either the same always or something different. Does it matter, then, or not, whether it thinks the good or any chance thing? Are there not some things about which it is incredible that it should think? Evidently, then, it thinks that which is most divine and precious, and it does not change; for change would be change for the worse, and this would be already a movement. ... Therefore it must be itself that [divine] thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking (1074b22-34).

Aristotle concludes this section by distinguishing between, on the one hand, divine thought and, on the other hand, perceptual knowledge and opinion, the latter of which “have always something else as their object.” He reaffirms that the object of divine thought cannot be composite, and so is unlike “human thought, or rather the thought of composite objects” (1074b35-1075a10).

The premise that all things by nature aim at an end has led Aristotle to inquire about the nature of this end. He has concluded that, while the end in itself more than anything else *is man*, it would be incredible if men could think it; for God must think nothing but itself. For this reason, Aristotle concludes, as he does in his criticism of Plato’s form, that, although he cannot think of what he is saying, it is evident that what he is saying is true. Rather than give up on his notion of God, he gives up on his own thought. This is the central point to remember. For Aristotle, being able to think what he says is not a condition for making assertions that what he says is necessarily true. There is a standard of truth that does not involve any

existential relationship between thinking and its object, and this standard is formal logic.<sup>43</sup>

Plato brilliantly depicts his own dependence upon what contradicts him in Books 6 and 7 of the *Republic* and in the *Parmenides*. Adeimantus asks Socrates in Book 6 of the *Republic* if there is anything more important than Justice.

Socrates replies that, yes, the form of the Good is more important, but “it isn’t enough to look at a mere sketch, as we did before, while neglecting the most complete account” (504d). (The “sketch” that Socrates wants to abandon is everything that has been discussed in Books 1-5.) Socrates first states his position that good things are good, useful, and beneficial because of their relation to the form of the Good (504e-505a), but then he tells Adeimantus,

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<sup>43</sup> In *On the Soul*, Aristotle follows the same line of reasoning as he does in both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Metaphysics*. He begins his analysis of the soul with an account of the ways in which the soul appears to affect the growth, decay, and general functions of living things. When he investigates further into the nature of the soul, however, he sees that, in itself, it cannot relate to the body. What, then, could the soul think? What could its object be? He questions, “if thought is simple and impassible and has nothing in common with anything else ... how can it come to think at all? For interaction between two factors [i.e., between thought and its object] is held to require a precedent community of nature between the factors. Again it might be asked, is thought a possible object of thought to itself?” (429b22-26)

Aristotle addresses this problem as best as he can; he restates the opposition between the soul and the body and makes logical distinctions in order to express his position more clearly. Thought is potentially actual insofar as it is “capable of being disengaged from matter.” Insofar as the object of thought is matter, however, thought is actually nothing (429b31-430a10). For “[a]ctual knowledge is identical with its object ... . It does not sometimes think and sometimes not think. When separated it is alone just what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal ... and without this, nothing thinks” (430a17-26). However, having made no advance into the problem, he postpones for a later time consideration of the question of whether it is possible to think of something that is separate “while not existing separate from spatial conditions” (431b16-19).

Aristotle is not able to distinguish between articulating a contradiction and resolving it because he is not able to distinguish between logic and what Kant, we shall see in Chapter 4, develops as reason. For Aristotle, reason is deductive logic; what deductive logic shows on the bases of teleological premises is that thought is opposed to existence. It might be thought that Aristotle recognizes, substantively, that the problem that he wants to solve is the problem of how thought and existence relate to one another when they are opposed to one another. How can human beings reach their end? But the only tool that he has to deal with the problem of existence that cannot be thought is thought that cannot exist.



we have no adequate knowledge of it. And you also know that, if we don't know it, even the *fullest possible knowledge* of other things is of *no benefit* to us, any more than if we acquire any possession without the good of it. Or do you think that it is any advantage to have every kind of possession without the good of it? Or to know everything except the good, thereby knowing nothing fine or good? (505a-b, emphasis added).

It is ridiculous, Socrates carries on, for those who speak about knowledge of the good to do so when they do not know what it is, and then to

blame us for not knowing the good and then turn around and talk to us as if we did know it. They say that [the good] is knowledge of the good – as if we understood what they're speaking about when they utter the word "good" (505b-c).

Adeimantus agrees with Socrates and asks him to say something about the good, given that he has spent a great deal of time thinking about what it is. Socrates, however, repeats that he does not know what the good is. "What? Do you think it's right to talk about things one doesn't know as if one does know them?" (506c)

When Adeimantus asks Socrates to speak, not as though he knows what the good is but merely to opine about the good, Socrates replies that even the best opinions are blind. Glaucon enters into the conversation and pleads with Socrates not to "desert us with *the end* almost in sight. We'll be satisfied if you discuss the good as you discussed justice, moderation, and the rest" (506d, emphasis added).

Socrates remarks that he would be satisfied to do so, adding, however, that, in trying, he would disgrace himself and look ridiculous. He then says:

let's abandon the quest for what the good itself is for the time being ... . But I am willing to tell you about what is apparently an offspring of the good and most like it. Is that agreeable to

you, or would you rather we let the whole matter drop? (506d-e)

Glaucon does not want to let the matter drop and Socrates agrees to speak about the offspring of the good without speaking about the good. It is at this point that Socrates introduces the analogy of the divided line, to which I shall return in a moment.

The discussion between Socrates and his friends is both ordinary and extraordinary. It is ordinary because it reflects the basic structure of Plato's dialogues. Socrates does not know anything, but the knowledge of not having any knowledge does not prevent him from talking about knowledge. When he speaks about form, he thinks about appearances. His speech contradicts his thought. But he thinks what he says and he says what he thinks: he just does not know that of which he speaks. What for us is so extraordinary is that Socrates and his interlocutors continue the discussion despite the fact that it is fruitless. Let us review the central points of the passages cited above. Socrates insists that he has no adequate knowledge of the form of the Good. He also insists that, without adequate knowledge of this form, nothing can be good, useful, or beneficial in any way. Given these two positions, if the dialogue does not stop, we expect that someone would raise the question of why it should continue. But no one raises this question.<sup>44</sup> Instead, the dialogue goes in the opposite direction. Socrates

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<sup>44</sup> It may be suggested that the reason that the dialogue continues is that Socrates aims to carry out his divine mission to reveal the ignorance of everyone, i.e., to "come to the assistance of the god and show [my interlocutor] that he is not wise" (*Apology*, 23b). The fact that Socrates serves Apollo does not mean, however, that Socrates does not seek knowledge. For all men by nature desire to know because thought is for the sake of an end (to recall Aristotle). The knowledge that no one

says that it makes no sense for him to talk about what he does not know. But he also says that what he does not know is the most important thing to talk about. He says that it is ridiculous for one to blame him for not knowing the good and then to speak to him as though he does know it. But then he speaks to his friends as though he does know the good through its “offspring,” which, he says, is not the good. He discusses the relationship between form and appearances through analogies, but these analogies are meant to demonstrate that all analogies, including his own, are contradictory.<sup>45</sup>

In the analogy of the divided line presented at the end of Book 6, Socrates distinguishes among four activities of the mind: imagination, belief, thought, and reason. The objects of imagination, he says, are images of their originals. For example, the image of a tree is the reflection of a tree on the surface of a pond (509d-e). The object of belief is the sensible original of its image; for example, the tree whose image is reflected on the water (510a). The object of thought is form. Thought tries to use the objects of sense perception, which Socrates here calls “hypotheses,” to reach the form. However, thought never attains the form “since it cannot reach beyond its hypotheses” (510b, 511a). Reason, like thought, also proceeds from hypotheses. Unlike thought, however, it does make its way to a first principle that is not a hypothesis. This first principle, form, is what Socrates calls

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knows the form does not lead either Socrates or his friends to abandon the search for it. If anything, it propels the search.

<sup>45</sup> In Greek teleology, all appearances, without exception, are contradictory. For they necessarily speak against their existence. The consequence of the fact that existence cannot appear – for appearances do not exist – is that the *opposition* between appearance and existence cannot be contradicted. The ontological opposition between appearance and existence is, therefore, the ground of the necessary contradictions of appearances in general.

“the unhypothetical first principle of everything.” Having grasped it, reason moves “from forms to forms, and [it ends] in forms” (511b-c).<sup>46</sup>

The main reason that Socrates differentiates among the four activities of the mind is to distinguish reason from imagination, belief, and thought. Reason alone reaches the end and attains knowledge. However, Socrates is not able to account for how reason reaches the end, which is what the modern reader wants to know. If imagination, belief, and thought cannot attain knowledge because each begins with the hypotheses of sense perception, how can reason, which also begins with hypotheses, use them as “stepping stones” to reach the unhypothetical form? How can the explanation for why imagination, belief, and thought fail to reach form also be the same explanation for why reason succeeds? Socrates does not say. He does not provide a secure criterion for one to distinguish between knowledge and ignorance, although it is precisely in order to determine the grounds for this distinction that he finds it necessary to invoke the analogy of the divided line.

Plato leaves the analogy of the divided line as a contradiction. He then regenerates what amounts to the same contradiction in the analogy of the cave that immediately follows at the beginning of Book 7. Here, Socrates describes all human beings as slaves who are imprisoned in a cave from childhood. They are fettered, unable to turn around, and all that these slaves see in front of them on the wall of the cave are shadows. If a prisoner were freed, Socrates says, he would see that the shadows are only reflections of what truly is, i.e., being itself. Being is

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<sup>46</sup> Socrates speaks of form in the plural, i.e., as an appearance, because he does not know what it is.

like the sun that is “in some way” the cause of visible things (516b-c). Whether this analogy is true or not, Socrates continues, he does not know.

But this is how I see it: [i]n the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has seen it, however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it produces both light and its source in the visible realm, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding, so that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it. ... [T]he ones who get to this point are unwilling to occupy themselves with human affairs (517b-c).

As in the analogy of the divided line, the opposition between form and appearance leaves Socrates contradicted by the very logic and perception upon which he depends. The sun is what Socrates has just called “belief”: it is merely an appearance that is outside the cave and not inside the cave. The opposition, then, between form and appearance in the cave analogy amounts to the similarity between belief and imagination in the line analogy. Socrates attempts to show that the appearance of the sun is not like other appearances when he claims that the sun is blinding (517a). For this reason it is the last thing to be seen: it is the end in itself. One never sees anything ever again. To know the Good is to be the Good. The sun, then, is an absolutely contradictory analogue for the form. It appears to Socrates as the visible source of light in the visible world. It is perceived, not known. Form, however, is not a part of the visible world. It is known, not perceived. Yet, the primary opposition between form and appearance leaves Socrates with no choice but to think about form as an appearance (and vice-versa).

Plato's most sustained deduction of the contradictions that follow from the ontological opposition between appearance and form is found in the *Parmenides*. Here, Parmenides does to Socrates what Socrates does to his interlocutors in other dialogues. He shows Socrates that, while the notion of the form is absurd because of the interminable contradictions that follow, the notion that there is no form is even more absurd, because in that case nothing can be explained at all. What is form? If the form is the essence of appearances, it is an appearance, and appearances are forms. In order, then, for either to be, the form must relate to appearances and appearances must not relate to the form.

Form must be, in itself, one, if it is not to be an appearance whose form is one. If the form is one, however, it would both be and be one, which would make it not one. Thus, if it is one, it cannot be; if it has being, it cannot be one. There is no difference between being one and being infinite because what is one, is, and is therefore two, three (one, being, and two), four ... and an infinite multitude of forms must appear if the form cannot appear. Parmenides tells Socrates,

nothing can be like the form, nor can the form be like anything else. Otherwise, alongside the form another form will always make its appearance, and if that form is like anything, yet another; and if the form proves to be like what partakes of it, a fresh form will never cease emerging (132e-133a).

Parmenides and Socrates make several fresh beginnings, all of which lead to contradiction. Since it is absurd for appearances to be without being appearances, what is this abiding (unchanging) being that is itself by itself? Is it large? Is it small? Is it in time? Is it timeless? Is it divisible or indivisible? Is it somewhere or nowhere? Is it knowable or unknowable? It cannot be large

because the larger the form is the smaller it must be. For it must contain more small parts, and that which has more small parts has a greater share of the Small and is smaller. The Small, however, must be larger than the parts that it contains and must, therefore, participate in the Large. The form is therefore both large and small and neither large – because it is small – nor small – because it is large. If it exists in time, it must be both young and old and neither young nor old, which is absurd. But if it is timeless, how can appearances in time share in it? Is it a part or whole? It cannot be a part without being within a whole that is not one. It also cannot be a whole without containing parts. But if it is neither part nor whole, then what is it? And where? Is it in itself or in another? It cannot be in itself because it would then be in something that contains it. It would thus be one thing as a container and another thing as contained. But it also cannot be in another, for it has no parts that can touch other parts. The form is therefore nowhere and nothing. Or is it? After all, not to be, to be a not-being, is to be! If it is by itself then it must be unknowable. But it is only if it is by itself that it can be known. Through what properties can it be known? If it could have properties, it could not be one. If it cannot have properties, it also cannot be one. If it is one, however, then it is infinite . . . .

The final words of the dialogue show that Parmenides and Socrates are trapped in the excluded middle with no way out. Parmenides summarizes the conclusion at which he and Socrates have arrived as follows: “whether one is or is not, it and the others [that are not one] both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to

each other” (166c). This means that because form and appearance are dependent contradictories, the law of contradiction is in contradiction with itself and there is no escape from the excluded middle (A is not-A).

The Greek explanation for why the human being is opposed to his end in the beginning presupposes this opposition<sup>47</sup> and is developed through a logical analysis of it. The human being aims at his end because he does not possess it, i.e., he is not an end in himself. This is what Aristotle communicates when he writes that God “produces motion in being loved” (*Metaphysics*, 1072b3-4): *love consists in the opposition between the lover and the end in itself*. The desire a man has to attain his end originates in, and it is sustained by, his awareness that it is opposed to him. It is the natural dependence between desire and its opposite that makes the desire for knowledge necessary but, from our point of view, futile.

Plato drives home the same point as Aristotle when he demonstrates in the *Symposium* that because the form is necessarily the highest object of love, it is not possible for a man to love what he possesses. Rather, these appearances block him in the pursuit of knowledge. Socrates asks Agathon whether, at the time a

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<sup>47</sup> In Greek myth for a mortal to question why he is fated is to resist, in blindness and ignorance, the inexorable force of tradition which the Greeks accept to be as old as time. This tradition teaches that no mortal has the right to question the gods. In *The Bacchae*, Teiresias tells Cadmus, “[w]e do not trifle with divinity. No, we are the heirs of customs and traditions hallowed by age and handed down to us by our fathers” (200-203). Later, before the tragedy unfolds, the chorus of Bacchae chants, “[b]eyond the old beliefs, no thought, no act shall go. Small, small is the cost to believe in this: whatever is god is strong; *whatever long time has sanctioned, that is a law forever; the law tradition makes is the law of nature*” (891-896, emphasis added).

The question of why the Greeks viewed tradition as a law of nature (or why the worldview of the Greeks is the way it is), i.e., as though a fundamentally different perspective is possible, is not one that can be posed (or answered) from within ancient teleology. It presupposes the necessary relationship between thought and existence, i.e., the consciousness that human beings are ends in themselves.



human being desires something, he is in possession of it, and Agathon replies that this is not likely. Socrates counters,

[i]nstead of what's *likely*, ... ask yourself whether it's *necessary* that this be so: a thing that desires something of which it is in need; otherwise, if it were not in need, it would not desire it. I can't tell you, Agathon, how strongly it strikes me that this is necessary. But how about you? (200a-b)

Agathon agrees with Socrates. It is not possible, then, for a healthy man to want to be healthy, Socrates argues, "because no one is in need of those things he already has." He is what he is, whether he wants to be or not, because of a "logical necessity" (a healthy person is healthy because he is healthy). When a person desires what he has, Socrates continues, what is meant is that he desires to possess what he has now at a future time (200c-d).

Socrates communicates here that, because desire necessarily depends upon – it is moved by – not possessing the object that is desired, all desire must be unfulfilled. It is the consciousness of being unfulfilled that alone stokes the flames of desire. To desire something, then, is always to desire what one cannot want, in principle, when this desire is fulfilled. When Socrates says to Agathon that a healthy man does not desire to be healthy in the present but that he desires this same health in the future, he is indicating that he will be in the same contradiction in all future times that he is in now. Given that human love must be love of something and that objects which can be possessed cannot be loved once they are attained, it follows that the true object of love cannot be possessed. After his exchange with Agathon, Socrates speaks with Diotima. There, we learn that the true object of love is "not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great

nonsense of mortality” (211e). It is what Socrates earlier calls “happiness” (205a): he uses the same Greek term that Aristotle uses to refer to the end in itself: *eudaemonia*. Happiness is the blessedness of the immortal soul that produces motion in being loved because it is “itself by itself with itself” (211b).

The fact that, for Plato and Aristotle, a human being can only love what opposes him means that his answer to the question of why he must begin with the law of contradiction is itself dependent upon the law of contradiction. Yet, it is precisely this law that drives him to violate the law of contradiction without end. Since logic, for the Greeks, is inviolable, the contradictions to which it leads are necessary.

In the *Metaphysics*, we see that, for Aristotle, all demonstration must begin and end with the law of contradiction. This means that all demonstration must begin with contradiction if it is to avoid contradiction. Aristotle writes in Book 3:

[b]y the starting-points of demonstration I mean the common beliefs, on which *all men base their proofs*, e.g. that everything must be either affirmed or denied, and that a thing cannot at the same time be and not be, and all other such propositions (996b27-30, emphasis added).

The law of contradiction, he says in Book 4, is the starting-point for demonstration because it is the most certain and “most indisputable of all principles” (1006a4-5). If men, however, were to demand a demonstration of this principle itself, they would be calling for an

infinite regress, so that there would still be no demonstration. But if there are things of which one should not demand demonstration, these persons cannot say what principle they regard as more indemonstrable than the present one (1006a9-11).

It is possible, Aristotle argues, to “demonstrate negatively” that the law of contradiction must be the starting point for demonstration “if our opponent will only say something ... which is significant both for himself and for another.” If, however, “he says nothing, it is absurd to attempt to reason with one who will not reason about anything, in so far as he refuses to reason” (1006a12-22). Anticipating that this will lead some people to ask who is to be the judge of how the law of contradiction is to be applied in any given case, Aristotle answers that such people “have no conviction” because they “demand that a reason shall be given for everything.”

But their mistake is what we have stated it to be; they seek a reason for that for which no reason can be given; for the starting-point of demonstration is not demonstration (1011a7-13).

According to Aristotle, then, if the starting point were not indemonstrable, it would refer to another principle that is less certain. Thus, the law of contradiction obtains authority as a first principle because it is the most indemonstrable principle of all. When Aristotle writes that this can be demonstrated negatively by letting the man who denies the primacy of the law of contradiction speak about something significant, his point is that in order for a claim to be understood, it cannot contradict itself. However, a statement that does not contradict itself can be contradicted by other statements that also do not contradict themselves and the law of contradiction cannot determine which of these non-contradictory statements are true and which are false. Hence, when a man begins with the principle of contradiction, his opponent will be sure to show him that he is right: what he says *is*

indemonstrable. For Aristotle, when a man speaks about something seriously, he must assert something and deny its contradictory. This “conviction” is what prevents all things from becoming contradictory. But since there is no basis for this conviction other than the fact that the one who defends it claims that it, and not the convictions of his opponents, is to be believed, the proof that the highest principle of all reasoning is the law of contradiction turns out to be that it leads to irresolvable contradictions. For what reasoning from the law of contradiction shows is that all convictions can be overthrown.

Reason that lacks its final end is ignorant of its beginnings. That is why I maintain that it is indistinguishable from logic, which cannot account for its premises and conclusions. For the Greeks, logic is not merely what Kant calls a “canon” (i.e., a necessary instrument for proof). It is what he calls an “organon” (i.e., a sufficient condition for proof). Because it is an organon, it ceases to be even a canon. The more the Greeks demonstrate through logic that all appearances are contradictory, the more they confirm the truth of their teleological premise that thought is ontologically opposed to existence. This premise, in turn, confirms that the law of contradiction is the first principle of thought. Logic supports the primary premise because it begins and ends with it. Not only is thought that is dependent upon logic blind, but it is dependent upon its blindness in order to “see.” Thus, while every person must, if his speech is to be understood, assert a position on something, no individual can account for, i.e., know, his own beginning, which is relative to him and opposed to the beginnings of those who oppose him. The result is that, as Cohen shows in his analysis of Athenian

litigation, everyone can contradict, and be contradicted by, everyone else. Just as the end in itself is held to be the end of contradiction in human life while, in fact, it is the principle that necessitates it, so, too, the law of contradiction is the first principle for avoiding contradiction while, in fact, it is on the basis of this law that human beings reproduce contradictions without end.

The principle that it is essential to have no explanation for one's beginnings in order to be able to explain anything and, therefore, that all explanations can have no explanation, describes perfectly the deductive reasoning of Plato and Aristotle. It leads to conclusions that are contradictory but, from both philosophers' point of view, necessary. It is important to understand that the *reason* that Aristotle argues that the law of contradiction is the indemonstrable basis of demonstration is to show that his own position has authority; in this respect, he is no different than Hesiod and Homer, both of whom appeal to the Muses at the outset of their poems in order to justify what they say. But the Muses themselves tell Hesiod that they tell lies (*Theogony*, 27-29) and Homer says to the Muses that "you know all things, [while] we have heard only the rumor of it and *know nothing*" (*The Iliad*, 2.484-86, emphasis added). How, then, can Hesiod and Homer judge, authoritatively, the reports that they hear? What are the Greek poets and philosophers communicating if their authority derives from the fact that they have none, i.e., if they have no way of knowing whether what they say is true or false?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The fact that the poet seeks authority because he does not possess it means that he is dependent upon his ignorance in order to have knowledge. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod says that Memory bore the Muses "to be a forgetting of troubles" and a "pause in sorrow" (55-56). Anyone who is grieved or troubled and who hears the sweet voice of Muses' servant chanting the deeds of

Aristotle notes that philosophy and myth share a common nature, a common beginning, and a common end, in a brief but instructive discussion in Book 1 of the *Metaphysics* (982b11-983a20). He writes that it is owing to the wonder and puzzlement of the lovers of myth “that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize.” The lovers of myth are therefore “in a sense” lovers of wisdom *because* “they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, ... pursuing [the] science [of knowledge] in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end.” Aristotle explains that the man who attains knowledge “is free” because he “exists for himself and not for another, ... for [knowledge] alone exists for itself.” The earliest philosophers “advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters,” he writes; yet, the privilege of possessing knowledge “might justly be regarded as beyond human power; for in many ways human nature is in bondage.” Aristotle supports this position by making reference to the Greek lyric poet Simonides, who recognized that “God alone can have this privilege [of knowledge]” and, Aristotle continues, “it is unfitting that man should not be content to seek the knowledge that is suited to him.” It follows that if there is something to what the poets say, then “all who excelled in this knowledge [that is suited to God alone] would be unfortunate” because the gods, according to the poets, are jealous. At

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past heroes or the blessed gods “soon forgets his heartache, and of all his cares [h]e remembers none” (55-104). The fact that Hesiod praises the daughters of Memory for helping men to forget suggests that true memory is the song of the immortal gods and that happiness (*eudaemonia*) involves forgetting the appearances of one’s life. Hesiod himself communicates that his own thought is not involved in the song that he sings, for it is the gods who have “breathed into me a voice divine, so I might celebrate past and future” (32-33). When Hesiod does speak of his era in *Works and Days*, he says that he would prefer to be dead or unborn (201-203). See *Works & Days, Theogony*. Translated by Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993.

this point, Aristotle distances himself from the poets who, he notes, are known to lie. In fact, nothing is more “honorable” and “necessary” than the pursuit of divine knowledge, though the acquisition of it “must in a sense end in something which is the opposite of our original inquiries.” A few lines later, he stops the discussion and resumes his inquiry into what this knowledge could be.

What is Aristotle doing when he distances himself from the poets? If the poets lie, then why does Aristotle, like Plato, appeal to them to support his own position? Aristotle does not want to claim that his own thought has not progressed beyond the poets; at the same time, however, he cannot distinguish himself substantively from them. For we see that, like the poets, philosophers pursue knowledge in ignorance of what it is and advance their thought little by little in exposing the “difficulties” (contradictions) that are entailed in their pursuit. It is through this kind of advance that Aristotle is led to the realization that the poet Simonides was indeed correct in concluding that human beings cannot have knowledge of God; for the search for knowledge is opposed to knowledge. When Aristotle seeks to distinguish himself from the poets while observing that the philosophers, like the poets, do not have the knowledge that they seek, he confirms that he is, as the poets are, dependent upon the opposition between thought and existence.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Plato is in the same position as Aristotle with respect to his critique of the poets. In the *Republic* Socrates banishes the poets from the just city (595b), the *kallipolis*, because poetry, which concerns appearances and not form, has a corrupting influence on the people. However, as we have seen, Socrates indicates that his own account of the just city is an appearance only. For he does not know what justice is. Thus, it is not at all clear how Socrates is different from the poets.

Aristotle resumes his discussion of the connection between myth and philosophy in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics* (1074b1-14) in the midst of his analysis of God. He indicates that he has inherited a tradition “in the form of a myth” that “the divine encloses the whole of nature” (he is speaking here about the heavenly bodies, which he believes are divine). “The rest of the tradition has been added later in mythical form with a view to the persuasion of the multitude,” he continues. For many think that the “gods are in the form of men or like some of the other animals.” However,

if we were to separate the first point from these additions and take it alone – that [our forefathers] thought the first substances to be gods – we must regard this as an inspired utterance, and reflect that, while probably each art and science has often been developed as far as possible and has again perished, these opinions have been preserved like relics until the present.

In these remarks, Aristotle maintains that the images through which the divine is depicted in the later (i.e., more recent) traditions of myth are contradictory; men, animals, and other things in nature cannot be divine. He defends his point, however, in the context of maintaining that the heavenly bodies are divine. This suggests that the distinction between the depictions of the divine in later myth and his own perspective amounts to the distinction between, on the one hand, representing the gods as people and/or animals and, on the other hand, representing the gods as planets and stars (as follows from the “inspired utterance” of his earliest predecessors) but not as people and animals. The reason that the arts and sciences have all failed to acquire knowledge, however, is not that divine existence is opposed to this or that perception but, rather, that it is opposed to



thought. When Aristotle rejects the notion that God can be depicted in nature, he is in complete agreement with Plato. Yet, as Plato has no alternative but to depict form as an appearance within the context of his proof that form cannot be an appearance (as is clear, for example, in the analogy of the cave), so Aristotle views the divine in the appearances of the heavenly bodies in attempting to differentiate his own position from the position of the multitude. He, like Socrates, seems to recognize that he does so in ignorance when he refers to his own position as “opinions,” not knowledge. (In fact, it is in the section that immediately follows that he defines divine thought as thought thinking itself throughout eternity, while perception and opinion always have something else as their object.)

How are readers in the modern world to think about the ancient Greeks? How are we to understand a kind of thinking whose first principle is that it does not exist, except as blind to, and ignorant of, its past, present, and future? If the Greeks cannot account for their own speech, whose beginnings and ends are, as I have shown, indemonstrable, how can we? Jean-Pierre Vernant observes in his “Introduction” to *The Greeks*<sup>50</sup> that

[f]rom the start the universe uncovered and imposed itself upon man, in its *unimpeachable reality*, like a *primal given* ... . In an attempt to know the world, man could not place the starting point of his project inside himself, as if to reach something one had to *pass through the consciousness one had of it*. The world man’s knowledge focused on was not attained ‘in his mind.’ There was *nothing farther from Greek culture than the Cartesian cogito*, the ‘I think’ set forth as a *condition for and a foundation of all knowledge of the world, of oneself, and of God* (p. 11, emphasis added).

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<sup>50</sup> Translated by Charles Lambert and Teresa Lavender Fagan. Edited by Jean-Pierre Vernant. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

In the *cogito*, Descartes grasps that existence is the object of thought and that thought is the criterion for existence; there is nothing in existence that does not “pass through” the “I think.” The foundation for modern life is the necessary relationship between thought and existence that is established in the *cogito*, an idea that is central to Kant’s transcendental idealism, as I shall show. At present, it is enough to grasp that, and why, the Greeks cannot comprehend the “I think, therefore I am” (and vice-versa: I am, therefore I think). For them, the reverse is true: I think, therefore I am not. The end in itself is ontologically opposed to (the appearances of) thought from the beginning, a beginning that, Vernant sees, has no beginning.<sup>51</sup> The teleological mind is therefore completely dependent upon its inner and outer perceptions and the principle of contradiction, as I have argued. Consistent with this insight, Erich Auerbach argues in Chapter 1 of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*<sup>52</sup> that Homer can be analyzed but not interpreted (p. 13). His narrative allows no room for interpretation, i.e., the reader’s involvement, evaluation, judgment, and critique, because it is given as complete in itself and “contains nothing but itself” (p. 12). There are no openings,

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<sup>51</sup> Barry B. Powell contends in Chapter 1 (“The Nature of Myth”) of his book, *Classical Myth* (Second edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1995), that the setting of ancient myths is never “in the present or the recent past; the action always takes place in the distant past, or in a shadowy time outside of human chronology altogether” (p. 2). Extant works that are based on these myths have identifiable authors, but “no one can say who created the myth[s] in the first place” because “the teller of a *mythos* [story] does not claim personal responsibility for what is said. After all, the teller did not invent the story, but only passes it on” (p. 3). Once more: “[i]t would be pointless to ask when these events occurred, even within the context of the story, because they are set in a time before human chronology has meaning” (p. 5). Thus, “the Greeks had no way to compare their traditions with historical reality” (p. 7). While myths themselves have no identifiable origin, Powell asserts, myths “explained why the world is the way it is” (p. 6). This means that the basis of explanation has no explanation.

<sup>52</sup> Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

spaces, or gaps that would allow one to establish relations and connections that are not already fully disclosed at each and every point. The text cannot be interpreted because it is not layered; it is not layered because nothing in it is hidden; and nothing in it is hidden because the narrative is nothing but “foreground,” i.e., “a continuous rhythmic procession of phenomena” that is “fully externalized” in terms “perceptible to the senses” (pp. 6-7, 13). Homer is not arguing for a particular position, as though other perspectives are possible. He does not *ask* anything; he only *tells*. He, like Plato and Aristotle, is moved by that which is unmoved when he, unmoved, moves others.

In *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique: Interpretation and Existence*<sup>53</sup> and *Truth and Interpretation: An Essay in Thinking*,<sup>54</sup> Brayton Polka delivers the most exacting, most substantive, and most exhaustive demonstration known to me that the Greeks cannot be read (interpreted, comprehended ...) through the principles that they themselves uphold as sovereign, except only as texts they are not (*The Dialectic*, p. 44). For what the Greeks demonstrate about themselves, continually, is that they are ignorant of and blind to, other than and opposed to, what they are in themselves, and it is not possible for us to interpret or comprehend a mind that cannot interpret or comprehend itself (*Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 55, 137-139). Polka sees that, while the Greeks say what they mean and mean what they say, what is meant cannot be spoken and what is spoken cannot be meant (*The Dialectic*, pp. 77-78; *Truth and Interpretation*, p. 140). Saying and meaning,

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<sup>53</sup> New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.

<sup>54</sup> New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

appearance and form, are, because opposed to themselves and one another, indistinguishable: “in being immediately identified, [they] remain in eternal antagonism to each other” (*The Dialectic*, p. 16). Polka shows that the Greeks, from their archaic myths to their classical philosophy, have no conception of existence (they do not exist in their concepts) and that nothing can be imputed to that which cannot be known as interpreted or interpreted as known (*Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 68, 198-199). He writes,

[t]he development within ancient Greek culture, from oral to written epic poetry and then from heroic epic culture to the ... great ... philosophical texts largely associated with Athens, shows a natural growth in technical sophistication but no transformation of ... wisdom (*sophia*) into wisdom as the original practice of interpreting existence as actual. The changes that occur between Homeric epic ... and Plato and Aristotle ... take place *within* the structure of ... the oppositions between mortality and immortality, many and one, ruled and ruler, body and soul ... [and express] constant (rather: arbitrary) metamorphosis but *no real transformation* (*The Dialectic*, p. 64, emphasis added).

Hence, what may appear as growth in the sophistication of thought from Homer to Aristotle “is a growth not in comprehension but in non-comprehension,” that is, in the increased brilliance (systematization, comprehensiveness, and lucidity) with which the fatal reversals and contradictions of human life are articulated (*The Dialectic*, pp. 79-80).

I find that Cohen, Vernant, Auerbach, and Polka are rare among contemporary scholars who, for the most part, do not examine the ontological

(teleological) character of Greek notions (terms).<sup>55</sup> In this chapter I have argued that, in Greek thought, human beings are not comprehended as beginnings and ends in themselves. Thought and existence are dependent opposites, formal logic is the indemonstrable basis of demonstration, and human beings are reliant upon the contradictory appearances of both deductive logic and inductive logic. The apex of human wisdom for the ancient Greeks, one discovers in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, is the consciousness that human beings are ignorant of what they are ignorant of. The contradictions of human life are therefore infinite and irresolvable because the mind depends upon the premise that leads to them. Thus, I maintain that it is impossible for the Greeks to exit from, to exist outside of, the closed circle of necessary contradiction – and, also, for us to enter into, and appear within, it. In the next chapter, I shall show that, in radical opposition to the Greek conception of the world, the biblical conception is not teleological. For its core ideas converge in the golden rule, i.e., the ethic of love. Once we are able to capture the striking distinctiveness of biblical thought and of teleological thought in and through their absolute incommensurability, we shall be able to grasp the fundamental concern, argument, and insight of Kant’s critical revolution, which

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<sup>55</sup> The result of this grave oversight is that Greek thought is viewed in the likeness of modern thought and often as the birthplace, or even as the ideal, of modern culture. See, for example, Jonathan Barnes’ “Aristotle” (in *Founders of Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), R. M. Hare’s “Plato” (in *Founders of Thought*), H.D.F. Kitto’s *The Greeks* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1986), John Pentland Mahaffy’s *What Have the Greeks Done for Modern Civilization?* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1909), Luis E. Navia’s *Socrates: A Life Examined* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007), John Mark Reynolds’ *When Athens Met Jerusalem: An Introduction to Classical and Christian Thought* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), W. Kenneth Richmond’s *Socrates and the Western World: An Essay in the Philosophy of Education* (London: Alvin Redman, 1954), and Bruce S. Thornton’s *Greek Ways: How the Greeks Created Western Civilization* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000).

once and for all establishes the parameters of all fruitful metaphysics to be biblical morality, not ancient teleology.

### **Chapter 3: Why Biblical Metaphysics is Not Teleological: an Examination of Core Biblical Ideas**<sup>56</sup>

In this chapter I want to defend the position that biblical thought is not teleological but is, rather, a polemic directed against pagan teleology from a position that is not, to my knowledge, found anywhere in pagan thought. For the core ideas in both the Old and New Testaments presuppose the ontological and ethical relationship between thought and existence and between human existence and the existence of God. Whereas in pagan thought the end in itself is opposed to, and therefore indistinguishable from, the perceived inner and outer world (the identity of thought and existence merely reflects their fundamental opposition), in the Bible the end in itself is the truest expression of human power: love. I shall examine the biblical ideas of love, sin, idolatry, repentance, creation, God, covenant, miracle, eternity, the kingdom of God, and the resurrection from the dead and show that, from the biblical standpoint, the end in itself that is adequate

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<sup>56</sup> Throughout this dissertation I have used, and shall continue to use, the terms “teleology” and “teleological” to describe all systems of thought in which human beings are not comprehended as ends in themselves and in which reason is wholly dependent upon deductive logic and inductive logic. I do not speak of biblical thought or of modern thought as teleological in order to avoid conflating Greek and biblical ideas (an error that, I argue, is the raw material for idols). When I defend the position that it is in biblical thought and not in Greek thought that human beings are self-conscious of being ends in themselves under the idea of freedom (i.e., reason conceived as moral will), I do not mean to suggest that the Bible does not explicate the nature of human life in terms of our common desire to fulfill goals and purposes that lie beyond our immediate perspectives. In fact, it is only on the basis of biblical ideals that we are able to see that our highest aims bear no relationship at all to Aristotle’s *telos* or Plato’s form and are altogether inconceivable from the teleological standpoint. Thus, when I claim that the Bible is not teleological, I always mean, without exception, that it is not teleological in the Greek sense. To establish that Greek and biblical ontologies are incommensurable, however, I cannot avoid speaking in terms that I apply to both. Only in so doing am I able to show that these terms have nothing in common because the ontological structure of these terms in biblical thought is not teleological, but moral.

to its idea is love of self, neighbor, and God at one and the same time and is alone creative of the highest possible existence: heaven on earth.

The golden rule is the basis of the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments. A clear formulation of it appears in Chapter 19 of Leviticus, after God commands the Israelites to *be* “holy,” to respect their mothers and fathers, not to reap their entire harvest but to leave food for the poor, not to steal, not to lie, not to deceive one another, not to defraud the neighbor, not to hold back the wages of a laborer, not to curse the deaf or be a stumbling block for the blind, not to pervert justice by showing partiality either to the poor or to the rich, and not to slander others, but “to judge your neighbor fairly.” When the neighbor is guilty, you must “[r]ebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but *love your neighbor as yourself*. I am the Lord” (19.9-18, emphasis added).<sup>57</sup>

The fact that the command to love the neighbor follows immediately upon the command not to seek revenge against “one of your people” suggests that, here, “neighbor” refers to a fellow Israelite. However, as Erich Fromm argues in *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Tradition* (pp. 182 ff.),<sup>58</sup> Leviticus 19.33-34 leaves no doubt that one’s neighbors include those who do not share the same blood or religion:

[w]hen an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

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<sup>57</sup> All citations from the Bible are taken from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>58</sup> New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1976.



The alien is a neighbor of the Israelite, but he is not native-born and he does not share the same religion. The principle that one must love the alien as oneself reappears in the Gospels, where Jesus teaches that there are no natural enemies in the human community and that one must love not only the neighbor but also the enemy (Matt. 5.44, Lk. 6.35). The Greeks, and their Roman conquerors, would have found this principle inconceivable.

The principle of love is the basis of the Ten Commandments (literally, “Ten Words”) that are the foundation of the Torah. The first three commandments forbid (1) worshipping other gods, (2) making God into an idol, and (3) misusing His name. The fourth commandment demands observance of the Sabbath. The next six commandments are (5) honor your parents, (6) you shall not murder, (7) you shall not commit adultery, (8) you shall not steal, (9) you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor, and (10) you shall not covet your neighbor’s belongings. Thomas Cahill argues in *The Gifts of The Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*<sup>59</sup> that the Ten Commandments are absolutely unique in history and that *nothing like them appears in any other ancient literature*. For they do not merely describe a set of fixed rules and punishments for disobeying these rules, as we find in the legal codes that precede it, such as the Code of Hammurabi some eighteen centuries B.C.E.<sup>60</sup> Equally, they are not propositions for debate that can “be argued away” and “set aside because of special considerations,” as Cohen shows is the case

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<sup>59</sup> New York: Random House, Inc., 1999.

<sup>60</sup> The text is available at <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/hamcode.asp>

concerning the laws of classical Athens, as we have seen. “*There is no document in all the literatures of the world that is like the Ten Commandments,*” Cahill asserts. “Here *for the first – and, I think, the last – time,* human beings are offered a code without [natural, instrumental, or supernatural] justification” (p. 140, emphasis added). This *moral* code is, Cahill writes, “necessary” and “unalterable” because it is “God’s code,” i.e., it is “written on human hearts” and constitutes “the inner core of the human person” (pp. 140, 142). We see, then, that, for Cahill, the Ten Commandments express a moral law that is at once divine and human and that is not in need of any justification that is extraneous to itself.

The fulfillment of the Ten Commandments expresses love of God (commandments one through four) and love of the neighbor (commandments five through ten), the two principles that Jesus defends in the Gospel of Matthew as the greatest of all laws. When Jesus is asked which commandment in the Law is the greatest, he cites Deuteronomy 6.5 and Leviticus 19.18: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22.36-40). The fact that Jesus grounds all of the teachings of the Torah and the Jewish prophets on love makes plain that, from his point of view, love is the central teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures and is the basis for interpreting them. But what is Jesus communicating when he says that the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself is “like” the commandment to love God above all others?

How is love of God to be distinguished from love of the neighbor? What is the relationship between God and the neighbor?

There is, in fact, a close relationship between love of God and love of the neighbor, and so between the first four commandments, which require further explanation, and the last six commandments. The reason that the first commandment forbids worshipping other gods is that these gods reflect either the fact that human beings do not comprehend themselves, as is the case with the non-biblical peoples, or the fact that they choose not to acknowledge their moral responsibility to live as ends, a condition that is unknown to the pagans but is the plague of the Israelites and is, in the Hebrew Bible, known as idolatry.

Ezekiel depicts the fundamental difference between the God of Israel and the pagan gods when, on behalf of God, he scolds the people of Jerusalem for abandoning the God who saved them from death.

On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!" I made you grow like a plant in the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your [pubic] hair grew, you who were naked and bare. Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you ... and you became mine. I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine

linen ... . But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute (16.3-15).

The contrast that Ezekiel depicts between the God of Israel and the pagan gods, and between their corresponding values, is both shocking and illuminating. It is the difference between, on the one hand, leaving an uncut, unclean, unfed, unloved, and helpless newborn out to die in the open fields, and, on the other hand, tending to her with love and compassion and, eventually, marrying her.<sup>61</sup> This contrast reflects directly upon the people who recognize it.<sup>62</sup> The first commandment, in which God instructs Israel not to worship other gods, shows that the ancient Israelites understand themselves to be entirely different from their neighbors and that worshipping pagan gods cannot ever fulfill the life that they desire.

The second commandment is like the first in that it directs the human being to acknowledge her dignity before God. It prohibits making God into an idol, i.e., of representing the divine “in the form [image] of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Ex. 20.4), a practice that was common among Israel’s neighbors. The commandment against idolatry is especially interesting because human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1.26-28).

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<sup>61</sup> Stephen L. Cook notes that marriage is symbolized in the spreading of a garment over the young woman and perhaps also in the fact that God washes the blood from her, which could signify the tearing of the hymen. (See footnotes 7 and 8 in Ezekiel 16 in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Third Edition: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001). In 16.30-32, God chides his “adulterous wife” for preferring “strangers to your own husband!”, leaving no doubt that God views his relationship to Israel as a marriage.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Ex. 9.14: Moses says on behalf of God, “there is no one like me in all the earth.” This means that the people of Israel see themselves as unique. In this light it makes perfect sense that the story of the Israelites’ freedom from bondage in Egypt is depicted through the metaphor of the exodus into the *desert*.

Thus, on the one hand, the commandment prohibits understanding God as a creature in nature rather than as the creator of nature, to cite Paul's definition of idolatry in his letter to the Church in Rome (1.25). On the other hand, it demands that the human being recognizes that he is the image of God precisely because he is, like God, the creator of nature, as we shall see. To reify God is to hypostatize human consciousness (and vice-versa).

The third commandment, which prohibits using the name of God in vain, bears the same structure as the second. The name of God is used in vain, i.e., falsely or wrongly, when it is distorted or manipulated in order to attain private ends that are not consistent with God's ultimate demands upon human beings: the practice of love and justice.

The importance of the fourth commandment, on Sabbath observance, is explained in Exodus in terms of God's resting after creating the world. However, in Deuteronomy 5.15 the Sabbath commemorates the freedom of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. In both Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Sabbath is a day of rest and freedom. Fromm explains in *You Shall Be as Gods* that the Sabbath was an old Babylonian holiday, *Shapatu*, observed on every seventh day of the moon month. On this day, the people castigated themselves in order to placate the wrath of the god of time, Saturn. In the Bible, Saturn's day, our Saturday, is transformed. The biblical Sabbath is not a day of mourning and punishing oneself in the face of time; it is a time to re-create (in) time and to celebrate life's sexual, sensual, and intellectual pleasures. Thus, "Saturn is dethroned on his very day, Saturn's-day" (p. 199).

The last six commandments clearly command love of the neighbor and require no further explanation at this point. In Matthew 7.12 Jesus crystallizes the Ten Commandments, i.e., love of God and love of the neighbor, into the golden rule: “[s]o in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” He does not find it necessary to use the language of God in order to articulate what it means to love God. For to love God is to love the neighbor. (This idea is explicit in the letters of Paul and in 1 John, as we shall see.) Yet, Jesus does not want to identify directly love of God with love of the neighbor when he says that the latter is “like” the former, perhaps because he wants to call attention to the fact that there are adequate and inadequate ideas of love of the neighbor and that adequate ideas alone are rooted in love of God. Love of God is a special kind of love of the neighbor, a moral love that Kant calls “good will” and that consists in treating persons as ends in themselves and not as means to an end. Jesus tells his disciples in the Gospel of John (14.20) that when you and I are both “in” God, then “you are in me and I [am] in you.” To see yourself in others and others in yourself from the standpoint of the golden rule, which is the standpoint of God, is to treat everyone as you would want to be treated, whether or not you have a corresponding sense-feeling. Love that is based on nature is not genuine love. Genuine love is always love of God, and it is for this reason that Jesus proclaims that to love God above all others is “the first and the greatest commandment.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> In *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Circle* (see “An Experiment in Love” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Edited by James Melvin Washington. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), Martin Luther King, Jr. distinguishes the biblical conception of love – as active, willful, and creative – from passive sentiment and natural

In the vision of the Bible, love is not uncritical acceptance (which is sometimes wrongly mistaken for “unconditional love”). When Jesus teaches in Matthew 7.1, “[d]o not judge, or you too will be judged,” he qualifies this counsel with the words “[f]or in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (7.2). For one to judge another as one would want to be judged requires that one is fair and compassionate in one’s judgments such that one examines where one stands within them and does not make oneself an exception to the moral demands that one places upon others. Everyone must be held to the same divine standard, the golden rule, and whatever our natural differences are in upbringing, class, status, race, or gender, we must all do our part to fulfill our commitment to those values to which we want others also to be committed, regardless of whether our love is reciprocated. Only thus do we help to create a *better* world.<sup>64</sup> In the Bible, then, the moral standard for action does not derive from, but lies beyond the world of, nature and experience; its

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affection, which, he observes, cannot be commanded. Only love that is directed to both friends and enemies is redemptive and restorative because all persons belong to a common humanity. Such love is “not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. It is the love of God operating in the human heart” (pp. 19-20).

<sup>64</sup> In his essay “The Will to Believe” (available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/26659/26659-h/26659-h.htm>), William James shows that how I respond to you is creative of how you respond to me. The relevant text reads: “*Do you like me or not?* ... Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you half-way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. The previous faith on my part in your liking’s existence is in such cases what makes your liking come. But if I stand aloof, and refuse to budge an inch until I have objective evidence, until you shall have done something ... *ad extorquendum assensum meum* [to compel my assent], ten to one your liking never comes. ... The desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth’s existence; and so it is in innumerable cases of other sorts. Who gains promotions, boons, appointments, but the man in whose life they are seen to play the part of live hypotheses, who ... sacrifices other things for their sake before they have come, and takes risks for them in advance? His faith acts ... as a claim, and creates its own verification. ... There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming. ... *[F]aith in a fact can help to create the fact ...*” (23-25).

fulfillment constitutes what it means to love God and, equally, what it means to be human.

In contrast, the Greek ethic among both gods and men is to do to others what you would *not* want others to do to you. It is better to rule than to be ruled, for the good in itself moves without being moved. The result is that the fortunes of human beings are perpetually reversed. Since the status that a man has depends on his rank relative to others, the greater his status, the more vulnerable he is in the presence of those who resent him and who want for themselves what he has. The man who wins admiration does not escape envy. It is perhaps with this in mind that Jesus says to his disciples that he teaches what no one can contradict (Lk. 21.15), i.e., a moral love that he distinguishes from teleological notions of love (as absolute privation or as sense-feeling) which, he sees, always lead to contradiction.<sup>65</sup>

Love is the central teaching of the Hebrew prophets, who subordinate all forms of natural love to moral love when they make social justice the criterion for the value of ritual performance, and not vice-versa. Amos preaches against

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<sup>65</sup> In *The Iliad*, Achilles reenters the war to avenge the death of Patroklos, whom he loves as a close friend at the level of sense-feeling. In fact, his love for Patroklos is opposed to the unfading glory (*kleos apthiton*) that he desires. For, in his mind, to win glory he must lead the Greeks to sack Troy, and he does not reenter the war until Hektor kills Patroklos. This suggests that Achilles' glory depends on the death of his close friend.

When Achilles kills Hektor in Book 22, he effects his own reversal. For a hero must not only live as a hero, he must also die as a hero. In Book 21, Achilles cries to the river god who wants to drown him, "[a]h, I wish Hektor had killed me; he's their best. Then one brave man would have brought down another. No, I was fated to ignoble death." (I use here the translation of Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974, lines 279-283.) Achilles wants to be a hero so that he will not live in shame; thus, he must kill Hektor. However, once he kills Hektor he dooms himself to an unheroic death. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the exchange between the shade of Achilles and Odysseus in Book 11 of *The Odyssey* shows that Achilles remains wholly dependent on glory and its appearances, which contradict him, each other, and, also, his natural love for his close friends.



opulent Israel, where the poor were sold into slavery because they could not pay for their own shoes. The rich

sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed (2.6-7).

Hosea proclaims to Israel,

[t]here is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying, and murder, stealing and adultery; [the people] break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed (4.1-2).

In first Isaiah God excoriates His people for not realizing that moral love is the criterion for the value of tradition:

[t]he multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me? ... Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. ... Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow (1:11-17).

In third Isaiah God proclaims that the kind of fasting He desires is the kind that loosens the chains of injustice, that sets the oppressed free, that shares food with the hungry, that provides the wanderer with shelter, that clothes the naked, and that does not turn away from the needy.

“Why have we fasted,” [the Israelites] say, “and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard

on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? ... If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday (58:3-10).

Finally, Jeremiah preaches at the palace of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah,

[t]his is what the Lord says: [d]o what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. ... Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. He says, "I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms." So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red. Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar?

God then says of Josiah, the former king of Judah and the father of Jehoiakim, "[h]e defended the cause of the poor and needy ... . *Is that not what it means to know me?*" (Jer. 22.3-16, emphasis added.)

In these and other passages<sup>66</sup> we find that the prophets distinguish clearly between love of the neighbor and the observance of rituals. It is an essential part of the law to treat the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, the exploited, the needy, orphans, widows, and strangers as you would want to be treated, but it is not an essential part of the law to fast, pray, or hold festivals for God, all of which are

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Jer. 6.20, 7.3-11, Am. 5.21-24, Hos. 6.6, and Micah 6.6-8.

worthless without the right spiritual disposition. For the prophets, God is not a supernatural being beyond the world. God is known, must be known, and can only be known through lawful (just) interpersonal relationships.

In the New Testament, Paul sees that the golden rule has its roots in the Hebrew Bible and that love of the neighbor is the essential teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures. He leaves no ambiguity about this in his letter to the Romans, which is likely his last letter<sup>67</sup> and, one assumes, the epistle that expresses his most developed position, when he writes,

[ ]let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man *has fulfilled the law*. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and *whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”* Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (13.8-10, emphasis added).

In his letter to the church in Galatia he says simply, “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5.13-14). Paul, like Jesus, does not mention God when he articulates the golden rule. He takes the position of the prophets: an adequate idea of (obedience to) God is love. From the time of the prophets to the time of Paul, nothing had been added to and nothing had been subtracted from the fundamental law.

The golden rule presupposes that human beings know the difference between good and evil, that they are conscious of their freedom, that they are conscious that freedom carries with it universal responsibilities and, also, that all

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<sup>67</sup> See Neil Elliot’s introductory remarks to Romans in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Third Edition*.

people, insofar as they are free, are accountable for their choices. If these insights are not new for us, it is because the modern world is absorbed in the biblical tradition in which it is grounded. If we switch our point of reference, however, and compare biblical values not only with our own deepest values but also with Greek values, then we will see that the disparity between our values and Greek values is utterly incommensurable.<sup>68</sup> For the Greeks, it makes no sense to love the enemy because in both logic and perception – perception understood as natural affection or preference – the enemy is the one whom one should not love. Indeed, as Thucydides makes clear in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*,<sup>69</sup> the power of Athens depended upon the Athenians doing to their neighbors what they did not want their neighbors to do to them but what their neighbors would have done to them if they had the power to do so.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The manner in which Greek thought is inconceivable to us is quite different from the manner in which our thought is inconceivable to the Greeks. We are in a position to provide an account for why Greek thought is inconceivable on the ground of the *cogito*, what Kant develops as moral reason. The Greeks, however, have no standard of truth on the basis of which they can comprehend not only that their thought is contradictory, but why, i.e., what the contradiction is and how to overcome it.

<sup>69</sup> Translated by Rex Warner. London: Penguin Books, 1972.

<sup>70</sup> The contradictory logic of the Greek position is expressed brilliantly by Thucydides in his report of the Mytilenian Debate, where Cleon puts forward a motion to kill the entire adult male population of Mytilene and to enslave the women and children, the guilty and innocent together, as punishment for daring to revolt against the Athenians. He counsels those in the Athenian assembly to “[r]emember how they would have been likely to have treated you, if they won, especially as they were the aggressors. Those who do wrong to a neighbor when there is no reason to do so are the ones who persevere to the point of destroying him, since they see the danger involved in allowing their enemy to survive” (p. 217). Since “it is a general rule of human nature that people despise those who treat them well and look up to those who make no concessions,” to give in to “feelings of compassion” is to be “guilty of a kind of weakness which is dangerous to you” and is in fact “entirely against the interests of an imperial power” (pp. 213, 215). For “your empire is a tyranny exercised over subjects who do not like it and who are always plotting against you; ... your leadership depends on superior strength and not on any goodwill of theirs” (p. 213). Cleon sums up his argument thus: if the Athenians accept his motion, they will be acting in accordance with those policies through which they have acquired the power that they have. If not, “you will be passing judgment on yourselves. For if they were justified in revolting, you must be wrong holding power. If, however, whatever the rights or wrongs of it may be, you propose to hold power all the same,

In biblical thought, love, regarded as doing unto others what you would want others to do unto you, is both the standard of truth and the highest expression of human power. Yet, since it is only in the light of truth that we comprehend what it means to live in untruth (idolatrously or sinfully), the Bible is also the unique and universal source of idolatry, as Polka argues in *Truth and Interpretation*. For idolatry presupposes the very truth that it subverts (pp. 141, 143). Truth is the standard both of itself and of its falsifications because there can be neither truth nor untruth, good nor evil, outside of truth. Evil that is not willed is ignorance of both good and evil. This is the status of evil in the writings of Plato and Aristotle: evil is done in ignorance of the good (e.g., *Meno*, 77b-78b; *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145b23-27).<sup>71</sup> Since everyone is, for Plato and Aristotle, ignorant of the good, how is one to *comprehend* evil in the ancient Greek world? How can evil be

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then your interest demands that these too, rightly or wrongly, must be punished. The only alternative is to surrender your empire" (p. 217).

The speaker who succeeds Cleon, Diodotus, argues against passing Cleon's motion, but on the same grounds as those offered by of Cleon. It is true that the Athenians should act for their own self-interest; but this involves keeping their neighbors (enemies) as weak as possible. If Cleon's motion carries, "can you not see that every city will not only make much more careful preparations for revolt, but will also hold out against siege to the very end, since to surrender early or late means just the same thing? This is, unquestionably, against our interests ... ." However, in "employing moderation in our punishments, we can in future secure for ourselves the full use of those cities which bring us important contributions." The right way to deal with potential threats is the opposite of what Cleon advises; it is "not to inflict tremendous punishments on them after they have revolted, but to take tremendous care of them before this point is reached, to prevent them from even contemplating the idea of revolt" (p. 221). He cautions the Athenians not to "be swayed too much by pity or by ordinary decent feelings. I, no more than Cleon, wish you to be influenced by such emotions." The motion to mitigate punishment should not be adopted because of pity or compassion but in order to "make your enemies fear you now. For those who make wise decisions are more formidable to their enemies than those who rush madly into strong action" (p. 222).

We see in Thucydides' report of the Mytilenian Debate that what is most important for both Cleon and Diodotus is maintaining the power and status of the Athenian empire. The sole issue is how best to achieve this end. There is no *moral* problem in doing "wrong"; in fact, it is right, and, indeed, necessary for the Athenians to do wrong to their neighbors, i.e., to rule over them against their wishes, in order to prevent suffering this fate themselves.

<sup>71</sup> At the end of Section 3 in Book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle agrees with Plato: it is the appearances of knowledge – i.e., "perceptual knowledge" and not "knowledge proper" – that are "dragged about" by the passions (1147b14-17).

distinguished from the good if, since to seek the good is to lack the good, it is not good to seek the good? The consciousness that evil is not done in ignorance of the good, that human beings are responsible for the evil that they do, is equivalent to the idea that human beings are ends in themselves. Idolatry is but the attempt to deny this truth and to treat human beings as means to an end. In this sense, idolatry is the conflation of Greek and biblical values.

Sin and idolatry share a common meaning: prioritizing natural ends (self interest, honor, power, wealth ...) over moral action. It is in biblical thought that both pagan ignorance and idolatry first obtain “existence.” It is paradoxical that only from the biblical perspective are pagans viewed as sinners and idolaters, paradoxical because it is those who comprehend that sin is not ignorance who view those who are ignorant as sinful. Paul, however, distinguishes very clearly between pagans (Gentiles) and Jews when he writes in Romans that “[a]ll who sin apart from the law [the Gentiles] will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law [the Jews] will be judged by the law” (2.12). For “through the law we become conscious of sin” (3.20). This critical distinction explains why, in the Hebrew Bible, the greater part of God’s wrath is directed not towards the pagans but towards the Israelites, whom He liberated from ignorance into the world of evil, sin, and idolatry.

Sin points to the imperfection of human beings, the consciousness of which is proof of the perfect standard on the basis of which sin is recognized: God. Sin presupposes that the essence of the human being is not unchanging and immortal; it does not precede her existence and it is not, as with the Greeks, given as a brute

fact that cannot be accounted for. Neither does the existence of the human being precede her essence; for the fact that she can say, with God, “I am,” entails moral obligations to which she is bound and through which sin is recognized as a contradiction that is willed and not, as in Greek thought, a contradiction of the will.

Polka writes,

[s]in is both human glory and human curse: the glory of fulfilling thoughtfully one’s existence and existing fully in one’s thought, and the curse of idolatrously contradicting human thought and existence by reducing them to the appearances of nature. Both the glory and the curse of thought and existence are unknown and un-lived within the natural law of pagan contradiction (*Truth and Interpretation*, p. 137).

Just as the idea of freedom contains within itself the power to turn away from God, the power to sin contains within itself the power to (re)turn to God. The Hebrew word for repentance, *tesuba*, derives from the root word *sub*, which means, literally, to “turn” or to “return” to God.<sup>72</sup> Repentance demands a willingness to acknowledge wrongdoing. It demands sincere remorse and a genuine commitment to atone for the wrong, a commitment that expresses what Jeremiah calls a “singleness of heart and action” (32.39) – at-one-ment. This change is not expressed through external observance but through love; it is not circumcision of the body, but circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30.6). Ezekiel urges Israel to repent, to turn away (*tesuba*) from their offenses, to form “a new heart and a new spirit” so as to “rid yourselves” of sin and enter into the world of the living. “Why will you die, O house of Israel?” Ezekiel laments. “Repent (*tesuba*) and live!”

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<sup>72</sup> See Paula Fredriksen’s discussion of repentance in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 646. Edited by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. I have not accented the Hebrew words in light of their various English transliterations.

(18.31-32).<sup>73</sup> The past has happened, but it does not determine the future; the past is, but its meaning is yet to be given, precisely because it belongs to freedom that must reinterpret, recreate, and relive the past at each and every moment.<sup>74</sup> The meaning of the sins of the past is transformed and created anew in the recognition of and atonement for these sins. It is when the individual who acknowledges her sins is compelled through moral necessity to change what she wills – not tomorrow, but now – that she transforms her past transgressions into the creative force of a new moral commitment. Sin, for Ezekiel, is death, a spiritual death. But as we read in 1 Corinthians and in the Gospel of John, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies. True life is not ignorance of sin, but, we shall see, resurrection from the dead.

To repent is to atone for sin. The repentant person understands that she alone is responsible for the choices that she has made and thus sees all fingers pointed towards her. No one else is to blame and there is nowhere to hide. It is not the one who errs, but the one who sins and who refuses to repent, who lives in untruth. Consistent with the prophets, Jesus teaches that the worst possible kind

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<sup>73</sup> See Jim Myers' article "Rediscovering the meanings of the teachings of the historical Jesus" at [http://biblicalheritage.org/DTB/0210\\_DTB\\_TESHUVAH.pdf](http://biblicalheritage.org/DTB/0210_DTB_TESHUVAH.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> The relationship between freedom and the past in the context of repentance is explored by Kierkegaard in *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 77-78 (translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and by Nietzsche in the section entitled "On Redemption" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (pp. 249-254 in *The Portable Nietzsche*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962). Kierkegaard shows that, while it is unchangeable that what has happened has happened in the way that it happened, it is not "necessary" because its "existence" is given in freedom. In this way, the past is not necessary for the same reason that the future is not necessary (fated). Nietzsche expresses essentially the same insight when he speaks of the past as "fragment," "riddle," and "accident" insofar as its meaning and significance are viewed as unchangeable and immovable. Redemption is the creative process of willing "backwards," i.e., of subjecting the "it was" to the "thus I will it" and so liberating the will from the fetters of its own human, all-too-human folly.



of sin is the sin against the spirit, the sin in which the sinner uses her will, which is the only power that she has to repent for her sin, to sin. This sin cannot be forgiven because the power of forgiveness consists in its being received as a gift. The person who can be forgiven must acknowledge that she has done something wrong; otherwise, she sees no wrong to forgive and forgiveness falls on deaf ears. When Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew that he comes to save not the “righteous” but the sinners (9.12-13), or when he says in the Gospel of John that he comes to make the blind see and those who see blind (9.39), he communicates that only those who acknowledge that they need help can be saved (healed). No one can force another to do good (or to repent for doing evil) because the good must be chosen. Its goodness consists in being chosen, i.e., it consists in the good will.

The idea that the will is a creator of the past, present, and future and that it is, therefore, central to the nature of time itself, brings us to the idea of creation, the meaning of which I shall now develop in light of a close reading of the two creation accounts with which Genesis opens. Before proceeding further, however, I must take a moment to explain and justify the hermeneutic that I use in reading the Bible.

It is widely accepted among biblical scholars that the Bible is a collection of writings that have different authors who write with different purposes and that these writings were produced over the course of approximately one millennium, from the tenth century before the Common Era to the end of the first century of the Common

Era.<sup>75</sup> However, it is entirely justifiable to read the biblical texts as unified wholes in cases where several different contributors appear to be involved and, also, as one unified whole once these texts have been edited and arranged in a particular order. For the process of editing is itself an act of authorship. For these reasons, my focus in this dissertation is not on collating the known facts about the Bible in its so-called “proper historical context,” as though this context is an objectively neutral standpoint that is independent of the context of the unified whole. In fact, it is only in light of the Bible being (read as) a unified whole that the question of its proper historical context is relevant. There is no Bible outside of the Bible that is received as the Bible, and this Bible is a unified whole. The object of my study is its ontology and ethics; *that is what the Bible is in itself*. I am less concerned with the “external conditions” that are associated (correlated) with the formation of the Bible and more concerned with *thinking seriously about the meaning of its core ideas*.

The creation stories might appear on the surface to be about cosmological and anthropological beginnings, following the law of contradiction into a teleological world in which, from the perspective of a free and critical self-consciousness, impossible things happen for no reason. While the biblical authors are not shy about borrowing material from the surrounding pagan cultures, their work is a polemic directed against pagan practices and pagan values. It does not make sense, therefore, to read the biblical narratives as we do pagan myth. In fact, the Bible itself counsels us to distinguish between *how* an idea is communicated and

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<sup>75</sup> See, for example, pp. 70 ff. in Christian E. Hauer and William A. Young's *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds*. (Seventh Edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2008).

*what* idea is communicated, i.e., between outward appearance and the “heart” (1 Sam. 16.7), perceptual judgment and moral judgment (Is. 11.3-5), body and soul (John 7.24), and between letter and spirit (2 Cor. 3.6).

In the previous chapter we observed that what we learn from the texts of Plato and Aristotle, when these texts are allowed to speak for themselves, is that they are not texts at all insofar as a text is understood to express the relationship between thought and existence such that it itself exists as an object (or subject) of interpretation to itself and to others. In contrast, the fundamental teaching of the Bible is the necessary relationship between thought and existence (human beings are ends in themselves). If the Bible is allowed to speak for itself, it must be interpreted from the golden rule; to do so demands that the reader does not view the text as given outside of (her) moral interpretation. Rather, she must respect herself as its sovereign interpreter.<sup>76</sup> In upholding the golden rule as the highest principle of thought and existence, the Bible indicates that its truth is not given outside of interpretation and that its interpretation is to be judged in light of truth.

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<sup>76</sup> When a reader reduces her own thought to the immediacy of the text, she reduces the text to the immediacy of her thought. Both her thought and the text become *idols*. It is perhaps in order to prevent his listeners from turning his teaching into an idol that Jesus prefers to communicate in parables. When his disciples ask him to explain why he speaks in parables, he refers to Is. 6-9: “[t]hough seeing, [people] do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand” (Matt. 13.10-13). He knows that understanding is not given through natural perception. Speaking in parables that do not make sense at a natural (literal) level encourages those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear to acknowledge their authority as interpreters. For it is only through this acknowledgement that they can grasp, authoritatively, the authority of his teaching.

It is fruitful to read Jesus’ response to his disciples in the context of the parable of the sower (Matt. 13.3 ff., Lk. 8.5 ff.). If a farmer (teacher) plants seeds (the word of God) in soil (the minds of those who listen to him) that is too shallow (literal-minded), the teaching will, Jesus explains, “have no root.” The people who accept the word will “believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.” Only those who have “a noble and good heart” will “hear the word, *retain* it, and by *persevering* produce a crop” (Lk. 8.13-15, emphasis added). So Jesus says a few verses later, “consider carefully *how* you listen” (8.18, emphasis added). The difference between listening without understanding and listening and learning is that the latter requires truthful interpretative judgment, i.e., a good and noble heart.

(Recall Leviticus 19.17: reprove the text where necessary, so that you will not share in its guilt.) The most fundamental reality of things, the ontology of existence, is hermeneutical and ethical and is revealed only in and through moral interpretation.

Our primary focus as readers of the Bible, therefore, cannot be on solving the problem of what was in the minds of the biblical authors at the time of their writing, two or three millennia ago, if this involves going beyond the project of rigorously exploring what is involved in the ideas that they have expressed. Such an endeavor would be fruitless. There is no way to know what is communicated in what is written outside of what is communicated in what is written. It is unreasonable, except in the rarest of cases, to assume from the outset that what is in the mind of the writer is different from (what is communicated in) what he has written. The important question to ask is not what is behind what is communicated, i.e., what is not communicated, but what is communicated. The Bible distinguishes itself from pagan texts because it insists that its existence is not finished, complete, self-subsistent, and uncreated. Only then can its authority be confirmed and accounted for. What the Bible is in itself is its revelation through the golden rule of interpretation: interpret the text as you want to be interpreted, i.e., lovingly, respectfully, charitably, critically, fairly ... and not with what Ezekiel calls a "heart of stone" (36.26). When in doubt about the text's meaning, give the text the benefit of the doubt until you no longer have reason to doubt where the text stands; see if its weaknesses can be redeemed when interpreted in light of its strengths, rather than ignoring its strengths because it has weaknesses; have faith in the text, meet it

“half-way,” and be open to having the faith that you put into it justified. Upbuild the text – and yourself – by distinguishing between its truths and its contradictions; for if a text has contradictions, it does not mean that it is contradictory, and if a text expresses truth, it does not mean that it is without contradictions. If the text provides a framework to support a figurative reading that overcomes the contradictions of a literal reading, thus saving the literal reading (and you) from contradiction, then it follows that the text should be interpreted figuratively. If not, we should not force upon it ideas and values that it does not itself contain, as is the case in reading texts that are not texts and that cannot be read.

There is no question that, when taken at a literal level, the Hebrew creation stories contradict themselves and each other together with our thought and existence. These stories, however, are surrounded by, and, I argue, are to be interpreted in light of, a constellation of values that is inconceivable in teleological cognition. Thus, the biblical narrative undermines a literal reading of its own surface-presentation and it does so boldly and explicitly. Its consciousness of contradiction is not based on the law of contradiction. (As I have shown, Aristotle’s conviction that the law of contradiction is the first principle of thought reflects the ontological opposition between thought and existence; that is, it expresses the necessity of beginning and ending in contradiction with one’s beginning and end.) The Bible exposes its contradictions as idolatry, as contradictions that are willed, and, therefore, from the standpoint of having overcome them. The contradictions in the Bible do not follow from its first principle. Rather, they are recognized because they contradict its first principle.

The main issue, again, is not how an idea is communicated, that is, the terms that are used to communicate an idea, but, rather, what idea is communicated, that is, the idea that is expressed through the terms that are used. That the biblical writers use the language and imagery of pagan myths is interesting, however, because, in transforming pagan myth, they show that they are not dependent upon it and that their stories are not imitations but original creations. The fact that the biblical writers use pagan stories in order to express values that are incommensurable with a literal reading of these stories accentuates the radical opposition between biblical thought and pagan thought.

The golden rule is the principle for interpreting a text in which it is upheld as the highest principle. But it must itself be the subject of interpretation if it is to serve as the principle for interpreting the subject. In this sense, it gives rise to the very problem that it addresses. Polka writes in *Truth and Interpretation*, “[t]he Bible demands that the very criterion or standard by which it is interpreted be truthful, but it equally demands that its criterion or standard of truth be interpreted” (p. 143). The standard for interpreting the golden rule is itself. Truth is its own standard. Yet, this standard demands the continual labor of the spirit. In this sense, truthful interpretation is always original reinterpretation. Keeping in mind these points on biblical hermeneutics,<sup>77</sup> we are ready to examine the two accounts of the creation of the world with which the Hebrew Bible opens.

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<sup>77</sup> The hermeneutic that I have developed is consistent in all critical respects with the hermeneutic for interpreting the Bible that Spinoza expounds in Chapters 7 and 12-14 of the *Theological-Political Treatise* (translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998). Spinoza argues that the only truthful basis for interpreting the Bible is the moral law: the practice of justice,

In the chronological order of composition, the second creation account, the story of Adam and Eve, is believed to predate the first story by some three to five centuries.<sup>78</sup> When the Hebrew Bible was canonized, however, these stories were placed side by side. Taken together, they communicate that human beings are created in the image or likeness of God – and not in the image or likeness of nature – because they comprehend good and evil. The first creation account begins with the distinction between the divine Spirit and nature: “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The earth is formless, empty, and dark, but is illuminated by Spirit: “[a]nd God said, ‘[l]et there be light,’ and there was light” (1.2-3). God creates the sky, land, seas, vegetation, celestial bodies, and the creatures of the earth and the sea over the course of different days: there is a first day, a second day, a third day, etc., and His creations are “good” (Gen. 1.4, 1.10, 1.12,

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sincerity of heart, and charity (*caritas*). For, when the Bible is read from itself alone, “we learn that its message ... is in essence this, to love God above all, and one’s neighbour as oneself. ... [T]his is the basis of the *whole structure* of [biblical] religion; if it is removed, the entire fabric crashes to the ground” (Chapter 12, p. 155, emphasis added). Again: “obedience to God consists *solely* in loving one’s neighbour [as oneself] ... . Scripture itself tells us quite clearly over and over again what every man should do in order to serve God, declaring that the entire Law consists in this *alone*, to love one’s neighbour [as oneself]” (Chapter 13, p. 158; Chapter 14, p. 164, emphasis added). Once more: “[w]orship of God and obedience to him consists *solely* in justice and charity, or love towards one’s neighbour” (Chapter 14, p. 167, emphasis added). Spinoza sees that what the Bible teaches, fundamentally, is that every individual must respect himself and others as sovereign and, therefore, as bound to the moral standard of truth and interpretation that is revealed in biblical religion to be “divinely inscribed in [all] men’s hearts – that is, in [all] men’s minds” (Chapter 12, p. 149). It is up to every sovereign individual to determine what in the Bible is fruitful for his moral edification; “Scripture does not require us to believe anything beyond what is necessary for the fulfilling of the [moral] commandment.” The letter of the text, Spinoza maintains, is neither sacred nor profane “in an absolute sense apart from the mind, but only in relation to the mind” (Chapter 12, p. 151).

<sup>78</sup> Proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis maintain that the second creation story involves the J tradition of the tenth and/or ninth centuries BCE (it may also have elements from the E source of around the ninth and/or eighth centuries BCE). The first creation story is believed to come from the P tradition of the fifth and/or sixth centuries BCE. (See pp. 70 ff. of *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds* and p. 72 of Alan F. Segal’s “The Jewish Tradition” in *A Concise Introduction to World Religions* [edited by Willard G. Oxtoby and Alan F. Segal. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2007]).

1.18, 1.21, 1.25). In the verses that follow, the text drives home its main point, one verse after the other, that God creates human beings, both male and female, not in the image of nature, but in His<sup>79</sup> likeness. Human beings are to “rule over” nature, be fruitful, and “fill the earth.”

Then God said, “[l]et us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “[b]e fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground (1.26-28).

After the creation of human beings, the creation of the heavens and the earth and all things in them is “very good” (1.31). Human beings are not determined through natural or supernatural forces; the birds, animals and plants are not omens, and the stars and moon are not gods. Human beings are themselves in command over their own lives and their task is to be productive in the blessedness of the here and now, not to aim for a world beyond.

The idea that the human being is (created in) the image of God, which the author, again, is careful to repeat three times in two verses, is critical. It indicates, first, that from the biblical perspective human beings cannot account for, or think their existence outside of, God and that, second, because human beings are like God, what is said about God informs us about human beings (and vice-versa).

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<sup>79</sup> I follow the narrative style of the Old and New Testaments when I speak of God in the masculine form. In Hebrew, all nouns, gendered or not, are either masculine or feminine. See [http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/26\\_nouns.html](http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/26_nouns.html)



How is the creation of human beings, who are embodied but who are unlike all other created things of nature and who are like the creator of all created things, to be comprehended within a text that is written by human beings but that appears to begin with God and not with human beings? What implications does the idea of being created in the likeness of God have for how one is to read the text that makes this principle central to it but that appears, on the surface, to prioritize God over human being? If the human being is like God, then she would have to share the attributes of God. What else could it mean to be like God? If she shares the attributes of God, she must share in God's creative power. Indeed, it is because she has a spirit and can freely will her existence that she knows that she is distinguished from all other creatures of nature. The fact that the creation of the world in Genesis 1 is spiritual – the world is created through Spirit – indicates that it is one in which human beings are involved. Otherwise, the creation account could not be accounted for and would express the fate of the pagan generation stories, all of which are governed by the law of contradiction.<sup>80</sup> The Bible's essential task, however, is, as I have noted, to liberate human beings from the contradictions of pagan teleology. That is why the Bible does not begin with the principle that human beings are blind and ignorant but exalts human beings as divine.

The second creation account brings to light the meaning of the first (and vice-versa: the first informs the second). It confirms that the idea of creation in both stories does not concern cosmological or anthropological beginnings. Here the

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<sup>80</sup> See, for example, *Theogony*, the Babylonian *Epic of Creation* (in *Myths from Mesopotamia*. Translated by Stephanie Dalley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and the *Rig Vedas* of ancient India (found at <http://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/RigVeda.pdf>).

human being, Adam,<sup>81</sup> is not created last, as in the first account, but when “no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up” (2.5). Placing creation accounts that are irreconcilable with each other in their literal presentation, side-by-side in the Bible’s opening pages, offers a silent warning to the reader: we must differentiate between letter and spirit, between what the text says and what it means, between the text as it appears and the text as it is in itself. This strategy supplements the subject matter of the narratives, which teaches that nature is created. After God creates the man, He creates Eden, a garden that is watered by a river that branches out into the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (2.14). This indicates that Eden is in the pagan land of ancient Mesopotamia (“Mesopotamia” originates from the Greek words *mésos* [“between”] and *potamós* [“river”] and means “the land between the [two] rivers”). God puts the man in the garden and creates a woman<sup>82</sup> to help and sustain him when He sees that no suitable partner is to be found among the birds and the beasts. For “[i]t is not good for the man to be alone” (2.18-20). We are told that, in Eden, there is a tree of life and a tree of knowledge of good and evil. God says that the man and woman are free to eat from any tree in the garden, including the tree of life that, we learn in 3.22, offers immortality. However, He commands Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge: “for when you eat of it you will surely die” (2.17). The human being, at this point, is not depicted as the image of God, which again contradicts

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<sup>81</sup> The word “Adam” means “man” in Hebrew. It implies that the story that is being told is the story not of one man but of every man. Thus, even the name of the first man betrays a literal reading of Adam as the “first” man in anthropological history.

<sup>82</sup> The woman is created from the man’s ribs, i.e., the part of his body that protects his vital organs, most notably his heart and lungs. This suggests that not only is she intimately related to him as “flesh of my flesh” but that she is also his protector.

the first story at an immediate level. In Genesis 2, he is ignorant of good and evil. But if he is ignorant of good and evil, how can he comprehend the commandment not to eat from the tree of good and evil? What could this commandment mean to him and what could it mean coming from God, whose highest commandment is to know good and evil? Who is God in pagan Mesopotamia? A literal reading of this story, as with the first, cannot support itself. The facts that (1) explicit contradictions were left in the story, (2) explicit contradictions between the two creation narratives are left unreconciled, (3) the story communicates its ideas using imagery that is not to be taken literally but is clearly symbolic,<sup>83</sup> and (4) the story is found in a collection of writings that polemicize against paganism, when taken together, suggest strongly that the contradictions that we find, like the imagery, are intended to serve a fruitful purpose, namely, to *help* the reader to recognize that the letter of the text must not be reduced to itself.

In this story, it is the serpent who first tells Adam and the woman that their eyes will be opened and that they will be like God if they eat from the tree of knowledge.

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of [the tree of knowledge] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (3.4-5).

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<sup>83</sup> Both the tree of life and the serpent are allusions to images found in ancient Near-Eastern literature. For example, in Tablet XI of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (in *Myths from Mesopotamia*), Gilgamesh, the King of Uruk, appears to have finally attained the object that he has been searching for: immortality. Thinking that he possesses the plant that will give him true life, he does not eat of it. Instead, he inexplicably goes to bathe and leaves the plant unattended, at which point a snake secretly carries it away.

Hearing this, the woman does eat of the fruit of the tree and also gives fruit to Adam. (Both the woman and Adam leave the tree of immortality alone.) Then, “the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked” (3.7). They cover themselves with fig leaves, which again points to their capacity to distinguish themselves from other natural beings (covering the genitals is a human-specific activity). When God sees Adam and the woman covered, He knows that they have disobeyed His command; He tells them that *because they have done this* they shall be “cursed.” He will make the woman suffer greatly in childbearing, the man will eat by toiling in the fields, and both will die (3.11-19). Nowhere in the story, however, is it said that either Adam or the woman has sinned, that their nature is corrupted, or that they are worse off after eating the fruit than they were before. Rather, three important things take place in the next three verses: first, Adam names his wife “Eve, because she would become the *mother of all the living*” (3.20, emphasis added).<sup>84</sup> Second, God clothes Adam and Eve in garments of skin (3.21). And third, “the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us,<sup>85</sup> knowing good and evil.’” Adam is like God not because he is able to do impossible things, things that human beings cannot do, but, rather, because he is conscious that he is a moral being. *It is because he has become aware of his humanity that he is divine.*

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<sup>84</sup> Segal notes that, according to most interpreters, “Eve” is derived from the Hebrew word for “living.” See p. 66 of Segal’s “The Jewish Tradition,” in *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*.

<sup>85</sup> It is interesting that God is referred to by way of the plural object pronoun “us.” For the Bible defends the idea of one God, not many gods. Pluralizing God might support the self-conscious recognition that the literal presentation of God in Genesis 2 and 3 is contradictory (there is no God in Eden). Alternatively, the plural pronoun could indicate that God is not alone, self-sufficient, unmoved, and knowable only in itself.

As I have stressed, the Greeks do not conceive of the labor and toil that are involved in knowing good and evil. In 150 b-d of Plato's *Theaetetus* Socrates tells Theaetetus that he (Socrates) is utterly "barren of wisdom," that "there is no wisdom in me," and that "I cannot claim as the child of my own soul any discovery worth the name of wisdom." Impotent to produce children, he acts as a "midwife" who watches over the labor of others, applying "all possible tests to the offspring" in order to determine which are phantoms and which are not. The result of these investigations, we have seen in the *Apology*, is that Socrates "sees" that no one has any wisdom that is worth anything at all. In the second creation story, the pain of childbearing emerges *after* human beings have knowledge of good and evil and have become like God. The pain is what Hegel speaks of as the sorrow of "bringing forth," the sorrow that belongs to consciousness that has broken from the unity of its immediate (natural and sensible) being, a schism that "means that man is certainly finite and mortal on the side of his nature, but that he is infinite in cognition."<sup>86</sup> To be infinite in cognition is to be a moral being, i.e., an end in oneself who hungers and toils in the fields of existence for spiritual bread. The fact that the second creation account ends with the banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden communicates that human beings who know good and evil cannot enter Eden. For it is a world that is without knowledge.

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<sup>86</sup> See Hegel's brilliant treatment of the Adam and Eve story in Section 23, Addition 3, of Hegel's *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*. (Translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), pp. 61-63.

To be expelled from the garden is to be conscious that one exists in real time as a moral being who will die. It is for this reason that the knowledge of good and evil carries with it the burden of spiritual travail, i.e., moral responsibility, and the assurance of death. To appreciate what it means to die is to appreciate what it means to live (and vice versa: the awareness of what it means to live as a moral being is necessary in order to appreciate the significance of death). Unlike the ancient pagan religions wherein death is an appearance of life,<sup>87</sup> the human being

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<sup>87</sup> In the metaphysics of the ancient Indian traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, death is an appearance in the ever-turning karmic wheel of life that is called *samsara*. In Hinduism, the goal of the human being is to escape from *samsara* and attain *moksha*, or oneness “with” the immortal soul of all things: *Brahman*. This is clearest in the Upanishads, which are the philosophical reformulations of the earlier Vedic texts. In the *Mundaka Upanishad*, we read that the universe is “nothing but the supreme *Brahman*” which “rules over the mind and life,” and that in him human beings “cross the ocean of ignorance.” Nothing can manifest the Brahman but all “objects draw their radiance from him.” (From “Hinduism.” In *An Anthology of Living Religions*, second edition, edited by Mary Pat Fisher and Lee W. Bailey. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2008, p. 65.) In the words of Hindu scholar Vasudha Narayanan, “Brahman cannot be described any more than infinity can be contained” (“The Hindu Tradition,” p. 267, in *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*). Sankara, the early ninth century CE teacher of the Advaita Vedanta school, writes that every thought, even the concept of the “I,” is a “superimposition” on the oneness of the “inner Self,” which is “the very opposite” of the self that is experienced. “Superimposition is the seeing of a thing in something which is not that . . . . It is for casting away this superimposition which is the cause of evil and for gaining the knowledge of the oneness of the Self that all the Upanishads are begun” (from “Hinduism,” in *An Anthology of Living Religions*, p. 72).

Buddhism is the child of Hinduism. The first Noble Truth of Buddhism is that life is suffering (*dukkha*); the second, that suffering comes from desire; and the third, that suffering ceases when desire ceases. In Buddhism, the end of *samsara* is *parinirvana*, or *nirvana* “without remainder” (see Roy C. Amore and Julia Ching’s “The Buddhist Tradition” in *A Concise Introduction to World Religions*, pp. 388-389). This notion is identical to the notion of *moksha*: it refers to the total cessation of suffering and desire that is achieved in the kind of death that does not lead to the reentrance into the orbit of karmic fate. The Indian philosopher-poet Asvaghosha writes in the second century CE in his *Acts of the Buddha* that, for the Buddha, there is “nothing substantial in existence, just as no heartwood is found in a plantain tree when it is cut open . . . . Alas! Living creatures obtain but toil; over and over again they are born, grow old, die, pass on and are reborn. Further man’s sight is veiled by passion and by the darkness of delusion, and from the excess of his blindness he does not know the way out of this great suffering.” The enlightenment that the Buddha attained during his meditations – an enlightenment that is *with remainder* – consists in the “tranquility” of his recognition that “from the destruction of existence birth itself is destroyed . . . .” (From “Buddhism.” In *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 115-116.) The end of life is, literally, the end of life.

In both ancient Hinduism and ancient Buddhism, as in ancient Greek thought, the human being is identical with the end to which he is opposed and his dependence on that which contradicts him leaves him ignorant of good and evil, which are karmic necessities that are unknowable in

who has been expelled from Eden knows that he must “return to the ground” (3.19). Here, time has meaning; there is a reason to establish priorities, priorities that shape and define how one lives. To know that you will die once is to know that you will live once and that a moment can never literally be recaptured, changed, or lived again: there is a first day, a second day, a third day . . . . It is because the chronological time of human life is finite that the quality of this time is infinite. The consciousness of death emerges with the consciousness of good and evil because the consciousness of good and evil amounts to the consciousness that human life, embodied life, is an end in itself.<sup>88</sup>

The Hebrew creation accounts are not only relevant to the Old Testament. In fact, the Gospel of John opens with an interpretation of them and confirms that

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themselves but indistinguishable from one another in their appearances. If John kills Peter, he fulfills the karma that Peter must deserve, although it is impossible to know why Peter deserves to be killed. John’s karmic consequence, too, must appear at some point, although it is impossible to know when or what form it will take.

The connection between Greek and Indian thought in antiquity is manifested plainly when we compare the last words of Socrates with the last words of the Buddha. Plato reports at the end of the *Phaedo* that Socrates tells Crito, “Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget” (118a). Socrates wants to thank the god of medicine for the hemlock that will cure him of the disease of life. (Nietzsche understands the passage in much the same manner in aphorism #340 of *The Gay Science* [translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1974].) Similarly, the Buddha teaches in his last words, “[e]verything that arises also passes away, so strive for what has not arisen” (“The Buddhist Tradition,” p. 377). For both Socrates and the Buddha, life is a disease.

In my bibliography I have not made individual entries for each relevant selection from *The Anthology*. Rather, I have referenced the individual chapters central to my discussion (with the editors’ names appearing in the author’s place).

<sup>88</sup> Pascal is consistent with the biblical (“Christian”) tradition that he defends when he observes in his *Pensées* that the greatness of a human being consists in the consciousness that he will die. Nature appears to have an advantage over him because it is so powerful and infinitely vast while he is so frail and miniscule in comparison. “But even though the universe should crush him, [a] man would still be nobler than what kills him since he knows that he dies, and the advantage that the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of it. *All our dignity consists then in [this!] thought. It is upon thought that we must raise ourselves up, and not on [natural] space and time which we cannot fill. Let us strive then to think well; that is the foundation of all morality*” (#65, emphasis added). In *Selections from The Thoughts* (translated by Arthur H. Beattie. Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1965).

they are not about scientific origins. Rather, creation expresses the power of human beings who are self-conscious of the Word of God. The Gospel begins with this declaration:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (1.1-3).

What is the Word? How does the Word create the world? What is the Gospel of John saying about the meaning of the Hebrew creation accounts to which it refers? What do the creation accounts tell us about the opening of John?

Cahill explains in *The Gifts of the Jews* that each of the Ten Commandments

may have been but one word, that is, a verb in the imperative form preceded by a negative prefix of one syllable. In this way, the originals may actually have been Ten Words – utterly primitive, basic injunctions on the order of “No-kill,” “No-steal,” “No-lie.” These Ten Words (which is the term the Bible uses, not “Commandments”) would have been memorizable by even the simplest nomad, his ten fingers a constant reminder of their centrality in his life (p. 139).

We have seen that Jesus and Paul encapsulate the tenfold Word in the golden rule, which they defend as the essential teaching of the Law. The claims of biblical scholars<sup>89</sup> that the Word refers to Jesus as the Christ cannot be correct in light of the fact that Jesus grounds his own teaching upon the Hebrew Scriptures from where, we see in Luke 2.46, he received his learning and whose law, we read in Matthew 5.17-18, he says he comes not to abolish but to fulfill. (Most of the Old Testament writings are believed to predate Jesus by more than five centuries.)

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<sup>89</sup> See William Beardslee’s notes in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (pp. 463-4) and Obery Hendricks, Jr.’s comments on the opening verses of John in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Third Edition*.



Our vision into what is meant by creation will deepen through the course of this dissertation. But it is fruitful at this time to note that in the first epistle of John the author binds together God and love when he says, directly, that “God is love” (4.8, 4.16). God is love. Love is the Word. The Word is God.<sup>90</sup>

The next few verses in the Gospel make clear that the Hebrew creation accounts are not here viewed as accounts of the cosmological origins of the world.

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. ... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world (1.4-5, 1.9).

The light referred to above cannot be a natural light; it does not make sense to speak of natural light as “in” the Word, as “true,” as “coming into” (gradually) this or that place, or as not being “understood.” When the Gospel connects the Word that creates all things with true light, that is, with the light of truth that is expressed in the teachings of Jesus (and the Law and the Prophets), it is evident that the idea of creation is comprehended as spiritual, not as material. Meaning comes into existence with moral self-consciousness. Thus, we read in 1 John: “[t]his is the message you heard from the beginning: [w]e should love one another” (3.11). *The*

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<sup>90</sup> The meaning of the Word (*logos*) bears no relationship to the meaning of *logos* in Greek thought. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus, for example, understands *logos* to be the unmoved principle of everlasting flux. In fragments 1 and 108, he says that *logos* is the “real constitution” of the world that is “set apart from all.” It “holds forever” but “people forever prove uncomprehending” of what it is. (See *Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary* by T. M. Robinson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.) Aristotle discusses *logos* in the *Rhetoric* as persuasion through logical reasoning, i.e., of moving others without being moved by them. The Greek conception of *logos* is always either supernatural or natural and, therefore, both. In John, *logos*, love, is the principle that shows teleological conceptions of *logos* to be contradictory.

*beginning of the world is the expulsion of human beings from Eden.*<sup>91</sup> It is the liberation of human beings from the formless, empty, and dark void of pagan ignorance.<sup>92</sup>

The Bible begins with the creation of God, i.e., with the consciousness that human beings are ends and not means. Martin Buber, scholar and translator of, as well as commentator on, the Hebrew Bible, argues in *I and Thou*<sup>93</sup> that *in the beginning is the I-You relationship* (p. 69). In citing the opening of Genesis, he makes it clear that he sees that the creation of the world begins with mutual recognition: seeing oneself (seeing oneself) in others and seeing others (seeing themselves) in oneself. Love, reciprocity, is the “cradle of actual life” (pp. 60, 67).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> The creation narrative is the current that flows through Genesis and Exodus. Both the story about Abraham leaving the pagan land of his ancestors and going forth as God commanded him (Gen. 12.1 ff.) and the story about Moses freeing the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 3.10 ff.) retell the story of the expulsion from Eden. For they signify the radical break of consciousness from a teleological worldview and a coming into existence of the single individual, humanity, and God at one and the same time.

<sup>92</sup> As with the ancient Greek and Indian religions, the ancient Chinese religions express no idea of creation as conceived in the Bible. In Confucianism and Daoism, the appearances of the world are opposed to the unchanging principle of the cosmos, the Dao. Since human beings cannot know what this unchanging principle is outside of its contradictory appearances, their end is to become one with the appearances of nature, e.g., in treating people according to their natural station, in following the path of least resistance (as water does), etc. In “The Doctrine of the Mean,” which is one of the Four Books that expresses the central teaching of Confucianism, we read that “[t]he way of heaven and Earth may be *completely described in one sentence: [it is] without any doubleness [in itself] and so [it] produce[s] things [relative to us] in an unfathomable way*” (from “Confucianism,” in *An Anthology of Living Religions*, p. 150, emphasis added). Similarly, Laozi asserts in his *Dao de jing* that “[w]hat we call ‘the Dao’ is not the Dao” and “[o]ne who knows does not speak; one who speaks does not know. ... [I]t is impossible to be familiar with [the Dao], and yet it is also impossible to be separated from it. ... That is why it is valued throughout the world” (from “Daoism,” in *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 166, 169, emphasis added). For other instructive excerpts from the foundational texts of these two ancient religions, see especially pp. 143-155 and 164-173 in *An Anthology of Living Religions*.

<sup>93</sup> Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970.

<sup>94</sup> The moment of mutual recognition is captured in Genesis 16.13, where Hagar, servant of Abraham, encounters God (or his messenger: the text is deliberately ambiguous), who recognizes her suffering and promises that He will make her prosperous: “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.” Hagar says to God: “You are the God who sees me ... I have now seen the One who sees me.” Hagar sees herself as existing – and she sees herself

It is from this standpoint that the world prior to creation is recognized as having no creative power. The world prior to creation is not without biological life; it is without spiritual life because there is no love as mutual recognition. The idea of God comes into being with moral self-consciousness. It signifies the beyond in the midst of life that calls for a deeper immersion in existence.<sup>95</sup>

Moses teaches his fellow Israelites that the commandments of God are not “beyond your reach,” “up in heaven,” or “beyond the sea,” but “very near,” not in space but “in your heart” (Deut. 30.11-14). 1 John is clear that God is known only through love:

we know that we have come to know [God] if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ... Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 John, 2.3-4, 4.7-8).

While there are as many ways to conceive of God as there are ways to conceive of the truth of human existence, all adequate ideas of God must express the moral imperative, the Word, to abolish all hierarchical relationships in which human beings are not respected as ends, and this includes the relationship between human beings and God.<sup>96</sup> As I showed in the previous chapter, supernatural

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seeing herself as existing – in seeing herself being seen to exist in the sight of God. At this moment, she sees God seeing her seeing Him seeing Himself through her eyes. She affects God and is affected by God. In mutual recognition, seeing is not passive sense perception but active moral self-consciousness. It is what Buber speaks of as the I coming to be through the You (*I and Thou*, p. 80).

<sup>95</sup> John A. T. Robinson defends this position in his daring and provocative book, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963).

<sup>96</sup> No idea could be more remote from the ancient teleological perspective. For example, in *Atrahasis* (in *Myths from Mesopotamia*) the gods create men so that they can be their slaves and toil on their behalf. The epic begins with the older gods complaining about their work. Because

conceptions of God lead to natural conceptions of human beings that lead to contradiction.

The commandments of God are in the heart because love is the pulse of true life. One loves God in one's heart when one does not expect extrinsic rewards but treats people well simply because it is the right thing to do. Moral life is the end in itself, what in Leviticus is called "holiness" (11.44) and in Matthew "perfection" (5.48). The question of how to understand the dependence of human beings upon God when, as Polka observes, "[t]he relation of God and person is the relation of person and person, just as the relation of person and person is the relation of person and God" (*Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 171-172), is like the question of what it means to love God above all others if the essence of the Law is the golden rule. One is dependent upon God because one cannot *exist*, i.e., outside of the immediacy of natural consciousness (the images of nature), without God (relationship, freedom, the golden rule, love of the neighbor ...). Thus, Kant argues that the ideas of God and freedom arise together and are inseparable in moral consciousness, as we shall see.

The I-You relationship among human beings and between human beings and God (in contrast with what Buber calls the "I-It" association, which is instrumental and involves no true relationship) is expressed in the idea of the covenant.

Bernhard Anderson observes that the Hebrew word for "covenant," *berit*, appears

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they do not want to work, they make the younger gods carry the workload. When these younger gods also complain, men are created to bear the yoke that none of the gods want. However, the gods become enraged because men are making too much noise in doing the gods' work, which prevents the gods from sleeping. So they plague men with disease and starvation in order to extinguish them.

to be derived from the root word that means to bond or to fetter, indicating that God and human beings are in a “binding relationship.”<sup>97</sup> In this relationship, God and human beings are subject to the same moral standard. If God is held to be the standard for morality, it is only because the idea of God is adequate to the moral standard by which His laws are judged to be valid or invalid, just or unjust, true or untrue. (Jesus rejects commandments that are not moral when he defends the truth of Hebrew Scripture.) When we believe that God is not subject to the golden rule, then, as Nietzsche proclaims, God is dead.<sup>98</sup> The insight that what is moral is moral not because it comes from a God that is apart from us but that God is God insofar as He expresses the moral law within us, is absolutely unique in history.<sup>99</sup>

Polka writes in *Truth and Interpretation* that

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<sup>97</sup> See pp. 138-139 of *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*.

<sup>98</sup> In aphorism #125 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells the story of a “madman” who preaches that God is dead to those who do *not* believe in God: “[w]e have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers.” The madman is actually a prophetic figure and represents Nietzsche’s own position (see, for example, #76, where Nietzsche interlinks madness with truth as opposed to the “law of agreement” [elsewhere called the “herd instinct”]). At first, the crowds do not understand him and heckle him. Later, they fall silent and the madman throws his lantern on the ground, an image that recalls Exodus 32.19, where Moses throws the tablets of the Ten Commandments on the ground after he sees the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. Nietzsche’s main point is that the conventional conceptions of God are not moral at all; they are immoral because human beings are viewed as means to an end.

Nietzsche defends much the same position in #21, where he argues that what people often call “morality” is purely self-serving and, in fact, depends on persons being harmed. He writes that there is a “fundamental contradiction in the morality that is very prestigious nowadays: the *motives* of this morality stand opposed to its *principle*. What this morality considers its proof [the virtue of self-sacrifice] is refuted by its criterion of what is moral [‘the strength for the highest autonomy’].” (Nietzsche is aware that Kant develops an idea of autonomy that is grounded on Christian morality.)

<sup>99</sup> In Greek life, justice is “decided” through violence on the battlefield and in speech. Because it is knowable only in itself, it is unknowable relative to human beings. Hesiod and Homer depict Zeus as just because justice is whatever Zeus does; there is no independent criterion for distinguishing between justice and injustice.

In the *Theogony*, Hesiod’s judgment of Kronos is very different from his judgment of Zeus. Kronos is presented as foolish, deceptive, and crooked for overthrowing his father to win power and for wanting to eat his own child (Zeus) to retain power. Zeus, however, is viewed as wise, just, and sound-minded for overthrowing his father to win power and for eating his pregnant wife Metis to

[t]he very notion that God makes a covenant, his covenant, with a people in history, that he is bound to the covenant which he makes with his people no less than the people are bound to the covenant which they make with their God is a revolutionary idea, revolutionary for the exacting reason that it is based on notions of mutuality, reciprocity, relationship, and responsibility... – the golden rule (p. 166).

Fromm argues for the same position:

*[t]he idea of the covenant constitutes, indeed, one of the most decisive steps in the religious development of Judaism, a step which prepares the way to the concept of the complete freedom of man, even freedom from God. ... [God] is bound, as man is bound, to the conditions of the constitution ... and man has gained the freedom of being able to challenge God in the name of God's own promises ... . Precisely because God is bound by the norms of justice and love, man is no longer his slave. Man can challenge God – as God can challenge man – because above both are principles [of morality] (pp. 25, 28).*

Polka and Fromm show that, since God and human beings are equally obligated and accountable to each other, the relationship between them cannot be hierarchical. God is not like Baal or Marduk.<sup>100</sup>

In third Isaiah (54.5), Jeremiah (3.8), and Ezekiel (16.32), God speaks of the relationship that He desires to have with His people as one between a faithful

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retain power. Hesiod thinks that Zeus is just for the same reason that he thinks that Kronos is unjust. The difference between the two gods is that Zeus has power.

It is precisely because justice is decided through power that, in the Greek tragedies, no matter how greatly human beings suffer because of the ever-changing preferences of the gods, they do not blame the gods. On the contrary, their most common response is to praise the gods while at the same time pitying themselves.

<sup>100</sup> In Tablet VI of the *Epic of Creation*, Marduk slays the primeval goddess Tiamat and becomes ruler of the gods. When Marduk learns that the lesser ranking gods want to build a ziggurat for him, “[h]is face lit up greatly, like daylight. ‘Create Babylon, whose construction you requested! Let its mud bricks be moulded, and build high the shrine!’” (p. 262) Genesis 11.1-9 presents a striking contrast between God and Marduk. God stops the people of Shinar (Babylon) from building a tower that “reaches to the heavens.” The city is called “Babel” – a term that sounds like the Hebrew word for “confused” but which can also mean “gate of god” (see Carr’s footnotes for verses 8-9 in the Fourth Edition of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). God does not desire honor; the gateway to God is moral action.

husband and a faithful wife. In Hosea 2.14-20, God says to adulterous Israel that when she returns to him after worshipping other Gods,

[o]n that day ... you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." ... And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord (Hos. 2.16-20).<sup>101</sup>

Again we see that to have intimate knowledge of God does not mean to be subservient to Him ("My Baal" can also be translated as "My Master"). It means to be faithful, i.e., to live with righteousness, justice, love, and compassion.

In light of the above we see that the biblical people are absolutely dependent upon God only in the sense that they do not view themselves outside of their covenantal relationship with God, i.e., outside of their moral obligations to one another. For this reason, their dependence upon God, and upon one another, expresses their absolute independence from teleological notions of God (and human beings). In the idea of the covenant we see that the biblical people comprehend God as a power among them, a power that is the source of their own empowerment and, indeed, of their very existence. They comprehend that they have dignity not because God says that they have dignity. Nor does God say that they have dignity because they comprehend, outside of God, that they have dignity. God is not the "cause" and moral self-consciousness is not the "effect," or vice versa. The Israelites and early Christians comprehend the commandment to treat themselves and one another with dignity through their relationship with God

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<sup>101</sup> From the New Revised Standard Version.

as a commandment that comes from the heart, soul, or mind of each person, which is to say that they comprehend love as the source of their lives through their loving relationships with one another.

The next core biblical idea that I shall consider is miracle, which, I argue, does not at all suggest a supernatural occurrence in nature. The very idea of a supernatural (or natural) miracle entails the idea that there can be no account of it whereas, in the Bible, miracles have their source in the power of God (and, I argue, of human beings). Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians that miracles (together with speech, prophecy, knowledge, and faith) are “nothing” without love: “if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (13.1-2). A few verses later, Paul interprets love as patience, kindness, modesty, trust, perseverance, truthfulness, hope, and belief (in oneself and others). His pronouncement in 13.13 that love is greater than faith reaffirms his position that there is no faith without love. As love is the criterion for a true idea of God, it is the criterion for true faith in God and His miracles. The idea that faith that can move mountains is nothing without love means that love alone can move mountains, an idea that reappears in Matthew, as we shall see in a moment.

Both the Old and New Testaments have miracle narratives that provide the principle for interpreting them. In Exodus, Moses performs a number of miracles before the Pharaoh. However, when we are told that the Egyptian magicians can do the same things in their secret arts (Ex. 7.8-8.7), we recognize that to “understand” Moses’ miracles as supernatural is to render them indistinguishable from the pagan secret arts. Yet, the miracles performed by Moses are supposed to



differentiate his teaching from pagan magic. It is only in the exposition of the Ten Commandments a few chapters later that we see clearly that the true miracle on the basis of which the Israelites are freed from bondage in Egypt is love of God and love of neighbor.

The narrative of the miracle in which Moses changes water into blood (Ex. 7.14-25) is modified in the narrative of the Gospel of John, where we are told the story of Jesus turning water into wine at Cana (2.1-10). In John 15.1, however, Jesus pronounces, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." Since wine comes from grapevines, the miracle at Cana is interpretable as a metaphor that depicts not a material transformation but a spiritual transformation. It is relevant that the metaphor of the vine also appears in Hosea 9.10 and 10.1, where God says, "[w]hen I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert . . . . Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself."<sup>102</sup> At Cana, water does not become wine, literally, just as Jesus is not a vine, literally, and just as the ancient Israelites are not grapes, literally, and just as God is not a gardener, literally, and so on. In the Bible, water is often a symbol for nature: the Spirit hovers over the surface of the waters (Gen. 1.2), Moses parts the water that engulfs Pharaoh's soldiers (Ex. 15.19), Jesus walks on water (John 6.19) . . . . In John 3.5-6 Jesus teaches that the human being is born of both Spirit and water and he connects

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<sup>102</sup> This metaphor expresses the miracle of freedom (creation): the fruit of love grows in the pagan desert. Israel is its own miracle. This narrative positions Israel as prior to God and neutralizes narratives that appear to position God as prior to Israel (or to human beings in general), as in the Hebrew creation accounts. Ultimately, the existence of God and Israel emerge in and through the vine of (their) loving relationship.

To ask how Israel is possible is to ask for the ground of freedom. Freedom is possible because it is actual. Its actuality as the cause of itself necessitates that it is inconceivable through formal logic and sense perception.

water directly with the flesh. After Jesus is crucified, we are told that a soldier pierces his body and that water and blood pour out (John 19.34). In this light, the change of water into wine at Cana refers to a spiritual conversion, a transformative insight, or a return to God. The fact that this miracle takes place in the context of a wedding adds to the celebratory mood of the occasion.

In Chapter 9 of the Gospel of John Jesus heals a blind man (9.1-7). This healing is described numerous times in the same chapter as an opening of the eyes (9.10, 9.14, 9.17, 9.21, 9.26, 9.30, 9.32). Is the blind man like Adam, whose eyes are “opened” in knowing good and evil (Gen. 3.5-7)? At Cana, Jesus says, “I am the true vine.” When he heals the blind man, he says, “I am the light” (John 9.5).<sup>103</sup> The theme of blindness reappears at the end of the chapter. Jesus says that he comes to make the blind see and to make those who see blind. The Pharisees ask him whether he is calling them blind and Jesus replies that, if they acknowledged their blindness, they would not be guilty of sin but that, since they claim that they see, their guilt remains (John 9.39-41). Jesus here accuses the Pharisees of the sin against the Spirit: the refusal to see that/what one has chosen not to see and then to repent. The important point to note here in reference to our discussion of the nature of miracle is that, when Jesus says that he comes to make those who “see” (see that they are) blind, he is clearly speaking about a spiritual, and not a physical, blindness, an idea which informs the nature of the miracle at Cana that precedes it in Chapter 2. Hence we see that, at times, Jesus ties together healing with forgiveness of sin (e.g., Mk. 2.3-12); at other times, he

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<sup>103</sup> In Matthew 5.14, he says to the crowds, “[y]ou are the light of the world” (emphasis added).

indicates that those who have been healed have been healed through their own faith (e.g., Matt. 9.22, Mk. 10.52, Lk. 17.19 and 18.42); and, on other occasions, it is said that Jesus cannot do miracles where there is unbelief (e.g., Matt. 13.58, Mk. 6.5).

The idea of truth that is defended in the Bible – and so of true speech, the true prophet,<sup>104</sup> the true faith, the true God, and the true miracle – is always bound to love and, therefore, to the good will of human beings. Jesus proclaims that it is the wicked and idolatrous generation that asks for supernatural miracles. For to do so is to give up what you know for what you do not know and so to whore after foreign gods. When the devil tries to tempt Jesus to perform supernatural miracles in Luke 4.1-14, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6.16: do not put the Lord to the test. His point is that God is not the contradiction of nature, for nature is not the world of contradictory appearance. If the power of God is shown in doing what cannot be done, then there is no God. The devil shows that he is well versed in the words of Scripture when he confronts Jesus (4.10-11), but (that) he is without love. In the words of Paul, he talks like a “clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13.2) because he does not comprehend either the nature of God or the nature of proof. The proof of God is not doing what cannot be done but doing what ought to be done. It is noteworthy that, while Jesus refuses to do supernatural miracles for the devil, he does not

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<sup>104</sup> Zvi Adar argues in *Humanistic Values in the Bible* (translated by Victor Cherkover. New York: Jewish Reconstructionist Press, 1967) that, for the true prophet, morality is the content of true religion (pp. 151-153). In *You Shall Be as Gods*, Fromm sees that, for the prophets, the moral imperative “is to become fully human; and that means to become like God.” The concern of the prophet “is the establishment of a society governed by love, justice, and truth ... . His realm is never a purely spiritual one; it is always of this world” (pp. 117-118).

refuse to feed and to heal people, which, again, supports the idea that the power of miracle is love (spiritual bread).

Jesus thus makes it clear on a number of occasions that anyone can perform the miracles that he performs. In fact, anyone who has faith “will do ever greater things than these ...” (John 14.12).<sup>105</sup> In Matthew 17.14-21 Jesus tells his disciples, “[i]f you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Yet, given the metaphorical context supplied by the Bible when it discusses miracles, Jesus is clearly not speaking about moving mountains in nature. If he were, no one could have faith. The mountain that is moved by faith (love) is the crushing sense of hopelessness, injustice, loss, and despair that was felt by the Jews and early Christians under Roman rule in the first century CE. This reading is consistent with Paul’s claim in 1 Corinthians that the faith that can move mountains is nothing without love.

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<sup>105</sup> Jesus does not imply here that there are miracles “greater” than love. His point is that he is not God. There are moments in which Jesus appears to align himself with God, as in John 14.6-7 where he says to Thomas: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.” In the very next sentence Jesus says that “[f]rom now on *you do know [God] and have seen him*” (emphasis added).

It is important to read 14.6-7 in the context of 15.15 and 13.35. In 15.15, Jesus says to his disciples that he does not call them servants but “friends, for *everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*” (emphasis added). In 13.35 he tells his disciples: “[l]ove one another. *As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (emphasis added). A disciple is not an imitator who stands before Jesus as an inferior; he stands as an equal in dignity before God in the presence of whom all acts of love are completely original. From Jesus’ point of view, there is no difference between what he knows of God and what everyone who loves knows of God, between his power to love and the power of other persons to love, and between what he ought to do and what all people ought to do; *nothing* more is required to fulfill the law of God than love for one another. To welcome the neighbor is to welcome God, and vice-versa (Matt. 10.40, 25.31-40).

The fullest realization of human freedom is called the kingdom of God (or the kingdom of heaven). Heaven is the realization of the will of God on earth, as is evident from the opening of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6.9-10). When the will of God is done on earth, then the kingdom of heaven, which is always near, will have "come." It is a world that human beings must bring about through their own efforts and it expresses the time in which, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians, "God may be all in all" (15.28). First Isaiah describes it as the time in which

[t]he wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox ... for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (11.9).

This extremely unnatural natural image, or metaphor, would not have made sense to the ancient Greeks and Romans. On the basis of both perception and the law of contradiction, natural enemies do not lie together and bear young. In *The Iliad*, when Achilles finally catches Hektor after chasing him around the walls of Troy like a predator chases its prey (this is a natural natural image, or simile, that Homer tirelessly reproduces in different ways and combinations), Hektor says to Achilles that there are only two possible outcomes: "I must take you now, or I must be taken." He then offers to make a pact with Achilles: whoever is victorious in the fight unto death should not defile the dead body. Achilles replies,

Hektor, argue me no agreements. I cannot forgive you. As there are no trustworthy oaths between men and lions, nor

wolves and lambs have spirit that can be brought to agreement but forever these hold feelings of hate for each other, so there can be no love between you and me, nor shall there be oaths between us, but one or the other must fall before then to glut with his blood Ares the god (22.261-267).

Achilleus agrees with Hektor: one of the two must kill the other. There is no alternative. Peace between them is inconceivable. The only point that Achilleus contests is that Hektor has much chance of being the victor. Hektor is a man: he is the son of mortal parents. For Achilleus, the proper analog of a mere man is a lamb. Achilleus, however, is a demigod, the child of a goddess and a descendent of Zeus. His proper analog is a lion or wolf.<sup>106</sup> Face-to-face, no lamb can kill a wolf and no hungry wolf would not kill a lamb. Thus, Achilleus kills Hektor.

In stark opposition to the world in which Jesus lived, the world of the Roman Empire, whose culture is in all essential respects indistinguishable from ancient Greek culture, is the world in which, Jesus teaches, the first, the so-called strong and wise, will be last, and the last – the poor, the disadvantaged, the meek, the persecuted, the merciful, and the sinners who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” – will be first (Matt. 5.3-12, 19.30). Paul expresses much the same idea in 1 Corinthians when he says that God’s weakness is stronger than human strength and God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. For, according to Paul, “human strength” and “human wisdom” are based on power (over others), wealth,

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<sup>106</sup> Achilleus’ speech betrays the inherent contradiction of his situation (which is the situation of all Greek heroes). If Achilleus kills Hektor, then he precipitates his own reversal because he must die at the hands of someone lesser. It is probably because Achilleus depends upon the status of Hektor for his own status that he implies that Hektor is the wolf whereas he is the lion but, contradictorily, not the lamb. For in the above cited passage Achilleus compares “men and lions” to “wolves and lambs” and not to “lambs and wolves.” Thus, Achilleus positions Hektor as both the wolf – his worthy adversary – and as the lamb – who is no match for him. In so doing, he shows that he depends upon the status of the enemy he must kill.

status, noble birth, and the natural categories in terms of which the Romans distinguished the first from the last (1.18-29). The Jewish vision of the kingdom of God is incomprehensible to the Romans, and it is exactly for this reason that Jesus teaches in John 18.36 that the kingdom of heaven “is not of this world.” The destruction of the Empire and the emergence of a “new heaven” and a “new earth” are anticipated throughout the Book of Revelation (e.g., 21.1-2).<sup>107</sup>

The good news that is explicated in the Gospels disclose that the kingdom is “near” and “at hand” (Matt. 10.7, Mk. 1.15, Lk. 10.9, 21.31), that the keys to the kingdom are with *us* (Matt. 16.19), that it shall come through repentance (Matt. 3.2, 4.17), that it belongs to those “who will *produce* its fruit” (Matt. 21.43, emphasis added), that it is like a mustard seed that a man sows in his own field (Matt. 13.31-32), and that it is beyond the world that “moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal” (Matt. 6.19-20). It is the world in which human beings relate to themselves and one another with dignity and in which, Isaiah teaches, a person does not judge on the basis of appearances but “with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth” (Is. 11.3-4). Jesus says in Luke that the kingdom of God is not defined in space – it is not “here” or “there.” “For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within [or among] you” (17.20-21). Consistent with the other key biblical ideas that I have examined in this chapter, the kingdom of God expresses the truth that human beings are not means to an end but are ends in themselves.

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<sup>107</sup> For a fruitful commentary on the meaning of the rich symbolism in the Book of Revelation, see Jean-Pierre Ruiz’s introductory notes to Revelation and his footnotes in Chapters 8, 12, 14, 17, 18, 20, and 21 in the Fourth Edition of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

In the Bible, life in the kingdom of heaven is described as “eternal.” “Eternal life” has nothing in common with the finite, immortal end of the pagan religions. In Matthew 19.16 a man asks Jesus what good thing he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus calls upon Exodus 20.12-16 (or Deuteronomy 5.16-20) and Leviticus 19.18 and tells the man, “[i]f you want to enter life, obey the commandments. ... ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” (As in his formulation of the golden rule in Matthew 7.12, Jesus does not mention “God.”) We see here that when the man inquires about how to attain eternal life, Jesus responds by telling him what he must do to enter “life.” What does it mean for those who are living to “enter” into living? Jesus is distinguishing between an idolatrous conception of life and a moral conception of life. When he speaks of the commandments as the way to (eternal) life, he indicates that eternity is not an infinite quantity of years but the quality of the life that is adequately conceived as an end in itself. In Deuteronomy 30.19-20 and elsewhere, life that is separate from God is called “death.”<sup>108</sup> Eternal life is freedom from death.<sup>109</sup>

The final idea that I want to work through in this chapter is perhaps the most freighted idea in the New Testament: the resurrection from the dead. The most sustained argument for the resurrection, which involves all of the central biblical

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<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Proverbs 18.21, 23.14, Ez. 18.20-22 and 18.30-32.

<sup>109</sup> In Revelation, the kingdom of God is freedom from death in both this spiritual sense and also in a literal sense. For it represents the end of Roman persecution during the reign of Nero (54-68 CE) and Domitian (81-96 CE), during which Christians were at risk of being “slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given” (6.9, New Revised Standard Version). (See Ruiz’s introductory notes on Revelation in the Fourth Edition of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.) In the holy city to come, God says, “[d]eath will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (21.4, New Revised Standard Version).



ideas that I have taken up thus far, is in Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, where Paul makes the staggering claim that “[i]f there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ... [I]f Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (15.13-17). It is astounding that Paul anchors his teaching on Jesus’ resurrection when he argues only two chapters earlier that the only true (necessary and sufficient) criterion for faith is love. (He defends this position explicitly in Romans and Galatians, as I have noted.) If faith depends on the resurrection of Jesus, why do the Hebrew Scriptures, which, we must remember, are the only biblical texts that Jesus ever knew, never explicitly mention the idea of resurrection? In addition, what meaning could a literal notion of resurrection have? The critical issue that we must work through, then, is the relationship between love and the resurrection from the dead.

Paul argues for the claim that faith is futile unless there is resurrection from the dead by first linking the idea of the resurrection to the idea of creation as found in the story of Adam and Eve: as “death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (15.21-22). We have seen how death came through Adam: the man whom Paul later calls the “first Adam” was expelled from the world in which human beings have no knowledge of good and evil into the world of “the living,” where he is conscious of himself as a spiritual and mortal being (Paul later refers to the spiritual man as the “second Adam” in verses 45-47). I shall not here repeat the argument that I presented earlier of how the story of the expulsion from Eden

retells in a different narrative the story of the creation of the world by God. What is important to note at this point is that the resurrection in Christ is like the death of Adam – it is like the realization, in the light of moral knowledge, that human beings die – as depicted in the story of the expulsion.

Having bound the resurrection from the dead to the creation of the world by connecting the idea of the resurrection to the idea of Adam's expulsion, Paul next binds the resurrection to the kingdom of God. He writes in verses 22-28 that the resurrection of Christ, in whom all who belong will be made alive, points to a time in which every ruler, every authority, and every power in the world will have been destroyed. We have seen in 1 Cor. 1.18-29 that "the world," according to Paul, is the world of the Jews under Roman rule, the world whose wisdom lies in natural power, high rank, and noble birth. (It is the world against which, Jesus says in John 7.7, he has come to testify and whose destruction, I have noted, is foretold in Revelation.) Paul says that after every ruler, authority, and power have been destroyed, death itself will have been destroyed. He is careful to note, however, that to destroy every power, authority, and ruler does not mean that there is no longer any power, authority, or ruler. Rather, Paul says that the sole authority that is left after every ruler, authority, and power has been destroyed is God. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death ... so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15.26-28). The world in which God is all in all, and so is not here (and not there) or there (and not here), is the kingdom of God.

How are we to understand the idea that in the resurrection, in the kingdom of God, death itself is destroyed? Has not Paul just spoken about the resurrection as

a new creation, i.e., as the expulsion *from* the world in which death does not exist? If the resurrection, life in Christ, is like the expulsion (for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive), and if it is in the expulsion that human beings become conscious of their existence and of death, then how can death be destroyed in the resurrection?

In verses 30-31, Paul writes, “why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day – I mean that, brothers ... .” The fact that Paul speaks of death metaphorically is crucial, because it is found within the context of an argument whose meaning is centered on the idea of death’s destruction. In fact, it is unexceptional for Paul to speak of death metaphorically. He writes in his letter to the Romans that a life of sin leads to death (6.16) and that “the wages of [or payment for] sin is death” (6.23). In this context, he contrasts the life of sin with obedience to God, which leads not to death, but to “righteousness,” “holiness,” and “eternal life.” Paul further explains in Chapter 8 of Romans that “[t]hose who live according to the sinful nature” do not have their minds set on living “in accordance with the Spirit. ... The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law” (8.5-7).<sup>110</sup> A few chapters later, he develops his analysis and indicates that sin is “dead” apart from the law. It is the truth of the law that reveals sin to be sin and that, because it brings life, brings death. Outside of the law, there is neither life nor death, neither righteousness nor sin, neither good nor evil.

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. Galatians 5.16-23, where Paul writes that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” and those who are alive in Christ “have crucified the sinful nature [and] its passions and desires” (5.22-24).

*I would not have known what sin was except through the law ... . For apart from [the] law, sin is dead. Once I was alive [dead] apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died [lived]. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ... So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful (7.7-11, emphasis added).*

In this extraordinary passage Paul contrasts death not with biological life, i.e., being “alive apart from the law,” but with the life of holiness, righteousness, and goodness, in which sin is “recognized as sin.” (Paul invokes the distinction between death as perishing apart from the law [through sin that is not recognized as sin] and death as perishing under the law [through sin that is recognized as sin] in Romans 2.12, as pointed out earlier.) In Romans 7.24 Paul cries, “[w]hat a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” The implication is clear: one is rescued from the body of death – one is resurrected – when one no longer lives apart from the law or in sin under the law but in love.<sup>111</sup>

Let us return to 1 Corinthians. Having fastened the idea of the resurrection from the dead to the expulsion of Adam and then to the kingdom of God in which death has been destroyed, Paul indicates that death is the condition for the true life: “[w]hat you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Cor. 15.36). (Jesus teaches in John 12.24 that “unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it

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<sup>111</sup> 1 John 3.14-15 plainly supports this reading: “[w]e know that *we have passed from death to life*, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother ... [does not have] eternal life in him” (3.14-15, emphasis added). See also James 5.19-20: “[m]y brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: [w]hoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”

remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”) Given that Paul on several occasions refers to the sinful life, the life that is separated from Christ, as death, could it be that Paul is arguing that obedience to God, the true and resurrected life, must involve the recognition of sin but also the overcoming of sin through repentance? Can true life exist outside of repentance? Have we not just seen, rather, that it cannot exist except through the law and, therefore, with death? Is it not for this reason that Jesus is able to heal those who are blind but not those who see, for he cannot heal where there is no faith? It is important to remember what Jesus teaches in John 3.5-6: no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of both nature (the flesh) and Spirit. If sin is the life in which human beings allow their decisions to be determined by nature, but if there is no kingdom of God outside of nature (the resurrection and the life [in Christ] are always of embodied persons), then it has to follow that there is no kingdom of God that does not involve the freedom to sin. There is no true freedom in evil; but there is no true freedom without the freedom to do evil. For what it means to do good, recalling Deuteronomy, is to know evil but to “choose life” (30.15-20).<sup>112</sup> True life is never without repentance because it is never without the freedom to sin. It is for this reason, we have seen, that Jesus calls upon the sinners, who acknowledge

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<sup>112</sup> In Deuteronomy, Moses says to the Israelites: “I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live ... . But if your heart *turns away* and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and to worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. ... I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. *For the Lord is your life*” (Deut. 30.15-20, emphasis added). The fact that Moses connects “death and destruction” to the heart that “turns away” from God implies that life and prosperity belong to the repentant heart that turns, or returns, to God.

their sins and are willing to repent, and not upon the righteous, who do not acknowledge their sins and see no need to repent. For what you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

From 15.42, Paul develops an important train of ideas in which he distinguishes between the body that is sown (buried) and the body that is raised, i.e., between the dead body and the resurrected body. He writes:

[t]he body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15.42-44).

The dead body is perishable, weak, and natural. The resurrected body is imperishable, powerful, and spiritual. If what is sown does not come to life unless it dies, as is surely the lesson of the story of Adam and Eve, then the imperishable body, the body that is raised in glory, must die. It would not be meaningful to read Paul as claiming that the body that is raised does not die, although it “comes to life” because it dies; for he has already indicated that we are to interpret the resurrection “as” death in Adam, the Adam that is not merely natural but also spiritual because he comprehends that he dies (15.21-22).

The ideas that Paul is defending here are, at least on the surface, unnatural and counter-intuitive. We would expect to hear that perishable things, things that perish, die and that imperishable things, things that do not perish, do not die. What Paul communicates, however, is that imperishable bodies, or spiritual bodies, die and that perishable bodies, or physical bodies, do not die. At this point in his argument, Paul again interlocks the idea of resurrection with the idea of the

expulsion from Eden. He says that the physical body is the first Adam and that the raised, resurrected, or spiritual body is the second Adam. The first Adam is a “living being” but he is not a “life-giving” spirit (15.45). (He is a “natural” being “of the dust of the earth” who views his life in the contradictory appearances of nature.) The second, resurrected Adam, the Adam who has, one might say, “fallen” into knowledge of sin and death, is a life-giving spirit “from heaven” (15.46-47). The spiritual body that is raised in power and glory, the body that is understood in the light of the knowledge of good and evil, is the body that is viewed not as mere dust but as sacred, as what Paul refers to earlier in 1 Corinthians as “God’s temple” (3.16-17).

Next, Paul transitions from discussing the contrast between the first Adam and the second Adam to discussing the present condition of those who accept Christ. He indicates to the Corinthians that, as all of them “*have borne*” the likeness of the earthly man, “so *shall we* bear the likeness of the man from heaven” (15.49, emphasis added). This expression is curious. Paul positions those who accept Christ as *between* the first Adam and the second Adam: the first Adam is of the past and the second Adam is of the future. Thus, while Paul argues that Christ resurrected (i.e., those who are resurrected in Christ) has the same status as the fallen Adam – which implies that resurrection from the dead is won through the labor and toil of the life-giving spirit – Paul avoids describing his own struggle (and that of his fellow men) in the likeness of the fallen Adam (the resurrected Christ). The reason for this is perhaps due to the fact that life within the Roman Empire

bears no relationship to the ideal world that he envisions in the kingdom of God.

Thus, he speaks of the resurrection as a future time.

The resurrection from the dead, Paul continues, is a kind of change:

the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.  
For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and  
the mortal with immortality (15.52-53).

Note that Paul does not separate the spiritual body from the physical body. The spiritual body is the physical body that is clothed, viewed, or seen in the light of what Paul here calls “immortality.” To clothe the body with immortality cannot be to view the body as immortal because, again, the immortality of which Paul is speaking belongs to the second Adam who *has been banished forever from eating of the tree of immortality*. When Paul indicates that the imperishable body is the perishable body that has put on immortality, he seems to be speaking in the same sense that Jesus speaks of “eternal life” in the Gospels. Immortality is life that overcomes death (sin) through repentance. It is life in the kingdom of heaven where God is all in all.

Having linked the idea of the resurrection of the dead to the ideas of creation, the kingdom of God, the spiritual body, and immortality – and having done so within the broader context of defending love as the essence of the law and as the criterion for true faith in God – Paul then indicates again, in the closing remarks of his argument, that what the resurrection of Christ means, what it means to be resurrected in Christ, is to overcome *not the body but sin*. He cites the Hebrew Scriptures to support his position:



[w]hen the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' [Is. 25.8] 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' [Hos. 13.14] The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15.54-56).

What, then, does it mean for the physical body to become a spiritual body, for the perishable body to become imperishable, and for the mortal body to put on immortality? What does the resurrection from the dead mean? It means to swallow up death. What does it mean to swallow up death? Paul writes that the sting of death is sin; this means that death comes from sin, or that sin brings death. Thus, to swallow up death means to overcome sin. The paradox is that, in order for one to overcome one's sins, one must acknowledge them, for those who do not know the law do not transgress the law (Rom. 4.15).

Consequently, when Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians that faith is futile and that one is trapped in sin if there is no resurrection from the dead, he re-expresses his fundamental insight that, without love, faith is nothing. The resurrection from the dead is the resurrection of the living, through repentance, into true life.

Oscar Cullmann argues in his essay "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament"<sup>113</sup> that the idea of the resurrection in the New Testament rests on ideas of the human being, the body, creation, death, and eternal life that are alien to the ancient Greeks. He writes that in Greek thought, "the material, the bodily, the corporeal is bad and must be

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<sup>113</sup> London: The Epworth Press, 1958. The essay is available online at [http://www.jbburnett.com/resources/cullmann\\_immort-res.pdf](http://www.jbburnett.com/resources/cullmann_immort-res.pdf)

destroyed, so that the death of the body would not be in any sense the destruction of the true life.” In the Christian (and Jewish) conception, however, “the life of our body is true life” (pp. 26, 30). “The contrast, for the Christian, is not between the body and the soul,” Cullmann continues, but between the “creation” of “death by sin and new creation,” a distinction that “is not Greek, but is connected with Jewish conceptions” (p. 31).

Cullmann observes that the New Testament uses the same terms as the Greek philosophers when speaking about soul, body, spirit, and flesh.

But [these terms] mean something quite different, and we understand the whole New Testament amiss when we construe these concepts only from the point of view of Greek thought ... . The contrast with the Greek soul is clear: it is precisely apart from the body that the Greek soul attains to full development of its life. According to the Christian view, however, it is the inner man’s very nature which demands the body (pp. 32-33).

Thus, Cullmann writes that the resurrection of the body

is not a transition from this world to another world, as is the case of the immortal soul freed from the body; rather, it is the transition from the present age to the future. It is tied to the whole process of redemption. Because there is sin there must be a process of redemption enacted in time. Where sin is regarded as the source of death’s lordship over God’s creation, there this sin and death must be vanquished together, and there the Holy Spirit, the only power able to conquer death, must win all creatures back to life in a continuous process (p. 38).

I have not discussed directly the idea of redemption, but the meaning of the above passage would be perfectly intact if we substitute “repentance” for “redemption” (both repentance and redemption imply the effort to seek deliverance from, or atonement for, past sins by returning to God). Cullmann’s insight is that the

resurrection from the dead is not the separation of the body from the soul, but the continuous process to live “not as fleshly bodies but as spiritual bodies,” i.e., insofar as the “flesh” is conceived as “the power of death” (p. 46).<sup>114</sup> The “essence” of the Christian faith, Cullmann writes, is living and thinking in the “chronological tension between ‘already fulfilled’ and ‘not yet consummated’” (p. 43). (It seems to be for this reason, again, that Paul locates the time of resurrection [fulfillment] in the future.) To be faithful means to live in the glowing embers of real time, always reaching for the beyond in one’s midst: holiness and perfection. So it is that “[w]e are already in the state of resurrection, that of eternal life – not immortality of the soul” (p. 35).

The fundamental ground of the core biblical ideas that I have discussed in this chapter, each of which implies the others, is the consciousness that human beings are ends in themselves and, therefore, that we are obligated to treat others as we would want to be treated. This moral self-consciousness marks an absolute departure from pagan teleology, an insight that I have shown is defended in the work of Cahill, Cullmann, Fromm, and Polka, not to mention the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, Paul, and the Bible’s various authors and editors.<sup>115</sup> It is only in the light of the Bible that paganism is comprehended to be ignorant of truth and of its falsification and that we see that the real problem for us moderns is not seeking the

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<sup>114</sup> In Galatians 5.19-23, Paul equates “the works of the flesh” with “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.” He contrasts the works of the flesh with “the fruit of the spirit” which, as noted earlier, is “love, joy, peace ... .”

<sup>115</sup> St. Augustine, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche are rare thinkers who self-consciously position themselves within the biblical tradition, which they see is radically other than the Greek (Roman) tradition, although it is not my task to offer a substantive defense of this claim in the present work.

truth, as though it were a thing in itself that is apart from us, but willing the truth by being truthful to ourselves and others.

In the next chapter, we shall see how Kant demonstrates that the mere idea of freedom, and so of the moral law to which it is bound, is sufficient proof that reason does not conform to nature but that nature conforms to reason and that the true end of rational persons is nothing more (or less) than the good will. Insofar as we fail to distinguish between spirit and nature, the moral law and the law of contradiction, love and sense perception, sin and ignorance, creation and generation, miracle and chance, God and fate, eternal life and the immortality of the soul and, in sum, between biblical and teleological metaphysics, we shall mire ourselves in contradictions. The good news of the critical revolution is that we are responsible for the contradictions in which we become entangled. It is because we are responsible for these contradictions that they are not necessary and that we are therefore able, and, indeed, obligated, to account for them and address them.

## Chapter 4: Kant's Critical Revolution: Human Beings are Ends in Themselves

Kant demonstrates in his transcendental philosophy that the first principles of modern thought and existence are rooted in the biblical idea of freedom and that the basis of truth is not formal logic and natural perception but the moral law that human beings are ends in themselves. In Chapter 2 I argued that logic and perception are the first principles of ancient Greek teleology because human beings are trapped in the excluded middle of dependent opposites: they are in contradiction with their essence and are thus dependent on being contradicted. In Chapter 3 I showed that core ideas in the Bible – love, sin, idolatry, repentance, creation, God, covenant, miracle, eternity, the kingdom of God, and the resurrection from the dead – are not teleological. Rather, they affirm that the power, freedom, and dignity of human beings are adequately expressed only when we fulfill our moral responsibilities and obligations. What Kant shows in the texts that are central to his critical philosophy is that thought and existence in the modern world are necessarily related, which is proof that we envelop the contradictions in our lives because it is we who create and sustain them when we think that we cannot will our existence and so do not treat ourselves and others as ends. Kant shows in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,<sup>116</sup> the *Critique of Practical Reason*,<sup>117</sup> the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*,<sup>118</sup> and *Religion within*

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<sup>116</sup> In *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Alan W. Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>117</sup> In *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*. Translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

*the Boundaries of Mere Reason*,<sup>119</sup> to which one might also add “Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History,”<sup>120</sup> and the *Opus Postumum*,<sup>121</sup> that human beings are the beginning(s) and end(s) of all things.

In the first *Critique* Kant maintains that the purpose of his critical project is to put an end to the seemingly interminable controversies of metaphysics and to set metaphysics on a secure path, once and for all. The central question with which he is occupied, he writes, is: how are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible? (B 19) He makes two distinctions that are central to comprehending this question: first, the distinction between “analytic” and “synthetic” propositions or judgments; second, the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* propositions or judgments. In analytic judgments, the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject; what is said about the subject can be deduced from the logical analysis of its concept, i.e., through the principle of contradiction. The claim that “all bodies are extended,” for example, is an analytic judgment because the concept of extension is contained in the concept of a body. In contrast, a “synthetic” judgment refers to a relationship between the subject and predicate that falls outside the limits of formal logic; explication of the concept through the principle of contradiction will not yield the

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<sup>118</sup> In *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*.

<sup>119</sup> In *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy: Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason And Other Writings*. Edited by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

<sup>120</sup> In *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought: Kant: Political Writings*. Second edition. Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Edited by H. S. Reiss. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

<sup>121</sup> Edited by Eckart Förster. Translated by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

predicate (A 6/B 10 - A 9/B 13).<sup>122</sup> For instance, the judgment that “all bodies have weight” is synthetic because the concept “body” does not contain “weight” (“weight” concerns the gravitational force between bodies and is affected by the masses of these bodies and by the distance between them). Thus, while it is a contradiction to speak of a body that is not extended, it is not a contradiction to speak of a body that is weightless.<sup>123</sup> Concerning the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, Kant argues that *a priori* judgments are universal, necessary, and, therefore, independent of experience. “Necessity and strict universality are ... secure indications of an *a priori* cognition, and also belong together inseparably” (B 4). Experience can never establish necessity; it tells us what is, not what (it) is, and certainly not that it *must* be so, and not otherwise (A 1). Thus, *a posteriori* judgments contrast with *a priori* judgments because they refer to what is empirical and contingent, i.e., to what is but may not be.

We shall see that to explore how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible is to search for the nature of what in thought and existence falls beyond the reach of both logic (the analytic *a priori*) and possible experience (the synthetic *a posteriori*) and provides the grounds of both *a priori* knowledge of nature, and so of the sciences, and of *a priori* truth in moral life. These grounds are the proper “objects” of meta-physics: freedom, immortality, God ... . Kant does not ask *if* knowledge or

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<sup>122</sup> In developing the idea of “synthetic” judgments, Kant distinguishes himself from Leibniz and his followers who hold that the predicate is always contained in the concept of the subject and that the connection between the predicate and the subject is either self-evident or apprehended through logical analysis of the subject-concept.

<sup>123</sup> “Analytic” and “synthetic” merely describe the nature of the relationship between the subject and the predicate in a judgment. They suggest nothing about whether the judgment is true or false, as we shall see.

morality is possible; he does not reason to existence, i.e., teleologically, but from existence, i.e., from its necessary presuppositions or “transcendental conditions.” The question of *how* synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible is the question of how creation is possible. It is the question of how the necessary relationship between thought and existence – that which cannot be thought except as existing and cannot exist except in/as thought: God, freedom, immortality ... – is to be comprehended and lived.

Kant writes that, in the time of the ancient Greeks, metaphysics was hailed as the “queen of all the sciences” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A viii). (Aristotle, we have seen, gives it the name “First Philosophy” because its object is the first and final cause of all things.) In the modern world, however, metaphysics wins rebuke and scorn for its groundless pretensions, and deservedly so. Kant likens it to a “battlefield” of “mock combat” in which “no combatant has ever gained the least bit of ground, nor has any been able to base any lasting possession on his victory.” There is “no doubt that up to now the procedure of metaphysics has been a mere groping, and what is the worst, a groping among mere concepts” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xv). The reason for the precipitous fall in the reputation of metaphysics is, according to Kant, the revelation of Christianity, the “pure religion of reason” in which the moral perfection of human being, “*humanity*,” is extolled as “the end of creation” (*Religion*, 6:60). Before Kant establishes that synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible only in light of a biblical framework, however, he first proceeds to determine the limits of formal logic and of possible experience, the latter of which is limited to the field of natural perception in space and time. For he



wants to show that we cannot think existence in terms of logic and possible experience (perception, nature) in order to establish that the meaning of all nature – formal, material, inner, and outer – is determined by the human mind (will, reason, thought). It is only when we grasp this fundamental truth that we shall be in a proper position to prevent ourselves from confusing nature and freedom, to recognize the problems that emerge when we do confuse nature and freedom, to hold ourselves responsible and accountable for these problems, and to correct them. Kant's critical revolution of idolatrous metaphysics, i.e., of the metaphysics that proceeds in contradiction with its synthetic *a priori* transcendental conditions, rests upon the insight that the human being is (created in) the image of God, not nature. Thus, the mind must not conform itself to nature but must make nature conform to it (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xvi).

The main problem of the first *Critique* is to determine how synthetic *a priori* "knowledge" of nature is possible. To answer this question Kant resolves to demonstrate how Aristotelian logic and inner and outer perception must be confined within fixed limits *so that he can establish that logic and perception are not sufficient conditions for synthetic a priori knowledge of nature and that such knowledge presupposes a moral world that is unknowable in terms of logic and sense*. The investigations in the first *Critique* are aimed from the beginning at clearing the way for the investigation of a "transcendental" world. Kant writes in the second Preface:

I had to deny **knowledge** in order to make room for **faith**; and the dogmatism of metaphysics, i.e., the prejudice that without criticism [of its own powers] reason can make progress in

metaphysics, is the true source of all unbelief conflicting with morality (B xxx).

The German word that Kant uses for “deny” is *aufheben* – which means to cancel in order to reappropriate. When Kant writes, “Ich mußte also das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen ...” he means that it is only when we limit logic and possible experience to the adequacy of their concepts that we can protect them from being misunderstood and misemployed and thus have faith (or belief) in them.<sup>124</sup> To establish their limits is to secure their meaning and validity; it is, we shall see, the first step in establishing that, although human existence is unknowable within the perimeters of teleological cognition, it is not thinkable without logic and perception.

It is primarily in the second *Critique*, the *Groundwork*, and *Religion* that we see the fulfilled vision of Kant’s project: the demonstration that human beings are ends in themselves and, therefore, that logic and knowledge have no worth *at all* unless they are employed for moral purposes in the service of humankind. Reason is not logic or sense perception and its highest end is not scientific (“theoretical” or “speculative”) knowledge but, rather, moral “practice”: it is the fulfilment of one’s moral obligations to oneself, others, and God. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in the section entitled “On the Primacy of Pure Practical Reason in its Connection with Speculative Reason,” Kant argues that practical reason is

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<sup>124</sup> I quote the German from Fred Seddon’s essay, “Kant on Faith,” p. 190 (in *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 7, no. 1. Fall 2005: 189-202). Seddon argues against the objectivists who, in falsely opposing faith and knowledge, accuse Kant of subordinating the real “facts” of perceptual observation to a faith that is “without evidence or proof” and contrary to both the senses and reason.

“the first determining ground” of theoretical reason; it is the self-determining basis for connecting “the interest[s] of all the powers of the mind ... with respect to the final and complete end” (5:119-120). One “cannot require pure practical reason to be subordinate to speculative reason and so reverse the order, since *all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone*” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:121, emphasis added).<sup>125</sup>

Let us now discuss Kant’s acute insights into the nature, function and limits of logic as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Logic is subsumed under the analytic *a priori*; it is a closed and complete system that articulates the purely formal rules of thought: concerning object A, A cannot be not-A, A = A, and something is either A or not-A. Logic cannot go further than what follows from the laws of contradiction, identity, and the excluded middle. Indeed, the *reason* that it has never had to retrace a single step, Kant writes, is precisely because it has never advanced a single step.

That from the earliest times **logic** has travelled [a] secure course can be seen from the fact that since the time of Aristotle it has not had to go a single step backwards ... . What is further remarkable about logic is that ... it has also

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<sup>125</sup> The thesis that, for Kant, theoretical reason is, first and last, practical, is defended by Richard Velkley in his study, *Freedom and the End of Reason: On the Moral Foundation of Kant’s Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989). Velkley argues that theoretical investigations would be useless without the practical ends that they presuppose (p. 40) and that the true function of acquiring theoretical knowledge is defending the rights of humanity (pp. 6, 28, 114 and 115). Although Velkley does not provide any sustained analysis of the relationship among transcendental philosophy, biblical thought, and Greek metaphysics, he does argue that the “revolution in the meaning” expressed in Kant’s account of reason “is summed up in the fact that morality or practice becomes the true ‘organon’” and is “the correction of the error of all ... culture” that “look[s] to nature for the teleological determination of human reason” (pp. 114, 117). The criticism of “the most basic of ancient premises – that nature ... gives reason its end [–]” is “entirely different from any ‘theoretical’ enterprise of the past” (p. 151).

been unable to take a single step forward, and therefore seems to all appearance to be finished and complete. ... [L]ogic is the science that exhaustively presents and strictly proves nothing but the formal rules of all thinking ... . For the advantage that has made it so successful logic has solely its own limitation to thank, since it ... is indeed obliged to abstract ... from all objects of cognition and all the distinctions between them (B viii - B ix).

Consider what Kant has said: *in more than two thousand years, the proper application of logic has not produced even one insight*. Logic determines whether ideas contradict *one another*; it cannot determine whether these ideas are *true*, which is a synthetic *a priori* enterprise and “is a problem with which general [formal] logic has nothing to do” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 154/B 193). Reason, when confined to its analytic use, is not able to judge its own judgments but only to determine whether or not they are formally consistent. The sole criterion for the validity of analytic thought is formal logic. Thus, Kant writes that, while

[t]o **cognize** an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility ... I can **think** whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought ... . But in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept (real possibility, for the first sort of possibility was merely logical) something more is required (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxvi [ft.]).

Kant then anticipates that the “something more” outside of logic that is required for the cognition of an object may lie in practical sources that are beyond the theoretical sphere.

The principle of contradiction thus counts “as the universal and completely sufficient principle of all analytic cognition.” It is “inviolable” insofar as “no cognition can be opposed to it without annihilating itself.” However, it annihilates

itself when it is viewed as the sufficient condition and “determining ground of the truth of our cognition” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 151-152/B 191). For “the error that concerns not form but content cannot be discovered by any touchstone of logic” and “nobody can dare to judge of objects and ... assert anything about them merely with logic without having drawn on antecedently well-founded information about them from outside of logic” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 60/B 84-85).

In the ancient world, Kant observes, logic was not employed merely as a canon; it was the *criterion* for truth. Kant gives the name “dialectic” to this use of logic as a “putative organon” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 61/B 85). For Plato, “dialectic” is the teleological search for the end in itself (form) through the logical discourse of appearances (e.g., *Republic* 532a-533d). It is what Kant calls the “airless space” in which Plato met no resistance and “made no headway” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 5/B 9). Kant appropriates the designation “dialectic” from the ancients and employs it in a sense of which the ancients could not have conceived. He writes that

[a]s different as the significance of the employment of this designation of a science or art among the ancients may have been, one can still infer from their actual use of it that among them it was nothing other than the **logic of illusion** – a sophisticated art for giving to its ignorance, indeed even to its intentional tricks, the air of truth, by imitating the method of thoroughness, which logic prescribes in general, and using its topics for the embellishment of every empty pretension. Now one can take it as a certain and useful warning that general logic, **considered as an organon**, is always a logic of illusion, i.e., is dialectical. For since it teaches us nothing at all about the content of cognition ... the effrontery of using it as a tool (organon) for an expansion and extension of its information, or at least the pretension of so doing, comes down to nothing but idle chatter, asserting or impeaching whatever one wants with

[the appearance of] some plausibility. Such instruction by no means befits the dignity of philosophy (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 61-62/B 85-86).

In this passage Kant does not distinguish among (1) the unintentional dialectic of reason (what Kant calls “transcendental illusion”), (2) the irresponsible dialectic of reason (biblical idolatry, or what Kant designates as heteronomy of will), and (3) ignorance, in which thought reflects its fatal opposition to existence. Kant does grasp here, however, that the thoroughness that we find in ancient pagan thought is anchored in logic and has *no content* at all from the standpoint of moral reason. There is no critical judgment, creative insight, fruitful labor, or real import in pagan thought: *there is no meaning* in it and that is why it amounts, in the end, to *nothing but idle chatter*.

Kant’s insights into the limits of possible, perceptible, or natural experience in the first *Critique* can, for our purposes, be summarized in three main points. First, Kant shows that possible experience – and hence knowledge of objects of possible experience – necessarily presupposes two distinct contents: sense perception (or what Kant calls our “outer” and “inner” “intuitions” in natural space and time) and “pure concepts of the understanding” (or “categories” through which our intuitions can be conceptualized in the logical form of judgments). Without sense-data, no object can be given; without the categories, no intuition can be conceptualized. “Neither of these properties is to be preferred to the other,” he writes;

[t]houghts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind’s concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in

intuition) as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts). Further, these two faculties or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only from their unification can [empirical] cognition arise. But on this account one must not mix up their roles, rather one has great cause to separate them carefully from each other and distinguish them (A 51-52/B 75-76).

If a judgment is made about an object of possible experience that has no corresponding sense-intuition, the judgment is meaningless. It is a judgment that is without content, i.e., the mere logical form of a judgment. Logical judgments assert something about the quantity, quality, relation, and modality of the connection between the subject and predicate, but this is not sufficient for them to have “objective validity,” i.e., meaningful application to possible empirical objects. In the first two Antinomies of theoretical reason, Kant demonstrates that it is fruitless to debate whether the natural world did or did not come into being (the First Antinomy), whether all composite things are or are not infinitely divisible (the Second Antinomy), or, in principle, any proposition about objects of possible experience that extend beyond the horizon of possible sense-intuitions. Both the thesis and antithesis are dialectical assertions that defy possible verification. For we can never arrive at an intuition, or a collection of intuitions, that will not call for further investigative regress in our search for ever more remote causes in time, ever smaller particles in space, etc. in our search for a first beginning or primary substance. The victor in the “dialectical battlefield” of opposing logical positions, Kant sees, is the fighter who attacks first and compels the opponent to assume a position that he must defend (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 422-423/B 450). Each

opponent, however, can show that the ground of his opponent's argument in fact leads to conclusions that contradict the conclusions at which he has arrived, and this because, Kant sees, the compass of logic, when undisciplined by reason, points in all directions. Nothing is gained in this rhetorical battle. The law of contradiction here serves only to "increase our ignorance, removing one inconceivability only to replace it with another, taking us out of one obscurity only to plunge us into a still greater one" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 485/B 513). It is not true, consequently, that, of two assertions that contradict one another, one must be true and the other false, as the law of the excluded middle might appear to suggest: both positions could be equally groundless.<sup>126</sup>

The reason that it must be possible to have empirical intuitions that support objectively valid empirical judgments is that these judgments are about a world whose objects are possible empirical intuitions. It is non-sense to talk about sense through terms that can never refer to objects that can be perceived through the senses. The empirical world is not governed by the principle of contradiction; it is the realm of what Kant calls real appearance. There can be no content in

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<sup>126</sup> Leibniz writes in "The Nature of Truth" that the solid rock, firm foundation, and Archimedean point for all investigations that aim at truth is the principle that "*every proposition is either true or false*" (p. 93). (All citations from Leibniz in this chapter have been taken from *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*. Edited by G. H. R. Parkinson. Translated by Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1990.) Kant addresses the error of Leibniz' position in his resolution to the theoretical antinomies, where he demonstrates that dialectical antinomies are neither true nor untrue. His position does not violate the excluded middle. In fact, it shows that the excluded middle is inviolable, but only from a rational standpoint. It is only when the principle of contradiction is used as an organon that dialectical antinomies are sure to erupt. From the standpoint of reason, it would violate the excluded middle to claim that dialectical assertions both are and are not meaningless. The claim that dialectical assertions cannot be either affirmed or denied and that they are therefore meaningless does not violate the excluded middle; it protects the role of logic as a negative touchstone for truth, but, again, only in its rational employment.



empirical judgments about which one has “neither hope for confirmation in experience nor fear [of] refutation by it” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 421/B 449).

The second important point that Kant makes in setting forth the limits of knowledge is contained in the first two Analogies of Experience. Here, Kant shows that, in the world of finite objects within the space and time of nature, there is no creation; nothing comes from nothing. In the First Analogy, on the “Principle of the Permanence of Substance,” Kant argues that, in all objective changes that appear in space and time, “substance persists, and its quantum is neither increased nor diminished” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 182/B 224). Kant identifies this “substance” with matter (A 185/B 228).<sup>127</sup> In order to distinguish between, on the one hand, different apprehensions of different objects in space and time and, on the other hand, different apprehensions of the same object, there must be “something lasting and persisting” on the basis of which change is “nothing but so many ways ... in which that which persists exists” (A 182/B 226). It is only on the basis of this presupposition that duration, as a mode of time, can have meaning; for duration is nothing but the persistence of substance through successive moments in time. Again, all change in outer appearance is a mode of that in existence which lasts and persists (A 183/B 227). This principle, which bears a close resemblance to the Law of the Conservation of Energy, restricts the meaning of change in the world of nature to alteration of the same substance and denies to

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<sup>127</sup> In the First Analogy, Kant distinguishes his own position from the “dogmatic idealism” of Berkeley. Berkeley rejects the existence of corporeal matter as a meaningless “abstract idea.” The consequence is that he falls into a pit of mysticism and abstraction: natural phenomena are reduced to the *fiat* of the incomprehensible will of God. See Part 1, Sections 20, 21, 35, 47, 50, 151 and 152 of *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (in *George Berkeley: Philosophical Works*. Edited by M. R. Ayers. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1992).

nature “origination out of nothing” (A 206/B 251). The latter belongs solely to the power of freedom. There is no will in nature, and nature has no power to create anything out of itself or to annihilate itself: “[n]othing comes out of nothing, and nothing can revert into nothing” (A 186/B 229, ft. b). The proof offered in the First Analogy is defended systematically in the Third Antinomy of theoretical reason, wherein Kant accepts both the thesis and the antithesis (unlike the first two antinomies). There, Kant demonstrates that it is true both that freedom is the cause of itself and the ground for the explanation of natural causality and that “[t]here is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 444-445/B 472-473 - A 451/B 479).

The First Analogy leads directly to the Second Analogy: “[a]ll alterations occur in accordance with the law of the connection of cause and effect” (B 232). In this section, Kant demonstrates that the very existence of an object in nature depends on the principle of causality (A 199/B 244). For its concept involves its specific causal connection with other objects. The concept of “ice,” for example, expresses the consciousness not that water *might* freeze, but that it *must* freeze, below a certain temperature; the concept is bound to its objective validity. Further, conformity with the principle of causality is the standard for distinguishing between dreams, whose appearances follow no particular order in time, and empirical events, in which the objective connection between causes and effects in time cannot be otherwise conceived. The very concept of a dream presupposes the causal principle to which it does not conform. It is because science, whose object

is the objective determinations of substance, recognizes causality as *a priori* that it has been able to secure *a priori* knowledge. The proof that science has *a priori* knowledge is (the idea of) its existence.

The first two Analogies have a direct bearing on Kant's hermeneutical approach to the Bible. The fact that nature is determination of substance through the principle of causality means that there are no miracles in nature and, therefore, that the miracles found throughout the biblical narratives, together with ideas such as God, creation, and resurrection, must be interpreted in a manner that is compatible with the principle of natural causality if they are to have meaning. The important question to consider in thinking about whether miracles can happen is not whether they are large, small, frequent, or infrequent but, rather, whether they violate the laws of nature: "either miracles are to be admitted as *daily*," Kant argues, "or *never*" (*Religion*, 6:86). In fact, it would take only one miracle for reason as a whole, in both its theoretical and practical employment, to collapse. "When reason is deprived of the laws of nature, it no longer is of any use in the resulting magical world, not even for moral employment," Kant writes, "for we no longer know whether, unbeknown to us, changes have occurred in our very moral incentives due to miracles" that have been produced by "some other obscure cause" (*Religion*, 6:88-89). His essential point is that if miracles were possible, human beings could not be ends in themselves. Although people might claim to believe in the miracles of old, he observes, they are unwilling to accept miracles in modern times; this contradiction betrays their true judgment.

Kant's third and most burdened insight in establishing the limits of perceptible experience, i.e., inner and outer nature, is expressed in and through his doctrine of "transcendental idealism." The central principle in transcendental idealism is that objects of possible experience are representations only; they are not things in themselves. To empirical representations Kant gives the name "appearances" or "phenomena"; to things in themselves, "noumena." In the first *Critique*, the idea of noumena serves, for the most part, as a limiting-idea; the thing in itself is conceived negatively, i.e., as "an unknown something" (A 256/B 312). It is the ground of objects that appear but it cannot itself appear; the idea of it restricts intuitions and categories to the empirical world and blocks their application to the transcendental world that necessarily lies beyond nature (A 254-255/B 310-311). In the *Groundwork* and second *Critique* Kant develops a positive account of this unknown something as rational (moral) self-consciousness, which, in the second *Critique*, he explicates in terms of the Christian conception of the relationship between freedom and God in the time of "immortality" (or eternal life). Kant thus takes the notion of the thing in itself, which for Plato and Aristotle is opposed to thought, and he applies it to the human being, who is an end in himself and not a means to an end. Thus, the ideas of both appearance and the thing in itself as found in Kant bear no relationship to the notions of appearance and the thing in itself as found in Plato and Aristotle. This, I suspect, is the main reason that Kant appropriates these terms; in true biblical spirit he wants to assign to them a meaning that is unthinkable from the standpoint of pagan antiquity precisely to

show that modern thought is founded on biblical principles, which are not teleological.<sup>128</sup>

In transcendental idealism, space, time, and the pure concepts are synthetic *a priori* conditions for possible experience: space and time are “forms” of our sensibility and the categories are “forms” of our understanding. There is no question that, for Kant, nature is objectively real. The reason that he maintains that space, time, and the pure concepts inhere “in us” and belong to the “subjective constitution of our mind” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A23/B 37-38, A 129) is to communicate that objective reality is an idea of the mind. For the concept of nature, and of its reality, is not natural: nature has no concept of itself. This means that spatiotemporal reality must be created. The reason that the sciences have acquired knowledge of nature and are on a secure path, Kant

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<sup>128</sup> T.K. Seung argues in his book *Kant: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007) the conventional position that, for Kant, the noumenal is transcendent of the mind and cannot be thought. Seung cannot explain, then, why Kant interlocks the idea of the noumena to freedom in his practical philosophy, for “noumena are ensconced beyond space and time. If the noumenal aspect of human beings is unknowable, there is no reason to say that it is free” (p. 98).

The reason that the thing in itself cannot be known, i.e., as an appearance of nature, is that it is not an effect of empirical causes. That by which I know, the determining self, cannot be known in the same manner as that which I know, the determinable object (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A402). Kant’s clearest expositions of the two standpoints from which a human being must be regarded, i.e., as an appearance and as a thing in itself, are found in the discussion and resolution of the Third Antinomy in the first *Critique* and in Section 3 of the *Groundwork*. In the former, Kant writes that “[i]n respect of what happens, one can think of causality in only two ways: either according to **nature** or from **freedom**. The first is the connection of a state with a preceding one in the world of sense upon which that state follows according to a rule.” Freedom, however, is “the faculty of beginning a state **from itself**, the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature” (A 532/B 560-A 533/B 561). Hence, “the causality of [the human] being” is grasped “in two aspects”: as determined in the world of sense and “as **intelligible in its action** as a thing in itself” which “is not itself appearance” (A 538/B 566-A 539/B 567). In the *Groundwork*, Kant links the thing in itself with the “pure activity” (or “self-activity”) of the “ego” through which “a human being distinguishes himself from all other things, even from himself insofar as he is affected by objects” (4:451-452). For Kant’s articulation of freedom as the thing in itself in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, see 5:6, 5:6 (ft.), 5:42, 5:48, 5:55, 5:94, 5:95, 5:101, and 5:114.

writes, is that its students approach nature not as passive pupils but as interrogative judges who demand evidence, evidence that must be secured through a rigorous and reliable experimental method, in order to confirm or reject their hypotheses. This approach is born from the realization that

reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design; that it must take the lead with principles for its judgments ... and compel nature to answer its questions, rather than letting nature guide its movements by keeping reason, as it were, in leading-strings; for otherwise accidental observations, made according to no previously designed plan, can never connect up into a necessary law ... . [W]hat reason would not be able to know of itself and has to learn from nature, it has to seek ... in accordance with what reason itself puts into nature. This is how natural science was first brought to the secure course of a science after groping about for so many centuries (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xiii-xiv).<sup>129</sup>

In the section entitled “Transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding,” Kant aims to reconcile the apparent contradiction between two ideas: that the pure concepts (1) originate in the mind and (2) are objectively real. The basis of his “deduction,” or justification, for holding both positions is transcendental idealism, whose ground is this absolutely fundamental principle:

[t]he **I think** must **be able** to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or at least would be nothing for me. ... Thus all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the **I think** in

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<sup>129</sup> The Copernican turn serves as an analog for Kant’s critical revolution because it broke from all teleologically-oriented notions of *what* science is, *how* science ought to proceed, and *why* science is done. Polka notes in *Truth and Interpretation* that it is not merely another “cosmic hypothesis.” Rather, it is “a revolutionary change” in which the “center of the universe” is no longer judged to be that which we see but that by which we interpret: self-consciousness – I think, therefore, I am – as the thing (end) in itself (p. 61).

the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered  
(*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 131-132).

That I must be able to think my representations in order for them to be *mine*; that what is not mine is “nothing” for me; that representations are mine *because* I can think them: these ideas indicate that the necessary relationship between thought and existence is, as Kant puts it, “the absolutely first and synthetic [*a priori*] principle of our thinking in general” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 117 [ft.]).

All intuitions are nothing for us and do not in the least concern us if they cannot be taken up into consciousness ... as a necessary condition of the possibility of all representations ... . All representations have a necessary relation to a possible empirical consciousness: for if they did not have this, and if it were entirely impossible to become conscious of them, that would be as much as to say that they did not exist at all. All empirical consciousness, however, has a necessary relation to a transcendental consciousness (preceding all particular experience), namely the consciousness of myself, as original ... . The synthetic proposition that every different empirical consciousness must be combined into a single self-consciousness is the absolutely first and synthetic principle of our thinking in general (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 116-A 117 [ft.]).

The idea that all my representations must be my representations communicates a meaning that is not analytic *a priori* but synthetic *a priori*, namely, that what nature is, *in itself*, is an idea of the “transcendental consciousness.” Nature is not a mirror in which the mind sees itself as a contradictory appearance but an idea of the mind that is conscious of itself as free (“original”). In complete opposition to pagan teleology, in the doctrine of transcendental idealism thought is held to be the horizon of existence. This means that, in order for something to be, we must create it.

The main reason that Kant invests so much labor to determine the *a priori* limits of logic and of possible experience is to show that metaphysics cannot move a single step forward if it is based on teleological cognition.<sup>130</sup> In this light, I shall now consider in some detail the metaphysician whose failure, Kant says, most impacted him: David Hume. For although Hume is famous for his *attack* on metaphysics, he represents the tradition of failed metaphysics that Kant addresses in his critical philosophy. The following pages are not a passing digression from the aim of this chapter but are of considerable consequence for three main reasons. First, a critique of Hume allows us to distinguish between Kant's critique of metaphysics and the critique that Hume offers, in which logic and sense are accorded the status of organons and lead to the very metaphysics that Hume purports to undermine. Second, it allows us to distinguish between two kinds of critique: one that proceeds in ignorance and ends in contradiction and one that recognizes, but deliberately avoids accounting for, its necessary presuppositions, thus leading to contradiction. Both critiques are fruitless, but for reasons that must not be confused with one another. Third, a critique of Hume allows us to comprehend the empiricist tradition as a variant of metaphysics that is rooted in formal logic, such as the metaphysics of Leibniz and Berkeley. It is only at this point in our work, having established that ancient Greek and biblical thought have

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<sup>130</sup> In this respect, Kant's critique of teleologically-oriented metaphysics is consistent with, and, indeed, rooted in, the biblical attack on idolatry. In "Conjectures," Kant interprets the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis as a narrative that tells of the release of the human being from natural captivity (i.e., necessary contradiction) into "*equality with all rational beings, whatever their rank ... because he could claim to be an end in himself, to be accepted as such by all others, and not to be used by anyone else simply as a means to other ends*" (p. 226). As we have seen, idolatry, as conceived in the Bible, emerges when people treat themselves and one another not as ends but as means to other ends.



utterly disparate conceptions of the human and of existence, that we are able to recognize that, how, and why the failure to distinguish between these disparate conceptions leads to catastrophic outcomes, e.g., as displayed in the pseudo-teleological metaphysics of traditional rationalism and empiricism.

Hume argues in Book 1, Part 1, Section 1 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*<sup>131</sup> that there are only two possible sources of knowledge: sense-perception (or “matters of fact”) and formal logic (or “relations of ideas”). He divides sense-perception into “impressions” and “ideas” and maintains that the “difference betwixt these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness.” Perceptions that “enter with the most force and violence, we may name *impressions*”; these include “all our sensations, passions and emotions.” Ideas are but “the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning ...” (1.1.1, p. 1). “[N]othing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas ... . To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see; all this is nothing but to perceive” (1.2.4, p. 67). In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*<sup>132</sup> Hume asserts that “[t]he most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation” (Section 2, p. 10) and that the “unbounded liberty” that one might suppose belongs to thought

is really confined within very narrow limits, and ... *all* this creative power of the mind amounts to *no more* than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or

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<sup>131</sup> Second Edition. Edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

<sup>132</sup> Second edition. Edited by Eric Steinberg. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience (Section 2, p. 11, emphasis added).

Thus, Hume argues, if we want to find the origin of an idea “we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?*” (*An Enquiry*, p. 13) Since all ideas are reducible to, and deducible from, sense impressions, there is no way to determine the source of these impressions, which must remain “unknown” (*A Treatise*, 1.1.2, p. 7). The second source of knowledge, for Hume, is logic, i.e., what is “intuitively or demonstratively certain” and “discoverable by the mere operation of thought, *without dependence on what is any where existent in the universe*” (*An Enquiry*, Section 4, Part 1, p. 15, emphasis added). Self-evident propositions cannot be false because to deny them results in a contradiction.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Leibniz develops a more complete account of relations of ideas than does Hume. In “A Specimen of Discoveries about Marvellous Secrets of Nature in General,” he writes that there are two first principles of reasoning: the principle of contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason. The latter, which is ultimately resolved into the former, holds that “every true proposition which is not known *per se* has an *a priori* proof, or, that a reason can be given for every truth ...” (p. 75). In “Primary Truths,” he asserts that “[e]ach thing is what it is’, [e]ach thing is like itself, or is equal to itself’, [n]othing is greater or less than itself – and [other propositions] of this sort ... can all be included under the one name of ‘identities’. ... All other truths are reduced to [these] primary truths by the aid of definitions – i.e. by the analysis of notions; and this constitutes a *a priori proof*, independent of experience. ... The predicate or consequent, therefore, is always in the subject or antecedent, and this constitutes the nature of truth in general ... the nature of truth ... is always, either expressly or implicitly, identical” (pp. 87-88). Since the predicate is necessarily contained in the subject, nothing in itself changes; what is, is, and cannot be other than what it is. “The complete or perfect notion of an individual substance involves all its predicates – past, present and future. For that a future predicate is future is true now, and so is contained in the notion of a thing” (p. 89). Or again, “from the notion of any given thing all its future states already follow” (p. 90). Leibniz has no explanation for how he knows, through the principle of contradiction (sufficient reason), that apparent contingencies are in themselves *a priori* identities that cannot be otherwise. He does not indicate a sufficient reason to account for the principle of sufficient reason outside of this very principle. For, as he asserts in “Of Universal Synthesis and Analysis,” the principle of contradiction, though the axiomatic basis of all demonstration, is itself indemonstrable (p. 14). In “An Introduction to the Secret Encyclopaedia” and “Necessary and Contingent Truths,” he is explicit in holding that, although we are “compelled to trust our senses” (“An Introduction,” p. 8), God perceives the truth in “its very notion” (“Necessary and Contingent Truths,” p. 98). There is no way for Leibniz to account for how he can know what God perceives insofar as human beings are dependent upon inquiries that proceed “to infinity” (“On Freedom,” p. 109). (All page references above refer to *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*.)

Hume does not account for, or develop a critique of, the position that the sole content of the mind is sense-impressions that arise from unknown causes and that the principle of contradiction is the sole basis for demonstrating the necessary relationship among ideas. He does not distinguish between spirit and nature but between sense and the images of sense, and between these and logic. Since, as Kant shows, left to themselves, logic is empty and the senses are blind (i.e., without judgment), Hume is trapped with “knowledge” that, because relative to the perceiver, necessarily contradicts both its appearances (to others) and its transcendent cause (what it is in itself).

Allowing himself to be led by sense and logic, Hume discovers that, because the contrary of every matter of fact can never imply a contradiction, “[*t*]hat *the sun will not rise to-morrow* is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, *that it will rise.*” If the idea that the sun will not rise tomorrow were “demonstratively false, it would imply a contradiction, and could never be distinctly conceived by the mind” (*An Enquiry*, 4.1, pp. 15-16). For this reason, every “matter of fact and existence” is

incapable of demonstration. Whatever *is* may *not be*. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction. The non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence. The proposition, which affirms it not to be, however false, is no less conceivable and intelligible, than that which affirms it to be (*An Enquiry*, 12.3, p. 113).

We see in this passage that, according to Hume, the principle of contradiction shows that the facts of real existence do not exist, i.e., that their non-existence is a clear and distinct idea. The non-existence of what “is” *is just as*

*intelligible* as its existence; it is *no less intelligible to believe that the sun will not rise tomorrow than that it will rise because its non-existence does not imply a contradiction!*<sup>134</sup> The reason that Hume does not distinguish between logical possibility and real possibility is that he has not examined their limits through moral reason, what Kant calls “absolute” or “practical” possibility. He tries to hold fast to the teleological standpoint in which existence is either relative to us and not in itself or in itself and not relative to us. He does not work through an idea of existence that is connected to our thought and that is both relative to us and in itself. He does not ask: how are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible?

Hume proceeds to demonstrate that, on the basis of logic and sense, our ideas of a real objective world, a human self, and absolute moral principles cannot be supported. He argues, first, that there is no sense-impression of a necessary connection among objects. The “law of cause and effect” expresses nothing but our common expectation that a consequent is sure to succeed an antecedent in light of our having witnessed resembling objects under resembling conditions conjoined together, time and again, in past experience. But, he contends, this

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<sup>134</sup> The position taken by Leibniz and Berkeley is indistinguishable in all essential respects from the position defended by Hume. Leibniz argues in “Necessary and Contingent Truths” that “[a]n *absolutely* necessary proposition is one which can be resolved into identical propositions, or, whose opposite implies a contradiction. ... That which lacks such necessity I call contingent, but that which implies a contradiction, or whose opposite is necessary, is called *impossible*. The rest are called *possible*” (pp. 96-97). That “this stone tends downwards when its support has been removed is not a necessary but a contingent proposition [for us]” (p.100). As with Hume, Leibniz is not able to distinguish between what is contingent and exists and what is possible and does not exist. What is, may not be.

In *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley argues that “the very notion of what is called *matter* or *corporeal substance*, involves a contradiction in it” (Part 1, Section 9, p. 79). For, if matter exists, it is impossible that we should ever come to know what it is independent of the ideas that we have of it, in which case the supposition of an external corporeal substance is necessarily contradictory. As with Hume and Leibniz, Berkeley is left with ideas (perceptions) whose ground cannot be thought.

connection is not known; it is imagined. For there is no contradiction in supposing outcomes that are different from our expectations. *A priori*, it is *just as likely* that a stone dropped from a tower will go up rather than down; a ball in motion that hits a ball at rest could lead to *any logical outcome*.

May not both these balls remain at absolute rest? May not the first ball return in a straight line, or leap off from the second in any line or direction? All these suppositions are consistent and conceivable. Why then should we give the preference to one, which is *no more consistent or conceivable than the rest*? All our reasonings *a priori* will never be able to show us any foundation for this preference (*An Enquiry*, 4.1, pp. 18-19, emphasis added).

The *reason* that we anticipate that the ball at rest will move upon impact is “*nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct ... which carries us along a certain train of ideas*” in conformity with past observation and experience.

Reason, then, “is nothing but one of the principles of nature, and derives all its force from that origin” (*A Treatise*, 1.3.16, p. 179, emphasis added).<sup>135</sup>

Hume’s assertion that it is just as conceivable and consistent to maintain that a ball at rest will remain at rest when a force is impressed upon it as it is to maintain that it will move – that, indeed, the entire body of scientific knowledge violates the principle of contradiction and is *therefore false!* – is especially surprising in light of the fact that one of the main inspirations behind Hume’s work

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<sup>135</sup> This position is perfectly consistent with the idealism of Berkeley. If we have no empirical knowledge, then the material world as we think we know it does not exist. The “objective world” is merely imagined. For Berkeley, it is a contradiction for matter that is perceived to “have any existence, out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.” To be is to be perceived: “*esse is percipi*” (*Principles of Human Knowledge*, Section 3, p. 78). It is on this logical basis that Berkeley arrives at the utterly contradictory position that the highest being is God, the unmoved mover who “actuates the whole [of nature]” and whose “existence ... *is far more evidently perceived than the existence of men*,” though God is “*unperceivable* to men of flesh and blood” (Sections 147 and 151, pp. 123, 125, emphasis added).

is the scientific revolution. (Hume refers to his own vision as a “science of man.”) (*A Treatise*, p. xvi.) The fact that, in developing a science of human nature, Hume desires to have the success of the great scientists before him, i.e., Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Bacon, and others, reveals that, while he appears to argue on teleological premises, he does not actually believe the positions that he defends.

Having denied objective reality in the world, Hume proceeds to argue that the self also does not exist. For there is no impression of the self that corresponds with an idea of the self that continues “invariably the same, thro’ the whole course of our lives; since [the idea of the] self is supposed to exist after that manner.” He recognizes that the question of what impression gives rise to the idea of the self is “*impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity.*” Still, he insists, “‘tis a question, which *must necessarily* be answer’d, if we wou’d have the idea of self pass for *clear and intelligible*. It *must* be [an] impression, that gives rise to every real idea” (*A Treatise*, 1.4.4, p. 251, emphasis added). Why is the attempt to find an impression of the idea of the self contradictory and absurd if it is based on, and follows from, the true premise that all ideas are derived from sense? Why is it necessary to answer a contradictory and absurd question? In what sense is a contradictory and absurd answer to a contradictory and absurd question clear and intelligible? Hume does not ask these questions. Instead, he chooses to follow the principle of contradiction into contradiction. When he fails to find the impression of the self, he concludes that “consequently there is no such idea” (p. 252). The idea of “personal identity” is *contrary to experience* (p. 251).

There is no way for Hume to express the position that he wants to defend.

His speech betrays him at every step:

[f]or *my* part, when *I* enter most intimately into what *I* call *myself*, *I* always stumble on some particular perception or other ... *I* never can ... observe any thing but the perception. When *my* perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am *I* insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist (emphasis added).

To someone who has a different notion of himself, Hume continues,

*I* must confess *I* can reason no longer with *him*. All *I* can allow *him* is, that *he* may be in the right as well as *I* ... . *He* may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd, which *he* calls *himself*; tho' *I* am certain there is no such principle in *me* (emphasis added).

Persons “are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (p. 252). Just as a ship is a mass of different parts and appears to remain the same when parts in it are removed and other parts are added to it during reparation, so, too, Hume asserts, a man (himself included) is but a mass of different perceptions and appears to retain a common identity when perceptions are added to, or lost from, the mass (*A Treatise*, p. 257). There is no identity that endures: the idea of a self “is only a fictitious one” (p. 259).<sup>136</sup>

How is one to think about claims whose very possibility presupposes that they are not true? At the Conclusion of Book 1 of *A Treatise* Hume admits that his weather-beaten vessel, upon which he has voyaged into the furthest reaches of

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<sup>136</sup> Berkeley and Leibniz arrive at a conclusion that is both identical with, and the opposite of, the conclusion of Hume. For Berkeley (*Principles*, section 141, pp. 121-122) and Leibniz (“Monadology,” p. 179), the self is in itself simple, immortal, unchanging and indestructible. Its existence is far more certain than objects that are relative to the perceiver.

human nature, is full of holes and must be retired from service. He claims to be in the “most deplorable condition imaginable, environ’d with the deepest darkness,” and would sooner “resolve to perish on the barren rock, on which I am at present, rather than venture myself upon that boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity” (1.4.7, pp. 264, 269). He does not, however, frame his alternative to be between truth (which involves giving up his premises) or falsity (continuing to rely upon them). To do so honestly would be to acknowledge, and hold himself accountable for the fact, that he has been false to his own thought. Instead, he frames his alternative as one “betwixt a false reason and none at all” and claims that “I know not what ought to be done in the present case.” The “*intense view*” of “manifold contradictions” that he has himself created inspires him *not to* account for them and “to reject all belief and reasoning” such that he “can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another” (pp. 268-269).

Since Hume finds that he is trapped between “a false reason” and “none at all,” from which of these standpoints does he recognize his contradictions? Is it not his consciousness of truth that drives him to despair? After spending time with friends, Hume confesses that he finds his speculations “so cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.” The “commerce and society of men” and “the common affairs of life” makes him “ready to throw all my books and papers into the fire, and resolve never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy” (*A Treatise*, pp. 269-270). He admits that he tortures himself with “subtilties and sophistries” that leave him without any “tolerable prospect of arriving by [their] means at truth and



certainty.” He asks himself: “[u]nder what obligation do I lie of making such an abuse of time? And to what end can it serve either for the service of mankind, or for my own private interest?” (p. 270)

This is the crux of the matter: Hume recognizes that there are contradictions between his speech and his thought. *But he proceeds as though they are contradictions between his thought and his existence.* His attempts to reduce his thought to his speech are not made in ignorance; for he understands that he cannot think his existence in terms of the categories of his speech. *But rather than give up on his speech, he pretends to give up on his thought.* He does not distinguish between two kinds of contradiction that belong to disparate frames of reference: one that is teleological, because it expresses the fatal opposition between thought and existence, and one that is created by a bad will, which attempts to understand the relationship between thought and existence as a fatal opposition. He is conscious of this distinction when he confesses that he has chosen to be ridiculous and to waste so much time, without being of any service to himself or others. But he does not take responsibility for what this realization demands of him because he clutches to principles that, he implies, absolve him of moral accountability.

It is important and instructive to see why it is that Hume, in his final words in *An Enquiry* (p. 173), condemns all abstract metaphysics, i.e., all metaphysics not rooted in relations of ideas and matters of fact, to the flames. He does so because such systems are themselves based on formal logic and natural perception and that logic and sense, when taken as first principles for existence, are two sides of a

counterfeit coin that has no currency in the marketplace of modern life. He all but concedes that his empiricism is fundamentally indistinguishable from the abstract metaphysics that he condemns as worthless when he writes that “[a]fter the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, *I can give no reason why I shou’d assent to it*” (*A Treatise*, p. 265, emphasis added). But, again, although he sees, on the basis of a moral idea of reason, that he has no reason to accept his reasonings, he continues to be false to himself and to others in his subsequent discussion of vice and virtue, which, in light of the previous remarks, requires only brief consideration.

Hume asks: from what impressions are ideas of good and evil derived? Among impressions that attend the consciousness of ideas of good and evil are feelings of pleasure, pain, approbation, and aversion. These cannot originate in reason because reason is “nothing but the comparing of ideas, and the discovery of their relations” (*A Treatise*, 3.1.1, p. 466) and it produces no original idea (*A Treatise*, 1.3.14, p. 157). Its sole function is to discover “truth or falsehood,” which consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the *real* relations of ideas, or to *real* existence<sup>137</sup> and matter of fact.

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<sup>137</sup> Hume neglects to discuss how it is possible to know what real existence is insofar as our impressions are affections of unknown causes. If real existence is sense-perception, how is it different from unreal existence, i.e., perception that has no corresponding material object, as Berkeley argues? Kant demonstrates in his dazzling analysis of the distortions of transcendental idealism, i.e., “transcendental realism” and “empirical idealism,” that there is no fundamental difference at all between them.

For Kant, empirical idealism rests on the doctrine of transcendental realism, in which space and time are regarded as existing outside of and apart from the mind. If space and time are self-subsistent, the mind can never arrive at sufficient grounds to establish their reality and, therefore, the reality of the empirical world. For we can think a space and a time that is outside of us only through representations that are in us. Thus, as Kant writes in the first *Critique*, “if one regards outer appearances as representations that are effected in us by their objects, as things in themselves found outside us, then it is hard to see how their existence could be cognized in any way other than by an inference from effect to cause, in which case it must always remain doubtful whether the cause is in us or outside us. ... If we let outer objects count as things in themselves, then it is absolutely impossible to comprehend how we are to acquire cognition of their reality

Whatever ... is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason (*A Treatise*, p. 458).

Consider murder. For Hume, the connection between murder and evil is not made through either relations of ideas or real existence. Of the former, Hume provides this example: when an oak tree drops its seed and produces a sapling that grows large enough to kill the parent tree, the relations of ideas are the same as those involved in the case in which a father produces a son who commits parricide. In both cases, the offspring destroys the parent. The differences between a father and a tree, or between a son and a sapling, do not affect the relations being considered (*A Treatise*, 3.1.1, p. 467). Neither is evil a real existence in this matter, for there is no sensible impression of vice in murder: “[t]he vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object.” Vice and virtue “may be compar’d to sounds, colors, heat, and cold” (pp. 468-469): they are not in the object but (in) the affections of sense. As it is not contrary to reason to have a preference for a particular color or sound over other colors and sounds, so it is “not

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outside us, since we base this merely on the representation, which is in us. For one cannot have sensation outside oneself, but only in oneself, and the whole of self-consciousness therefore provides nothing other than merely our own determinations” (A 372, 378). Both transcendental realism and empirical idealism regard nature as a thing in itself. In opposing thought and existence, there is no way to distinguish between thoughts and things. Kant calls this error, in which the determining self does not self-consciously see itself as fundamentally distinct from objects and so as free from the determination by objects, “the subreption of hypostatized consciousness” (A 402). He investigates it in the paralogisms of pure reason.

In the doctrine of transcendental idealism, space and time are synthetic *a priori* forms of outer and inner sense, respectively; they are empirically real because they are transcendently ideal. Space and time cannot be thought except as existing because they cannot exist except in thought. For, again, if they were apart from consciousness, the mind could not have empirical knowledge. The basis for establishing both the ideality and reality of space and time is the critique of the transcendental subject and empirical object, a critique in which the limits of each are established from the standpoint of pure reason (i.e., transcendental philosophy). It is because Hume never establishes this critique that his dogmatic (skeptical) empiricism collapses into skeptical (dogmatic) idealism.

contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger” (*A Treatise*, 2.3.3, p. 416). Since, for Hume, reason is formal, he is compelled to locate the ends (content) of reason in sense: “[r]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (*A Treatise*, p. 415).

Kant sees that, when Hume argues that ideas of the objective world, the unitary self, and moral truth have no corresponding object, he does not err in the form of his argument; it is true that knowledge, the idea of self, and morality have no corresponding *object*. But this is because thought and existence lie “in” the transcendental *subject* whose freedom and dignity are not natural appearances of logic and sense but are, rather, the ground for the proof of the objective world and of the moral laws to which the self is bound.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant establishes that truth is grounded neither in logic nor in sense perception but in the good will, i.e., in practical reason, because human beings are ends in themselves and not means to an end. The explosive thesis with which Section 1 of the *Groundwork* begins orients the entire program of Kant’s practical philosophy: “It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a **good will**” (4:393). Kant defines the good will as “the summoning of all means ... in our control” (4:394) to treat persons as ends, not means. The good will is good “without limitation,” i.e., “categorically,” “intrinsically,” “absolutely,” or “in itself” because the highest power of a human

being is expressed through moral choice, i.e., as dignity. The meaning, purpose, goal, end, or good of human life must not be sought – in nature or in a supernatural world; it must be willed. For, because the will alone is free, it is the *source* of all meaning, good, and, indeed, evil.<sup>138</sup> Thus, it is impossible even to think of a good that is greater than the good will; the good will is “the highest good and the condition for every other” good (*Groundwork*, 4:396). For it has no end beyond itself (4:399, 4:401), no beginning prior to itself, and, without it, “nothing of *absolute worth* would be found anywhere” (4:428).<sup>139</sup>

The necessary connection between (the consciousness of) freedom and moral obligation is expressed in Kant’s unequivocal pronouncement on the status of persons: “[n]ow I say that the human being and in general every rational being *exists* as an end in [him]self, *not merely as a means* to be used by this or that will

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<sup>138</sup> Kant opens Part One of *Religion* with a discussion of “the radical evil in human nature.” He argues, consistent with the Bible, that evil does not arise either from nature or from ignorance, but from the will: “for otherwise the use or abuse of the human being’s power of choice with respect to the moral law could not be imputed to him, nor could the good or evil in him be called ‘moral’ [or ‘immoral’] . . . . [I]f the entire exercise of freedom could be traced back to a determination through natural causes – this would contradict freedom” (6:21). Or again, that the human being is evil “cannot mean anything else than that he is conscious of the moral law” (6:32).

<sup>139</sup> In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant writes that either “we represent to ourselves something as good when and *because we desire* (will) it, or . . . we desire something *because we represent it to ourselves as good*, so that either desire is the determining ground of the concept of the object as a good, or the concept of the good is the determining ground of desire (of the will); . . . in the first case . . . we will something *under the idea* of the good; in the second, we will something *in consequence of this idea*, which must precede volition as its determining ground”(5:59 [ft.]). Here, Kant follows Spinoza who writes in his *Ethics* (translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992): “we do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it” (Part 3, Proposition 9, Scholium).

The crucial distinction that Kant and Spinoza are making is between a biblical and a teleological conception of human life, i.e., between willing the good because the good will is the cause of itself and the source of what is good and seeking a good because the will is not good, lacks the good, and is moved by the good, as is the case in Plato and Aristotle. In the first case, what is good is good because it is good for human beings who are ends (beginnings) in themselves. In the second case, what is good is good in itself apart from human beings who love it because they do not possess it and have no knowledge of what it is.

at its discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded *at the same time as an end*" (*Groundwork*, 4:428). It is because every person "exists as" an end that she is entitled to "be regarded" as an end by others, and vice-versa: our desire to be treated with dignity attests to our obligation always to treat others as we wish to be treated. I am an end and am entitled to be respected as such for the same reason that all other persons are ends who are entitled to be so respected and whom I must never, therefore, use as means: "every other rational being also represents his existence [as an end] consequent on *just the same rational ground* that also holds for me" (*Groundwork*, 4:429, emphasis added). According to Kant, then, human beings have absolute rights, i.e., rights whose priority is not subordinate to the fulfillment of imperatives that are empirical or instrumental (i.e., what Kant calls "hypothetical" imperatives) and it is precisely these rights that confer upon us an absolute obligation to respect them. This means that I can no more escape moral obligation than I can cease to exist as a person, i.e., who has absolute rights. That human rights are universal indicates, further, that there is a common bond between persons and that the interests of others are at once my own interests; I do not have the right to be indifferent to the injustices suffered by others, whose existence is bound up with my own.<sup>140</sup> The law to defend universal human rights

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<sup>140</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. was not only a civil rights leader but also one of the great theologians of our time. For he grasped in his thought and existence that individual freedom is dependent on and, indeed, constituted by, universal freedom. He writes in his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" that "[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly" (p. 290). Insofar as the Church separates the relationship between human beings and God from the relationships among human beings, it cannot but inspire "outright disgust" among those who expect

is the heart and soul of biblical teaching and of Kant's moral philosophy, and the failure to comprehend it as the basis of truth is the principal reason that Kant is so critical of uncritical metaphysics. For when the mind conforms to objects, human beings objectify themselves and one another.

Kant is relentless in insisting that all persons, without exception, have no finite equivalent. He declares that our "inner worth," or "dignity," is "*that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself*"; it is "*infinitely above all price with which it cannot be brought into comparison or competition at all without, as it were, assaulting its holiness*" (*Groundwork*, 4:435, emphasis added). We are what Kant calls "*objective ends*" whose "existence ... is in itself an end, and indeed one such that no other end, to which [we] would serve *merely as means*, can be put in its place" (*Groundwork*, 4:428). Once more, the right that each person has to be treated as an objective end constitutes his duty to treat every other person as an objective end, and this right/duty "is the supreme limiting condition of the freedom of action of every human being" (*Groundwork*, 4:431). Freedom is, fundamentally, a moral idea and involves the obligation to discipline choice. I have the power to do evil and am "free" to do so in the limited sense that I can choose it and am responsible and accountable for this choice. In a fuller sense, however, I am not free when I do evil, i.e., when I sin, because sin is the condition in which I allow myself to be determined through inclinations that do

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it to live up to its true purpose: to be not just a thermometer (recorder) of the status quo but a thermostat (regulator) that helps to defend the rights of everyone (p. 300). (In *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*)

not affirm (my) humanity and dignity; I treat myself and others as having hypothetical, and not absolute, value. Surely it is because we feel guilt when we do to others what we do not want done to us that we hide our sins from others. The good will gives no reason to feel guilt or shame; it is only when I do evil, i.e., when I choose to act with a bad will, that I *am* in fundamental conflict with myself because I act from maxims that I recognize are wrong (*Groundwork*, 4:437).<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> When discussing self-contradiction, the issue to which Kant returns most often is lying. As James Ellington observes in his translation of the *Groundwork*, the reason that I think that others will believe my lie is that I believe others are truthful. In order for my lie to work, others must trust me; that is what makes it possible for me to take advantage of their confidence in me. To make lying universal would mean that no one would have reason to believe anyone else, which is not a condition that I, or anyone else, can ever will (ft. 18, p. 32, in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1981). Thus, Kant writes that I can will the lie, but never its universality (4:403).

I express a contradiction in my own will when I lie because I help to create a world that I do not want, i.e., I act in a way that I do not want and could not want others to act. I do to others what I do not want others to do to me and I thus maintain that the principle of my action is both valid (for me) and invalid (for others). I except myself from an unconditional duty on the basis of an empirical interest, which I make the standard for my practical interest. In truth, it is only through the latter that empirical interests can be worth anything at all. Further, I lie to people and not to things because I distinguish between them. This shows that I do not and cannot believe my own lie. All moral transgressions are variants of lying and presuppose that one is aware that one ought not to do what one is doing.

Lies are willed, not spoken; they express a bad will and not a faltering tongue. It is, therefore, very surprising that in his short paper, "On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy" (in *The Cambridge Edition: Practical Philosophy*), Kant argues that it is always wrong to tell a lie, even if one has every reason to believe that it will save a person's life (e.g., 8:426-8:427). If a murderer asks a person if he knows where his intended victim is hiding, and if this person knows, it is, Kant writes, better for him to tell the truth to the murderer than to lie. For if, in telling a lie, the victim is found, the liar could bear some responsibility for the murder to the degree that his lie contributed to it.

Kant's analysis of the moral law does not actually support this position. To live the truth of the categorical imperative is not compatible with telling the truth to an evil person if one has reason to suspect that he will use this truth to advance his lie. Further, as Kant himself points out, acting in accordance with duty is not necessarily acting from duty. The former separated from the latter is blind obedience to the letter of the law. It is an *a posteriori* and not a synthetic *a priori* judgment. The fundamental problem of reason, however, is not how to be a good soldier but how to be a good human being.

Finally, as Kant has argued, the will must be judged through the principle of its willing and not through consequences that fall beyond the limits of will. Thus, in the event that the murderer finds the victim after a person makes every effort to protect him, it is clear that the individual who tried to protect the victim in no way deserves blame.



Kant calls the moral law the “categorical imperative.” An “imperative” is the principle for willing this or that action; it is “categorical” when its fulfillment is an end in itself. That the good will is both the highest end of reason and the supreme good is consistent with all three formulations of the categorical imperative as presented in the *Groundwork*. The first formulation is this: “*I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law*” (4:402). In everything, I must think about how what I do affects others and consider the consequences if others were to think and behave as I do. Under no circumstances do I have the right to make myself an exception to the standards to which I hold others. Rather, I must weigh everything from the infinite standpoint of moral reason. The first formulation of the moral law affirms a radical equality among people who nevertheless have no equivalent; there is no rational basis for making a fundamental distinction between my own concerns and the concerns of others or of assigning precedence of right to either. The question of what I should do is always coupled with the question of how this or that choice will affect others.

The second formulation of the moral law in the *Groundwork* is the imperative form of the judgment that human beings are ends in themselves: “[s]o act that you [treat] humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (4:429). Here, Kant defends reason as its own categorical standard: the moral law does not come either from nature or from a transcendent sphere but expresses the essential character of free self-consciousness. As we have seen in Deuteronomy

30.11-14, the law of God is not “up in heaven” or “beyond the sea” but “in your heart.” Now, it is indeed paradoxical that while the moral law, the Word, is an “objective” (*a priori*) principle that derives from the freedom of the subject, we so often fail to grasp that it is the ground of our own being. One reason for this failure is that what is true from a practical standpoint is not understandable from a theoretical standpoint, which concerns perceivable objects in natural space and time. That I should treat all persons as ends in themselves is a practical principle that I cannot grasp in terms of logic or the categories of possible experience. I do not understand or sense how morality is possible. From a practical point of view, however, I rise above what I can understand and sense and live with faith, treating you not *as* you treat me but *as you ought* to treat me. This obligation is not conditional upon you treating me in the same way; it is absolute and supports the principle that the rational mind must not conform to our natural responses; our natural responses must conform to the rational mind.

The third formulation of the moral law is closely related to the first and second. Here, Kant explicitly defends the will as its own ground:

the will is not merely subject to the law but subject to it in such a way that it must be viewed as also giving the law to itself and just because of this as first subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author) (*Groundwork*, 4:431).

We see yet again that Kant blocks all attempts to ground the moral law in an extraneous object or being. The will is its own ground (standard, beginning, and end). In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that nothing more (or less) is demanded of the human being than what he himself can do; it is therefore within

everyone's power at all times to fulfill the moral law (5:36-37). In *Religion*, he argues that what it means to do the will of God, as commanded in the Gospels, is to fulfill one's duties towards oneself and others:

a morally good life is all that God requires of [people] ... whenever they fulfill their duties toward human beings (themselves and others), *by that very fact* they also conform to God's commands ... and ... *it is absolutely impossible to serve [God] more intimately in some other way* ... (6:103, emphasis added).

Once more:

*[a]part from a good life-conduct, anything which the human being supposes that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious delusion and counterfeit service to God (Religion, 6:170-171).*

Kant calls his third formulation of the moral law the principle of "autonomy of the will." However different its emphasis might appear to be when compared to the central teachings in the Old and New Testaments, it is perfectly consistent with them. When I read the Old Testament and, in particular, the Five Books, I have the impression that the general focus of their teaching is on commanding obedience to God: the absolute duty to oneself and the absolute duty to others converge in the absolute duty to God. In the New Testament, I have a different impression. Stories like the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.30-37) merge the absolute duty to oneself and the absolute duty to God in the absolute duty to others. It is striking that, in Kant's third formulation of the categorical imperative, the absolute duty to God and the absolute duty to others converge in the absolute duty to oneself. Admittedly, the above distinctions are forced, but

they remind us that one's duties to oneself, others, and God are inseparable and that they are all rooted in the biblical tradition.

Kant subsumes all teleological notions of morality under the category of heteronomy, which is the futile effort to locate the ground (end) of the will in an alien end (ground). It is the equivalent of idolatry in which the self-determining creator whose existence is categorical is understood as hypothetical, i.e., as a thing that *may not be*. In the *Groundwork*, Kant argues that the reason that the metaphysics of morals has been such a colossal failure is that none of its schools has comprehended that human beings are bound to universal laws that they give to themselves, and that every individual "is bound only to act in conformity with his own will, which, however, ... is a will giving universal law" (4:432). Instead, the standard of the will has been viewed in something else. Kant distinguishes his own principle of autonomy from every other failed principle, which he rests not on ignorance, but on heteronomy of the will. Heteronomy is the conflation of biblical autonomy with pagan teleology.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> While Kant has acute insight into biblical teaching, he does not work through the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in a manner that is consistent with his recognition in *Religion* that the moral law is the true standard of biblical interpretation (6:110-112 and ft.). On the contrary, he claims in the same work that "the *Jewish* faith stands in absolutely no essential connection" to Christianity because it makes "no claim at all on the *moral disposition*" of individuals but is, rather, "directed simply and solely to external observance" (6:126). (He does not discuss the Prophets and makes no comment on their unflinchingly austere critique of external observance at the expense of social obligation.) Christian thought, he writes, expresses a "total abandonment of the Judaism in which it originated, [and,] grounded on an entirely new principle, [it] effected a total revolution in doctrines of faith" (6:127). Kant knows, of course, that Jesus is not a Christian, but a Jew (6:79), and that Christianity presupposes the Jewish faith and its sacred texts (e.g., 6:136 ft.); but he does not work through the implications of these facts.

What does it mean to say that Christianity dispensed with its origins? How? Kant observes in "Conjectures" that nature is the womb of non-biblical thought and that it is the expulsion from Eden that expresses the human being's "transition from a rude and purely animal existence to a state of humanity, from the leading-strings of instinct to the guidance of reason – in a word, from the

If it is the case that the good will alone is good without qualification and the condition of all other goods – or else we are stuck in the contradictory metaphysics of pre-critical heteronomy – then the parameters for an adequate idea of God cannot extend beyond the idea of the good will, which must therefore be respected as the supreme *and* “highest” good (*Groundwork*, 4:396). Hence, Kant declares in the second *Critique* that in the idea of God we find “nothing more than what is required for the possibility of thinking of [i.e., willing] a moral law” (5:137). It is to make room for this existential idea of God as a postulate of practical reason that Kant establishes in the first *Critique* that it is fruitless to demonstrate the existence of God theoretically. God is not an empirical object or a transcendent notion of formal logic. Kant thus shows that the cosmological and physico-theological arguments, which hold that God is a first and final cause of nature, are variants of the theses of the first two Antinomies: claims are made about the cosmos for which no experience can, in principle, ever offer adequate support. Further, in these arguments, the logical conclusion contradicts the premise on which it rests: the premise is that what exists in the world is an effect of prior causes; the conclusion is that God must therefore exist, but not as an effect of prior causes. Or does God exist transcendent of the world? If so, how can God be admitted as a part (a beginning or end or cause or designer ...) of the causal sequence? This transcendent notion of causality is without either objective or practical validity, for it

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guardianship of nature to the state of freedom” (p. 226). This *Jewish revolution*, he writes, has had “epoch-making effects in imparting a *wholly new* direction to thought,” effects that are “*more important than the whole endless series of subsequent cultural developments*” (p. 225, emphasis added). Kant offers no instruction on how to reconcile his crucial insights in “Conjectures” with his remarks concerning the Jewish faith in *Religion*.

bears no relationship either to the pure concept of natural causality, in which all causes are also effects, or to freedom, which is the cause of itself. Since defenders of these arguments have no empirical support, they must resort to a logical analysis of mere concepts, i.e., of “what kinds of properties in general [the notion of] an absolutely necessary being would have to have” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 606-607/B 634-635). The cosmological and physico-theological arguments for the existence of God thus depend on what Kant calls the “ontological” argument.

Those who summon the ontological argument to support a theoretical proof for the existence of God transition unjustifiably from the logical term “God” to its objective existence outside the term and profess to do so in a manner that is *a priori*. They argue that, since it is a contradiction for a necessary and perfect being (God) not to exist in reality – for, in that case, God would not be God – God must exist in reality. Kant replies, however, that existence is “not a real predicate” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 598/B 626). What does this mean? Seung provides a clear explanation in *Kant: A Guide for the Perplexed*. There is no difference between the content of the term “unicorn” and the content of the term “existent unicorn”; to say that the unicorn exists in the term “unicorn” does not affect the status of the term “unicorn.” It does not make the content of the term real in actual existence (p. 86).<sup>143</sup> Expressed differently, there is no difference between a thing and an existent thing in the field of logical possibility. In the logical form of a judgment, “is” is not a predicate that adds real content; it is only what Kant calls a

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<sup>143</sup> I have made slight modifications to the example Seung provides.

formal “copula” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 598/B 626). The problem involved in determining real existence is not whether there is an analytic connection between the subject and predicate, but whether there is a synthetic connection. It is true that, in an analytic connection, I cannot deny the predicates that belong to the subject; but this connection does not mean that the subject exists. For I can deny the subject altogether because it does not exist (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 594/B 692). In sum, the existence of a thing is not found in the relationship between the subject and the predicate, but in the ontological character, status, or condition of both subject and predicate. If I claim that I have a million dollars, a million dollars exists as a concept in the claim that I make. The claim is not true, however, unless I have a million dollars in real space and time.

Having rejected in the first *Critique* all theoretical conceptions of God born from the dialectical employment of experience and logic, i.e., as organons, Kant proceeds in the second *Critique* to defend the ontological argument for the existence of God from a practical standpoint, although he makes no mention that (he is aware that) this is what he is doing. He appears<sup>144</sup> to struggle in his moral philosophy to present an account of God that is consistent with his account of the good will as the supreme and highest good whose essence expresses the necessity of moral existence. On the one hand, he argues that actions which are not done from duty are not moral (e.g., *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:82). For moral worth *consists in acting from duty* (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:81) and

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<sup>144</sup> I say “appears” because the unsteadiness in Kant’s presentation could have been a strategic decision to make his work more palatable to the Orthodox wing of the Prussian government.

this is what makes the moral character incomparably the highest of all goods (*Groundwork*, 4:399) and the very *condition* for the worthiness of being a free (self-determining) person (*Groundwork*, 4:396). The good will is good in itself only through its *willing* (“volition”) (*Groundwork*, 4:394), and duty is the *indispensable condition* under which *alone* something can be an end in itself: “humanity, *insofar as it is capable of morality*, is that which *alone* has dignity” (*Groundwork*, 4:435, emphasis added). Thus, the *reason* that virtue is the supreme good is that it expresses the power of self-overcoming through repentance, which demands that there is no *a priori* agreement between will and law (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:84, 5:110, 5:124, 5:156; *Opus Postumum*, 22:54). On the other hand, Kant sometimes speaks of God in a manner that could be seen to imply that God (holiness) and morality (human virtue) are incompatible or even opposites. He writes that the divine will is in necessary agreement with the law (*Groundwork* 4:414, 4:439) and that God, therefore, has *no obligation* (i.e., moral necessitation), *no interest* in the law, and *no respect* for the law, because obligation, interest, and respect for the law presuppose a will that is *not* in necessary agreement with the law (*Groundwork*, 4:439; *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:76; *Opus Postumum*, 22:49). The divine will is *not* engaged in a struggle (*Critique of Practical Reason* 5:76) and is *not* subject to any commandment (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:84) because, in the idea of God, there is *no possibility* of moral transgression. Thus, the moral condition of human beings is that of virtue and *not* holiness (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:84), whereas the condition of God is that of holiness and *not*



virtue. Hence, holiness is *unattainable* for human beings (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:84, 5:123-124).

How are we to resolve the conflict between these two presentations? If the will of God necessarily agrees with the moral law and does not involve the obligation to fulfill the law, and if willing the moral law because of the categorical obligation to do so is the source of all moral worth, how, then, can God be an ideal of reason and the supreme and highest good? How can we even relate to, let alone desire, the divine disposition? Further, if God is not subject to any commandment, what does it mean that God's volition "is of itself necessarily in accord with the [moral] law"? (*Groundwork*, 4:414). What is the nature of this agreement if holiness involves the power to do evil? If holiness does not involve the power to do evil, how is it related to choice and freedom? Further still, how is one to comprehend moral commands as coming from God if God has no interest in or respect for them? What justification does virtuous action have if its end, holiness, is unattainable? How is the ideal of an unattainable holiness different from a teleological end? To resolve these and related issues, it is necessary to investigate more deeply the meaning and ontological status of the idea of God. Such an effort will lead to a discussion of the postulates of immortality and freedom which, together with God, are upheld as "immanent and constitutive" in moral practice (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:135).

For Kant, the idea of God is synthetic *a priori*. It emerges with and through, and not antecedent to, the consciousness of the moral law (*Religion*, 6:5, 6:104).

Kant begins *Religion* with this pronouncement:

So far as morality is based on the conception of the human being as one who is free but who also, just because of that, binds himself through his reason to unconditional laws, it is in need neither of the idea of another being above him in order that he recognize his duty, nor, that he observe it, of an incentive other than the law itself. At least it is the human being's own fault if such a need is found in him (6:3).

Kant writes later in the same work that the “pure faith of reason” is its own proof (6:129). For the idea of freedom involves necessary existence and expresses the ontological argument for the existence of God: that than which nothing greater can be conceived<sup>145</sup> is moral life, i.e., love as the fulfillment of duty. This message, Kant indicates, is precisely the good news of Christianity:

the Christian principle of *morals* itself is not theological (and so heteronomy); it is instead autonomy of pure practical reason by itself, since it does not make cognition of God and his will the basis of these laws but ... places ... the proper *incentive* to observing them not in the results wished for but in the representation of duty alone ... . In this way the moral law leads ... *to the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as ... contingent ordinances of another's will* – but as essential laws of every free will in itself (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:129).

In cases where the Bible appears to teach that God ought to be obeyed before human beings, as seems to be implied in the “greatest” commandment to love God above all others (Matt. 22.37-38), the Bible does not posit a hierarchical (idolatrous) relationship between God and human beings. To love God above all

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<sup>145</sup> I use here St. Anselm's formulation of God as found in Chapter 2 of the *Proslogium* (in *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*. Second Edition. Translated by S. N. Deane. La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1996). For St. Anselm, God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, i.e., God is not beyond thought but the “reality” of *(the highest object of) thought*. This proof is the basis of Descartes' proofs for the existence of God as presented in Parts 3 and 5 of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume II*. Translated by Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). There, Descartes demonstrates that the existence and perfection of God follow from the *cogito*: I think, therefore I am.

others means that in all cases wherein there is a conflict between the moral law and subjective maxims, the moral law takes precedence (*Religion*, 6:153-154 [ft.]). It alone must serve as the criterion for distinguishing between authentic and spurious commands, whether human or divine.

In the previous Chapter, I argued that the only possible way that human beings can accept the authority of God authoritatively is if they do not subordinate their own authority to God. The acceptance of an authoritative law must itself be authoritative if the true authority of the law is to be distinguished from a blind authoritarian rule, i.e., idolatry. It is for this reason that Kant argues in the *Groundwork* that God must be subject to our ideal of moral perfection before God can be recognized as God (4:408). The autonomy of reason, i.e., the idea of freedom, must therefore be respected as the sole basis of obligation (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:125-126). The idea of God is valid because it conforms to a *synthetic a priori* moral law of reason and, hence, “the doctrine of virtue stands on its own (even without the concept of God)” (*Religion*, 6:183). But, Kant shows, it is for this reason that the *idea* of God necessarily exists.

Kant rejects the idols of God, idols made not from gold earrings<sup>146</sup> but from empty concepts, in order to make room for God as the truth of human existence. He embraces the ontological argument for the existence of God when appropriated by reason in his last but unfinished work, *Opus Postumum*. It is best to let him speak in his own words: the idea of God “is not a hypothetical thing but pure practical reason itself” (22:118, pp. 201-202). “All expressions of moral-

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<sup>146</sup> See Exodus 32.2-4.

practical reason are divine” and “only relation (the moral relation) indicates [God]” (22:57, 21:26, pp. 215, 230). God is “in the idea of the relation of man to right and duty” but “not as a being outside man” (22:60, p. 217). He is “not outside man as a substance different from man,”

that is ... a being which exists independent of my thought – but the idea (one’s own creation ...) of a reason which constitutes itself into a thought-object, and establishes synthetic *a priori* propositions (21:21 and 21:27, pp. 228 and 231).

We live, move, and have our being in God.

It cannot be denied that such a being exists; yet it cannot be asserted that it exists outside rationally thinking man. In him – the man who thinks morally according to our own commands of duty – we live ... move ... and have our being (22:55, p. 214).

Still again:

**[t]here is a God.** There is a being in me, which is different from me ... itself free (that is, not being dependent upon the laws of nature in space and time) it judges me inwardly (justifies or condemns); and I, man, am this being myself – it is not some substance outside me (21:25, pp. 229-230).

God requires no further proof than moral-practical reason and “already lies, rather, in the developed concept of this idea” (21:92, p. 252). “The mere idea of him is likewise proof of his existence” (21:14, p. 221).

If, according to Kant, the idea of God has the same ontological standing as freedom, which is the case since both God and freedom are bound to one another as synthetic *a priori* postulates of practical reason, then does not God become redundant to Kant’s discussion of morality? Gordon E. Michalson, Jr. explores this

question in his provocative study, *Kant and the Problem of God*.<sup>147</sup> He argues that “the effect of [Kant’s] position is that language about God gradually becomes either redundant or a disguised version of language about ourselves” (p. 2). The attack on the theoretical “proofs” for God’s existence “has the appearance of an opening salvo in an atheist manifesto” (p. 28) and the fact that

divine commands not subsumable under the moral law are simply incompatible in principle with human freedom ... leaves no room for a divine command that derives its obligatory status apart from the moral law, or that overrides my own exercise of autonomy (p. 73).

Reason, then, assumes the character of divine agency (p. 23). It is certainly possible, Michalson points out, that Kant is “fashioning a new conceptuality for divine transcendence” (p. 137) that is immanent in practical reason (pp. 35-36). In this case, “God is real ‘for us’ in the course of a life of moral earnestness rather than as the theoretical object of a proof” (p. 44). Michalson concludes, however, that, if religion is not needed for morality, the struggle to incorporate an idea of divine transcendence into an idea of autonomy “is finally a losing one”; “the intimate link [Kant] forges between moral consciousness and consciousness of God ... inevitably and completely” results in the subordination of God to moral consciousness. Thus, what Kant himself shows when he invokes the language of God is that God is redundant to the discussion, an outcome that is “perhaps the ultimate expression of Kant’s own Copernican revolution” (pp. 137-138).

Michalson’s work stimulates three important insights that are relevant to the present study. First, there is no question that what Kant shows is that faith in God

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<sup>147</sup> Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999.

demands rational atheism, i.e., reason's critique and abandonment of the dialectical pursuit of teleological ideals. The necessary existence of God requires that God is indemonstrable from a theoretical standpoint. Kant insists in the second *Critique* that every step that he has taken in the practical field is in "precise agreement" with "all the moments of the *Critique* of theoretical reason," as though "each step had been thought out with deliberate foresight merely to provide this confirmation [of their agreement]" (5:106). We are thus assured that, while Kant uses theological language, he does not cling to the ideals of theoretical teleology that he abandoned in his first *Critique*.

This leads to the second point: Kant relies on biblical usage, I think, for two main reasons. First, it is in the Bible that he finds the roots of his own ideas and, indeed, of modernity (e.g., *Religion*, 6:107).<sup>148</sup> Perhaps it is possible for Kant to have obviated biblical language; but he cannot dispense with biblical truth, which is the focus of his attention. Second, biblical usage allows him to shine a spotlight on its idolatrous conceptualizations. The creative process of reconfiguring the meanings that are conventionally ascribed to the biblical terms that he uses calls

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<sup>148</sup> One of the reasons that Michalson argues that Kant's idea of God is redundant is that he does not work through the meaning and significance of the Bible. He is perceptive in recognizing that Kant's moral world absorbs Christian doctrine as the "vehicle" of pure moral faith (p. 102); however, he holds that to make Christian faith intelligible in modern life may well be to lose what is "distinctively Christian" (p. 138). He does not see clearly that the reason that religion is not needed for morality is that morality is religion conceived as the autonomy of reason.

It is on the basis of a teleological reading of the Bible that Heinz Cassirer argues in *Grace & Law: St. Paul, Kant, and the Hebrew Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988) that St. Paul and Kant "propound views concerning morality which are utterly irreconcilable with one another." There is a "complete contrast" and "radical opposition" between them (p. xvi). Cassirer sees that, insofar as one remains within the Kantian orbit, human beings are their own autonomous ground and end and that, therefore, all moral content in Kant's system necessarily falls within the province of reason (pp. 80-83). But he thus falsifies the position of both Kant and the Bible in concluding that Kant's system cannot accommodate what is essential to biblical thought (and vice-versa).

attention to the inadequacies of these conventional meanings. It is in the absence of adequate ideas of God that inadequate ideas of God proliferate.

The third point of interest is that, although virtue stands alone without the idea of God, the idea of God is no more dispensable than the idea of freedom. God is not subordinate to consciousness, or even to moral consciousness. It is perhaps to help prevent this misinterpretation of his own position that Kant elevates God to a necessary idea that is “beyond all measure” (*Opus Postumum*, 21:455, p. 6). For Kant, the human and the divine are comprehensible only through each other. If they are unrelated to each other, they are identical with each other and vice versa: their identification leads to their opposition. In both cases, there is no relationship that human beings can have with themselves or with others that does not reflect the finitude of nature, leaving us with no higher purpose beyond fulfilling our natural inclinations and empirical interests.<sup>149</sup> The moral law expresses the necessary relationship between thought and existence to be infinite. It locates us in a relationship with ourselves and God such that we are bound to ideals which necessarily exceed our grasp although we strive from them and within them.

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<sup>149</sup> I suspect that when Kant maintains that God has no interest in the moral law he means that God has no *theoretical* interest in the law, i.e., that the imperative of God’s command is not hypothetical but categorical.

In the *Groundwork* Kant distinguishes between practical interests and theoretical interests and argues that the specific mark that distinguishes categorical imperatives from hypothetical ones is the renunciation of all interests that are grounded in what he calls the kind of “self-love” that can never be valid as a universal law (4:431-432). A practical interest is not based on “mediate,” “conditional,” “empirical,” “sensible,” or “sensuous” interests or incentives, all of which are hypothetical. Rather, it is what Kant calls a “pure rational interest” or “that by which reason becomes practical.” It is the interest of the moral will that is the cause of itself. It is indistinguishable from the good will such that “*what belongs to mere appearance is ... subordinated by reason to the constitution of the thing in itself*” (4:460-461, incl. ft.).

After Kant discusses the postulate of immortality in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which I shall take up in a moment, he develops his account of God. He argues that God is the sufficient cause for the highest good that the moral law demands, a good that he connects with the Christian idea of the kingdom of God, which, Kant grasps, is the kingdom of ends (5:127-128).<sup>150</sup> He distinguishes between the supreme good and the highest good and claims that whereas virtue is the supreme good and is the condition even to be worthy of happiness, it is not itself sufficient for the highest good; the latter must involve happiness. (In *Religion*, Kant maintains that happiness is the natural end of every human being [6:46 (ft.)] and that “total renunciation” of the “unavoidable desire” for the sensuous element of happiness “cannot be expected” of him [6:134-135].) There are thus two aspects of the highest good of human beings: virtue and happiness. These together fulfill human beings in both their rational and sensible character. God is that power through which the highest good is, and ought to be, realized.

This account raises a fundamental problem whose solution is not evident. To this point I have argued that, for Kant, the highest good is the good will which alone has full value in itself, i.e., regardless of whether it furthers happiness. In Kant’s discussion of the postulates of practical reason, however, the good will is not necessarily sufficient to achieve the highest good, insofar as happiness and moral action are not necessarily connected to one another (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:124). There are moments when happiness is regarded in terms of the

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<sup>150</sup> In the *Groundwork*, the kingdom of ends is the ideal of perfection (holiness) in which all persons respect themselves and others as ends in themselves (4:433-434, 4:438). In *Religion*, it is the good “common to all,” the “ethical community,” or heaven on earth (6:97, 6:100, 6:101).



contentment that comes from the consciousness of being able to make moral decisions in the face of contrary inclinations (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:117-119). Kant also indicates that happiness depends upon the contentment that comes from being moral and, therefore, upon *denying* happiness as sense-feeling. For example, Kant writes that

an upright man cannot be happy if he is not first conscious of his uprightness; for, with such a disposition, the censure that his own cast of mind would force him to bring against himself in case of a transgression, and his moral self-condemnation would deprive him of all enjoyment of the agreeableness that his state might otherwise contain ... . If a human being is virtuous he will certainly not enjoy life unless he is conscious of his uprightness in every action ... (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:116).

The implied distinction between moral and immoral kinds of happiness is a reminder that it is the worthiness to be happy, and not happiness itself, that has moral worth. Yet, to identify happiness and contentment would leave unresolved the problem that Kant introduces when he includes natural happiness in the highest good: if it is better for human beings to be happy than unhappy in the realm of experience, which can hardly be disputed if one assumes that, in both cases, human beings are moral, then the highest good would have to involve empirical happiness as well as contentment. Herein lies the problem: on the one hand, Kant insists that happiness should not in any manner be a motive or end for moral action and that the sole motive and end for moral action is duty, i.e., respect for the moral law. This is what it means for reason to be autonomous. On the other hand, human beings are sensible beings who want to be happy and moral action that furthers happiness is a matter of duty (*Critique of Practical Reason*,

5:124-125; *Groundwork*, 4:399). In other words, it is Kant's position that the highest good is the goal of the supreme good, but that the supreme good, i.e., the good will, alone has intrinsic value.

Insofar as the happiness that is found in the highest good is a condition that exceeds what the collective will of human beings can, in principle, bring about, human beings cannot be obligated to bring it about. Insofar as the collective will of human beings can, in principle, create the happiness that is found in the highest good, God would have to express the power of the collective will that is sufficient to bring about the greatest happiness that moral action will allow. I should add my voice to the cacophony of thinkers who have protested that Kant has not been clear in accounting for what exactly is required beyond the fulfillment of one's duties to promote the greatest happiness that moral action will allow. If the happiness of the highest good is not attainable in and through moral action, then it cannot be a part of the highest good; if it is attainable in and through moral action, then it is subsumed under it and it is not clear how the duty to promote happiness is different from the duty to be a moral person.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> In *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961) Lewis White Beck articulates clearly the problem with Kant's presentation. He sees that because, according to Kant, there is nothing that can be conceived to be greater than the good will, one cannot be duty-bound to do more than to act from respect for the law. Thus, promoting a happiness that is not within my power to effect cannot be a moral duty. "Kant simply cannot have it both ways. He cannot say that the highest good is a motive for the pure will, and then say ... man must have an object which is not exclusively moral (for there is nothing moral in happiness except insofar as its condition is worthiness to be happy, and even then the moral value lies in the worthiness, not in the enjoyment). ... [T]he highest good ... does not exist as a separate command, independent of the categorical imperative ... . For suppose I do all in my power – which is all any moral decree can demand of me – to promote the highest good, what am I to do? Simply act out of respect for the law ... . I can do absolutely nothing else toward apportioning happiness in accordance with desert ... . [That] is not *my* task; my task is to realize the one condition of the *summum bonum* which is within my power; it is seriously misleading to say that there is a command

Kant is working with two ideas of the “highest” good: (1) the absolutely good will and (2) a kingdom of ends in which we find the greatest possible happiness. These ideas lead to two parallel ideas of God, conceived as the power that is sufficient to create these highest goods. To comprehend further the relationship between these two ideas of God, it is necessary to turn to Kant’s discussion of the postulate of immortality.

The idea of immortality expresses the tensions inherent in the human condition: it is within each and every individual’s power to fulfill the moral law at each and every moment of her existence, but it is impossible for her to make a choice at one moment that will fulfill her moral obligations in subsequent moments. It is not possible, then, for her to arrive at a final and complete end. To fulfill the law, her struggle must be “endless.” It is for this reason that, although holiness – the perfect agreement of the will with the moral law – is attainable by a human being at any given moment in time, it is not attainable as a disposition that forever satisfies the moral demands of reason. The positions that God is not separate from the good will and that the good will is not identical to God are therefore both true, and the reason that they are both true is the idea of freedom. Freedom entails that the highest good is incapable of being met with except in and through what Kant calls the “endless progress from lower to higher stages of moral

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to seek the highest good which is different from the command to fulfill the requirements of duty” (pp. 244-245).

perfection" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:123).<sup>152</sup> Immortality is the time, and God is the power, that is sufficient to express holiness of will.

The endless progress towards holiness that is demanded by the moral law is not measured in chronological time. The human being will die: the paralogistic notion of an everlasting soul as simple and permanent substance is utterly without meaning. As Velkley observes, immortality cannot imply, for Kant, a supernatural existence, for the object of pure reason in its practical employment is the perfection of earthly and sensible existence (pp. 142, 153). The endless continuance of existence must refer to one's labor and toil to bring oneself into necessary agreement with oneself. At this point, the question that I raised earlier appears to be resolved: when Kant writes that in God we find the necessary agreement between will and law, the claim does not imply that God is free *from* duty (obligation, struggle, interest, respect, or morality). This would be an obvious contradiction. Rather, *the "necessary agreement" between will and law in the*

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<sup>152</sup> This idea bears a close resemblance to the biblical idea of the connection of death and resurrection in eternal life. While the *concept* of a miraculous (bodily) resurrection is of no interest for Kant, he accepts the *idea* of resurrection as repentance that leads to what he calls "a kind of rebirth" and a "new man" (*Religion*, 6:47).

In his book, *Kant as Philosophical Theologian* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1988), Bernard G. Reardon sees that, for Kant, the end of creation is humankind in its complete moral perfection, which Reardon connects with the biblical language of the Son and the Word through which all things have been created. He argues that, for Kant, human beings must raise themselves to this moral archetype by the power supplied by the ideal itself, which is found in rational consciousness (p. 111).

Reardon sees that, on Kant's view, the idea of redemption (resurrection) is found in the course of moral regeneration whose ground is the will; sin is not atoned for through the sufferings of Christ as a historical personage or through his literal resurrection. "The change ... from a corrupt to a good disposition – 'the death of the old man', 'the crucifying of the flesh' – is ... a sacrifice ... which the changed man freely accepts – in that he now makes the moral idealism of the Son of God his own ... . Physically of course it is the same man who suffers for his guilt, and rightly so, but because of his new disposition he is in the sight of his judge another and a different person" (pp. 115-116).

*divine disposition refers to the fulfillment of the biblical covenant in the moral life of human beings and so the creation of eternal life in the kingdom of ends.*

That the highest good has two distinct meanings – to repeat, the absolutely good will and the kingdom of ends in which we find the greatest possible happiness – implies two corresponding ideas of God: (1) the absolutely good will of the single individual and (2) the expression of an absolutely good will among all persons. These two ideas of God, in turn, imply two corresponding ideas of immortality. First, immortality is the time that is sufficient for an individual person to be in agreement with himself, to live up to himself, or, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, to become who he is.<sup>153</sup> It is time as unfinished, as yet to be fulfilled, as infinite, as the eternally returning obligation to love, once more, innumerable times more, yet always originally, freely. Second, immortality is the time that is sufficient for the universal expression of love. Here, the peaceable kingdom – in which the lions and lambs of inner nature lie together and reason rules over the beasts, birds, fishes, and creeping inclinations – is not the moral disposition of this or that individual but the condition of actual human relationships throughout the social and political world. The greatest possible happiness that this ideal heavenly world – in which injustice for one is injustice for all – will allow cannot be anything

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<sup>153</sup> Aphorism #270 of *The Gay Science* reads: “*What does your conscience say?* ‘You shall become the person you are.’” Here, Nietzsche distinguishes his own position from the ancient Greeks, for whom being does not involve becoming and becoming does not involve being. The moral imperative of human beings is to will their being, i.e., to live as ends and not means. He says as much in *The Antichrist*, “[t]he problem I ... pose is not what shall succeed mankind in the sequence of living beings (man is an *end*), but what type of man ... shall be willed, for being higher in value, worthier of life” (Section 3). He then proceeds to attack what he calls “Christianity,” which, he notes, is not the teaching of Christ, but is the history of its “misunderstanding,” i.e., the *Antichrist* (see, for example, Sections 35-37).

other than the happiness that results when every person in God's kingdom promotes her own happiness and the happiness of others within the limits of reason alone. It is the happiness that emerges when human beings treat themselves and one another with kindness, compassion, respect, and dignity. Any other notion of the greatest possible happiness in the highest good is not consistent with the first principles of Kant's moral philosophy.

Thus it is that, when Kant maintains that human existence must be endless in order to attain the highest good, he testifies to the nature of the difficulty of willing that than which something greater cannot be conceived, the idea of which straddles the invisible border between necessity and impossibility: how to be holy, as God is holy; how to be perfect, as God is perfect; how to live in such a way that, in everything that you do, big or small, with others or in secret, you treat others as you want to be treated, as ends and never as means. Kant's revolutionary insight is that the awareness of this task originates in biblical self-consciousness, whose core ideas – God (the highest good), love (the good will), creation (freedom), eternity (immortality), and the kingdom of God (the kingdom of ends) – he sees, express the necessary relationship between thought and existence to be transcendentally ideal, i.e., determined always anew through the "I think" as the cause of itself. The fundamental problem of the critical project – How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible? How must I synthesize my thought and my existence in a manner that fulfills the categorical imperative of my own reason? – is incomprehensible, an unknown X, through logic and perception. That is why it never appears, in any formulation, at any time, in any pagan text. Its solution is

found only through the existential trial of human beings before the divine court of practical reason.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The general thesis that I have defended in this dissertation is that the necessary relationship between thought and existence in the modern world is anchored in the first principle of biblical thought, i.e., human beings are ends in themselves. I have argued that the consciousness of this first principle is not present in ancient Greek thought. In fact, ancient non-biblical thought in general is teleological: human beings are not regarded as ends in themselves. On the one hand, in ancient teleology thought and existence are opposed to each other. Thought does not exist and existence cannot be thought. For the unchanging, immortal, self-sufficient end in itself necessarily contradicts the changing perceptions that are relative to the observer. On the other hand, however, the end in itself is the essence, soul, or definition of appearance and constitutes what thought is in itself. The ontological condition of human beings as depicted in pagan teleology is, therefore, contradictory. The limit of human wisdom is the consciousness that no human being can know anything at all. Thus, teleological systems are sealed from the inside (and, as well, from the outside). The opposition between the changing perceptions of mortals and their unchanging immortal end, i.e., between what thought and its objects appear to be and what they actually are, is, in itself, immortal and unchanging. Human beings are, therefore, fatally dependent on reproducing contradictions in their efforts to escape from ignorance, i.e., they seek the end because they cannot know what it is.



I have argued that the ontological structure of thought and existence in the Old and New Testaments is completely different from the ontological structure of thought and existence in ancient teleology. For, in the Bible, human beings see themselves seeing themselves from the standpoint of the holiness and infinite perfection of God: they comprehend themselves to be ends in themselves and not appearances within the unending metamorphoses of finite nature. I have shown through consideration of core ideas of the Bible that the standard of truth and interpretation and of (a truthful interpretation of) thought and existence in biblical metaphysics is moral reason, i.e., the idea of freedom as necessary existence, and not formal (Aristotelian) logic or natural perception. To fulfill one's moral obligations to oneself and others is to fulfill one's moral obligations to God, whose highest commandment is love, i.e., the good will. The human being does not seek an end in ignorance of what it is but must will the end that he comprehends to be the good in itself and, therefore, do his part to create the kingdom of ends, which is the highest fulfillment of both God and humankind. We learn from the fact that the biblical authors bind their core ideas to moral obligation and dissociate them from the teleology of neighboring populations that the mythical narratives which they self-consciously appropriate within a rational/moral matrix have no point of contact at all with pagan ideas and ideals. For, whereas pagan teleology begins and ends in necessary contradiction, biblical thought begins and ends with necessary truth.

Once I showed that ideas central to biblical thought are not teleological, I was then able to establish that Kant stands within the biblical tradition. Kant demonstrates that the success of the theoretical sciences is possible only on the

basis of “Christian” morality, the pure religion of reason whose essence, he sees, is the consciousness of the moral law to treat all persons as ends in themselves and not as, or on the basis of, appearances of nature. It is this consciousness that underlies the scientific comprehension that nature is not free, that we must attain knowledge of it, and that we must use this knowledge for moral ends. Kant shows that when reason transgresses its moral limits, together with the limits of logic and sense, it precipitates itself into contradictions. He establishes the *a priori* limits of logic, possible experience (sense perception, nature), and moral reason to provide the criteria for detecting, diagnosing, and resolving the contradictions that emerge when we breach these limits and view the contradictions between our speech and our thought as reflecting an impassable contradiction between our thought and our existence. This failure to distinguish between two completely incommensurable kinds of self-contradiction is common not merely in the tradition of metaphysics as a discipline of academic philosophy but also in our everyday lives.

To defend the above general thesis, I began by first establishing that ancient teleology cannot overcome the necessary contradiction of its beginning. In Chapter 2, “Ancient Greek Metaphysics: the End in Itself in Plato and Aristotle,” I explored the fundamental structure of thought and existence as presented by Plato and Aristotle, the two most systematic, comprehensive, and influential expositors of ancient Greek metaphysics, and showed that, while they observe that both they and their opponents perpetually fall into contradiction, they are not able to resolve the contradictions that they observe. The reason for this is that both philosophers think within an ontological framework in which all things divide into dependent

contradictories. For Plato and Aristotle, opposites appear to come from opposites in the world that is relative to the observer; in reality, however, opposites cannot admit of opposites. The unchanging essence of appearances cannot appear (appearances cannot express their essence) or else the essence of appearances would be an appearance and appearances would be without an essence and could not exist.

The ontological opposition between thought and existence that we find in Plato and Aristotle necessitates that consciousness is dependent on formal logic, which is not concerned with appearances, to account for appearances that are the sole objects of thought. Hence, Aristotle points out, the law of contradiction (together with the laws of identity and the excluded middle) is the basis of all demonstration: what is cannot not be what it is ( $A=A$ ); it cannot express contradictory predicates ( $A$  cannot be not- $A$ ); and it must be one of two contradictories (either  $A$  or not- $A$ ) because contradictories admit of no intermediate. It is on the basis of these principles that human beings seek the reason for their seeking in ignorance of what this reason is, a seeking that confirms the opposition between, and identity of, thought and existence. Thus, thought relies on logic because it violates it, i.e., it lives in the excluded middle: its essence is to be (in itself) and not to be (as an appearance). Because each side is known through the other that cannot be known through it, there are no means available for the mind to escape from contradiction. Teleological logic, logic that is employed not as a canon but as an organon, is intrinsically contradictory. For the mind that views itself as dependent on what it cannot know detects contradictions only from

the standpoint that led to them, with the result that the consciousness of contradiction is itself a contradictory appearance.

Plato demonstrates in the dialogues of Socrates that the apex of human wisdom is the “knowledge” of being completely ignorant. Socrates understands himself to be the wisest of men because he “knows” that he knows nothing. He teaches that he teaches nothing and he learns that he learns nothing. His dialogues are not dialogues in the modern sense of the word; there is no moral relationship, and thus no violation of any moral relationship, between interlocutors. Rather, adversaries battle one another in the *agon* of rhetoric, where sense and logic are used as instruments of war and where, therefore, opposite conclusions come from opposite conclusions without end. Socrates does not know what he seeks; what, then, does he seek? What does it mean to seek an end that violates the law of contradiction on the basis of appearances, which also violate the law of contradiction, and to do so on the basis of the law of contradiction, which is inviolable? Whether one argues through appearances (imagination, opinion, or thought) to account for the end (which cannot be imag[in]ed, opined, or thought) or through logical analysis of the end to account for appearances, the standpoint from which one argues inexorably contradicts that for which one wants to account. The defeated party in the contest is the individual who asserts that he has knowledge. Because the object of desire cannot be possessed (for what is possessed cannot be desired), human beings are dependent on being contradicted in their desire to escape from contradiction.

Aristotle recognizes that there are fundamental contradictions in Plato's metaphysics. However, like Plato, he does not know the end of these contradictions. For they are deduced from the immortal, necessary, ontological given of natural teleology. It is the nature of a man, Aristotle maintains, to desire, to aim at, knowledge, so that he can reach the actual end of the world of potentiality, becoming, non-being ... . The first and final cause of every action, choice, inquiry, and movement is the divine end in itself – the complete and self-sufficient subject and object of thought that moves without being moved. "Ends" that are a part of the process of becoming can be a subject of choice and deliberation, but the final end of deliberation cannot itself be a subject of choice or deliberation. For deliberation *is* reasoning with a view to the end and choice *is* for the sake of the end, an end that, because it is in itself, is the proper object of wish. Since the reason for the things that are done consists in that for the sake of which they are done, the end is sought, i.e., it produces motion, because human beings love (lack) it. *Love of the end consists in the opposition between the seeker and his end. It is this opposition that drives and sustains the unending contradictory search for knowledge.*

The notion of aiming at an end in itself that we cannot attain is alien for us in the modern world, i.e., from the standpoint of freedom. For an object that we cannot think cannot be an object for us at all. According to Plato and Aristotle, however, human beings must lack the reason for their action if they are *not* to be aimless. If a man does not love the end, if he does not seek knowledge, we are told that his life is purposeless and in vain. Since he cannot attain knowledge

through the appearances of thought, the starting-point and compass of demonstration is the principle of contradiction, a principle that one must acknowledge is indemonstrable if one is to avoid calling for an infinite regress of explanations. Since the ground of explanation can have no explanation, or else it would not be possible to explain anything, all convictions can be overthrown. Once more we see that, in order to avoid contradiction, it is necessary to end in contradiction, i.e., to lead to conclusions that are consistent with the ontological contradiction within which one begins but which cannot be thought precisely because it *is what thought is in itself*. Thus, it is impossible to escape from necessary contradiction, and the reason for this is that no one can know what this reason is. Human reason is indistinguishable from the employment of the law of contradiction to demonstrate that, because appearance and existence are irreconcilable opposites, the appearances of thought have no valid currency.

Having shown that the structure of teleological thought and existence as developed in the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle is an ontological contradiction, I argued in Chapter 3, “Why Biblical Metaphysics is Not Teleological: an Examination of Core Biblical Ideas,” that it is in biblical thought that we find the basis of modern existence: the consciousness that human beings are, and must be respected as, ends in themselves. What it means to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul is to love your neighbor (the stranger) as yourself and so to treat everyone, friend or enemy, as you would want her to treat you, i.e., as an end and not as a means. This is what we learn in the Books of the Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, and others): knowledge and worship of God are

expressed through moral practice, i.e., helping the poor, the needy, the oppressed, the weak, the disadvantaged, and the marginalized. It is on the basis of the necessary connection between love of God and love of neighbor that is explicated in Law and the Prophets that Jesus and Paul interpret the fundamental teaching of the scriptures as the golden rule. The Word of God is not up in heaven or beyond the sea, but written on the human heart: it is what Kant calls a synthetic *a priori* moral law of rational (free) consciousness.

Since the Bible upholds the golden rule as the highest standard of truth, interpretation, thought, and existence, it follows that the Bible is to be read from this principle. This involves extracting from the text the insight that it contains – no more and no less – and meeting the text halfway in order to allow it the opportunity to justify the faith that we have put into it, a hermeneutical approach that involves charity but also the resolve to reprove the text where necessary so that we will not share in its guilt (perversions, injustice, idolatry). To interpret the Bible from itself alone, i.e., as a "thing in itself" and not merely as an appearance, is to see that, although the biblical narratives might at first glance appear similar to pagan myths and may, indeed, have in part been stolen from there (quite consistent with the eighth commandment), the constellation of values that surrounds and envelops the biblical narratives simply does not exist in pagan thought. Doubtless it is because the biblical authors do not defend their teaching on the basis of pagan notions of nature, human being, and the divine but, in fact, condemn these notions, that they do not cite any sources that are authoritative in the Near Eastern and Greco-Roman traditions in order to give authority to their own position. The Bible refers

only to itself because it has to; it has no other source upon which to call to explain and defend its teaching.

The status to which the golden rule (or the principle of love) is raised in the Old and New Testaments demonstrates that the biblical people are self-conscious of the fundamental differences between good and evil. It also demonstrates self-consciousness of the fundamental differences between spirit and nature and of the connection between one's power to choose and one's moral obligation to be accountable for one's choices. The ideas of sin and repentance presuppose this special kind of self-consciousness; there is no sin or repentance where evil reflects ignorance of the good and where good and evil are appearances that are identical with, and opposed to, each other. Whereas in Greek teleology everyone can contradict everyone, no one can escape contradiction, and violence is an essential feature of life (in both word and deed), in biblical consciousness evil is chosen with full knowledge of the good in itself and is always at one and the same time injustice to God, to others, and to oneself. Sin points to the infinite gap that divides us from ourselves such that we are both lesser and greater than ourselves, too small and too large to contain ourselves. (This infinite gap is what Kant calls "immortality.") It is precisely the sinner, i.e., every free person, who is called upon to become perfect through repentance, i.e., through authentic moral transformation. Such transformation is morally necessary because every person is wholly accountable for her choices. The children's teeth are not set on edge because the father has eaten sour grapes (Ez. 18.1-3).



I next considered the biblical idea of creation and examined what it means for the two biblical creation narratives with which Genesis opens to contradict one another explicitly at a literal level. I argued that the contradictions guide us to approach the creation stories with a winnowing fork so that we can gather the wheat in the granary and burn the chaff in unquenchable fire. When we do this, we are able to see that the reason that human beings are exalted as the image and likeness of God is that they comprehend their freedom as the cause of itself: the stars, planets, animals, birds, fish, vegetation, and things in nature in general are not gods, omens from the gods, or things in themselves. Human beings are condemned to the blessing and “curse” of freedom until death. It is we who are responsible for creating the world through the manner in which we think our existence and exist in our thought. I defended the position that the creation account of the Gospel of John is consistent with this interpretation. For we learn there that the light that overcame – that understood and illuminated – the darkness of pagan teleology is the Word (of) God: love, the covenant, the categorical imperative to treat oneself and others as ends and not means. The creation narratives end with human beings barred forever from the dark and formless void of immortal contradiction because they know good and evil.

The God of the Bible expresses the developing comprehension among the biblical people of the truth that is involved in the consciousness that human beings are free. The parameters for an adequate comprehension of God in biblical thought can be expressed in three related observations: (1) the ideas that human beings have of God tell us about how they view themselves. The development of

these ideas of God expresses the development of the mind(s) in which these ideas are thought. The fact that the biblical people conceive of God as a holy and perfect creator whose highest commandment is love shows that they are aware that holiness, perfection, and creation inhere in love. Further, that human beings maintain that the commandment comes from God indicates that they are aware that to love one another is morally necessary. (2) God is not a part of nature, the sum of nature, or opposed to nature. These three notions of God are dominant in pagan myth but are comprehended from the biblical standpoint to be idols. God's presence is only in the embodied existence, the spirit and flesh, of human beings who are conscious of the moral law. To become like God is to become more fully human (rational, faithful, and moral). (3) Since the highest commandment of God is the golden rule, the God of the Bible is no less obligated to human beings than human beings are obligated to God, which demands that the relationship between human beings and God, like the relationship among human beings, is not, and must not be viewed as, hierarchical, i.e., as a relationship between means and ends. The fact that the biblical people think of themselves as dependent on a God who is bound to love them as He wishes to be loved by them demonstrates that they are free from bondage to teleological notions of God. Hence, while the worship of God expresses a critique of pagan teleology, it does so mainly through its critique of idolatry, which is comprehended from within the covenant with God (and human beings) to be the abrogation of the covenant with God (and human beings). Strictly speaking, then, in light of the aforementioned observations, the

teleological notion of the divine falls outside the compass of biblical cognition (and vice-versa).

From the biblical standpoint, there is no higher end than eternal life in the kingdom of ends (heaven, the kingdom of God) that we must will into existence. Isaiah describes this world through the unnatural metaphor of natural enemies, i.e., predators and prey, living together in peace in a common space and time. This metaphor, in which the first is the last and the last is the first, is inconceivable in pagan thought because it utterly contradicts the appearances of nature. In the kingdom of ends I do not determine my relationship to others on the basis of appearances (lineage, status, wealth, private interest ...); rather, I perceive myself in others and others in myself and others perceive themselves in me and me in themselves such that all people treat themselves and one another as ends and not as means, ends who belong to a common human family. The universal fulfillment of the moral law translates into a compassionate and humane world that includes everyone and excludes no one because the rights that belong to one person are respected as belonging to all persons. To describe the quality of this life as “eternal” signifies that it is not predicated on the time of the common order of nature regarded as a thing in itself but on the transcendently ideal time that is appropriated by reason and rendered meaningful through continual moral effort (or good will). Eternity is a special kind of existence in chronological time, an existence that is neither finitely complete (at its finite end) nor finitely incomplete (lacking its finite end) – nor both together, as is the case in pagan teleology. Rather, it is the fullness (fulfillment) of time that is realized through its creation by

human beings in their infinite transition from lesser to greater degrees of their moral perfection. Eternal life is life conceived as repentance.

As the ideal of eternal life does not refer to a supernatural existence but is, rather, a call for a deeper immersion in human existence, I have argued that the biblical miracle narratives, of which the resurrection from the dead is the most burdened, do not imply an impossible natural occurrence. (Kant shows that a single supernatural occurrence would render modern thought and existence impossible.) Rather, they depict the power of faith in God, i.e., the power of love for, and belief in, oneself and others. In Exodus the account of the miracles that Moses performs in front of the Pharaoh is preceded and succeeded by the teaching that the God of the Israelites is not at all like the pagan gods and that the Israelites are not like the Egyptians. In this way, we are warned against interpreting the miracles of God as pagan magic because they are performed precisely to show that the Israelites are free from bondage in Egypt.

The critique of (super)natural miracles through miracle narratives in the Old Testament carries over into the New Testament. Jesus teaches that it is the devil and idolaters who seek proof of God in what is impossible rather than in what is necessary, i.e., love, the love that Paul teaches is the sole source of all miracles. Further, it is instructive that the miracles in the Gospels are almost always healing narratives: they do not make people blind, deaf, mute, paralyzed, and sick; they cure. They do not kill, but resurrect. It is because miracles rest on the power of love that Jesus is unable to do miracles where there is unbelief and that he teaches that any faithful person will do even greater things than he has done.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul grounds the value of faith on the resurrection from the dead, a resurrection that he links to the resurrection of Christ, creation, the “second” (expelled) Adam, eternal life, and the kingdom of God. In light of the fact that Paul regards love to be “greater” than faith only two chapters earlier, and that, in Romans, which is believed to be his last epistle (and so indicative of his most developed position), he defends love as sufficient for the fulfillment of the Law, it follows that the value of faith depends on the resurrection only if the idea of the resurrection expresses love. The resurrected Christ is the Word, the call to repent, that cannot die; thus, Paul binds the resurrected Christ not to the first Adam but to the second Adam who, knowing good and evil, comprehends that he dies. Paul writes that the resurrection is the change from the natural, perishable, living, earthly, mortal body – all of which describe living in the likeness of the “first” Adam of pagan Mesopotamia – to the spiritual, imperishable, life-giving, heavenly body that is “clothed” with the “immortality” of the second (expelled, fallen) Adam. When Paul connects the resurrection through Christ as the second Adam to eternal life in the kingdom of God where death has been swallowed up victoriously, we see that life in Christ is described as the condition in which there is no death and that the condition in which there is no death is described as the condition in which God is all in all. If life in Christ is expressed in the fall of Adam, then the condition in which there is no death cannot refer to the pagan notion of immortality. Death must be a metaphor for the condition of the mind that does not live in Christ, i.e., that is hostile to God’s law. Paul uses death in precisely this sense, most evidently in Romans, in a manner that is entirely consistent with key passages in the Old and

New Testaments. Since the resurrection is a time in which there is no death and not a time in which there is no sin – the time in which there is no sin would be the time of the first Adam in Eden and not the time of the second Adam – eternal life in Christ, i.e., immortality, must express the ceaseless struggle on the part of the human being to overcome death as unrepented sin. Once more, we see that eternal life in Christ is repentance: the commitment to truth as expressed in moral life. The claim that faith is futile unless there is resurrection from the dead is, therefore, consistent with the teaching that faith without love is worth nothing at all.

Once I established that the consciousness that human beings are ends in themselves envelops the core ideas in the Bible and that these ideas are, therefore, inconceivable from the standpoint of ancient teleology, I was then able to show in Chapter 4, “Kant’s Critical Revolution: Human Beings are Ends in Themselves,” that Kant demonstrates in his critical philosophy that modern thought and existence are based on the first principles of the Bible and not on the first principles of ancient teleology. Kant shows that the fundamental reason that uncritical (dogmatic) metaphysics has become contradictory is that its diverse traditions have been rooted, almost without exception, in the false assumption that analytic *a priori* logic and synthetic *a posteriori* experience are organons for reason. No school has on these bases been able to establish a position that cannot be contradicted on the same grounds on which it is defended because the compass of thought is here completely unreliable. Metaphysics cannot arrive at necessary existence unless it proceeds from necessary existence, i.e., the categorical imperative.

Kant hints in the Preface of the second edition of the first *Critique* that his ultimate purpose in his critical project involves establishing the inseparable connection between modern reason and the Christian religion. What he means when he writes that he must “deny” knowledge – of God, freedom, and immortality – in order to make room for “faith” is that it is necessary to show that God, freedom, and immortality cannot be known in terms of the categories through which nature must be conceptualized in order to demonstrate their necessary existence and necessary relationship in moral practice. In the second *Critique* and the *Groundwork*, Kant focuses on demonstrating that reason itself cannot be known as an object of possible experience. Experience has no categorical imperative. It is in order to demonstrate that all attempts of reason to think on teleological grounds, i.e., outside of “Christian” faith as pure rational religion, are necessarily fruitless that Kant sets out to establish the *a priori* limits of logic, possible experience, and reason.

Kant demonstrates that Aristotelian logic, the analytic *a priori*, is finite. It is a closed and complete system of the formal operations of thought. It is able to demonstrate merely formal necessity; it cannot demonstrate existence. Thus, its success depends on the fact that it has no content and can produce no insight. When one employs logic as an organon, one cannot judge the content of one’s judgments; one can only judge whether these judgments are consistent with prior hypothetical premises. Whether these premises are true or false is not deducible through logic. Thus, because logical possibility admits of contrary hypothetical premises, the conclusions at which one arrives will contradict all conclusions that

follow from contrary premises. Deductive logic cannot resolve these contradictions. From the standpoint of reason, if logic is not to annihilate itself, its nature must be clarified and its boundaries must be respected.

From the critical perspective, experience, unlike logic, involves existence but cannot reveal that what appears must be as it appears and not otherwise. Kant shows that, while all our knowledge begins with experience, the concept of experience is not itself a product of experience and the concept of an empirical object is not itself an empirical object. All objects of nature are created in and through their conceptualization. It is because appearances are not things in themselves that things in themselves cannot be known as the objects of nature are known: the mind by which I know, the self-determining subject, cannot be known in the same fashion as that which I know, the determined object. This critical-biblical insight, that human beings are not like other creatures in nature (i.e., means) but are the image of God, is the foundation of the theoretical sciences. If we followed nature's footsteps, we could never have knowledge. It would not be possible to demonstrate causal necessity because the mind would be dependent upon nature, and there is nothing in nature that can produce the *pure concept* of necessity.

The fact that, on the one hand, logic demonstrates necessity but not existence and, on the other, experience involves existence but cannot establish necessity, does not show that logic and experience together are sufficient to demonstrate necessary existence, as we have seen Hume discover in his uncritical metaphysical critique of uncritical metaphysics. It is because Hume maintains that logic and experience are the sole sources of knowledge that he professes to deny



necessary existence altogether, a conclusion that is not consistent with the necessary presuppositions of his own critique. Kant demonstrates that reason can have meaningful conceptions of logic and experience only insofar as it comprehends that they are not their own sufficient grounds. Otherwise, it hypostatizes consciousness and falls into transcendental illusion. The negative, or problematizing, account of the grounds of logic and experience is the doctrine of transcendental idealism, which holds that objects of nature are appearances, i.e., our representations, and not things in themselves: things in themselves can never appear and what appearances are, in themselves, can never be known. It is in practical philosophy that we learn that the thing in itself is unknowable (as an appearance) not because it is transcendent of the mind, as is the case for Plato and Aristotle, but because it is the self-conscious mind. Thus, while the problematic relationship between things in themselves and appearances might seem at an immediate level to be teleological, in truth this problematic relationship constitutes an essential part of the demonstration that teleological metaphysics is fruitless. When Kant uses Platonic language to divide appearances from things in themselves, he adopts the strategy of the biblical thinkers who appropriate teleological language in order to express ideas that are inconceivable in pagan teleology. This allows us to see that the fount of the critical revolution is not teleological but biblical, which is what Kant himself argues.

Kant refers to the story of the expulsion in Genesis as the story of human freedom, the story that tells of the release of human beings from captivity to nature into the rational consciousness that all persons, regardless of their rank, have the

right to be respected as ends in themselves. He sees that this insight set human beings on an entirely different course than hitherto and that nothing in history has been greater than this revolution of which, he grasps, transcendental idealism is a necessary consequence. Space, time, and the categories of possible experience are not apart from us but inhere “in” us. The reason is not that our experiences, or nature itself, is not objectively real; it is that nature is not its own ground but determined through the meaning and significance that we ascribe to it. For me to be able to represent an experience as my own, i.e., to be able to think all my representations as mine, means that, because these representations belong to me, I must create them in choosing the manner in which I incorporate them into my existence. This, again, is the fundamental point: the mind does not conform to objects; objects conform to the mind. In space, the universe envelops me; in thought, I envelop it.<sup>154</sup>

The apparent dichotomy between the idea that all things are determined according to the principle of cause and effect and the idea that freedom is the cause both of itself and of all things is not a contradiction. On the contrary, it is because appearances are not things in themselves that the free mind can conceptualize nature through synthetic *a priori* categories that no experience can justify. The reason that Kant claims that we can have insight only into what we produce by our own design is that we cannot have knowledge of an objective world that we are not responsible for creating; such a world is “nothing.” We know that appearances have objective validity because nature is not the cause of itself. Put

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<sup>154</sup> I take this formulation from thought #66 in Pascal’s *Pensées* (in *Selections*).

another way, it is because objects in nature *may not be* that the principle of causality is synthetic *a priori*. In contrast with the dogmatic (skeptical) metaphysics of transcendental realism and empirical idealism, which cannot account either for freedom or for nature because, from their common standpoint, the thing in itself cannot be thought, transcendental idealism and empirical realism show that the limit of thought and existence is the necessary relationship between freedom and nature. Transcendental idealism is, therefore, the absolute antithesis of ancient teleology and reveals all metaphysics in the likeness of ancient teleology to be the heteronomy of reason, i.e., the idolatrous reduction of ends to means (or elevation of means to ends).

The positive account of transcendental idealism is, to repeat, fulfilled only in practical philosophy, where it is explicated through the metaphysics of morals whose foundation is the categorical imperative. The reason that I have no right to treat you (or myself) as a means is that we are free. I must not will anything from any principle that I do not want to be universal. If I treat you as an object, I do so in self-contradiction because I cannot even conceive of the world I pretend to will, i.e., in which everyone has the right to infringe upon my rights. This self-contradiction expresses a bad will and not a will that is anchored in contradiction. (We must never forget that it is only from the standpoint of freedom that these two kinds of contradiction are distinguishable from, and can be confused with, one another.)

It must not be supposed that, because articles of faith have meaning only within the province of reason, reason can dispense with faith. Kant demonstrates the opposite: the categorical imperative, which is both biblical and rational, cannot

exist outside of the necessary relationship between freedom and God, whose perfect agreement presupposes immortality. From the critical standpoint, God and immortality have the same ontological status as freedom and are, therefore, no less necessary than freedom for thinking the moral law. God is not a cosmological or teleological cause but the sufficient cause of the highest good that inheres in moral practice, i.e., the good will than which nothing greater can be conceived. For Kant, no one can outdo a moral human being. On the one hand, since the will is its own cause, there is nothing outside of one's choice to do evil that can prevent one from being moral. On the other hand, what it means to be truly moral is to be engaged in lifelong repentance; therefore, it is impossible for a moral person to acquit herself, permanently or absolutely, from the trial of being human. Thus, while reason is inseparable from God, God is nevertheless an unattainable ideal of reason, and this is the case because human beings can never be equal to themselves in the likeness of finite objects. The infinite distance between human beings and God is identical to the infinite distance between human beings and the fulfillment of the moral law. It is the space of relationship – between human beings and themselves, between human beings and one another, and between human beings and God – that Kant calls “immortality.” Immortality is the time that is necessary to fulfill the moral law and that prevents the reduction of both human beings and God to natural appearances. It signifies that, because reason is the thing in itself, rational beings must strive for the good in itself from the position of being it.

In demonstrating through the critique of pure reason that human beings are, in the beginning, ends in themselves, Kant shows that metaphysics is meaningful only when bound to the ethics of existence whose revelation is biblical metaphysics interpreted from itself alone. Perhaps it is because the idea of freedom cannot be thought except as existing that its nature and origins have not been viewed as a problem in traditional metaphysics but have been mistaken for matters of fact. In so doing, reason has confused things in themselves with appearances and has plunged itself into contradictions that it is not in a position either to ignore or to overcome insofar as it remains under the spell of its delusion. I have undertaken in this dissertation to confront a teleological world that we cannot comprehend through its first principles except as incomprehensible in order to show that the ontological presuppositions and limits of thought and existence in modern life are moral, not teleological, and have their origin in biblical, not pagan, thought. For when we grasp that the necessary relationship between thought and existence in the modern world is biblical and is incomprehensible from the viewpoint of pagan teleology, then we shall be in a stronger position to comprehend, to resolve, and so to avoid the inevitable contradictions that arise when we confound sense perception with experience, logic with reason, and means with ends. The insight that reason is moral practice means that the origin of self-contradiction – the condition in which reason is in conflict with itself – is the conflation of Greek and biblical values. While it is true, then, that what we learn from Greek texts when we read them from themselves alone is that we can learn nothing from them, it is hard to conceive of an insight that is more important. For the inconceivability of the

ontological contradiction of pagan teleology is what defines the absolute limit of conceivability to be necessary existence, whose fulfillment, unknowable through logic and sense, is the end in itself.

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