

Kant's Doctrine of Religion as Political Philosophy

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Boston College
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KANT'S DOCTRINE OF RELIGION AS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

a dissertation

by

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2009

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2009

ABSTRACT
Kant's Doctrine of Religion as Political Philosophy
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Through a close reading of Immanuel Kant's late book, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, the dissertation clarifies the political element in Kant's doctrine of religion and so contributes to a wider conception of his political philosophy. Kant's political philosophy of religion, in addition to extending and further animating his moral doctrine, interprets religion in such a way as to give the Christian faith a moral grounding that will make possible, and even be an agent of, the improvement of social and political life.

The dissertation emphasizes the wholeness and structure of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* as a book, for the teaching of the book is not exhausted by the articulation of its doctrine but also includes both the fact and the manner of its expression: the reader learns most fully from Kant by giving attention to the structure and tone of the book as well as to its stated content and argumentation. The *Religion* provides the basis not only for a proposed reenvisioning of the basis of existing religious creeds and practices, but along with this a devastating critique of them in particularly moral terms. This, however, is only half of what constitutes Kant's political philosophy of religion; Kant goes beyond the philosophical analysis of the social-political context of religion and pursues, alongside this effort, a political presentation of philosophy which is intended to relieve the reader's anxieties concerning the tension between philosophy and political life that it is in the interest of the partisans of the church-faith to encourage.

Dedicated, in appreciation and with prayer,
to the memory of three teachers and one colleague in teaching:

Ernest Fortin

Robert Rethy

Richard Talaska

Thomas Dillon

Requiescant in pace.

Acknowledgements

My first thanks must go to my advisor, Susan Shell. I am grateful for her expertise in Kant, her patience with my method of writing a dissertation, and the generosity which has marked her teaching. The degree to which this dissertation suffers is the degree to which I did not request more help from her, which she would gladly have given. My other readers, Robert Faulkner and Nasser Behnegar, kindly offered helpful suggestions for the improvement of the dissertation. This is not the first time Mr. Behnegar has agreed to help me, even though I did not have the good fortune to be in coursework at the time of his arrival at Boston College. Mr. Faulkner has taught me much about political philosophy, and I am grateful for much more than his agreement to comment on the dissertation.

Financial support was given by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the Political Science Department at Boston College; the Harry and Lynde Bradley Foundation; the John M. Olin Foundation; and the Goethe Institut. Some of this aid was dispensed through two organizations at Boston College – the Institute for the Study of Politics and Religion (directed by Christopher Bruell and Ernest Fortin) and the Institute of Medieval Theology (directed by Stephen Brown and Ernest Fortin). The directors were not only generous with the funding but also excellent teachers, and I benefited in many ways from the kindness and friendship of their assistant, Shirley Gee. Finally, my present employer, Thomas Aquinas College, made financial arrangements which allowed me some free time in which to complete the work.

Another kind of support was necessary for the completion of this dissertation. Many colleagues and friends at Thomas Aquinas College have helped me on my way; I must single out for particular thanks John Goyette, who has hounded me about finishing it since the day we met. My parents and brothers have also offered long-distance and long-standing encouragement.

My last thanks must go to Melissa, my wife, who seemed to know what I needed to be told at every step. Without her patience and encouragement, and her willingness to see to matters which did not receive my attention, this would never have been completed.

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1. From Critique to Doctrine: Introduction

Keeping in mind even such candidates as Francis Bacon's *Wisdom of the Ancients*, Giambattista Vico's *New Science*, and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, it is difficult to think of a work by a modern philosopher more striking in its oddness than Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.¹ In it, the popular and clichéd picture of the ponderous epistemological Kant diminishes as the author writes of eastern religions, Jewish trinitarianism, Iroquois catechumens confounding Jesuit missionaries, virgin conception, and the mechanism of world history. He decries the encroachments of papal ecclesiastics, presents the marks of the true church in terms of the concepts of the understanding, and laments the universal sinfulness of man. Furthermore, the author treats the reader to a Hobbesian-themed ecclesiology, an encomium to sincerity, an account of true and false service to God, and numerous clever interpretations of scripture. More important than all these curiosities, however, is the striking possibility that this very strange book, the published version of his doctrine of religion, is a major, perhaps the major, part of Kant's work in political philosophy.

The goal of the present study is to illuminate the political element in Kant's doctrine of religion. I shall argue that the *Religion* is not at all theological or exclusively moral in nature but constitutes Kant's political philosophy of religion, which, in addition to its ostensible purpose of clarifying, extending, and even vivifying his moral philosophy, reinterprets and represents religion in such a way as to reground the Christian

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine from volume six of *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Königl. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 1902-), although I have made use of the suggestions of the Greene-Hudson and the diGiovanni translations.

faith for moral-political purposes. The effort of regrounding is necessary to make possible the vision of political life in which politics and morality are not at odds with each other; the chief obstacle of this vision is religion – or, more properly stated, church-faith. The political philosophy of the *Religion* springs from an initially moral-individual consideration of what determines whether man is good or evil²; the resulting presentation of the moral components of human nature is projected in terms of a moral existence that must be contextualized in terms of both a nonhuman moral legislator (while not compromising the autonomy of morality itself) and of man’s social existence with other men – with a consequent philosophy of God restricted to moral considerations and, much more importantly, an ecclesiology that is not ultimately tied to, and explicitly designed to shed, any historical revelation. In thus presenting a religious culmination of his investigation into morality Kant at the same time offers a critique of existing Christian faith and religious practice, a critique which has an intended and essential connection to social-political life.

In supporting this claim, I shall rely on *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* as the expression of the doctrine of religion³ and as a whole and unified *book*, for the teaching of the book is not merely the doctrinal content as expressed but includes both the fact and the manner of its expression: the reader learns most fully from Kant by

² Even the initial consideration is cast in terms of the global context of moral decline in all of civilization, and is pursued with the question of whether the human species itself is by nature good or evil.

³ A collection of Kant’s lectures on the doctrine of religion may be fruitfully compared to the *Religion* in terms of content, rhetorical character, and context. In focus the lectures are more limited and in presentation they are more carefully, or at least more rigidly, ordered. For a study of the lectures themselves, see Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology*.

giving attention to the structure and tone of the book as well as to its stated content and argumentation. The present study will take apart the whole and represent it in the following manner in order to make clear its doctrinal content and its rhetorical strategy: Underlying the work are reminders of Kant's labors in the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to make problematic the claims of speculative rational theology.⁴ In the *Religion*, as in Kant's writings as a whole, this is tied to an expanded realm of claims on behalf of practical moral faith, which, too, leaves behind the transcendent claims of theology – traditional problems of which are taken up and considered in the *Religion* in more purely moral terms.⁵ By presenting, in light of these previous steps, a philosophy of practical-moral (that is, without benefit of revelation) religion in terms of human sociality, and comparing it with historical manifestations of revealed faiths, the *Religion* provides the basis not only for a proposed reenvisioning of the basis of existing religious creeds and practices, but along with this a devastating critique of them in particularly moral terms.⁶ But this is only half of what constitutes Kant's political philosophy of religion; Kant goes beyond the philosophical analysis of politics through a presentation of religion and pursues, alongside this effort, a political presentation of philosophy which is intended to relieve the reader's anxieties about the

⁴ Chapter two takes up and explores this connection of the *Religion* with the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁵ A lengthy consideration of this layer of the *Religion* is found in chapter three below.

⁶ The roots of religion in human nature, the resulting necessity of church-faith, and the history, critique, and reform of church-faith are all discussed in chapter four.

seeming tension between philosophy and political life that it is in the interest of the partisans of the church-faith to encourage.⁷

In short, Kant's political philosophy of religion originates from his critique of reason and is an extension of that critique⁸ into matters of faith and the resulting practices such that the reader may view in a new light, and perhaps see as problematic from his original perspective, the history of his church, the basis of his faith and religion, the meaning of historical revelation as communicated by scripture, the purpose and efficacy of cultic and sacramental practice, and the psychology of the priest. Throughout the *Religion* the reader encounters Kant's re-presentation of these things, and will find that the intention of this representation is, in addition to the clarification of Kant's moral teaching, the regrounding of historical Christianity for social-political, as well as moral purposes.

But perhaps there is already an objection to thrusting such importance onto the *Religion*. For several reasons – it is shorter in length, order, formality, and repute – the book has an unclear place in the Kantian corpus. Readers, paying inordinate attention to the critical component of Kant's philosophy (whether it be concerned with theoretical knowledge or practical activity), may be tempted to construct the edifice of a system around them and to treat the rest of his works as less than relevant: under this attitude, if someone is somehow able to work through the *Critique of Pure Reason* and put it down,

⁷ This second aspect of Kant's political philosophy of religion is treated in chapters five and six below.

⁸ This should remind the reader of Kant's talk of the "age of critique" at the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Even religion is to be subjected to this critique, writes Kant long before the publication of the *Religion*. The extent to which the critique (and reinterpretation) of religion is a matter of political philosophy, one might conclude that to this extent all of Kant's philosophy is as well.

he certainly would not be tempted to trespass beyond the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Such an attitude is dispelled if one notes the subtitle of the *Religion* in light of Kant's distinction between critique and doctrine. In the third critique Kant makes clear that his project is far from complete, for whereas the "entire critical enterprise" is completed, the "doctrinal" enterprise has not yet been begun. Following his division of philosophy into its theoretical and practical components, this second enterprise will "consist of" a metaphysics of nature and a metaphysics of ethics. The work of critique is to "investigate whether and how our powers allow us... to produce a doctrine".⁹ A comparison of the first and second critiques with what seem to be their primary doctrinal counterparts, the *Metaphysical Starting-Grounds of Natural Science* and the *Metaphysics of Ethics*, is illustrative of the difference.¹⁰

The overall purpose in bringing up this rather pedantic series of points is to indicate the importance of the doctrine of religion as it stands with the more often touted first (and second, and third) critique. Kant's philosophy begins with critique but ends in doctrine,¹¹ and so the doctrine of religion may well be not only the conclusion but the

⁹ KU 5.170, 176 (Pluhar trans.). Cf. KrV A11/B25-A12/B26.

¹⁰ A difficulty for us emerges from this distinction, for with the existence of a work titled *Metaphysics of Ethics* comes the possibility that it, not the *Religion*, supplies the needed doctrinal effort pertaining to practical philosophy. The latter would seem to be a practical doctrinal work but subordinate to the former, whose concluding section has the following title: "Doctrine of Religion as the Doctrine of Duties to God Lies beyond the Boundaries of Pure Moral Philosophy" (6.486). Leaving aside the question of primacy, one can see the relative importance of the *Religion* to Kant's enterprise in light of its doctrinal content.

¹¹ This characterization of the book as doctrinal is not wholly satisfactory, however, for the *Religion* contains a great deal of what must be called critique, both explicit and implicit. Can the book still be called doctrinal and not critical? If it is doctrinal, the work of criticism has already been done, and so to call Kant's effort in the *Religion* at all critical is to miss his intention. The answer to this hesitation is to observe that whatever criticism of religion is present in the *Religion*, it is not critique in the strict technical

intention of Kant's project.¹² Certainly God, theology, and religion are still pressing concerns for Kant in the writing of his very late works, such as the *Opus Postumum*.

Another objection to our initial suggestions is the suspicion that a book about religion should not be taken to be the presentation of political philosophy. After all, if we consider the subject matter, the *Religion* would seem to be a theological (or, if we look a little more closely, an ethical¹³) rather than a political book, even more so if we keep in mind the full title. Another quick look, this one in the direction of other books written in the two generations prior to Kant, offer a clear answer: books such as Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Locke *Treatise on Civil Government*, several of Hume's works, and Rousseau's *Emile* and *On the Social Contract* – not to mention Machiavelli's works in general – are works of political philosophy that take up religion as a central theme, or the central theme, so much so that early modern political philosophy has been described as anti-theological as much as anti-Aristotelian.¹⁴ A full half of *Leviathan* treats of Christianity as it is rightly and then wrongly employed in relation to political life, and its largest chapter by far is devoted to the theme of "Ecclesiastical Power." The "chief thing" Spinoza sets out to "demonstrate" in his *Treatise* is that "not

sense just cited in the third critique. Rather, in the course of a doctrinal exposition, both already-existing critique and the presently-adumbrated doctrine are combined as a means of criticism.

¹² That the problem of religion is a lifelong concern of Kant's is evident from his 1774 letter to Johann Caspar Lavatar, written quite some time prior to the conception of the *Religion* (10.175-80). The focus of this letter is purely moral and not at all political.

¹³ This, of course, is another objection, and a stronger one, the response to which may be found in chapters three and four below.

¹⁴ See, for example, Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?", esp. p. 44, and Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, ch. 1.

only can this freedom [to judge and to worship] be granted in keeping with piety and the peace of the Republic, but moreover it cannot be removed unless along with that same Peace of the Republic and piety”.¹⁵ The first half of Locke’s *Treatise* is an interpretation of the Bible with an eye toward the explication of political power in the second half, and to this could be added several other works of Locke, such as the “Letter on Toleration” and *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. All three of these treatments are attempts to reinterpret biblical revelation with an eye toward a more liberal political life. Rousseau brings with him, most easily seen in *On the Social Contract*, an endorsement of the attempts of his predecessors but also a concern about the full effects of their success. In short, many of the early modern political philosophers viewed religion as the key to political and philosophical liberalization precisely because it was also the obstacle to these things and for that matter the very reason for them. That Kant takes up religion and considers it in light of political life, and does so in a book that seems a hybrid of political philosophy and philosophy of religion, is not a surprising continuation of a consistent pattern in early modern philosophy.

For that reason the reader finds in the *Religion* an abundance of considerations of religious wars, the relationship of churches to civil laws and government rule, and the civic bonds that are formed or at least reinforced – or threatened – by religion. While all the considerations are not explicitly political, their subject matter cannot be considered long in abstraction from political life. Furthermore, and more importantly, the reader

¹⁵ Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. Yaffe, preface.

finds in the *Religion* the most provocative and troubling account of human nature in all of Kant's writings, and this depiction of the problems caused by, as well as the solution to, this nature are of obvious importance to political life.¹⁶ In addition, the author offers the book as a solution to a theologico-political problem and, as a result, makes himself exactly this kind of problem in offending the religio-political authorities and bringing upon himself condemnation and censorship.

With the observation that Kant is continuing a tradition of philosophical concern with religion comes the question as to why he feels the need to do so. The theologico-political problem seems to have been solved by Machiavelli and his successors, and only time is necessary in the practical completion of what had been begun. Kant's task with regard to religion would then not seem the same as that of his modern forerunners, but he faced theoretical and practical problems that remained after the early modern success. The theoretical problem is that the absence of the religious element of human existence seems to leave out part of the account, as one can see even in the reforms proposed by Locke and Rousseau in particular; there is the possibility that the early modern view of man is too reductive and thus eliminates, or at least denigrates too severely, some

¹⁶ Kant's connection of politics and religion is clear not only from the *Religion* but also from the later *Metaphysics of Ethics*. The doctrine of right, Kant's most explicitly and extensively political work in a manner differing from that of the *Religion*, deals more than once with the role of religious bodies in political life and with the regulation of religion by the government. The doctrine of virtue, in turn, concludes with a précis of the *Religion*. (See particularly 6.324-28, 367-69, and 486-91.) Several of Kant's essays, including "Toward Eternal Peace" and "The End of All Things", the latter of which is discussed at length in chapter six below, reveal this connection as well.

constitutive element of human nature without attempting to rehabilitate or moderate it.¹⁷

The practical problem is that Europe, despite some possible moderation due to the Enlightenment as well as the Reformation, was still Christian and thus still vulnerable to theologico-political strife.

This fact permeates the *Religion*. The reader is reminded of “the so-called religious struggles, which have so often shaken the world and sprayed it with blood” (6.114); told that, without “true enlightenment”, churches will continue to operate on the basis of a “degrading means of compulsion” instead of a “free faith” (6.123n); shown that the history of Christianity, “so far as the beneficial effect which we rightly expect from a moral religion is concerned, has nothing in any way to recommend it” (6.130); informed that only “political interest” has suppressed further continued “violent outbreaks” and “scenes” of “bloodthirsty hatred” between Christian sects (6.131); and told that wherever “popery” is the rule of a church, “the church finally lords over the state, not indeed through force, but through influence over minds” and “through pretense” which gains for the subjects “the habit of hypocrisy” which “undermines, unnoticed, the integrity and loyalty of the subjects” (6.180). It turns out, as we shall see in detail below, that the very problems of human nature that religion is meant to resolve are exacerbated by the church-faiths that are meant to convey but instead obscure that religion.

Whether a solution may be expected at all, even if almost infinitely in the future, is not clear. Part of the difficulty in working for a solution to the problems caused by

¹⁷ Furthermore, though less to the point here, in the light of his own moral-philosophical enterprise, as an examination of the preface to the first edition of the *Religion* will show, the human moral picture is not complete without what the *Religion* provides.

churches and the faiths they proclaim is that wars of religion may well serve to prevent even more disastrous circumstances. Yet, at least in the *Religion*, Kant does appear as a theological chiliast, although he recognizes the apparent ridiculousness of this position as well as its strictly political counterpart: he proposes that a “world ruler” who will eventually “bind all together” (6.122). Because of the danger in initiating this condition without the proper moral and social cultivation, however, Kant warns against an immediate and violent revolution and instead provides the basis for a gradual reform (6.121).¹⁸

This introduction to our study of Kant’s book on religion has noted its connection to early modern political philosophy in its stance toward religion but has not commented on its concurrent radicality or its own novelty in comparison to more traditional (and more speculatively theological) treatments of religion. For this reason, even granting the philosophico-political core of the *Religion*, one fruitfully compares it to some of its more strictly theological predecessors. A comparison of Kant’s definition of religion with that of Thomas Aquinas, for example, results in a blend of similarity and departure. Kant’s definition is as follows: religion is “the cognition of all our duties as divine commands”

¹⁸ This would seem to match the expectation, or lack thereof, expressed a few years later in “Toward Eternal Peace.” In this work, Kant asks how nature promotes the human purpose of eternal peace, and how this is accomplished according to the three aspects of public right, the third of which is “international right”: “... the desire of every nation (or its ruler) is to establish an enduring peace, hoping, if possible, to dominate the entire world. But nature wills otherwise. She uses two means to prevent people from intermingling and to separate them, differences in language and religion, which do indeed dispose men to mutual hatred and to pretexts for war. But the *growth of culture and men’s gradual progress toward greater agreement regarding their principles* lead to mutual understanding and peace. Unlike that peace that despotism (in the graveyard of freedom) brings about by vitiating all powers, this one is produced and secured by an equilibrium of the liveliest competing powers” (8.367, Humphrey translation, my emphasis). The doctrine of religion very likely sets the stage for that growth and gradual progress. Such a development makes unnecessary a united world government or even a single world church. Cf. 6.34n.

(6.153-4). The advantage of this definition, as Kant explains in a long footnote, is that, with it, “some erroneous interpretations of the concept of religion in general are obviated” (6.153n). The obviation of errors is helpful for two reasons. First, the definition puts forth a concept of religion which has no need of theoretical statements about God (for instance, regarding the knowledge of His existence), since, as the critique of pure reason (and thus of theology) shows, man is limited by a “lack of insight into supersensible objects.” The definition of religion is thus the fruit of the critique of speculative theology given in the critique of pure reason. Second, with this new definition, religion will no longer suffer the “erroneous representation” consisting in “particular duties” to God which appear to be “works of courtly service,” rather than in the properly religious “ethico-civil duties of humanity” (6.154n). Rather than toward cultus, that is, religion should direct men purely toward ethics. These two stated advantages to Kant’s redefinition of religion provide the core of his doctrine’s limitations on the claims of religious observation and practice. They also presuppose a critique of theology.

It is perhaps surprising to us that Aquinas treats the phenomenon of religion as a virtue rather than a system of beliefs, and, furthermore, that his consideration of religion is found under the explication of the cardinal virtue of justice rather than under the theological virtue of faith. Midway through his analysis, we find the following passage, which can be used as a challenge to Kant’s restriction of the meaning and purpose of religion:

Religion is neither a theological nor an intellectual, but a moral virtue, since it is a part of justice, and observes a mean, not in the passions, but in actions directed to God, by establishing a kind of equality in them. And when I say “equality,” I do not mean absolute equality, because it is not possible to pay God as much as we owe Him, but equality in consideration of man’s ability and God’s acceptance.¹⁹

Rather than an attempt to sway God’s favor, religion (and particularly its element of worship) is thus the means by which man admits his utter inability to give to God His due. Rather than an attempt to seize supernatural power by a perversion of natural means, acting in accord with the virtue of religion is a man’s expression of impotence in the face of the Divine.

The Thomistic analysis of religion is introduced by a consideration of the meaning of the word.²⁰ Against claims that the virtue of religion directs man to neighbor as well as to God, Aquinas invokes Cicero’s statement that “religion consists in offering service and ceremonial rites to a superior nature than men call divine”.²¹ This statement stands in clear opposition to Kant’s own clarification of the (subjective) meaning of “religion” in that it leaves obscure the character of the service offered but unmistakably through the mention of “ceremonial rites” admits the centrality of the cultus. For Aquinas, or at least for Cicero, religion is at least as cultic as it is moral. Further, in clarifying the etymology of the word (i.e. whether it comes from the notion of rereading,

¹⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II.81.5. Cf. Josef Pieper, “The Limits of Justice”, in *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, pp. 104-13. For a recent Thomist presentation of moral theology, see Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, especially part three, “Freedom and Natural Law.” Because of its lengthy discussion of human freedom, a comparison between this book and Kant’s moral thought would be very useful.

²⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, II-II.81.1

²¹ Aquinas is quoting Cicero’s (probably spurious) *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, II.53.

of choosing over again, or of retying a bond), Aquinas pushes further from Kant in stating that religion “denotes properly a relation to God.”²² If there is a God, he is to be worshiped, and worship may be understood as a kind of cultivation, and so cultus is justified.²³ These differences between Kant and Aquinas – they even disagree when it comes to the importance of the internal over external acts of religion²⁴ – point out the necessity of continuing to examine the question of the existence and character of an “essence above” man. There is no other way of judging between the two positions without continuing to search for the answer to this question.

We see that Aquinas argues for the human necessity of religion, that it opens up man to God all the more and keeps him aware of his limitations and his indebtedness as a created being. A human need is also met in Kant’s doctrine of religion, but in his presentation of the idea of the highest good, he merely provides support for man’s choice to live a moral life; it has nothing to do with assisting man in the grasping of a mysterious cosmos. Let us remember that the dogmas of church-faiths are expected to be replaced with or redirected toward summonses to moral action. What then takes the place of those

²² Nevertheless, a few sentences later, he grants that religion “is referred to those things one exhibits to one’s human kindred, if we take the term religion in a broad sense...” Further, “Every deed, in so far as it is done in God’s honor, belongs to religion” (S.T. II-II.81.4 ad 2), and so acts of religion clearly go beyond the merely ceremonial acts – which, in light of what they indicate to God and even more to us, Aquinas does not wish to consider as less important.

²³ S.T. II-II.81.1 ad 2-4.

²⁴ S.T. II-II.81.7: “in the Divine Worship it is necessary to make use of corporeal things, that man’s mind may be aroused thereby, as by signs, to the spiritual acts by means of which he is united to God. Therefore the internal acts of religion take precedence of the others and belong to religion essentially, while its external acts are secondary, and subordinate to the internal acts.” Kant would interpret John 4:24 much differently.

dogmas? Does religion, as Kant defines it, fully satisfy the human need to grasp his relationship to the rest of the world and to act upon this relationship?

A possible answer lies in Kant's discussion of the sublime, which is the failure of the imagination to comprehend the "absolutely great," such as the concept of infinity in mathematics or the vision of the starry heavens. Another possibility is the mysteries of reason, or other such matter discussed in the second and third *parerga* of the *Religion*. For that matter we could also look to his praise of sincerity toward the end of the *Religion* (6.190), or of the moral law itself near the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason*,²⁵ as possibilities. Such concepts, Kant writes, are both revolting and enticing because they frustrate any attempt at comprehension. Even though they might be suitable replacements for more traditional and more defined conceptualizations of the divine, their very lack of definition or concreteness may prohibit many human beings from reaching for them as replacements. The human propensity to anthropomorphize and to personalize a concept of the divine might well reveal in man a need that is not, and cannot be met in any substitute. Kant does not seem willing to deny this recognition of and adherence to mystery, but he cannot countenance doing so with any claim of holding those to be true – which seems precisely the human need.

This comparison with Aquinas serves, in addition to the historical observation of Kant's intention to overturn the theological tradition in the cause of human freedom and morality, to force us to wonder at the cost of Kant's success. As the present study unfolds, and as the *Religion* itself unfolds, the reader – and not just the traditionally

²⁵ 5.162-3.

religious reader but the reader interested in the human character and its possibly natural disposition to religious faith – should keep in mind the question of whether something crucial is lost in Kant’s moral reorientation of religion. Is the “moral law within”, and the hope that Kantian religion provides in its support, a sufficient place in which human longing for divinity may rest, or is the post Kantian religious man left in a state of conscious or unconscious dissatisfaction? Do the reorientation of the so-called sacraments, the demystification of the scriptures, and the demonization of the priest and the reformation of the churchman provide enough?²⁶ Kant would probably respond to these questions by observing that he who asks them is too stubborn to see the persuasiveness of his critical enterprise or too morally weak to make of it what an honest man can. Thus the reluctant critic of Kant’s doctrine of religion is forced to confront not merely it but rather Kant’s entire critique of reason, obviously something that cannot be taken up here.

The examination here proposed by Kant’s *Religion* requires the combination of two fields of inquiry, political thought and the doctrine of religion, which are often treated separately. A selective account of the secondary literature on both Kant’s political philosophy in general and then the doctrine of religion in particular (though not necessary as political) will be useful in framing the present attempt to give an account of

²⁶ Obviously these are not directly political reservations regarding Kant’s doctrine of religion, they do call into question the overall truth of his account.

both.²⁷ We shall begin by looking at some key discussions of Kant's political philosophy, and shall then consider a sample of scholarship on the *Religion*.

A. Interpretations of Kant's Political Thought in Connection with His Doctrine of Religion.

Scholarly treatment of Kant's political philosophy faces the challenge offered by Hannah Arendt in her lectures on the subject, since he "never wrote a political philosophy."

Neither the later short writings on history (which Kant "himself did not take too seriously") nor the *Metaphysics of Ethics* (which focuses too narrowly on philosophy of law) can be said to constitute the "Fourth *Critique*" that would provide the Kantian doctrine of politics.²⁸ Arendt's solution is to attempt, by uncovering the full implications of the account of reflection, to show that the *Critique of Judgment* "actually should have become the book that otherwise is missing in Kant's great work" (p. 9).

An article by Pierre Hassner and Howard Williams's book on Kant's political philosophy, by contrast, both first explore in detail the relationship of morality and politics in Kant's work and ultimately turns to the essay on eternal peace. In so doing they emphasize the importance of the *Religion* on that work, published three years later.²⁹

²⁷ The account that follows is meant to be a representative sketch of various major interpretations without serving at the same time as a response to them.

²⁸ Arendt, pp. 7-8. There is, further, the possibility (rejected by Arendt) that these works insofar as they "date from Kant's last years" reflect "the decrease of his mental faculties, which finally led into senile imbecility" and so ought not be taken seriously for this reason, either (p. 9).

²⁹ "The aim of perpetual peace cannot be achieved by political and legal means alone, so the success of Kant's plan for perpetual peace depends on the moral progress of man. Political and moral progress converge therefore on the same goal, a goal which Kant outlines most fully in his essay on *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*" (Williams 261). Williams also helpfully, though he does not follow it up sufficiently, suggests that the *Religion* is "perhaps the most committed" of Kant's works. The character of that commitment will interest us in chapter five.

Williams attends chiefly to the *Religion*'s bringing together of morality and politics in terms of the movement toward international peace, and, especially in the discussion of ethical as opposed to juridical commonwealth, shows that the *Religion* makes explicit the political implications of chiefly moral works such as the *Groundlaying* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Although both Hassner and Williams identify the *Religion* as informative regarding Kant's political thought, the work still receives only a modicum of attention. The suggestion is that the *Religion* would thus be as supplementary or secondary in political philosophy as it is in ethics. Certainly Hassner in particular deals at length with the aspect of right in Kant's political philosophy, and thus its connection to the political teachings of earlier moderns such as Locke and especially Rousseau, whereas the *Religion* itself dwells neither on right nor on rights very much. It would seem, though, that a political teaching would naturally take up the matters addressed in the first half of the *Metaphysics of Ethics*, and so it seems problematic to cast the *Religion* as a work of Kant's political philosophy: there is no "political teaching" in it if by this phrase we mean instruction on matters such as justice and right. What both Hassner and Williams indicate, however briefly, in their studies, however, is that differences of religion (as well as of language) are "to some extent desirable and permanent even though they entail hatred and war" – and so are an unavoidable obstacle in the effort for peace. For this reason, then, a religion within the boundaries of mere reason must, as "the gradually emerging, pacifying product" of enlightenment, "supervene" over all the different religious expressions of the world.³⁰ Even if Hassner is

³⁰ Hassner, p. 611.

right in locating the focal point of Kant's political philosophy in the doctrine of right in the *Metaphysics of Ethics* and in "Toward Eternal Peace", the *Religion* provides the basis of the international problem and its possible solution, and furthermore instructs on the role of religion in intranational, social, politics as well.

Before going any further, therefore, it is necessary to determine at least generally what is meant by "political philosophy". A quick response to the question would most likely be to point to Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, or Hobbes's *Leviathan* and to state that political philosophy is the attempt to address questions of justice and the best regime and the practicability of possible answers to those questions. While this quick response is not wrong, one might supplement and deepen it by appealing to an essay on the question by Leo Strauss:

In the expression "political philosophy," "philosophy" indicates the manner of treatment: a treatment which both goes to the roots of and is comprehensive; "political" indicates both the subject matter and the function: political philosophy deals with political matters in a manner that is meant to be relevant for political life; therefore its subject must be identical with the goal, the ultimate goal of political action. The theme of political philosophy is mankind's great objectives, freedom and government or empire – objectives which are capable of lifting all men beyond their poor selves.³¹

At the heart of this passage is a claim that becomes explicit in a different essay:

The philosophers, as well as other men who have become aware of the possibility of philosophy, are sooner or later driven to wonder "Why philosophy?" Why does human life need philosophy, why is it good, why is it right, that opinions about the nature of the whole should be replaced by genuine knowledge of the nature of the whole? Since human life is living together or, more exactly, is political life, the question "Why philosophy?" means "Why does political life

³¹ Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" , p. 10.

need philosophy?” This question calls philosophy before the tribunal of the political community: it makes philosophy politically responsible.³²

From this point of view Strauss is led to suggest that the “deeper meaning” of the phrase is “the political, or proper, treatment of philosophy, or the political introduction to philosophy – the attempt to lead the qualified citizens, or rather their qualified sons, from the political life to the philosophic life.”³³ Whether this meaning of political philosophy, the second sense of political philosophy as I have called it above, is present in Kant remains to be seen.³⁴ Joseph Knippenberg, who also identifies “two aspects” of political philosophy – the “normative” aspect and the aspect which considers the relationship of philosophy to political life – begins his consideration of the political nature of Kant’s philosophy by noting that it is primarily the classical political philosophers and not moderns who observe that second aspect as such.³⁵ We shall have to face this question in

³² Strauss, “On Classical Political Philosophy”, pp. 92-93.

³³ Strauss, “On Classical Political Philosophy”, pp. 93-94.

³⁴ It should be noted that Strauss offers a distinction between political and social philosophy that, if one is to accept it, leads to the denial that Kant is a political philosopher, at least in the first sense. Social philosophy “has the same subject matter of political philosophy, but it regards it from a different point of view. Political philosophy rests on the premise that the political association – one’s country or one’s nation – is the most comprehensive or the most authoritative association, whereas social philosophy conceives of the political association as a part of a larger whole which it designates by the term ‘society’” (“What is Political Philosophy?”, p. 13). One might therefore justly claim that the *Metaphysics of Ethics*, if anything, contains Kant’s political philosophy and the *Religion* contains, at best, Kant’s social philosophy. For this possibility, see for instance the contrast Kant offers between a political state and an ethical community at 6.94-6.

³⁵ Meditations on the two aspects “are written by classical philosophers and are inspired by the life and death of Socrates. Modern treatments of this theme are, needless to say, much less particular and personal appearing generally under the rubric of ‘theory and practice’” (Knippenberg, p. 155). This difference between ancients and moderns is suggested as well by Strauss, whose comments on the “deeper meaning” of political philosophy appear in an essay devoted to classical political philosophy: “No difference between classical political philosophy and modern political philosophy is more telling than this: the philosophic life, or the life of ‘the wise,’ which was the highest subject of classical political philosophy, has in modern times

the course of our examination, but even if we cannot add to our notion of political philosophy the Socratic concern, even focusing on the question of theory and practice as one of the aspects of modern political philosophy certainly opens up Kant's writings to further investigation.

Also worth noting, especially in light of the comments from Strauss, is that some interpreters of Kant have gone beyond claiming a political teaching of Kant and focused instead on the political mode of his writing -- although "political mode" for them does not always fit exactly with the object of Strauss' focus. Strikingly, a group of these scholarly works begin not by focusing on the *Metaphysics of Ethics* or "Toward Eternal Peace" or even *The Conflict of the Faculties*, but starting rather with the *Critique of Pure Reason* (and even earlier, with the so-called precritical writings). These works, by bringing attention to the doctrine of method, have done the invaluable service of rescuing the *Critique of Pure Reason* from existence as a strictly "epistemological" work. Hans Saner (whose book is praised by Arendt as "the only one worth studying"³⁶), spends an entire volume of preparatory work on Kant's political philosophy by concentrating on the political nature and tone of all of his thought.³⁷

almost completely ceased to be a subject of political philosophy" (Strauss, "On Classical Political Philosophy", p. 91).

³⁶ Arendt, p. 7.

³⁷ Saner's book, translated into English as *Kant's Political Thought: Its Origins and Development*, is more accurately titled in English as *Kant's Path from War to Peace, Volume One: Opposition and Unity: Paths to Kant's Political Thought*. Saner focuses extensively on this path throughout Kant's career, showing how the themes of war and peace are woven together by the time Kant writes the *Anthropology*.

It is even more strange, therefore, that these very scholarly treatments either treat the *Religion* very lightly (Saner)³⁸ or not at all (Knippenberg and Clarke).³⁹ This absence raises the question of whether the *Religion* is a necessary object of study at all, since we also have the *Conflict*, which does present the bulk of the argument of the *Religion*. It differs from the earlier work both in having a more upfront and streamlined presentation of the doctrine and in giving the philosophy-theology dispute more centrality.

Although not entirely attentive to the theology-philosophy question, the work of Sharon Anderson-Gold has advanced the thesis of Williams by delving further into the *Religion* and displaying the social element of radical evil, which is present from the very beginning of Kant's account, and linking it to his overall teaching on history and culture.⁴⁰ Anderson-Gold focuses her attention in particular on Kant's discussion of the

³⁸ Saner does treat the *Religion* (pp. 269-80) – he makes the provocative comment that “Conflict thus maintains the possibility of freedom and a minimum, at least, of its reality – just enough to let a man remember to what end freedom is a principle, what the principle of morality is, what faith is based upon, and what upholds the church” (p. 279) – but attends chiefly to faith in reason and faith in facts, which “are mutually exclusive and cannot coexist except in conflict” (p. 271). He treats the philosophy-theology relationship more explicitly in his discussion of *The Conflict of the Faculties* (pp. 96-103, 302) – but it is important in the *Religion* as well, perhaps all the more so by being more obscure. Of course, Saner may have planned further treatment of the *Religion* in the second volume of his project. We do have this intriguing comment, however: “this seemingly senseless battle of religious parties has an unintended beneficial effect: not unlike war in a politically decayed world, it preserves the freedom that it would not mind suppressing. Its task in the history of faith is to keep freedom alive, though in limited measure, until a united faith can agree with freedom and enter into it.” (pp. 272-3)

³⁹ Although Clarke states that “Kant's concern for freedom in the public use of reason is evident in almost all his writing on politics from the publication of *What is Enlightenment?* and onwards” (p. 64), his examples do not include the *Religion*. The second half of his essay is a good treatment of *The Conflict of the Faculties*, and does take up the matter of his thoughts on religion overall, but curiously does not touch on the *Religion* as a book itself. Similarly, Knippenberg, while examining the *Conflict* and many other writings carefully, as well as the situation caused in no small part by the *Religion* (see esp. pp. 166-7), does not mention it, let alone analyze its content.

⁴⁰ The “concept of radical evil offers a systematic means for evaluating the sources of our historical failures to realize human freedom... If evil is rooted in the sociocultural aspects of the human condition, it goes deeper than external institutions. External institutions are the result of sociocultural processes that must

tendency to humanity, since it both is most closely tied to the concept of evil and also “represents the social and cultural dimension of human nature, the dimension through which freedom will historically develop” – thus identifying a link between moral evil, social-cultural institutions, and the historical development of freedom. As a result, her “interpretation of radical evil, unlike others such as Michaelson’s, makes a strong connection between evil and our social condition.”⁴¹ Individual moral struggle is always part of a “larger struggle” within a “social context.” In emphasizing that “moral development” has a clear “social orientation,” Anderson-Gold clarifies the political dimension of Kant’s doctrine of religion and thereby transforms him into a critical social theorist.⁴² This is among the most helpful accounts of Kant’s doctrine of religion in relation to social, if not political, philosophy.

B. Interpretations of Kant’s doctrine of religion with respect to political thought

The efforts of Emil Fackenheim to understand certain puzzles in the doctrine of religion provide the fountainhead of much of the subsequent work in Kant literature. Beginning with the observation that Kant’s contemporaries, those “moral and religious humanists” inspired by his ethical writings, were stunned by the “essay on radical evil [which]

become the subject of moral improvement. By reconceptualizing the overcoming of evil as a social process, it is possible to build a bridge between Kant’s ethics and his philosophy of history” (Anderson-Gold, p. 26) Anderson-Gold is particularly helpful because she brings to light certain “interpretative gaps” for those who wish to apply Kantian ethics to society (p. 31).

⁴¹ Anderson-Gold, pp. 35, 36.

⁴² Anderson-Gold, p. 50. This transformation has been attempted before but without giving due attention to the doctrine of religion: “while many socially oriented commentators attempt to provide communitarian applications for a Kantian ethic, their commitment to a secular foundation and their dismissal of the conception of radical evil make it difficult to provide a universal social and historical scope for their projects.” (p. 52)

certainly represents a shift in doctrine.”⁴³ Dismissing the interpretation of the *Religion* as a work of necessity occasioned by political realities,⁴⁴ Fackenheim argues that Kant’s “philosophy of religion” and his presentation of radical evil are necessary explorations in his moral philosophy. “Kant’s shift to radical evil is made for a strictly philosophical reason, and this reason is, strangely enough, the need to give a full and adequate justification of moral freedom... [H]e finds it necessary to introduce the doctrine of radical evil so as to make freedom... intelligible.”⁴⁵ After introducing an “important ambiguity” in the doctrine of freedom, Fackenheim argues to the conclusion that, “whereas, according to Christian doctrine, only God can redeem fallen man, Kant asserts, and must assert, that man can redeem himself... How this conversion [to the new man] is possible is utterly unintelligible... This revolution, then, is a sort of *creatio ex nihilo*... It too is an ultimate act of decision for which there is no higher ground.”⁴⁶ In rejecting a primarily political motivation in the publication of the doctrine of religion by focusing on its purely philosophical intention, Fackenheim opens up for the reader the latent but undeniable darkness present in Kant’s account.

The result of Gordon Michaelson’s monograph, although itself challenging a part of Fackenheim’s interpretation, continues Fackenheim’s project of focusing on the ambiguities of Kant’s doctrine. Toward the beginning of his account Michaelson offers a

⁴³ Fackenheim, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Fackenheim, pp. 20, 195.

⁴⁵ Fackenheim, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Fackenheim, pp. 32-33.

helpful general statement about the character of the *Religion* itself, a “distinctive feature” of which is “the way Kant interweaves closely-defined details of moral philosophy... with sweeping generalizations about human nature. The first two books of the *Religion*, in particular, amount to a Kantian treatise on human nature.”⁴⁷ This would make the approach toward political considerations all the more clear. Although Michaelson for the most part steers clear of political considerations himself, his reflections on Kant’s treatise on human nature lead the reader to provocative conclusions that will eventually contribute to the political nature of the teaching. For example, Michaelson suggests that Kant’s “position is a kind of polite preview of the Freudian project, in the sense that... a presumably rational being turns out to be subject to a vast and powerful array of dynamic, hidden, and natural forces, forces that bind even the most intelligent and insightful person to his or her true motivations in public life.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Michaelson 2002, p. 37. Michaelson also helpfully observes that, because of the “extremely complicated terminological scaffolding” erected for the discussion of radical evil, “a piecemeal approach to Kant’s language” is necessary (p. 32). Michaelson’s apparent swerve from Fackenheim’s interpretation appears later when he again mentions the “terminological scaffolding” that “can create the impression that the theory of radical evil is a somewhat isolated and highly technical component within Kant’s total ethical theory, a component that Kant momentarily sets off for special attention to fill out a picture potentially left incomplete” by his earlier moral-ethical works. “But the theory of radical evil is not a corrective to the earlier ethical writings, but a crucial part of Kant’s larger vision of the creation of a moral universe” (p. 52). If this is a difference, both authors share a real attention to the philosophical core of the doctrine of radical evil.

⁴⁸ Michaelson 2002, p. 44. And further, in a later passage: “The Kant of the textbooks often seems to provide us with a mathematically precise universe, dependable transcendental footholds, a theory of moral obligation firmly grounded in the moral law, and an ambitious authorship designed to explain how these all fit together. Yet, as the account of radical evil suggests, the free will that is at the heart of Kant’s theory of human nature has the look of something raw and arbitrary – the look, that is, of something surprisingly close to the world that Ivan [Karamazov] describes” (p. 68). Although conclusions such as these and the arguments that lead to them are both provocative and compelling, I am not so certain that “[r]adical evil can thus be viewed as the final result of Kant’s latent resentment against the body” (p. 69) – but this is worth looking further into.

John Silber opens his essay with the following assertion: “That Kant was a religious man there can be little doubt.”⁴⁹ Yet Silber quickly clarifies that Kant’s “is essentially a religion of ethics” – so much so “that Kant could scarcely have written a book on religion without simultaneously illuminating and expanding his ethical theory.”⁵⁰ Above all, Silber views Kant’s writings on religion, but particularly the *Religion*, as a further working-out of his more explicitly ethical writings. Per Silber, what Kantian ethics treats statically, Kantian philosophy of religion treats dynamically; this explains the change in Kant’s understanding of the will with regard to evil and transcendental freedom. Without the *Religion*, then, Kantian ethics would have remained too abstract and inapplicable to the historical and human world. “The capital importance of the *Religion* in Kant’s ethics consists in the fact that the *Religion* offers us his only sustained analysis of the human will...”⁵¹ Thus the book is not so important for any normative content about religion or even ethics but rather for technical clarification.

From a different point of view, Allen Wood argues that “a full understanding” of Kant’s doctrine of moral faith “is necessary for any genuine appreciation of the outlook of the critical philosophy as a whole.”⁵² The significance of religion for Kant, according to Wood, is that in the writings on religion “Kant exhibits the critical philosophy itself as a *religious* outlook, a profound conception of the human condition as a whole, and of

⁴⁹ Silber 1960, p. lxxix.

⁵⁰ Silber 1960, p. lxxx.

⁵¹ Silber 1960, p. cxxvii.

⁵² Wood 1970, p. vii.

man's proper response to that condition."⁵³ Because the doctrine of moral faith has its "foundations in the critical philosophy" itself, the "moral arguments" underlying the doctrine "constitute an integral part of the critical philosophy"⁵⁴ – and are not a simple appendage or even a last-minute clarification. Furthermore, Wood makes clear that Kant's writings on religion have more than a theoretical goal, for moral faith sees the need for a "moral community" in addition to a "political state." Religion

is derived from the social character of man's highest end... Kant's 'philosophy of religion,' then, in the strictest sense, is part of his social philosophy, and it is in his philosophy of religion that Kant gives decisive expression to the role of human community in his ethics.⁵⁵

For reasons of space, however, and because this aspect of Kant's doctrine of religion is not immediately pertinent to his study, Wood refrains from examining this notion. His concern with Kant's writings on religion is chiefly with the basis in the critical philosophy of moral faith, and thus he argues that the *Religion* is a sort of culmination of Kant's philosophical enterprise. Wood himself takes a new direction in a later work, in which he offers a more socially-oriented presentation of the doctrine of religion as part of larger analysis of ethical life.⁵⁶ He notes that "the most powerful historical force for good is an enlightened religious community"⁵⁷ – and thus begins to show the influence of

⁵³ Wood 1970, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Wood 1970, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Wood 1970, p. 191.

⁵⁶ Wood 1999. At the conclusion of this more recent discussion, Wood raises important questions about religion in our own time and Kant's probable reaction to it. I treat these in chapter 7 below.

⁵⁷ Wood 1999, p. 283.

Anderson-Gold's work. Wood now argues that the "doctrine of radical evil is anthropological, not theological, in both its ground and its content. Its basis is not religious authority but naturalistic anthropology... It is based on a shrewd perception of how people have made themselves in society – especially in modern bourgeois society."⁵⁸ Religion itself is nevertheless crucial, for its institutions can cause men – or prevent them – "to relate to one another on terms of extraordinary intimacy, self-revelation, mutual influence, and mutual trust."⁵⁹ These recent development in interpretations of the doctrine of religion as part of Kant's social-ethical thought have marked a real development of appreciation in its relevance beyond appending his moral thought.

Between the publication times of Wood's two books there appeared another crucial interpretation of the doctrine of religion. Michel Despland, in his analysis of Kant's "philosophy of religion," makes a beginning claim similar to Silber's – "There is no reason to doubt, and there are many reasons to believe, that Kant was in his own way a religious man." To this Despland offers the suggestion "that Kant's philosophy of religion is an effort to understand his own religion, to clarify its meaning, and to come into a more mature possession of [its] basic insight..."⁶⁰ In other words, Kant's writings on religion are not only matter for public consumption but a sort of working-out for himself of his personal understanding not only of what religion is but of what it means to

⁵⁸ Wood 1999, p. 291.

⁵⁹ Wood 1999, p. 316.

⁶⁰ Despland 1973, pp. 103-4.

him. Despland's suggestion of Kant as a religious man makes clear Kant's nuanced understanding of the word "religion"; nevertheless, Despland reads Kant as a seriously religious man who "returned [religion] to something like the original Latin and Ciceronian meaning of *religio*"⁶¹ and who "can be said to have criticized the Christian tradition (and even to have objected to many of its doctrines) from the inside..." For this reason, Despland concludes, "Kant's philosophy of religion... could be presented as a Christian philosophy..."⁶² Rather than working merely from his own ethical principles, therefore, Kant is said to have contributed to Christianity by returning it to its original basis and on its own terms. Despland's thesis is significant to the present study because it asserts not only that Kant's doctrine of religion reflects his own beliefs (that is, not merely his view of religion, but rather his religious beliefs) but also that it is an honestly religious attempt to return Christianity to honest religiosity.⁶³

Elizabeth Galbraith makes a shift in approach with her suggestion that in the *Religion* Kant operates as a moral theologian rather than as a philosophical examiner of religion.

He seeks to raise both morality and theology to a higher level of significance in the progression towards religion, a fact which has been neglected in a great deal of Kant scholarship. Therefore the *Religion* is not as independent an investigation of religion from a philosophical standpoint, as its title leads one to believe...

However, it is essential to point out that it is not my intention to suggest that Kant

⁶¹ Despland 1973, pp. 108-9.

⁶² Despland 1973, p. 252.

⁶³ At play throughout Despland, and the other studies including the present one, is the problematic meaning of "religion." By the end of Despland's study what we mean by religion and what Kant means by religion have been conflated intentionally.

thought of himself as a theologian. Rather, Kant engaged in theology whilst acting under the title of philosopher. It is for this reason that I have chosen to call him a ‘closet’ theologian.⁶⁴

It would seem that Galbraith is suggesting Kant to be engaging in esoteric writing, a possibility to be examined below in chapter five. Kant’s intention, contrary to the claim of Fackenheim, is thus “to defend the rational interpretation of religion, as a study belonging to the philosophy faculty, against authoritarian claims of priority of interpretation coming from biblical theologians in the theology faculty.” Therefore, it is only to protect his philosophizing from censorship that Kant “defined it as a philosophical exercise.”⁶⁵ There is something to Galbraith’s overall claim, but there remains an unclarity about what Kant is really up to, for she seems to argue that as a prudent philosopher he had to act like a theologian who was acting like a philosopher. Regardless, it is worth noting that Galbraith’s reading of Kant does emphasize this political aspect of Kant’s doctrine that studies explicitly concerned with politics do not.

Onora O’Neill, echoing Heinrich Heine’s humorous claim, argues that Kant dispatched religion from his critical philosophy and then revived it – in order to placate the fears of his valet. Behind this claim is the notion that Kant viewed religion as “the bridge across the great gulf” between the natural world and human freedom, a gulf created in part by the critical philosophy itself.⁶⁶ Beginning “from an anthropocentric

⁶⁴ Galbraith 1999, pp. 62-63.

⁶⁵ Galbraith 1999, pp. 65-66.

⁶⁶ O’Neill 1997, p. 271.

rather than a theocentric starting point”⁶⁷ Kant’s critical philosophy thus turns to religion in the form of a “reasoned answer” to the question of “What may I hope?”⁶⁸ By “reasoned answer” O’Neill means to say that, rather than supporting irrationalism, “the grounds of faith lie within the limits of reason. [Kant] is, it seems, neither deist nor fideist.”⁶⁹ In short then, according to O’Neill, Kant’s doctrine of religion is not an expression of his personal religious views (Despland) or a final working-out of ethical ideas (Silber); it is somehow a capstone to the critical philosophy (Wood), but its intention seems less directly moral than cognitive, although of course it would support morality.

For the most part, however, prolonged attention is not given to the explicitly political element of the doctrine of religion, especially as it appears in the *Religion*. A notable exception is the effort of Mark Lilla, who reads Kant as the successor to the line of thinkers of modern political philosophy. This orientation provides a key to understanding the purpose of the writing and content of Kant’s *Religion*: religion is the “original problematic” of modern political philosophy.⁷⁰ Lilla reads Kant as “a child of Rousseau but not a disciple”⁷¹ whose “novel view is that religion as a psychological phenomenon arises ultimately out of the needs of practical reason, and that fear,

⁶⁷ O’Neill 1997, p. 278.

⁶⁸ O’Neill 1997, pp. 278-9.

⁶⁹ O’Neill 1997, p. 279.

⁷⁰ Lilla 1998, p. 397.

⁷¹ Lilla 1998, p. 402.

ignorance, and even sentiment only respond to that need... Man is religious because he is genuinely needy..."⁷² Kant's understanding of religion is thus not theological but rather as a view of man as *homo religiosus*.⁷³ The role of religion, particularly of Christianity, in political life has been at different points to support and to undermine the crucial virtue of hope,⁷⁴ and thus Kant sees Christianity as beneficial to public life if it can be "reprimarized" and universalized.⁷⁵ So, according to Lilla, Kant's doctrine of religion is first a reading of modern society's ills through the lens of Christianity and second a proposed cure.

From a cursory study of some of the secondary literature, the necessity of understanding Kant's teaching on either politics or religion depends on the understanding of his teaching on the other. There still remains much work to be done on Kant's politics and doctrine of religion. Even where scholars have succeeded in locating for Kant a convincing place in the history of political philosophy, further determination is possible. Most pressing is the need to address the remaining relative silence in the literature on the relation of Kant to political philosophy in the second sense mentioned above; Lilla's discussion is suggestive but not exhaustive. The present study intends to further these determinations by attending to the *Religion* in light of its character as a book – as itself a philosophical political act whose character and even existence are not accidental but

⁷² Lilla 1998, pp. 409-10.

⁷³ Lilla 1998, p. 421.

⁷⁴ Lilla 1998, p. 419.

⁷⁵ Lilla 1998, p. 423.

themselves have something to teach about politics, philosophy, religion, authorship, and readership.

C. The Arrangement and Central Themes of the *Religion*

The best way to begin to demonstrate the intention of Kant's doctrine of religion is to examine the stated theme of the book on religion. There are at least four ways in which Kant labels the purpose of the book:

1. It is a "philosophical doctrine of religion" (6.10, 16)
2. It is a "treatise dedicated to the definition of the concept of religion" (6.8)
3. It is "to make apparent the relation of religion to a human nature..." (6.11)
4. It is "the unification, or the attempt at it," of reason and scripture (6.13)

These are not necessarily identical. A "doctrine of religion," if we follow the distinction between doctrine and critique, would be the positive teaching that follows a critique. The "concept of religion" and its definition might seem more clearly theoretical matters, while to investigate how religion is related to human nature would seem to be an anthropological effort. Lastly, to attempt the unity of reason and revelation would seem to be a task of theology. Despite the ostensible differences in these acts, the *Religion* is offered as all of them. If so, a book of such a character would not allow one reading but several, inasmuch as several themes are being worked out simultaneously.

That this one book can have a fourfold argument is clear from another division that is suggested by the very arrangement of the book. Owing to its publication history, and its prepublication history in that the first part originally appeared by itself, the *Religion* has four distinct starting points. The oldest such starting point is the beginning of part one. The first two editions of the *Religion* each carried its own preface, and the

preface to the first edition has a clear division within it in reflection of two sufficiently (or at least initially) unrelated topics of discussion. As each of these four starting points offers its own distinct perspective to the book as a whole, the reader can pursue any one of them throughout, thus emphasizing some matters and ignoring or downplaying others. Only when the reader makes the effort first to see the various perspectives of the book and second to unite them into one does the full teaching of the *Religion* become manifest.

The second preface is a defense of the first edition of the book. First, it claims to be a mere experiment in the relationship of rational religion to revealed religion, with the indication that believers should not take offense at what is a hypothetical enterprise. Then, Kant announces that one need not understand the critical philosophy in order to grasp the principles of his doctrine of religion, but rather that its conclusions are meant for everyone and should be incorporated into sermons. We find here, then, a seeming contradiction between the claim that the doctrine of religion is a speculative experiment and the claim that its conclusions would be helpful for the common believer.

In the preface to the first edition, Kant first raises the question of how religion is related to morality. Basically, religion follows inevitably from morality, though we might think otherwise. The first half of the first preface thus offers the book on religion as an application of the critical philosophy to the concept of religion. Most readers of the book on religion tend to focus on this theme alone.

The second half of the first preface is less theoretical and more polemical or political. It raises the question of the proper boundaries of operation for both the professor of philosophy and the professor of theology, and cautioning his readers about

the tendency of the latter spitefully to muscle his way into all branches of sciences so as to humble them. Thus in the second part of the first preface Kant sets the groundwork for a dispute between the faculties of theology and philosophy, and also forces theology to admit that it thrives from conversation with philosophers. Therefore, it is only fair that theologians give Kant a fair hearing, so much so that he argues that the book on religion – or one like it – ought to be used as the culmination of theological education.

Finally, in the introductory remarks to part one, Kant presents the question of whether the human race is headed toward or away from moral and physical corruption. Reading the doctrine of religion on this level, one focuses on human nature, evil, religion, and politics. Part of the task is thus after explicating the various themes to determine how, or whether, they combine as parts of one doctrine: is there a principle theme among them under which the rest might be understood?

Despite the varied themes of the *Religion*, in outline its main thread of presentation is not difficult to comprehend. It has four major parts, each of which is divided at least once.⁷⁶ The four parts themselves demonstrate the major thread of Kant's argument in symbolic terms, taking on the theme expressed at the beginning of part one (i.e. the third beginning sketched above). The following summary of these parts is an

⁷⁶ The first part is divided into four, with each leading to the next. The other three parts, however, are divided into two, with the resulting components in opposition to each other. For example, the first "section" of part two attends to the rightful claim of the good principle, while the second treats the rightful claim of the evil principle. Part three has two "divisions," the first of which is a philosophical presentation and the second of which is an historical presentation. Finally, part four has two smaller "parts," and discusses first the service of God and second the counterfeit service of God. Parts two through four of the *Religion* are thus self-contained single reflections divided into two opposites so as to reveal more fully the consideration at hand. This will prove a useful method.

attempt to characterize the main thread, but, in light of the nonlinear character of Kant's writing in the *Religion*, the summary obscures many of the most intriguing elements of the work – but these are taken up at length later in the present study.

Part one, titled “On the Indwelling of the Evil Principle against the Good; that is, on Radical Evil in Human Nature,” and originally published on its own as an article, is divided into four sections, along with a brief introduction and two separate remarks. It begins with the troubling question of whether the human race is moving toward moral progress or decline but then shifts to asking whether man himself may be called good, evil, or neither. The first step in answering this question, since it must be answered a priori, is to examine what happens in the adoption of maxims. Having made the adoption of maxims central to his understanding of morality, Kant now attempts to give a more fundamental account insofar as he delves into what determines man to choose the maxims that he does. Assuming that man is a free being, this determination cannot be traced to his natural inclinations but only to a mysterious and apparently unknowable “first ground.” Thus ends the introduction to part one, but a remark precedes the main body of this part.

In this remark, Kant makes several distinctions in order to clarify the rigoristic approach that part one will take, and in so doing introduces two notions that do not receive thematic treatment anywhere in the *Religion* but without which the book is not intelligible. The first of these is “disposition” (*Gesinnung*), which is Kant's attempt to identify and to characterize the “first ground” of taking up good or evil maxims. The

second of these is “way of thinking” (Denkungsart) and would seem to mean something like attitude that springs from mental habit.

Following this remark are the four divisions of part one. The first of these takes up the “original tendencies” of animality, humanity, and personality, all of which are “elements of the determination of man” to good. The second division, in contrast (but, as we shall see, not in real contrast), takes up the “propensity to evil in human nature” in the forms of frailty, impurity, and depravity – which corrupt both the disposition and the way of thinking and are thus compared implicitly to original sin of Christian theology. Third, having set up a division each concerning the determination to the good and then to the evil in human nature, Kant surprises the reader (in light of his seeming alliance with philosophical pedagogues early in the introduction to part one) by following the latter position and heading the third division, “Man is by nature evil,” and using a morally ominous quote from Horace. Here Kant introduces the notion of “radical innate evil in human nature” and dispenses with giving “formal proof” that it exists, instead giving many examples of it from human history. He continues in the third division by turning from the “experiential” proof of evil and toward an a priori concept of it, and the point of examination is the incorporation of a moral and a sensuous incentive in maxims. The subordination of the former to the latter results from a guilt that is on one hand always seemingly present and on the other surely originating from human freedom. After this division’s elaboration on its predecessor, the reader might suspect that the fourth and last division will return to the first division in the form of a further consideration of good rather than evil, but instead Kant offers a further reflection on evil, this time on its origin.

By origin one can mean either according to reason or according to time, and while taking up the former as his focus Kant introduces a recurring meditation on the Bible, whose language reflects the difficulty of explaining the origin of evil.

Part two, “On the Battle of the Good Principle against the Evil Principle for Lordship over Men,” is divided into a brief introduction, two sections (the first itself divided into three subsections), and a concluding remark. The introduction recalls the claim in part one that evil is not the result of man’s sensuous nature and asserts that the chief error of the stoics resides in thinking otherwise. Most immediately obvious about the treatment of the “battle” between the good and evil principles is that the two sections, one devoted to the good and the other to the evil, make use of legal terminology. The first subsection in the discussion of the suit of the good principle recalls from the analysis of humanity from early in part one; reflection on humanity leads Kant to link the “ideal of moral perfection,” to which all men have a duty to aspire, with the (as-yet unnamed) Biblical Christ. The second and third subsections raise questions about this personification of the ideal of moral perfection, the third being a lengthy investigation into the theological question of what is known by Christians as justification.

Instead of providing a comparable abstract argument on behalf of the evil principle, section two offers a selective interpretation of salvation history. The Christian Bible, including Genesis, offers a pictorial presentation of the historical evolution of a revolution in morality personified by (the still-unnamed) Christ. Just before the conclusion of the body of part two, just as he did at the conclusion of part one but now even more strongly, Kant emphasizes the largely symbolic purpose of the revealed text

and claims that the stories are vehicles for the essential moral teaching at the heart of that text.

Even though by the end of part two Kant has commented on the Bible and raised typical theological questions, the *Religion* has not yet discussed religion but instead seems to remain in the realm of morality. Only with part three is Kant clearly talking about religion, and so one must ask how to understand the first two parts of the book, and especially the second.

Part three, “On the Victory of the Good Principle over the Evil Principle and on the Foundation of a Kingdom of God on Earth,” provides the resolution of its predecessor by moving to the social or communal consideration of human evil and thus returning to the full implications of part one. As soon as man is among his fellows he becomes further susceptible to radical evil, and so the ultimate solution to the problem of moral betterment is an ethical, as opposed to political, community. The theme of part three – which has two divisions, first a philosophical presentation (split into seven subdivisions) and second a companion historical presentation – is the emergence and success of this community. These are followed, as always, by a general remark. The philosophical presentation relies on the language of Hobbes: just as there was a political state of nature, so is there an ethical state of nature from which man should exit in favor of an ethical community. An ethical community differs from its political counterpart in having laws that dictate the morality rather than legality of actions and which deal with man’s inner character. This necessitates the “concept of God as a moral ruler of the world” and thus means that the ethical community is primarily to be understood as a “people of God.”

Because human hands decrease in majesty all that they touch, the pure idea of an ethical community (as church invisible) is possible in the concrete only as a visible church, which, to the extent that it is true insofar as it reflects the invisible, has four marks by which it may be identified. A further reflection of the weakness of human nature is that the visible church must originate from an historical revelation, best communicated by means of a scripture – but the presence and the limitations of this scripture lead to many difficulties of correct practice and belief. The faith promoted by a church, i.e. “church faith,” has as its legitimate and necessary interpreter “the universal practical rules of a pure rational religion.” All historical religions betray, in one way or another, at least grudging recognition of this ultimate criterion of scripture and thus doctrinal interpretation. Finally, the goal of the visible church is the coming of the kingdom of God, that is, the eventual shedding of all historical and extramoral (“impure”) doctrinal considerations. Even if this is at an “infinite remove” we can take heart if the kingdom of God is at least within us as individuals. The historical presentation is a largely critical account of Christian history the main points of whose criticism are derived from the previous philosophical presentation. The criticisms of Judaism in the historical account, it takes little effort to see, lead to the same criticisms of the Christianity of which it was the vehicle. With this Kant brings us full circle to the present day and would seem to have ended the *Religion*, just as Hobbes might be expected to have concluded *Leviathan* with his presentation of the Christian commonwealth.

Part four, “On Service and Anti-Service under the Lordship of the Good Principle, or on Religion and Popery,” reminds the reader of Hobbes’s presentation of the

“Kingdom of Darkness,” the most blistering attack on Christianity (or a certain kind of Christianity) in the book, even though it would seem unnecessary in light of the previous arguments in the book as a whole. Like its predecessors, part four has a brief introduction and a general remark; it is divided into two parts, the first into two sections and the second into four. The first half of part one takes up the service of God and the second takes up the anti-service of God. Kant begins the first part by defining religion (using formulations tried out earlier in the book) by linking it to moral rather than cultic duty and then makes a distinction between natural and learned religion. The two sections of the first part take up this distinction by studying Christianity according to each possibility. It is not immediately clear why Kant writes this part, for much of it is present explicitly or implicitly in earlier parts of the book, although now Kant now writes about religion whereas before, in parts one and two, he was writing more abstractly, wherein neither man’s social existence nor religion a fully explicated have yet appeared in the book (except for the first parergon). The second part of part four deepens the critique of impure church-faith and analyzes further the human nature which is prone to it. The fourth of the four sections concludes (with the exception of the general remark) the *Religion* and is thus striking as it offers a discussion of conscience as a “guiding thread” in “matters of faith.”

In addition to these four parts, each part has an appendix, called a parergon, that takes up material that cannot be properly treated in the context of the chapters themselves. Examination of these remarks furthers the main discussion of each part, helps to clarify what Kant means by “within the boundaries of mere reason”, and also

contain some of his most suggestive thoughts about religion. Finally, preceding the four parts and their appendices, two prefaces – one for each of the first two editions – begin the *Religion*. As we have already noted, these two prefaces, which in a way are three due to the divisibility of the first, along with the opening of the first major part may be said each to constitute a different beginning into the argument of the many-layered *Religion*. This would suggest at least four layers to the *Religion*, or sufficient starting-points for four different readings of the *Religion* all of which must be bound up in one overall reading. The method of the present dissertation is to take up each of these in turn and to follow it through to a preliminary conclusion and then to bind them up as suggested.

D. On the Procedure of the Present Study

With these opening considerations in mind, the dissertation will take up, in chapters two through five below, four different strands in the argument of the doctrine of religion as it is found in the *Religion* book; these four chapters examine the teaching of *Religion* on theoretical reason, morality and moral theology, political life, and philosophy itself and how each of these relates to religion and to the *Religion*. In laying out these four relationships I follow the lead of Kant himself as expressed in the various beginnings that introduce the book. In each of these beginnings Kant means to isolate a particular theme for emphasis, but all of them must be read together if a coherent reading of the *Religion* is to emerge. Chapters two and three are both provisional and necessary, provisional in the sense that they intend to bring out the major paths of argument in the *Religion* regarding reason and morality without pursuing every pertinent matter, and necessary insofar as these considerations are essential as the basis for the political teaching of the *Religion*,

the examination of which is the primary intention of the present study. Chapter four, the first half of the heart of the dissertation, is an analysis, based in Kant's thoughts on morality in the *Religion* but with a focus on his findings regarding human nature, of the relationship of religion and human nature insofar as the one manifests the other in political life. Equally important is the content of chapter five, which examines the relationship of philosophers and theologians – a relationship that takes place in a political setting and which thus also is part of Kant's political philosophy. This twofold division, of chapters two and three on one hand and of three and four on the other, is thus a recognition both of Fackenheim's assertion that the *Religion* is a philosophical rather than prudential work and of Cassirer's opposite claim, for – as will be seen – the *Religion* is a working-out of the concept of radical evil as a solution to a lacuna in Kant's critical philosophy as well as the basis of a previously-lacking analysis of political things, philosophy included. Prior to chapter seven, which is a summary synthesis of these different themes and then the posing of critical questions to Kant's doctrine of religion, chapter six provides an excursus in what might be considered the fifth part of the *Religion*, Kant's short essay on "The End of All Things." In this essay will be found an elaboration of certain themes discussed in the previous chapters.

The reader might raise two general objections to the manner of investigation. The first of these is the obvious, general, and deliberate isolation of the *Religion* from Kant's other works; a fetishistic vacuum-packed interpretation of a book so obviously tied not only to other books but also to historical events is insufficient in bringing out the full meaning of the book. One could surely profit from the context provided by a lengthier

display of how the books comes out of the critiques and of how it relates to the historical essays written so close in time to the *Religion*. With such context comes the possibility of seeing more clearly Kant's overall intentions and the degree to which this book does or does not contribute to them. This, however, is the task for another endeavor – and other writers have already made significant contributions to it – since the intention here is to read the *Religion* on its own terms and as a cosmos with its own separate effects on the reader. Such an approach does not seem illicit in light of Kant's own claims in the second preface about who can profit from reading it and in the first preface about its possible role even in seminaries.

The general procedure of the dissertation may also raise questions inasmuch as it breaks into separate parts an argument that Kant presents as a composite. On occasion this procedure is clearly problematic, for it requires the suspension of consideration of passages in the *Religion* that are in sequential order. For example, sections of part one of the *Religion* are discussed in chapter three of the dissertation, but other sections not until chapters four and five, and even more seriously, in some cases the same text is discussed in two different ways in different chapters. This is not to suggest that Kant's account is incoherent but rather to demonstrate that it is complex; the reasons for this complexity will become clear. Although a unity of thought exists in the *Religion*, the presentation is not, or does not appear, so unified. Considering passages slightly out of context (and yet always within the context of the book) helps the interpreter to avoid merely reiterating Kant's explicit line of argument, while juxtaposing passages from different parts of the *Religion* that nevertheless have the same or similar theme helps to bring out more the

dialectical character of the work. In order to avoid too much confusion, the previous section contained an overall sketch of the order of Kant's arguments as they appear in the four parts of the *Religion*, and the conclusion will contain a synthesis of the intervening chapters that will, one hopes, tie everything back together again. Ultimately there are very good reasons – philosophical, polemical, and pedagogical – for Kant's seemingly muddled presentation, and if this dissertation is at all successful, it will assist the reader in returning to the *Religion* as it exists with a fuller understanding of the parts.

2. Sublated Knowledge: The *Religion* and Theoretical Reason

The meaning of the title is the first question faced by the reader of the *Religion*. Answering this question entails revisiting that part of the Transcendental Dialectic pertinent to (as Kant's criticism of) speculative theology, after which it would seem (especially when the reader keeps in mind Kant's still earlier dismissals of what might be called mysticism and fideism) that no religion could withstand the critique: if there is no scientific knowledge about God, it seems unlikely that much meaningful practice could be devoted to Him.⁷⁷ This chapter, therefore, without going into matters of religion itself, looks to Kant's criticism of speculative theology in the first critique as reiterated throughout the *Religion* in order to begin to see any remaining relationship between reason and religion. As in the earlier work, Kant's critical treatment of human knowledge with respect to God leads first to the impairment of theology as a science and then to a practical use of reason that preserves the importance of God.⁷⁸

A likely first reaction to the word "reason" in the title may be concern that Kant embraces the very errors that were exposed by the first critique; a "religion within the boundaries of mere reason" might suggest a return to early modern natural theology, already demolished by David Hume as well as by Kant, or even to rational theology in the manner of St. Anselm, a modern version of which is taken apart in the *Critique of*

⁷⁷ One should not assume too quickly that Kant undertook the critique of speculative theology from a desire to destroy religion. Bielfeldt (pp. 152-4) amplifies Kant's claim that he is protecting faith from the skepticism and dogmatism that result from such theology, at the obvious cost of religion.

⁷⁸ For a detailed account of pertinent texts leading up to the *Religion*, see Lawrence, pp. 312-31.

Pure Reason. Unless Kant is using these words with some nuance, he would seem to reverse the philosophical progress he and his predecessors had made.

Kant uses the new preface as a clarification of the title,⁷⁹ in response to the charge that “doubts also have been expressed in regard to the intention hidden beneath it” (6.12),⁸⁰ but instead of giving word-by-word definitions of the title he offers a remark at some length about two “experiments”⁸¹ that he has conducted in the *Religion* and which underscore the importance of reason in his presentation of the doctrine of religion. Before turning to this preface for help, then, it is necessary to come to a basic notion of what the individual words of the title might mean.

Kant does not define “reason” in the *Religion* and seems to use the word with a variety of meanings or at least with varying degrees of determinacy,⁸² but the most

⁷⁹ Karl Barth writes that the “title does does not at all imply that religion exists solely within the limits of reason. It does, however, state that religion at all events is to be contemplated also within the limits of *reason* alone, and secondly that within the limits of reason alone *religion* too is to be contemplated. In this it must be borne in mind that ‘reason alone’ must in no circumstances be confused with ‘pure’ reason, the capacity for the knowledge of ideas, but stands in contrast to the reason illuminated by revelation, the reason which believes positively and concretely.” (Barth, p. 164)

⁸⁰ From the start, then, Kant introduces to the readers of the second edition that doubts or objections have been raised about his intentions. That he chooses not to identify the nature of the problem could provoke the reader to attempt to find it himself and further does not guarantee that the subsequent explanatory remark will fully satisfy the scrupulous readers of the first edition. Whether the suspicion is largely focused on the title (as the grammar of Kant’s sentence suggests) or on the work as a whole – and whether either is justified – remains to be seen.

⁸¹ The word *Versuch* has several possible shades of meaning, more than one of which Kant seems to suggest at the same time. A *Versuch* is an attempt, an experiment, or a trial. The related noun, *Versucher*, “tempter,” does not appear in the *Religion*, but *Versuchung*, “temptation,” does (6.44).

⁸² In its most basic meaning reason may be said to be an intellectual faculty which in its operation abstracts from all experience (6.12). With it comes the ability to make comparisons (6.12). It seems to be naturally prone to extending itself into “extravagant ideas” (6.52) and can be the disguise of an “invisible enemy” (6.57). Reason has a tendency to make connections between things that may not be connected, in order to satisfy its need for unity (6.64-5n, 6.74n, 6.109, 6.176-7). A man marked by his reason seems to have

important and the most common notion of reason operative in the *Religion* is that of practical reason – the will, that by which man has a free and moral existence. This would seem to follow from the argument of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which, although it made clear that rational theology as pursued was not tenable, put forth support in favor of a moral faith which takes its lead precisely from reason.⁸³ Moral faith, and perhaps the religion by which it is held or through which it is expressed, is therefore not in direct opposition to reason.⁸⁴

The programmatic statement in the first critique that Kant “had to sublimate knowledge in order to make room for faith” indicates that the real opposition is between faith and knowledge. Knowledge in the strict sense pertains to theoretical rather than practical reason, and the problem emerges when, as often happens because of the tendency of reason, something is wrongly held to be true on the basis of a theoretical claim of knowledge. To control reason in this regard is the goal of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant does not treat this as a completely settled issue, however, for since one need not have worked through a critique of pure reason to understand the basic principles of the *Religion*,⁸⁵ he makes certain to lay out in various sections of the book the tendency

nothing or little to do with faith in miracles (6.85). It is capable of tying itself into antinomies (6.116). It seems to have a theoretical function as well as a separate practical function (6.110, 6.118, 6.183).

⁸³ See especially *Critique of Pure Reason*, A631/B659-A642/B670. For a brief account of reason in Kant’s thought as it develops toward the writing of the *Religion*, see O’Neill, pp. 274-77.

⁸⁴ According to Lawrence, “Instead of being the antithesis of reason, true faith is nothing but reason itself transformed and purified through the critical expulsion of its speculative hubris” (p. 314). For a preview, see 6.109-14.

⁸⁵ See especially the following: “Only common morality is needed in order to understand this book according to its essential contents, without getting into the critique of practical, even less of theoretical,

of reason in its theoretical operation to trespass beyond the boundaries by which it should be limited. Along with this he presents examples of this tendency in historical religious contexts. We therefore begin with a consideration of Kant's negative teaching regarding the role of theoretical reason in matters of faith. Drawing out this implicit theme of theoretical reason will allow us to link this book to Kant's overall project of critique, the importance of which link is clear from the following passage in the *Critique of Pure*

Reason:

Our age is properly the age of critique, and to critique everything must submit. *Religion* and *legislation* commonly seek to exempt themselves from critique, religion through its *sanctity* and legislation through its *majesty*. But in doing so they arouse well-deserved suspicion and cannot lay claim to unfeigned respect; such respect is accorded by reason only to what has been able to withstand reason's free and open examination.⁸⁶

The tenor of this proclamation makes the consideration of theoretical matters, not necessarily political in themselves or perhaps even having political ramifications, public, historical, and thus political. Even if one does not engage in direct criticism of religious practice in public life, if he does critically engage with the theoretical principles of that practice he has already begun.

To see what Kant means by "religion" one must either have read the second critique⁸⁷ or wait until part four of the *Religion*,⁸⁸ where he supplies what might be a

reason" (6.14). (But see 6.108). Compare the following: "Natural religion... is a pure practical concept of reason, which, regardless of its unending fruitfulness, yet presupposes only so little ability of theoretical reason that practically one can convince each man of it sufficiently, and everyone can expect at the least its actuality as duty" (6.157).

⁸⁶ KrV, Axi note (Pluhar trans.). Reference might also be made to 6.132, top.

⁸⁷ See 5.129 and the surrounding text.

surprising definition and then an explanation of it. The first part of part four begins with this definition: “*Religion* is (subjectively considered) the cognition of all our duties as divine commands” (6.153-54).⁸⁹ The author offers a footnote explanation, as if to admit the reader’s justified confusion: “Through this definition many mistaken meanings of the concept of a religion in general will be prevented” (6.153n). One advantage of this definition is “that in it, as concerns the theoretical cognition and profession, no assertoric knowledge (not even of the being-there of God) is demanded, because with the defect of our insight into supersensible objects this profession could be feigned” (6.153n).⁹⁰ Here, despite the disclaimer in the preface to the second edition that knowledge of the critical philosophy is not necessary to the understanding of the *Religion*, is a connection to the critique of speculative reason. The human ignorance of “supersensible objects” makes impossible any honest claim to “assertoric knowledge” as the basis or content of religion. In a way, of course, this is hardly surprising if the reader has been prepared for it by the stated mission of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is “to sublimate knowledge in order to make room for faith” (KrV Bxxx). To some hopeful religious readers, perhaps, this

⁸⁸ Although the definition is not provided until the beginning of book four, it is preceded by several rudimentary or implicit formulations, for instance at 6.84, 98-99, and 103.

⁸⁹ The qualification, “subjectively considered,” suggests that this definition cannot stand alone as the full explanation of what Kant means by “religion”. One could supplement this definition with, and compare it to, the following claim made later in part four: the “doctrine of *divine bliss*”, rather than the “pure *doctrine of duty*... perhaps expresses best the meaning of the word *religio* (as it is at this time now understood), in an objective sense” (6.182; cf. 6.103, bottom). Although the definition from a subjective consideration provides the terms by which the overall argument of the book is conducted, clearly the subjective and objective considerations are shown to correspond.

⁹⁰ Not to be discussed until the next chapter are the elaboration of this first advantage and the statement of the second, these having more to do with morality and dependent upon more than has yet been discussed. (For another advantage, see 6.108-09.)

appeared to mean that reason would clear the way for irrational or even antirational religious faith, or mysticism,⁹¹ but part of the force of the *Religion* is slowly to remove that hopefulness. Aside from some awareness of what would constitute a “divine command,” then, Kantian religion will have everything to do with ethics or morality and nothing to do with biblical faith or cultic actions.

There is no explanation in the *Religion* of what Kant means by “boundary”, although a passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* is helpful. Late in the *Critique*, in the first chapter of the Doctrine of Method, there is a discussion of the stages of examination which reason must undergo – first the dogmatic, then the skeptical, and last the critique itself of reason:

What through this critique we prove from principles – and do not by any means merely conjecture – are not merely *limits* of reason but the determinate *bound[arie]s* of reason; i.e., what we thus prove is reason’s ignorance not merely in some part or other but in regard to all possible questions of a certain kind... Our reason is by no means a plane spread out indeterminately far, whose limits one cognizes only in a general way. It must, rather, be compared to a sphere whose radius one can find from the curvature of the arc on its surface... from which in turn one can reliably indicate also the sphere’s content and boundary. Outside this sphere (the realm of experience) nothing is an object for reason... [KrV, A761-2; Pluhar]⁹²

⁹¹ An earlier work of Kant, *Dreams of the Spirit-Seer*, deals with some of this.

⁹² See also the following, from the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*: “Boundaries (in extended things) always presuppose a space that is found outside a certain fixed location, and that encloses that location... Our reason, however, sees around itself as if it were a space for the cognition of things in themselves, although it can never have determinate concepts of those things and is limited to appearances alone... As long as reason’s cognition is homogeneous, no determinate boundaries can be thought for it. In mathematics and natural science human understanding recognizes that something lies beyond it to which it can never reach, but not that it would itself at any point complete its inner progression... But metaphysics, in the dialectical endeavor of pure reason (which are not imitated arbitrarily or wantonly, but toward which the nature of reason itself drives), leads us to the boundaries...” [4.352-3 (Hatfield trans.)]

The notion of the boundaries of reason recalls the Socratic science of ignorance, with the critique of reason leading to the certain conclusion that in some matters reason will exert itself in vain and face error or frustration. The geometrical imagery used here to illustrate real and concrete boundaries reappears in the discussion of the experiments in the second preface of the *Religion*, to which we now return.⁹³

With this basic explication of the title, we now turn to the second preface, which is concerned first with two “experiments” that will help to clarify the title and thus more fully the relationship of religion and reason. After this examination we shall elaborate on the tendency of theoretical reason to extend itself beyond its boundaries and to see the negative effects in particular in matters of religion and theology. To accomplish this the study will examine three sets of text: the note, added in the second edition, to the first parergon; the second and third parerga, which deal with miracles and mysteries; and the first part of *Religion* part four.

A. Experiments with Reason and Revelation: The Second Preface

The preface to the second edition is meant to respond to criticisms of the first edition, most prominently the question regarding the intention of the title. Instead of an explanation, the author offers a remark about two experiments or tests that are to be performed in the *Religion*. The first of the two experiments is to offer a comparison of revelation and “the pure rational religion”. The means of comparison are derived from two facts, first that “*revelation* can at least grasp also the pure *rational religion* in itself”

⁹³ We should also note that Kant’s use of “Grenzen” in the title of his book, which ties back to the discussions in the KrV and *Prolegomena*, further indicates that the *Religion* is not simply a moral catechism for the nonphilosopher. For further consideration of the difference between boundary and limit, see both Cherkasova and Palmquist.

and second that the converse is not true (6.12). The reasoning behind these premises is clear from the way in which they are stated, for while it is not necessary for a revealed doctrine to contain everything also held by a rational religious doctrine, revelation, as comprised in part by what is historical, and thus derived from experience, may contain but cannot be contained by the teaching of reason, which faculty abstracts from experience. Kant is able to set for himself the first experiment: “to consider the former as a *wider* sphere of faith, which contains the latter, as *narrower*, in itself” (6.12).⁹⁴ Revelation, the wider sphere, contains in itself the narrower sphere of rational religion; that we are to imagine them as “concentric circles” not external one to the other indicates again that rational religion as a whole is to be found as a part of revealed religion. Even if this claim does not appear to be problematic at first glance, neither does it seem obviously true, for it suggests that revealed faiths have at their core a rational principle; some adherents to religions might make this claim,⁹⁵ but for the claim to come from the

⁹⁴ This experiment, I suggest, is largely performed in the first division of part three of the *Religion*, and this indicates the primacy of that part of the book with respect to Kant’s intention.

⁹⁵ It seems no great blow to orthodoxy to suggest that, for example, the existence of God on one hand and the life of Christ on the other are not subject to the same kind of theological treatment. St. Thomas Aquinas indicates this by virtue of his placement of these topics in their respective positions in the *Summa Theologiae*. That God exists can be known by natural reason without recourse to revelation, whereas the key points of Christian dogma (i.e. Trinity and Incarnation) cannot be known by reason but instead are held by faith and made less offensive to reason by means of analogy. For all this ostensible agreement between Kant and Aquinas on the practical result of how to treat the subject matter of revelation and the subject matter of reason alone, a closer examination shows that in principle – and thus in practice as well – these two thinkers are opposed. We are able to say, in light of Kant’s critique of speculative theology, that, while Kant and Aquinas may have similar notions of revelation (views on the truth or possibility of that revelation momentarily ignored), they are far apart on what is meant by “rational religion.” Thomistic natural theology, i.e. the first dozen questions of the *Summa*, is not possible for Kant: this is the kind of knowledge that he finds necessary to sublimate. (We could also note that even this “natural theology” in the *Summa* is directed, in the *sed contra* of each *articulus*, by means of quotations not from Aristotle but from the Bible.)

mouth of an eighteenth-century philosopher it is surprising. The reader is somewhat less surprised, if he is aware of basic distinction such have been made above, by Kant's labeling of rational religion as a "sphere of faith". At this point emerges geometrical language that evokes the more technical discussions of boundaries in Kant's earlier works. With the next comment Kant goes further, for in stating that within the narrower circle "the philosopher thus holds himself a teacher of pure reason (from mere a priori principles), and here thus must abstract from all experience", he firmly places the philosopher within the boundaries of rational religion – and thus, up to its non-historical point, within the boundaries of revelation. Not only reason but also the philosopher, the exemplar, perhaps, of reason, is bound within limits when it comes to religion. We can thus expect Kant to avoid examining such matters of historical revelation as the miracles of Christ and the mysteries of Trinity and Incarnation, for reason and the philosopher who uses it have no right to investigate or criticize them.

But, as the description of the second experiment suggests, perhaps we have spoken too soon about the philosopher remaining within the narrower circle of rational religion. The "standpoint" acquired from the first experiment allows a second, according to which Kant, proceeding from what is "held" to be a revelation and at the same time "abstracting" from the pure rational religion, holds up for comparison the "fragments"⁹⁶ of the first to the moral concepts of the second. Such a comparison will enable Kant to

⁹⁶ The reader might be brought to think about the recently published *Fragments* of Reimarus, to which Kant refers at 6.81n.

“see whether this does not lead back to the same pure *rational system* of religion...”⁹⁷

The clear implication is that historical revelation is not necessary for genuine religion,⁹⁸ provided one had access to the moral concepts that are communicated in the rational religion. The conclusion to the experiment is that “between reason and scripture is not mere compatibility but rather unity”; if one has the direction of moral principles he will also come upon, in some way, the Bible. This conclusion comes by way of the following reductio, the statement of which is very revealing:

If this is not so, so one would either have two religions in one person, which is absurd, or one *religion* and one *cultus*, in which case the latter is not (as is religion) a purpose in itself, but rather only has worth as a means, both would often have to be shaken together, in order to combine them for a short time, but immediately as oil and water they separate again from one another and allow the morally pure (the rational religion) to float above. [6.13]

First, Kant is explicit from the start about the respective value of religion as opposed to cult, a view that becomes increasingly important as the *Religion* progresses. Second, and more important, he describes the difficulty of maintaining a proper relationship between the two if we are forced into accepting that the second experiment has failed: a combination of the two elements is necessary but oft-repeated and short-lived. (The image of the “purely moral religion” floating to the top is a clear indication of which Kant holds to be the more valuable. The reader may be tempted to look into whether Kant’s image of shaking and rest somehow fits as an analogy of his own efforts in thinking and writing about religion.)

⁹⁷ This second experiment is largely performed in the second division of part three and in part four.

⁹⁸ It would be useful to keep this in mind as Kant presents the “true church” and its independence of, at least in ultimate intention, from historical revelation. See especially *Religion* 3.1.4-5 and 7.

While setting up the relationship of rational and revealed religion, and thus seemingly also reason and faith, Kant brings us back to our larger present concern: he is considering the rational religion “not at all with a theoretical intention”: one must be careful also to keep separate the respective claims of theoretical and practical reason, as the former we have been led to see cannot be reliable in matters of religion. If we keep this in mind, then we can overcome the opposition of faith and reason, for faith is opposed not to reason but reason to claims of knowledge. The task is thus to let moral concepts do their work and to keep religion away from claims of theoretical knowledge.

These two experiments provide much of the argument and the methodology of the *Religion*, and they appear explicitly in several passages. In part three, in the discussion of the dependence of every church on historical revealed faith, Kant cautions against a too-quick denial that a church “in perfect harmony with moral [rational] religion” may be the result of a “special divine dispensation” (6.105). This is borne out fully later in part three. Early in part four, as a preface to the discussion of Christianity as a natural and a learned religion, Kant writes the following:

But every [religion] must, in part at least, even the revealed religion, also contain certain principles of the natural. For revelation can be added in thought to the concept of a *religion* only through reason; because this concept itself, as derived from a combination under the will of a *moral* lawgiver, is a concept of pure reason. Thus we shall consider a *revealed* religion on the one hand as natural and on the other hand as *learned* religion, we shall examine it and be able to distinguish what or how much is due it from the one source or the other. [6.156]

A bit later, in the discussion of popery as rule, he writes the following, which links back very nicely to the second preface:

Now there is a practical cognition which, if it rests singly on reason, and needs no historical doctrine, still lies as close to every man, even the most stupid, as if it was written literally on his heart: a law, which one only needs to name in order to agree with everyone about its intention, and which leads with itself unconditional binding force⁹⁹ in everyone's consciousness, namely that of morality; and what is more, this cognition either already itself leads alone to faith in God or at least determines His concept as a moral lawgiver, thus guiding it to a pure religious faith, which is not only in the grasp of every man but rather also worthy of respect in the highest degree; indeed, it leads thereto so naturally that if one wishes to make the experiment, he will find that it can be queried from every man fully and entirely without it having been taught to him.

[6.181-2]

The moral law, the law of reason, is the test by which one may examine the validity of the content of any historical revelation. Thus even in the soul of the individual believer is the potential for reason to act as experimenter or tester. We find this suggestion at the conclusion of the second preface as well, for, after justifying his proposed experiment by appealing to the example of "the late Michaelis" (6.13), Kant mentions two reviews of the first edition. The second review is of interest because it brings to the fore the relationship of the *Religion* to the more theoretical works of the critical philosophy. To Greifswald, who charges that the *Religion* is of interest only to readers of Kant's pre-existing "system" and thus to a very few of even educated men (6.13), Kant answers that "It requires only common morals to understand about this book its essential contents, without going into the critique of practical, still less theoretical, reason ..." (6.14). Again, the truth of the moral law, the law of reason, is sufficient to do reason's critical work upon itself, which includes its limiting its own tendency to extend itself to the transcendent.

⁹⁹ The word for "binding force" is *Verbindlichkeit*, the basic notion of which was very important in earlier works like the *Groundlaying of the Metaphysics of Ethics* and has just as much importance in the *Religion*.

B. Beyond the Boundaries: On the Role of the Parerga

Further help in clarifying the relationship of faith, reason, and science is found in a note, added in the second edition, to the general remark that closes part one. The purpose of the note is to explain the special character of the general remarks which are appended to each of the four parts of the book. The remarks are noteworthy in that, judging from the inscriptions that could be assigned to them – “Concerning Effects of Grace”; “Miracles”; “Mysteries”; “Means of Grace” – they seem to have nothing to do with Kant’s stated purpose or subject matter. Based upon what he has written thus far, Kant appears to have no business concerning himself with these matters, as he makes clear by admitting that the contents of these remarks are “so to speak, parerga to religion within the boundaries of pure¹⁰⁰ reason” (6.52).

The name “parergon” seems to indicate the character rather than the context of the remark, for it may be taken to convey here its basic sense of appendix or appendage. After all, Kant begins this note by stating that a general remark is “hanged onto” each of the four parts. This appears to be confirmed a few sentences later, where Kant uses the Greek word as a parenthetical gloss to the word *Nebenschaft*: “sideline affair”. On the other hand, a sideline affair is not merely something appended but perhaps a concern different from the one to which it is attached. These parerga are thus not simply to serve as footnotes, but as actually separate matters that still can be seen to have genuine relevance to the argument of the main parts of the book. With this in mind, the reader is

¹⁰⁰ Kant replaces “*blossen*” with “*reinen*” here.

free to reflect on the extended meanings of the word “parergon”, which include “secondary purpose”, “unhappy addition”, “useless remedy”, and (in painting) “subordinate object or accessory”.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, when he uses the word as a parenthetical gloss for “sideline affair”, Kant is speaking not of these appended segments of the book but rather an act of thinking. These latter observations should indicate to the reader that the general remarks, odd relationship to the main parts of the book notwithstanding, indicate something crucial about religion within the boundaries of mere reason even if they do not belong to it. It does appear strange to discuss what one should not take up because of one’s self-imposed limitations, and so to portion off certain parts of a book not at the end but after each part, is a provocative authorial choice. There would seem to be little use for an appendix that is restricted territory unless it were used to reveal something either about the territory or about the restriction, or perhaps even that the restriction is not so firm as to be heeded. This ambiguity is brought to light at the end of Kant’s initial sentence about the general remarks: “they do not belong within the boundaries but bump against them” (6.52). The language suggests that something is unwilling or unable to let the boundaries be as they are. And in fact this something is reason itself.

¹⁰¹ These are meanings supplied by Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon*.

The manner¹⁰² in which this fact is presented suggests that reason is the cause of its misfortunes and the only possible guard against them. Reason desires to “satisfy” its “moral need”, and so turns to “overflowing ideas”. The immediate context provides no indication about what is meant by this moral need, but it is at the heart of the doctrine of religion as a whole. As we shall see in the following chapter’s discussion of the preface to the first edition, Kant finds in man the need to see the outcome of moral acts. Although man needs nothing other than the moral law to show what ought to be done or not done, he still needs something beyond the moral law that reveals the outcome of the moral act. Eventually this leads to the idea of the highest good in the world, which “is (practically considered) not empty; because it remedies our natural need to think all our deeds and nondeeds taken together in a whole as some end-purpose, which can be justified by reason, which otherwise would be a hindrance to moral resolution” (6.5; cf. 6.109). But, as noted, reason turns not just to the idea of the highest good but to other “overflowing ideas” as well (6.52). In the present context Kant speaks of reason extending itself to these ideas but without taking them as its own and yet without making a claim against their “possibility or actuality”. There is something desirable and useful in

¹⁰² The characterization, particularly by personifying language, of reason is reminiscent of the Canon of Pure Reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “Human reason is humiliated by the fact that, in its pure use, it accomplishes nothing and indeed needs a discipline to restrain its own extravagances and prevent the deceptions that these engender for it. But, on the other hand, human reason is elevated and acquires self-confidence through the fact that it can and must exercise this discipline on its own...” (KrV A795/B823) See also KrV A797/B825: “Reason is impelled by a propensity of its nature to go beyond its use in experience, to venture outward – in a pure use and by means of mere ideas – to the utmost bounds of all cognition, and to find rest for the first time in the completion of its sphere...” A third example is from KrV A828/B856: “even after all the ambitious aims of a reason roaming beyond the bounds of experience have been defeated, we are still left with enough in order to have cause to be satisfied from a practical point of view” (Pluhar translation).

the ideas, provided reason observe the distinction between a “reflective faith” and a “dogmatic faith” in them. Faith¹⁰³ is dogmatic, and seen by reason to be insincere or presumptuous, when it claims to be knowledge concerning matters that are transcendent and thus out of reason’s theoretical reach.

Unfortunately, because the ideas cannot be brought into religion itself without harm,¹⁰⁴ they are best left in the hands of a reason operating with reflective faith, as something that remains inscrutable but still helpful in overcoming moral impotence. If reason itself trespasses its boundaries, if it gives in to the ideas bumping against these boundaries, “with this all use of reason comes to a halt” (6.53). At this point Kant offers the briefest of statements why the effects of grace, for example, cannot be taken up into a maxim without causing this halt of reason. The cause is twofold, one theoretical and the other practical. The practical difficulty, the core of which is to be taken up in the next chapter, is that, insofar as it entails doing something by doing nothing, the idea of effects of grace contradicts itself. The theoretical difficulty is that, asserted here but argued elsewhere not only by Kant but also to devastating effect by Hume, we cannot extend our use of cause and effect beyond objects of natural experience. If this is so, then we cannot

¹⁰³ Faith, also not defined in the *Religion*, is distinguished from knowledge and opinion in section three of the Canon of Pure Reason, KrV A820/B848-A830/B859. See especially A822/B850, where Kant lists these three as levels of assent (“holding-to-be-true”) and identifies faith as that level in which “assent is sufficient only subjectively and is at the same time regarded as objectively insufficient” (Pluhar trans.). A few pages later (A827/B855-A828/B856), Kant distinguishes not between reflective and dogmatic but between moral and dogmatic faith.

¹⁰⁴ Turning from reflective faith to dogmatic faith, (1) effects of grace can be perverted into enthusiasm, (2) miracles into unbelief, (3) mysteries into illuminatism (initiate-delusion), and (4) means of grace into thaumaturgy (wanderings of a reason that has gone out beyond its limits, that is, for a supposedly moral [God-pleasing] intention). Kant underscores the element of dishonesty in these tendencies as well, listing (1) supposed inner experience, (2) alleged outer experience, (3) apparent illumination of the understanding in regard to the supernatural, and (4) risky attempts to influence the supernatural.

take a phenomenon and determine whether its cause is grace or nature. We must thus conclude by admitting the impossibility of a theoretical cognition of the effects of grace.

So concludes the explanatory note added in the second edition. It clarifies but does not replace the lengthier and more particular treatment of transcendent ideas as found especially in the second and the third parerga, to which we now turn.¹⁰⁵

C. The Relation of Reason to Miracle and Mystery

While the first parergon has examined the effects of grace and then offered a general explanation of the function of the parergon itself and its three successors, the second deals with the more particular topic of miracles, a weak point in revealed religion much exploited by Kant's predecessors.¹⁰⁶ It follows Kant's treatment, in part two, of the traditional doctrine of justification, and it is explicitly connected to part two through the latter's rejection of the necessity or even desirability that miracles be thought to accompany the personification of the good principle. The immediate reason for this rejection is a moral one, for to request a miracle as a bona fide amounts to a confession of "moral *unbelief*" or "a lack of faith in virtue" – "because only faith in the practical validity of the idea that lies in our reason has moral worth" (6.62-3).

Likewise, much of the treatment of miracles in the parergon itself is from a moral perspective. The clarification of the meaning of the word "miracles", as "occurrences in the world, of whose causes the *laws of effect* are and must remain absolutely unknown to us", is explicitly presented in practical terms of "what they are *for us*, that is, to our

¹⁰⁵ For a further and provocative introductory discussion of the parerga, see Michalson, pp. 126-8.

¹⁰⁶ See especially chapter six of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* and section ten of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

practical use of reason” (6.86). Here, perhaps because of the cover he has given himself by declaring himself on foreign territory, Kant writes bluntly: “If a moral religion... ought to be grounded, so must all *miracles*, which history links with its inauguration, themselves make the faith in miracles in general finally dispensable”, or the faithful would express this lack of moral faith (6.85).¹⁰⁷ But then, in a move common to much of the *Religion*, Kant makes a concession to human nature and its way of thinking. If the introduction of the new moral religion as a replacement of, or a transformation from, a religion of cult and observance requires for its “introduction” in “history” to be escorted by miracles, this is morally acceptable provided they be discarded as soon as possible. So there is a morally useful and even necessary function to faith in miracles, but it is not part of the moral religion itself. Again Kant backs off prudently from the denying the possibility that the earthly existence of the “teacher of the one and only religion”, presumably the Kantian-Christian religion, is a collection of miracles – but our reason cannot make a judgment on this except to exclude it as necessary for “knowing, having faith, and professing” the true religion (6.85).

The parergon continues to view the profession of miracles from a moral-practical rather than a theoretical perspective, particularly in terms of how “rational men”, whether

¹⁰⁷ In support of this statement Kant quotes the words of Christ from John 4:48. Christ has just returned to Cana, where at his last appearance he turned water into wine, and is asked by a royal official to heal his dying son. It is difficult to understand Christ’s response, for although the context would suggest that Kant is not quoting carefully, Christ seems to be saying what Kant suggests – but the reader of John’s Gospel is surprised because the request for the healing is not the request for proof of the validity of Christ’s teaching or way of life but rather (based upon previous experience) a reasonable desire for his help.

“wise governments” or spiritual leaders,¹⁰⁸ see to the relationship that the public has with faith in miracles. They allow for the possibility that miracles occur, but they do so “in theory” but not “in practice”. At first this may seem that Kant is going against his own position by favoring a theoretical rather than practical grasp of miracles, but the distinction here is not between theoretical and practical reason but rather between holding out the (extremely) vague possibility of the reality of miracles and of making that possibility somehow related to the “business” (*Geschäft*, the word translated just above as “practice”) of one’s everyday life: to say that “in theory” one has faith in miracles means only to say that he does not assert their impossibility, while to claim them in his “business” is to rely on miracles as a supplement or even replacement for his moral agency. After a clarification of the meaning of the word, Kant distinguishes between theistic and demonic (which is itself distinguished into satanic and angelic) miracles, he takes up theistic miracles for a consideration that briefly touches on questions of theoretical knowledge.

Insofar as we can conceive of God as creator and ruler of the world according to the order of nature we can form a “general concept of the causal laws of miracles”. This seems merely to say that to the extent that God orders nature He is somehow responsible for all that happens in it, even if the causes and effects are unknown to us. There is nothing controversial in this because “immediate” and “independent” cognition of the laws of nature are available to us. If we depart from our general concept by suggesting

¹⁰⁸ *Geistliche* is commonly translated as “clergyman”, but since Kant also uses the word *Klerus*, and so I have reserved “clergyman” or “clergy” for the latter word. “Spiritual leader” is not a very happy translation of the former.

that God permits nature to deviate from its own laws, we face the difficulty that we have no conception at all of that law by which God permits the allegedly miraculous occurrences. Because it cannot rely on the previously articulated laws of nature and also has nothing with which to replace them, “here reason is crippled” (6.86). All that can be said by reason, therefore, is limited to the “general moral law” that all of God’s doings are good (although this is at best a “negative criterion” by which one is enabled to judge the divinity of the proposed miracle: a miracle cannot be thought to be from God if, for example, a father was asked to put to death his innocent son – and we are provided with a foretaste of the critical force of Kant’s biblical hermeneutics). “In his business, therefore, it is impossible for one to count on miracles... But as for miracles of a good kind: they are so used by people in business as mere phrases” (6.87). Like the natural scientist inquiring into the causes of natural laws, so the man charged with his own moral betterment is unable to determine what are natural and what are supernatural causes nor how to cause them himself (6.88).

With this the parergon concludes, but in the second edition Kant adds a footnote that is longer than any paragraph in the body itself of the parergon. Of anything written in the second parergon this footnote may be the most illustrative of the relation between religion, miracles, and reason. From a consideration of the claimed equivalence between the ignorance of the man who has faith in miracles and the ignorance of the natural scientist who struggles to understand the world, Kant is led to meditate on an “inner phenomenon of human understanding” (6.88n) regarding miracles and then to conclude with a warning about miracles more sharply stated than anything preceding it. It is

furthermore a useful text because it focuses not on miracles so much as on the attitude of those who hold them and of those who promote faith in them.

The claim of equivalence is a “common excuse” given not only by those who want by means of magic to fool the credulous but also by those who more generally want to make the credulous to have faith. The reasoning is that, if scientists themselves admit, on occasion, to ignorance in grasping some phenomenon in the world, there is no reason why others cannot do the same: if a scientist is ignorant of the cause of gravity and yet holds gravity to be true, so may the faithful be ignorant of the cause of an apparently miraculous occurrence and yet hold the miracle to be true. Yet, Kant responds on behalf of the scientist, we do have sufficient cognition of the laws of the forces (i.e. the cause of gravity) “so as to order experiences under them” (6.88n). Unlike an alleged miracle, a natural phenomenon like gravity occurs in certain conditions, and can be predicted and explained when occurring or about to occur. Even though going beyond, or above, a grasp of the magnetic forces and whatever else creates the effect of gravity themselves may not be possible, but the effects themselves always act in accordance with determinate laws. One cannot make a similar claim about miracles without relinquishing the name “miracle”.

From this, Kant is able to grasp “an inner phenomenon of the human understanding” according to which new natural wonders either exhilarate or deject us. If an occurrence is unexpected, new, or in seeming violation of human knowledge, it can still exhilarate if it is held to be natural, for reason then has the hope of “nourishment”, of coming upon further laws of nature. If such an occurrence appears in the form of a

miracle, reason is dejected because its old cognitions are invalidated without replacement, and reason thus finds itself in a magical world where it has no function and no way of navigating it. This has severe ramifications for the moral life, for if one's moral tendencies are affected but lack indication as to whether the moral agent himself or something inscrutable outside him is responsible, then he is left without the ability to act morally on his own. The conclusion to the discussion of miracles is thus as follows:

But these are experiences; for us they are thus nothing other than natural effects, and ought also never to be judged other than natural effects; for this the modesty wants in the claims of reason; but to go out beyond these limits is presumption and immodesty in claims; however often one passes off evincing, in the assertion of miracles, a humble and self-relinquishing ways of thinking. [6.89n]

This is the most restrictive, negative, statement in the whole parergon. The mystery – to use the subject of the next parergon – of the causes of certain phenomena is not necessarily divine.

Kant devotes the third parergon to an explanation of the meaning and relevance of mysteries. The parergon follows upon the philosophical and historical presentations of religion in part three, and fittingly so insofar the historical presentation of Christianity as moral religion echoes the teaching of the second parergon that the inauguration of the moral religion may well require miracles that can be dispensed with later (6.129). A “moral and soul-saving faith”, Christianity nevertheless required “in a holy book miracles and mysteries”. To the paragraph whence these quotations are drawn is attached a lengthy footnote that uses the “mysterious history”¹⁰⁹ of Christ's resurrection and

¹⁰⁹ The “mysterious history” is contrasted by Kant with the “public history” that precedes and includes the death of Christ, and so in the footnote the reader is presented with the preliminary distinction that

ascension as an example of what “cannot be used, its historical worthiness notwithstanding, toward religion within the boundaries of mere reason” (6.128n). Now the reader may not be surprised by this because of what is already said about the difference between a religion and revelation, the former which is based in moral reason which abstracts from experience and the latter which is based on experience and history, but Kant’s dismissal does not end with the historical character of the resurrection and ascension stories. Rather, and more importantly, religion within the boundaries of mere reason cannot include such claims about Christ because it is too much to bear for “reason’s faith about the future” insofar as reason accepts the concept of material existence: the resurrection and ascension are problematic in light of the psychological materialism by which personality can be maintained only if embodied and of the cosmological materialism which limits worldly existence to spatial determination. On the other hand, reason finds some comfort in a hypothesis that is spiritual rather than material, a hypothesis which holds that a person may live while his (former) body is buried and that man in his spiritual nature may reach heaven without having to undergo spatial travel to it. This difficult footnote is one justification for the third parergon’s examination of mystery following the body of part three.¹¹⁰ On several occasions in the

determines what is to be considered a mystery (i.e. what is not for public profession) and what is not to be considered a mystery in Kant’s sense. See the discussion below of Kant’s explanation of the word “mystery”.

¹¹⁰ Another justification appears a few pages later in another footnote, this one commenting on a phrase from 1 Corinthians 15:28. Kant presents a way in which it might be understood, provided it be abstracted from its “mysterious” aspect, which “stretches above all boundaries of possible experience” and thus belongs to the “holy history of humanity” and cannot be grasped for practical purposes (6.153n). Part two of the *Religion* contains another pertinent text, in which Kant addresses the possibility and significance of virgin conception and birth from a practical rather than theoretical point of view.

Religion, then, Kant has mentioned and dealt with mysteries but without directly facing them or their relation to reason.

Largely because of its sometimes unclear dialectical method, in which Kant raises and then drops various candidates for the label of mystery, the third parergon is perhaps the most difficult section of text in the *Religion*. From the point of view of traditional theological speculation, however, it is also perhaps the most alluring. The reader may get the sense that Kant, treating some of these matters only because historical Christianity has imparted them, and thus reluctantly, is at the same time allowing himself to make observations that would be intriguing to theologians if only he would write out his thoughts less sketchily. Our purpose in looking at the third parergon, however, is not to develop the theological considerations any further but rather to examine further reflections on the relationship of reason, knowledge, and religion.

The parergon as a whole appears to be a continuation of the restrictions Kant has set earlier, as can be seen from the start with Kant's clarification of what the word "mystery" should be taken to mean. This clarification itself is grounded on the distinction between the theoretical and the practical, between knowledge and faith – and reason's difficult navigation between these dichotomies. All the ways of faith that pertain to religion, in other words all historical faiths that have the moral faith at their core, have at their "inner quality" a mystery. Because this observation is made apropos ways of faith insofar as they relate to religion, and thus practical reason, Kant puts close together what traditional theology might wish to keep further apart. A mystery, or at least a mystery of this kind, is "something *holy*, which indeed can be *known* by every

individual, but yet cannot be *made known* publicly, that is, universally imparted” (6.137). The manner of knowing by the individual cannot then be the knowing that comes from the act of theoretical reason, or else the matter in question would be communicable. This restriction is even more clear from the explanation of what is meant by “holy” and “mysterious”, for holiness refers to its ability to be “cognized internally for practical use” and mysterious is glossed to mean “not for theoretical use” (6.137).

The practical character of what Kant wants to call a mystery is visible in its very origin, for mystery springs from a “need of practical reason” (6.139): man is aware of his moral duty but unable to see that or how the final purpose of morality is to be accomplished, and so must have faith in the direction of a “moral ruler of the world” who is seeing to this accomplishment. Again we are cautioned that the existence or the nature of this moral ruler is beyond our reach, for the need of practical reason is only to “know” what this ruler is “for us as moral essences”. As he writes in a footnote, “in regard to that which only God can do, for which to do something ourselves would overcome our ability and also our duty – there can be only a real, namely holy, mystey (mysterium) of religion, from which”; knowing and understanding this rather than having insight into it might be the extent of its use. (6.139n.). Such a limitation would suggest the foolishness of theological speculation on such a matter as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity – but we are surprised by, and, because of its cleverness, pleased by, Kant’s presentation of this very thing.

It is several pages before Kant gets to writing about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,¹¹¹ and this fact, combined with the attempt to show that the Trinity is neither a necessarily mysterious doctrine nor an especially Christian one, makes obvious that Kant is writing on one of the most difficult theological notions in a nontheological manner. Because of the brilliance and interest of how he does write, though, the reader is by this time not likely to be displeased.

Kant begins his discussion of the Trinity by linking it to the need of reason; although morality needs no assistance in determining for us our duty, in order to see that duty done we seem to need to have faith in a holy legislator, a moral protector, and a just judge. Regarded in this way, faith in God as a Trinity in light of how He relates to man “contains no mystery” (6.140). Kant notes that, even it is only with the Christian faith that it has been imparted publicly, the faith in God as a Trinity can be found “in the religion of most civilized peoples”. Because the moral need to have faith in a world ruler is as common as practical reason, this note should not come as a surprise. But this concept of trinity is further available to human reason from the arrangement of power found in juridical and even ethical (this distinction is explained in chapter four below) communities: the Truine God is mirrored by, or perhaps mirrors, the political doctrine of separation of powers. If this were not so, “one cannot easily provide the ground why so many ancient peoples came into this idea, if it is not that it is, that it lies in universal human reason, when one wishes to think of a rule of a people and (by analogy with it) a

¹¹¹ Even at that point, at 6.145f, it is from a moral perspective, and it concludes with the sharp caution about holding to it with anything more than this perspective. See the final sentence of the parergon (6.147), the content and tone of which are further reason to place this discussion in the safety zone of a parergon.

rule of the world” (6.140n). The reader can see faith in a divine trinity everywhere in historical faith, from Zoroastrianism, Hindu, and Egyptian faiths to those of the Goths, Christians, and (it is shakily if humorously suggested) Jews (6.141n). The true object of faith is therefore not a mystery, at least as regards the relationship of that trinity to men as moral essences. In fact, its presence in the various faiths has largely contributed, by virtue of its moral core, to the purification of the immoral elements of those faiths.

But of course traditional theology has maintained the doctrine of the Trinity as much less (if at all) a practical idea than as a true though mysterious revelation of the inner life of God as He is in Himself. This is a “mystery climbing above all human concepts”, and to hold such a doctrine to be true is to limit it to the particularity of a church-faith (6.142).

Three mysteries “revealed to us through our reason” – the call, satisfaction, and election – are explained in moral terms, the only terms by which they are useful for religion within the boundaries of mere reason, for as to how or why these things are “God has revealed nothing to us, and can reveal nothing to us, because we would not *understand* it” (6.144). Everything that we do need is available from the revelation of reason and scripture which are understandable to all men.

Kant’s teaching on mystery is that it is present at the heart of every religious faith and ought not to be removed, for it is the embracing of this mystery, the mystery of man’s moral vocation and its connection to God, that is the meaning and purification of religion. It belongs in a parergon, and is in fact the exemplification of Kant’s working within the boundaries of mere reason, because in its teaching it does not result in a

rationalization or demystification of the concept but in fact a preservation of the soul of religious belief. That it is not necessarily the notion of mystery held by an orthodox Christian does not compel us to assert that Kant has no sense of mystery. In his discussion of mystery he reveals more clearly than anywhere else that faith need not be regarded by modern men as superstitious self-delusion. The ramifications for reason are familiar: theoretical boundaries for the sake of moral exertion.

D. Kant's Rationalist Position and Methodology

The introductory paragraphs to the first part of part four provide the last substantial reflection on the impossibility of reconciling religion and speculative reason. Part four as a whole takes up the service of God in religion and the anti-service of God in popery, with the first of its two parts examining “service of God in religion in general”: here is the location of Kant’s definition of “religion”, discussed above. Part four also provides the most detailed and most sustained analysis of Christianity in the *Religion*. Our main purpose in turning to it now is as a conclusion to our opening thoughts on the *Religion*, as to how it treats the relationship of religion and reason. The character of the introductory paragraphs of *Religion* 4.1 is such that the reader can observe Kant’s implicit reflections on the attitude and methodology according to which he thinks through and presents the argument of the *Religion*. Our earlier discussion of the note concluding the first parergon has made a preliminary contribution to this observation.

Immediately after his definition of religion, which in its articulation removes, among others, the error of claiming theoretical cognition (assertoric knowledge), Kant makes several divisions. Revealed religion is that according to which the adherent must

recognize a command to be divine before realizing his duty, whereas natural religion is that according to which the adherent first cognizes his duty and only then as a command of God. A rationalist holds that only natural religion is necessary, and a pure rationalist holds the same position while allowing for a revelation provided it not be thought necessary for religion. A naturalist is someone who denies the “actuality of all supernatural divine revelation”, while a supernaturalist “holds that faith in this is necessary for universal religion” (6.154-5). Which is Kant? He is obviously not a supernaturalist. His denial of the theoretical cognition of revealed doctrines is not necessarily the same as a denial of the actuality of that revelation, so it seems also safe to conclude that he is not a naturalist. The most likely label that he would self-apply is therefore of rationalist, perhaps of a pure rationalist who sees the historical-cultural necessity, for a time, of using revelation as a means for imparting the true religious faith.

If Kant would agree that he is a rationalist in matters of religion, then the next paragraph is most revealing of his self-understanding:

The rationalist must, by power of his title, hold himself within the limits of human insight. From there he will never deny as does a naturalist, nor contest, the inner possibility of revelation in general or the necessity of revelation as a divine means toward an introduction to the true religion; for concerning these no man can make out something through reason. [6.155]

This apparent self-description might prompt us to recall our quotation from the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason* concerning the age of critique from which not even religion can exempt itself.¹¹² From that earlier announcement the reader of the *Religion*

¹¹² KrV, Axi note. In anticipation of the treatment to be given of this question in chapters four and five below, one can also look to 6.132, top.

can expect to see reason acting as the judge and examiner of religion, but this quotation from the *Religion* seems rather cautious. The difficulty vanishes if the reader keeps in mind the important distinction between religion and church-faith. From the little of the *Religion* that we have seen, the latter item is clearly subject to critical attack.¹¹³ We can say with confidence that, despite the superficial contradiction suggested by the existence of this work along with the earlier critique of speculative theology, Kant has not changed his mind about the impossibility of rational theology and the claim to scientific knowledge regarding God. Following through on the vague suggestions of the first critique and the lengthy presentation of the second, Kant shows again in the *Religion* that any genuine theology, or religion, must be moral rather than speculative: reason remains although knowledge is impossible. To answer the remaining question as to why even moral religion is desirable or necessary, we begin again in our examination of this work.

¹¹³ We might also note that the passive appearance and then critical use of reason appears throughout the main parts of the *Religion*. For instance, in the first major use of sacred scripture, Kant writes the following in a footnote: “That which is said here must not be seen as if it ought to be scriptural interpretation, which lies outside the boundaries of the authority of mere reason” (6.43n). This attitude is contradicted several times by the end of the book. The chief point to be taken from these observations is that Kant does not indicate, explicitly, his full intention or methodology, and that he has protected himself from the charge of heresy by operating in the language of experiment and observation of appropriate boundaries. With this language he is free to make the controversial statements or implications that he does, and then to retreat to the cover of (what is called in his “Enlightenment” essay) “public reason”. That he does wish to rely on “private reason” as well is clear from his suggestions that the *Religion*, or another book like it, be used in theological training and that its message be translated, through sermons, to women and children. This tension runs throughout the book.

3. Room for Faith: The *Religion* and Morality

We have observed that, contrary to possible first impressions, the *Religion* follows the *Critique of Pure Reason* in denying theoretical knowledge of God and yet preserving, or perhaps establishing, moral faith. We may likewise assume that the character and desirability, and for that matter the necessity, of moral faith according to the *Religion* will correspond to Kant's teaching in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.¹¹⁴ The assertive beginning of the preface to the first edition, and thus to the whole of the *Religion*, certainly gives the reader reason to take comfort in his assumption:

Morality, insofar as it grounded upon the concept of man as a free essence but who also binds himself through his reason to unconditional law, needs neither the idea of an other essence above him, so that he cognizes his duty, nor an other incentive than the law itself, so that he observes it. [6.3]

Further, toward the end of the *Religion*, Kant gives his definition of religion and reveals fully its genuine importance: religion is “the cognition of all our duties as divine commands” (6.153-4), and this, too, recalls the earlier critical writings.¹¹⁵ And so we can expect no major surprises in the *Religion*, leading us again to the possibility that this work is supplementary at best and reiterative at worst. But lest we make this conclusion too quickly, and lest we fall prey to the temptation to read the former book merely in the light of the latter, let us then follow the trail through the doctrine of religion as it presents

¹¹⁴ One should note, however, the admonition of Schweitzer: “The question as to the relationship of the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Religion within the Limits* is almost insoluble, should one presuppose the former in evaluating the latter” (Schweitzer, p. 294). One curious problem among several is that in the former work “immortality is postulated in the interest of the infinite moral development” while in the latter “this development is thought of as finished with life on earth” (ibid., p. 296).

¹¹⁵ Compare KpV, 5.129. the first principles of the doctrine of religion are already formulated in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5.124-32 and of course even prepared by the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

itself. The task in this chapter is chiefly expository: to expose the core of the first two parts of the *Religion*, wherein Kant lays the ground for religion but merely comes to the brink of discussing it. Rather than a treatment of religion itself, parts one and two are largely the presentation of what should animate it, and why it should be so animated.¹¹⁶ What is the teaching of the first half of the *Religion*, understood through the lens of the preface to the first edition, and what can that contribute to the teaching about political life? To put it briefly in advance of the exposition: the moral analysis of a human nature which makes moral faith and (eventually) religion not only desirable but necessary makes clear the moral rather than theological core of religion and furthermore provides the real basis of a possible critique of religion as it is practiced in contradiction to that moral core. In other words, morality first provides a ground for justified religion and then, so grounded, that religion can be unleashed on existing religious groups and practices that are not so grounded. This would link the opening quote from the first preface, the definition of religion from the beginning of part four, and the subsequent moral criticism and plan for reform that takes up most of part four. What appears to be a doctrinal work thus continues the task of criticism. If this is true, then the *Religion* can be seen less as the mere presentation of a new notion of religion and more as the basis of criticism. This chapter provides the opening part of this interpretation. Let us commence with a more detailed examination of another of Kant's beginnings to the work, the preface (or the first

¹¹⁶ The argument for the necessity of religion does not appear, with the exception of a brief passage in the first preface, until the beginning of part three (discussed in the next chapter); as Schweitzer notes, apropos the problem of relating parts two and three, "the recognition that the moral concept of God is not actually reached until well along in the third [part] remained under cover by virtue of the confusion of the presentation with the religious-dogmatic pronouncements of historical Christianity" (Schweitzer, p. 304).

half of it¹¹⁷) to the first edition. In this scant but dense text three paragraphs in length the reader is confronted first with the independence of morality from outside factors (including, it would seem, religion), then the necessity of religion for human life and for human reason itself, and then lastly the inevitable connection of morality and religion. We thus find the introduction to the key theme of morality as it extends not only to religion but to the whole of the *Religion*.

A. Necessary Connection: The First Preface

Kant immediately qualifies what is meant by morality so as to prevent the reader from relying on a notion of morality that is in some way defective.¹¹⁸ The subject of Kant's study is morality properly understood, and it is to be understood as having no need of anything aside from itself. Further, for it to be properly understood requires that the reader operate with a certain concept of man. Man is free, but free in a particular manner, as we note from the *Groundlaying*: freedom is the property of the will of the rational being "that makes it effective independent of any determination by alien causes."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ The second half of this preface takes up another matter, and provides another interpretive entryway, which is pursued in chapter five below.

¹¹⁸ The meaning of the word "morality" does contain great potential for equivocation, whereas any system or code of praise and blame may be called a morality. Ignoring this might lead one automatically to recoil at the pronouncements of Machiavelli and Nietzsche and deny that Machiavellian or Nietzschean morality is really morality, whereas all they can really mean is that it is not Christian morality, or Aristotelian morality.

¹¹⁹ *Groundlaying*, 4.446 (Ellington trans.). Cf. *Critique of Practical Reason* 5:41: "the conclusion from this, that since material principles are quite unfit to be the supreme moral law (as has been proved), the *formal practical principle* of pure reason (in accordance with which the mere form of a possible giving of universal law through our maxims must constitute the supreme and immediate determining ground of the will) is the *sole* principle that can *possibly* be fit for categorical imperatives, that is, practical laws (which make actions duties), and in general for the principle of morality, whether in appraisals or in application to the human will determining it" (Gregor trans.).

Unlike nonrational or nonliving beings, man as a free being is not limited to natural necessity: he is not determined from outside himself. Saying this alone leads to freedom in a merely “negative” sense, however, and must give way to the “positive” sense resulting from it, for this positive sense “is richer and more fruitful.” Without such an extension in meaning, freedom would seem, wrongly, to be lawless. Compared to natural necessity, which “is a heteronomy of efficient causes,” positive freedom must be “autonomy, i.e., the property that the will has of being a law to itself.”¹²⁰ This self-legislation is necessarily connected to the adoption of maxims of action based upon the universal moral law. In accord, therefore, rather than in contrast with this freedom, man “binds” himself by his own choice to law.¹²¹ This would exclude, as the opening of the *Religion* asserts, dependence on a “higher essence.”¹²² Man cannot, or need not, therefore know his duty by means of receiving divine commandments, for he is self-sufficient as a free and rational being to determine his duty with the efforts of his own reason.

It would seem that God and the teachings of religion would have no place at all in moral considerations, and that they would either be harmful or irrelevant in the determination and performance of one’s duty. If man needed such an external determinant, then he would be showing a faulty limitation whose remedy could not be

¹²⁰ *Groundlaying*, 4.447.

¹²¹ The language of “binding” appears several times in the *Religion* (e.g., 6.93-94) and recalls an ancient source of the word “religion” itself. Cf. 6.182. Here the verb used is “bindenden,” and Kant has not yet arrived at the notion of binding that fully characterizes his understanding of religion, but the word for it, “verdinden,” first appears only a few lines afterwards.

¹²² See, however, Kant’s mention of the “highest essence” at 6.79.

supplied from outside him anyway. At best, God or religion would be useful merely in speculative matters – but this possibility has seemingly been removed by the argument of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this early sentence of the *Religion*, Kant has summed up the argument of his prior writings on morality: “Thus, on its own behalf, it needs... in no way religion, but rather is itself enough by virtue of the pure practical reason.” So far, Kant has given us no reason to maintain religion but instead has made it more difficult to do just this or to spend time reading a book on religion.

Before addressing this problem, Kant elaborates on the assertions he has just made by clarifying the relationship of morality, universal moral law, and the will. Autonomy extends to the internal workings of the will itself, for in adopting universally lawful maxims the *Willkür* is not subject to a material determining-ground. In cognizing his duty to tell the truth under oath and to keep faith in contracts, man not only does not need God to tell him his duty but also does not need a given outcome to his action to help him to determine his duty. One merely tells the truth and acts faithfully because the universal moral law dictates that he do so. There is no need, morally speaking, for man to cognize the purpose or result of his doing his duty, for such considerations have nothing to do with the morality of an act or of its conformity to the moral law and would make man “contemptible.” To tell the truth is expected without reference to a reward for doing so. Morality “on its own behalf” here is characterized as faultless, existing in its own abstract perfection. It “very well can and should, when it comes upon duty, abstract from all purposes” (6.4). Of itself, it is a work of formal design, but one wonders if this makes up a complete concept of man in relation to the moral life. Kant has often been

seen as a formal rigorist, one who takes insufficient heed of the actualities of man's passions and overall finitude.¹²³

Immediately after asserting that morality needs nothing but its own reason, Kant steps back and admits that, although morality on its own behalf is self-sufficient, man himself is not. He explains the difficulty, and indicates the solution, by addressing the relation of parts of the will to the extra-moral purpose of a given action resulting from one's duty:

For without connection to a purpose, absolutely no determination of the will can take place in man, because [this determination] cannot exist without an effect, [and] its presentation – although not as the determining-ground of the *Willkür* and [not] as a preceding purpose in intention – of course must be taken up as the consequence of its determination to a purpose through the law (*finis in consequentiam veniens*), without which a *Willkür* – which does not add to a planned action either an objectively or subjectively determined object (which it has or should have had), indeed instructed how to work but not whither – cannot give itself satisfaction. (6.4)¹²⁴

The *Willkür*, as it is not an abstract and objective part of the human will, but is rather inevitably influenced by incentives exterior to human autonomy, takes into account these various incentives and thus cannot operate in isolation from them; the incentives must be dealt with even if they must not be directly obeyed. When accepting the command of the moral law from the *Wille*, the *Willkür* sets beyond the command any incentives that happen to conform with it in their purpose, therefore agreeing to act according to the

¹²³ Passages from his own writings, especially when taken out of context, can encourage this way of seeing him. For example, he writes at *Groundlaying* 4.410n. “that ethical principles are not grounded on the peculiarities of human nature, but rather must exist standing for themselves apriori, and practical rules must be able to be derived from such [principles] for every rational, and thus human, nature” (Ellington trans.)

¹²⁴ Cf. Wood 1970, p. 41.

moral law and thus satisfying itself as well by acting in accord with a purpose provided by the nonmoral incentives. In such a way, a represented purpose (as provided by religion) can answer a question which is rational but which morality needs not and does not address, namely, “what then comes out from this right-action of ours?” (6.5). Although the dictates of the moral law are sufficient for morality, even reason itself requires further satisfaction.¹²⁵

Religion “has a necessary connection to such a purpose, that is, not as the ground but rather as a necessary consequence of maxims which are taken according to them” (6.4). A purpose for a given action already seen as one’s duty can help to illuminate but not determine the moral validity or desirability of a given action. That is to say that once morality has determined right action, religion may be employed so as to give moral support for the carrying-out of the action. Such a role for religion, or for another means of providing a depiction of the consequences of an action, suggests not the dependence of morality upon other factors, but rather reflects the inability in man to conform to his duty to morality alone without a more perfect comprehension of the context of his actions. Without the presentation of the purpose, and thus the effect, of an act, the *Willkür* “cannot give itself satisfaction” (6.4).¹²⁶ The difficulty of presenting a purpose without making it

¹²⁵ Compare the following statements from the preface: “to reason it cannot possibly be indifferent” and “thus to morality it cannot be indifferent” (6.5).

¹²⁶ A grasp of the respective roles of *Wille* and *Willkür* are central not only to the preface to the first edition but also for finding in the *Religion* a larger analogical examination of these two elements of the human will. The argument of the *Religion* is in a way the working-out of the *Wille-Willkür* relationship, which is perhaps the dominant conflict in the book, whose resolution takes place beyond the divided will and in an ethical commonwealth. Kant’s proposal is thus for a public and social solution to a problem fundamentally originating in every individual will.

the ground finds its solution in the idea of the highest good, a theme banished from modern philosophy by Thomas Hobbes¹²⁷ but subsequently resuscitated in Kant's second critique and now given central importance.

The idea of the highest good "contains united together in itself" two elements, duty and happiness proportioned to that duty. Duty has clearly been an important element in all of Kant's discussions of morality, but happiness often seems to be overshadowed if not apparently completely denigrated. As the *Critique of Practical Reason* states, "When one's own happiness is made the determining ground of the will, the result is the direct opposite of the principle of morality" (5.35; cf. 4.442). This is not a complete denial of the importance or benefit of happiness but a caution that the desire for happiness not be the controlling factor in the choosing of a maxim. Obviously, even in the present discussion of the highest good, happiness per se is not at issue, but rather a happiness correctly proportionate to the observance of duty; here one sees a replication of sorts of the relationship of morality to religion – the former determines according to moral law, while the latter adds, for the sake of the human *Willkür*, a discernable purpose. Importantly, it does away with, or at least softens, the interpretation of Kant as a moral puritan who claims that adherence to the moral law is sufficient for human life, and who also believes that happiness is in its nature detrimental to the moral life.

Despite Kant's confidence that duty and happiness can be combined and result in a strengthening of morality, he is not so confident that man can be left to his own devices

¹²⁷ "... we are to consider that the felicity of this life consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus* (utmost aim) nor *Summum Bonum* (greatest good) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. XI. (This chapter precedes Hobbes' initial discussion in *Leviathan* of religion.)

in order to make this combination. For this reason he defines the conditions for the idea of the highest good as follows: “we must assume¹²⁸ a higher, moral, holiest, and all-powerful essence¹²⁹ which alone can unite both elements of this [good].” To be sure, this idea is not meant for theoretical speculation, in which case it would be transcendent and thus off limits, but rather is intended for the practical purpose of satisfying the “natural need” of the *Willkür* which otherwise would be hindered in the moral choice of a maxim. The idea of the highest good therefore provides an “end-purpose to all our doings and non-doings taken as a whole” that is rationally justifiable. Therefore, reason, in “making for itself the concept of an end-purpose of all things,” gives “objective practical reality” to the combination of the purposiveness of freedom with the purposiveness of nature. Here is the first substantive appearance of the key word, *Verbindung*, which, insofar as Kant will rely on it for his development of the concept of religion, introduces in the first preface the purpose of religion in the most general formulation of that purpose. The idea of the highest good is the final synthesis of the separate worlds identified by the critical philosophy, and this synthesis is possible only on the ground of religion. At this point Kant suggests a thought experiment whose conclusion is that “man proves the need, made morally actual in him, to think an end-purpose to his duties, as their result” (6.6).

Religion, in positing the idea of an essence capable of combining duty and happiness,

¹²⁸ Kant’s account of this process is elaborated in more detail in KpV, and is aptly summarized in Hoffe, pp. 202-4, who asserts that the existence of God is not a mere “useful fiction”; it has reality, but in the moral and not the empirical world.

¹²⁹ At the beginning of the preface, Kant denies the moral benefit of the idea of “another essence above” (*über*) man. In the later instance, the essence is “higher” (*höheres*).

allows man to contemplate himself in the divine position and, in assuming the idea of the highest good as unifying all human actions, to justify the world as it is, man as he is, and the higher essence as it made them. Without this idea of the highest good, however, human nature is not capable of satisfying its own yearnings to know the meanings of its actions even though the moral law is clearly discernable.

By way of summary Kant concludes the first half of the preface to the first edition: “Morality thus inevitably leads to religion, and through religion it extends itself to the idea of a mighty moral lawgiver outside man, in whose will the final-purpose (of the creation of the world) is what can and at the same time ought to be the final-purpose of man” (6.6). At this point the reader is left wondering about the character of that religion, as to whether it is dogmatic, mystical, or anything other than moral – and if it is moral, how it would be anything other than framing moral considerations in edifying and nontheological contexts. The rest of the *Religion* provides Kant’s answer.

With the opening words of this preface, Kant has suggested that religion need no longer guide morality; now he asserts that it never has, that morality has always informed religion rather than the other way around.¹³⁰ Kant’s initial presentation of the problem of religion is an abstract one, not providing historical, dogmatic, or biblical support,¹³¹ and therefore he is not presenting a theological argument but is rather among the first authors

¹³⁰ Barth notes the following: “Religion, the religion of reason... is distinguished from morals as the primary use of reason not in its content but in its form, inasmuch as it represents morals in a certain connexion...” (Barth, p. 165)

¹³¹ As Barth writes, Kant’s treatment of religion without revelation is “merely a void, but which, precisely because of this, is the necessary form in all reason too which is filled by faith based on revelation.” (Barth, p. 165)

to offer a philosophy of religion, and one that is primarily geared toward moral and psychological rather than theological considerations. The consideration in the *Religion* of the relationship of morality and religion is twofold, just as was the position of the first preface itself, but in the body of the *Religion* the order of consideration seems to be reversed. First, Kant lays out at length the moral importance of religion and subsequently uses the resulting notion of (moral) religious faith as a means of criticizing existing religious practice.

B. The Disposition and Human Nature: *Religion* Part One

The precedence that Kant gives to morality in the first preface prepares the reader for his distance from religion itself at the start of book one of the *Religion*, where there is no discussion to be found of matters such as God, revelation, faith, or church. Instead of speculative theology, Kant offers his most profound investigation into human moral experience. The investigation, and the ensuing analysis of religion from this standpoint, has at its center the human disposition,¹³² which has already made important appearances in the *Critique of Pure Reason*¹³³ and in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.¹³⁴ The

¹³² The apparent etymological connection of two key terms, “disposition” (*Gesinnung*) and (what is normally translated as) “predisposition” (*Anlage*), is in English but not in Kant’s German. For this reason “tendency” translates *Anlage*.

¹³³ See, for example, A748/B776 (“There is in human nature a certain insincerity that must still in the end involve, like everything that comes from nature, a tendency to good purposes: viz., and inclination to conceal one’s true dispositions, and to parade certain adopted dispositions that one considers good and laudable”), A813/B841 (If “the prospect of happiness... first makes possible the moral disposition... the disposition would not be moral, and hence would also not be worthy of full happiness...”), and A829/B857 (“In other words, the faith in a God and in another world is so interwoven with my moral disposition that, as little as I am in danger of losing my moral *Gesinnung*, so little am I worried that my faith could ever be torn from me”) (Pluhar trans., with slight modification).

centrality of the concept of the disposition is clear from the following passage late in the *Religion*: “Moral faith... presupposes as necessary a morally good disposition” (6.115-16). The disposition, which is alternately defined as “the first subjective ground of the adoption of the maxims” (6.25) and as “a subjective *principle* of actions” (6.37), makes its appearance in the *Religion* in the midst of a puzzle about human evil.

Between the priests who complain that the world declines further into evil and the philosophical pedagogues who assert that man is on the course of moral betterment, Kant suggests the middle position that man is neither good nor evil or even that he is partly good and partly evil. It is difficult to make a judgment, however, for we call a man evil not primarily because of his actions but because of the maxims that inform them – and maxims are impossible to observe. The only resort, then, is to infer “an underlying evil maxim, and, from this... a maxim, of all particular morally evil maxims” (6.20). Because his reader may be alarmed at the “expression *nature*” – which carries with it the implication that natural impulses are at the origin of man’s moral life – Kant clarifies that by “nature of man” he means that “deed of freedom” which serves as the “subjective ground of the exercise of man’s freedom in general... prior to every deed that falls within the scope of the senses” (6.21). Otherwise, of course, if the subjective ground were not a deed of freedom, a man could not be said to be morally good or evil but rather naturally

¹³⁴ See especially 5.99 [“For, the sensible life has, with respect to the intelligible consciousness of its existence (consciousness of freedom), the absolute unity of a phenomenon, which, so far as it contains merely appearances of the disposition that the moral law is concerned with (appearances of the character), must be appraised not in accordance with the natural necessity that belongs to it as appearance but in accordance with the absolute spontaneity of freedom.”] and 5.71 [“... the highest worth which men can and should procure for themselves lies in dispositions and not in actions only.”].

determined.¹³⁵ On the other hand, in order to avoid an infinite regress, we are left to conclude that the ground adopted and held is “to us inscrutable.” Because man’s good or evil character is the result of a choice, albeit a distant and mysterious one, nature cannot be held accountable for that character; because, however, this choice is so distant and mysterious, it is yet proper to speak of the moral character as “inborn” – present at, but not caused by, birth (6.22). Man alone, as free rather than as naturally determined being, is the “originator” of his own moral character.

The mysterious adopted subjective ground of the exercise of man’s freedom is unnamed until this point, when in a page-long “Remark” Kant identifies not only this but also the approach he takes in ethics and what that approach necessitates. Having just argued that man by nature is either morally good or morally evil, he now observes that “at the ground of the conflict between the two hypotheses lies a disjunctive statement: *Man is (by nature) either ethically good or ethically evil*” (6.22). Of this statement one could ask whether it is correct and whether it is not possible on one hand that man is neither good nor evil or on the other hand that man is partly good and partly evil. Experience, which has not been helpful thus far in Kant’s inquiry, seems to bear out the possibility that the latter is a verifiable “middle,” but the rigorist way of thinking, to which Kant seems to hold, thinks it against the interest of the doctrine of ethics to proclaim any “moral half-way point.” According to this “strict way of thinking”: “between an evil and a good disposition (inner principle of maxims), according to which

¹³⁵ Kant returns to this matter several times, taking great pains not to be associated with a position such as ancient Stoicism. Although he is less explicit about keeping his distance from modern materialism (whether of Hobbes or of Tom Wolfe), it would seem that his position would preserve that distance, at least to the point of resisting a chemical or neurological determination of man’s moral character.

also the morality of the action must be judged, there is thus no middle” (6.23n). For this reason, disposition being what it is, man is never neither good nor bad, nor is he partly one and partly the other. Although the short “Remark” is illuminating in that Kant reveals plainly to the reader his own approach to moral questions, it is further helpful in its introduction of the key terms way of thinking (*Denkungsart*) and disposition (*Gesinnung*). In its sixth and concluding paragraph we find the latter defined as “the first subjective ground of the adoption of the maxims” (6.25).

As deftly as he proposes the disposition, Kant drops his focus on this mysterious ground and turns, in the bulk of part one, toward somewhat more determinate elements of human nature in order to sketch the causes of the *Willkür*'s adoption of a good or evil disposition. The full anthropology that Kant claims will be necessary for a complete consideration of whether any man is exempt from having a good or evil disposition will not be found in these pages, but still the reader witnesses an encounter with human nature in its various aspects to an extent not often seen in Kant. Until section three, however, Kant is clearly working a priori rather than from experience of directly human things. That he takes up human nature at all might seem out of place, not because his moral thought precludes that source as worthy of attention but because, in light of what he has said thus far about morality and the source of religion, the reader ought to expect Kant to shy away from considering natural determinants of freely chosen maxims and actions as well as ultimate subjective grounds for them. In part, the reader is correct, and so our first look at part one will be largely cursory, allowing us to draw from it what is needed for the exercises in moral theology in part two. It is not by accident, however, that Kant

places his considerations of human nature at the beginning, and so our study of this book will have to return again to the beginning of part one and make a new interpretive beginning.

The first and briefest¹³⁶ section of part one is “On the Original Tendency in Human Nature toward the Good.” This tendency, divided into three classes and thus three related tendencies, provides “the elements of the determination of man,” at least insofar as man does tend toward the good. By “toward the good” Kant means nothing more mysterious or metaphysical than ordered to observance of the moral law, while by “original” he suggests that these tendencies “belong to the possibility of human nature,” a vague statement that must mean that, as the sources and thus principles, they make man what he is. This is clear from the subsequent definition of “tendency” as “the components... as well as the forms of their combination” of a given essence “so as to be such an essence” as it is. Of course, the tendency toward the good is not the sole source or set of sources that determines a man, for Kant is presently concerned with only “those which related immediately to the desiring power and the use of the *Willkür*,” that is, with only those tendencies that do have the observance of the moral law as their purpose.

Some combination of the animality, humanity, and personality determines man toward the observance of the moral law. The proportion of that combination is not clear,

¹³⁶ Section one treats the tendency toward the good and second two the propensity toward the evil. This balance is overturned decisively in sections three and four, where the focus is clearly on the evil principle; this is in keeping with the subtitle of part one. Even in section one, which ostensibly has the tendency toward the good, there is, as we shall observe at length in chapter four, in that context the shadow of evil. The subject of section one is, however, of central importance to the first parergon, which is itself larger than any of the four sections to which it is appended as a general remark.

but personality is of primary importance in moral considerations. Although animality produces self-preservation, reproduction, and society, and humanity produces the rational judgment of happiness or unhappiness and thus the desire for equality, personality¹³⁷ is “special” in that it extends that rationality to moral responsibility: “The tendency toward personality is the susceptibility to respect for the moral law *as in itself a sufficient incentive of the Willkür*” (6.27). Although this susceptibility, this “moral feeling,” is not itself the purpose of the tendency toward personality, it does provide an incentive – the incentive – to the *Willkür*. This tendency is the subjective ground itself for “assuming” the moral law into our maxims.¹³⁸

Yet the tendency toward the good would seem to be only half of the human moral situation, and Kant takes the next three sections of part one (the remainder of its body) to examine the other half. Even so, he has already hinted in section one, and will state more clearly in section three, that these two components of the situation, although not identical, are not ultimately separable either.¹³⁹

The distinction between propensity and tendency, with which section two opens instead of with an explanation of what is meant by evil, is necessary because of the difficult task facing Kant, whereby he must show that the propensity to evil is natural to

¹³⁷ Cf., from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5.87-88.

¹³⁸ In an intriguing parenthetical statement, Kant calls “personality itself” – i.e. the moral law combined with the person’s respect for it – “the idea of humanity considered wholly intellectually” (6.28).

¹³⁹ We should further note that, within part one, sections two and three form a smaller unit. At first they appear to be repetitious and scattered, but section two, without informing the reader, is providing the terminology and raw material for the full exposition that is found in section three. This is most clearly seen if one wonders of what use the division into levels of the propensity to evil is to Kant, while the answer is provided in the formulation offered in the middle of section three.

man and yet not inborn to him in the way that the original tendency to the good is. The wording of the distinction itself, as well as the choice of italics, displays the difficulty: “It distinguishes itself from a tendency in that it can indeed be inborn but yet *may* be presented as not such: but rather it can also be thought (if it is good) as *acquired*, or (if it is evil) as *brought upon* himself by man” (6.29). A footnote added to the second edition adds more determinacy to the difference: “*Propensity* is actually only the *tendency* toward the craving of pleasure which, when the subject has the experience of it, engenders an inclination to it” (6.29n). Just as all uncivilized men have a propensity to alcoholic beverages, so do all men have a propensity to evil; this is in neither case a tendency in Kant’s sense, for, although it seems to be bound up in what man is, the propensity is only a potency until something stirs it – whereas the tendency toward the good is already in act insofar as man is man.

After this distinction Kant makes clear, as he will at length again at the end of the section, that he is here concerned with moral propensities, i.e. those having to do with the *Willkür*, and not with physical propensities, which would have to do with the body alone. If the *Willkür*, and thus the man, is to be “judged” good or evil, and this judgment relies on the observation of its maxims, then the propensity to moral evil “must consist in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxim from the moral law” (6.29).

For reasons not clear until the climax of section three, Kant provides “three different levels” – weakness (*Gebrechlichkeit*), impurity (*Unlauterkeit*), and depravity (*Bösartigkeit*, or perversity – *Verkehrtheit*) – of the propensity to evil. The chief

differentiation between them is their degree of relationship to the moral law in the adoption of maxims. Human nature is seen in its weakness when, upon having adopted a maxim, the man in question has difficulty complying with it; even though receptive to the dominant force of the moral law in the adoption of the maxim, the man gives into or at least suffers from the pull of his other inclinations: he needs other incentives than the moral law to see him through in the acting upon a maxim that took the moral law as the sufficient incentive (6.29). The goodness of the maxim itself comes into question when human nature is seen in its impurity; the maxim is “not purely moral” because the moral law is not the sufficient incentive. Instead, it often if not always requires those other incentives not only (as in the first level) in the carrying-out of a maxim but in the very adoption of the maxim. The moral law is still the dominant but not the sufficient incentive in this second level, and so, even if not “purely” so, the moral order is still in place.

By comparison of the names alone the reader can see a drastic transition from the first two levels, weakness and impurity, to the last, depravity, and this transition would seem to provide all the Dostoyevskian elements that the name “radical evil” (which is, after all, to be found in the title of part one) suggests. Further, in suggesting that this level might also be called corruption and perversity, Kant mentions a reversal of “the ethical order” (6.30). Yet what Kant has in mind is not necessarily a man like Smerdyakov, but instead someone much more banal, for depravity is simply the occasion of the *Willkür*'s adoption of maxims in which the moral law is not only not the only incentive but is furthermore not the supreme incentive. One need not be Smerdyakov to

be considered börsartig, for his actions might well still be morally good. This is not to deny, however, that for Kant this is the great moral disaster for any man who is not really a devil, for with the reversal of moral order, in which the supreme incentive is no longer seen to be supreme, comes a corruption at the root of the way of thinking. This is the evil man.

The corruption of the way of thinking is set up in every man, “even the best” – by which Kant would seem to mean the man whose external actions at least appear to conform with the moral law in result if not in intention. Both the *bene moratus* and the *moraliter bonus* act in accord with the moral law, but for the *bene moratus* the law is rarely or never the “sole and supreme incentive”; instead, he follows the letter rather than the spirit of the moral law. It would seem then that the *moraliter bonus* is a fiction. Even the *bene moratus* whose *Willkür* is determined by sympathy is evil, for a man acting out of sympathy might as easily commit an evil as a good act. That the actions agree with the moral law is merely accidental: regardless of his good actions the man is nevertheless evil (6.31). This statement would seem to close the discussion opened toward the beginning of part one, namely, whether man was good or evil. Even if it does not, it leads clearly into the third section of part one, titled “Man is Evil by Nature.” Now, whether this is the conclusion to that question, and whether we now have sufficient grounds to answer the still prior question, i.e. whether man is heading towards moral betterment or decline, is not yet clear.

In the final paragraph of section two, Kant offers an “explanation” that is not only “necessary so as to determine the concept of this propensity” (6.31) but which also

provides “the ground” as to why he focuses in section two on moral and not physical propensities (6.32).¹⁴⁰ The explanation consists in four sets of distinctions. First, Kant distinguishes between two kinds of propensities, the second of which is of present concern: propensities may be physical, related to man’s body and thus taking account of man as a natural being, or they may be moral, coming from man’s free *Willkür* and thus understand him as a moral being. Second, considering the moral propensity in the light of two premises – that only our own deeds are morally imputable and that the concept of propensity is that it precedes every deed – he is forced to conclude that, unless “simple propensity to evil” has different meanings, man’s propensity to evil is not morally culpable. To get around this difficulty, he turns from propensity to deed, which itself can be said to have two meanings: it can mean the use of freedom in adopting the supreme maxim, or it can be the use of freedom by which actions themselves are performed according to that supreme maxim. The propensity to evil, as discussed in this section, is a deed in the first sense, and is the principle of all other deeds. The propensity to evil, therefore, is, in theological language, the *peccatum originarium*, or, in philosophical language, an intelligible deed. As the principle, it provides the “formal ground” for the material conduct of the deeds in the second sense, each of which may be called – if unlawful – *peccatum derivatum* or sensible-empirical-temporal deeds. These distinctions only go so far to make the phenomenon of human evil intelligible. The reminder that we cannot, despite the sophistication of argument that Kant himself puts before us, grasp the

¹⁴⁰ This ground has already been provided, though not definitively, in Kant’s explanation of his use of the word “natural” in relation to the *Religion*. This is not the last time that he will emphasize the significance of a moral rather than physical basis of evil.

origin of evil in man is repeated so often in part one that clearly Kant does not wish his reader to forget this – regardless or perhaps especially because of the level of determination reached about subsequent questions related to it. Kant thus plunges his reader into what in another context (parergon three) is called the mystery of human freedom. The final word must be inscrutable.¹⁴¹

Kant concludes his particular analysis of the propensity to evil by noting that the “maxim, then, in terms of whose goodness all moral worth of the individual must be appraised, is thus contrary to the law, and man, despite all his good deeds, is nevertheless evil.” This conclusion would seem to close the discussion initiated at the beginning of part one, namely, whether man was good or evil. And even if it does not, it leads clearly into the third section of part one, titled “Man is Evil by Nature.”

At first, section three would seem redundant coming right after section two, which seems to have settled the question. After all, if section one lays out the good in human nature, and section two the evil in it, then Kant would seem to have given both sides of the story. A glance ahead at section four, which treats the origin of evil, would suggest that it, not the contents of section three, should come next. What, then, is the point of section three?

¹⁴¹ This may well be the single most definitive point to be taken from part one, and yet this cannot be all or, for the purposes of the overall argument of the *Religion*, even the most important lesson from reading it. The most important lesson must be that the radical evil in man is a fact, a fact that man can neither safely ignore nor prudently allow to cover over the fundamental fact of his tendency toward the good. Having established these facts Kant has made his entryway into the question of religion as an agent or a barometer of man’s moral situation.

Before answering this question directly, we note that Kant assigns to section three a quote from Horace as an epigrammatic subtitle. Because his classical quotations do not seem to be done for the mere sake of style or without serious intention,¹⁴² and because the head of section three is the only such occurrence in the *Religion*, it is reasonable to expect it to have bearing on section three. Even out of context, Horace's statement, "no one has been born without vices,"¹⁴³ certainly makes sense in the context of Kant's argument that man is by nature evil – but a look at the original context may indicate still more about Kant's intentions.

The theme of *Satire* 1.3 is the disjunction between how one sees or judges the vices of one's fellows and how he sees or judges his own. It begins with a look at a particular singer, who is meant to illustrate singers in general, who in turn, one might suggest, are meant by Horace to represent men in general. Of this singer Horace says that "There was nothing consistent with the fellow" and "Never was a creature so inconsistent" (1.3.9,18). "Now," Horace adds, "someone might say to me: 'What about yourself? Have you no faults?'" (1.3.19-20). After providing a response that we might expect would make rigorist (6.22-25) Kant's skin crawl – "Why yes, but not the same, and perhaps lesser ones" (1.3.20)– Horace quickly adds that if a critic of a man's faults says "I take no note of myself," then this "love is stupid and improbus and worthy of

¹⁴² See, for example, the many quotations or references found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where texts quoted or referred to offer not only a more beautiful or more witty restatement of Kant's point but a context in which the gravity or extent of that point is emphasized. A second example would be the references to Lucretius in "Toward Eternal Peace".

¹⁴³ Horace, *Satires*, 1.3.68. All quotations are of the translation by H.R. Fairclough.

negative remark” (1.3.23-24). It would seem then that the moral critic is cannot afford to ignore the blemishes in his own character. One may gather from this that Horace is arguing that one be consistent, “*aequale*,” in moral judgment, so that if rigorous regarding our fellows we be similarly rigorous in looking at ourselves. He continues in this direction as he goes on:

When you look over your own sins, your eyes are rheumy and daubed with ointment; why, when you view the failings of your friends, are you as keen of sight as an eagle or as a serpent of Epidaurus? [1.3.25-27]

Yet Horace makes a different move than we expect, for he suggests that we not be so harsh on our friend, for “he’s a good man, none better” and “under that uncouth frame are hidden great gifts” (1.3.32-34). He does wish his readers to shake themselves violently so as to determine whether “nature, or haply some bad habit has not at some time sown in you the seeds of folly” (1.3.34-36). With this, certainly, Kant would find agreement, and this line could serve as the subtitle to part one as a whole, and yet, with the rest of *Satire* 1.3, Horace moves further away from what lies at the heart of Kant’s moral teaching; honesty about oneself is not alone sufficient, for this can lead to moral betterment or to cynical or resigned acceptance. The chief vice for Horace is not so much the choice to be ignorant of one’s own vices but the unwillingness to forgive the weaknesses¹⁴⁴ of one’s

¹⁴⁴ “Let us turn first to this fact, that the lover, in his blindness, fails to see his lady’s unsightly blemishes, nay is even charmed with them... I could wish that we made the like mistake in friendship and that to such an error our ethics had given an honorable name. At any rate, we should deal with a friend as a father with his child, and not be disgusted at some blemish... This, I take it, is how to make friends, and to keep them when made” (1.3.38-44,53-54).

fellows and even ignorance of their virtues.¹⁴⁵ Consideration of these tendencies leads to the statement quoted by Kant at the head of *Religion* 1.3:

Ah, how lightly do we set up an unjust law to our own harm. For no living wight is without faults: the best is he who is burdened with the least. My kindly friend must, as is fair, weigh my virtues against my faults, if he wishes to gain my love, and must turn the scales in their favor as being the more numerous – if only my virtues are the more numerous. On that condition he shall be weighed in the same scale. One who expects his friend not to be offended by his own warts will pardon the other's pimples. It is but fair that one who craves indulgence for failings should grant it in return.¹⁴⁶

Horace's suggestion for moral judgment accepts that anger, and "all the other faults that cleave to fools cannot be wholly cut away" (1.3.76-77). The solution is not then to attempt to eradicate them but instead to look to reason for a suitable means of measurement for judging and punishing. If one does not make such an appeal to reason he risks committing the "madder and grosser sin" of harsher punishment than he should: a friend who "has committed a slight offense" ought not to be hated and avoided (1.3.83-86). If someone finds unforgivable the inadvertent urination on his couch by a drunk friend, he will find it difficult to have a suitable response to real acts of vice such as theft or breaking faith. Again, Horace is making a great deal of sense and coming closer again to Kant, if he includes under the rubric of vice the piddling offenses made by friends. He is clearly not absolving the criminal or the immoralist of blame. To the reader who wonders why Horace presents his position in the way that he does, the author responds in the last part of the satire by hinting at and then identifying against whom it is chiefly

¹⁴⁵ "But we turn virtues themselves upside down, and want to soil a clean vessel" (1.3.55-56). This is not the "reversal of the ethical order" about which Kant speaks in *Religion* 1.2, but it is an inversion nonetheless.

¹⁴⁶ Horace, *Satires*, 1.3.66-75.

directed. The hint follows immediately upon the appeal to reason and the showing by examples of the problems that follow from not making that appeal.

Those whose creed is that all sins are much on a par are at a loss when they come to face facts. Feelings and customs rebel, and so does expedience herself, the mother, we may say, of justice and right. [1.3.96-98]

From this Horace launches into a history of justice and injustice that springs from human prehistory.

If you will but turn over the annals and records of the world, you must needs confess that justice was born of the fear of injustice. Between right and wrong nature can draw no such distinction as between things gainful and harmful, what is to be sought and what is to be shunned; nor will reason ever prove this, that the sin is one and the same to cut young cabbages in a neighbor's garden and to steal by night the sacred emblems of the gods. [1.3.111-17]

In other words, as the evolution of just and unjust shows, it is not reasonable to hold that all sins are alike. Horace's addressee, not the morally lax or the lenient in punishment but their opposite, is the man who, if granted "royal power," would "cut back with the same sickle" both great and little sins (1.3.122-24). Against this man, who holds to the Stoic doctrines of Chrysippus, Horace and his friends, willing to ignore each others' vices, will live more blessedly in private life than the kingly wise man.

Why does Kant quote from this text and place the quote so prominently, especially since there is not an unambiguous agreement between himself and Horace? Further, why does he employ a text that is aimed directly against the Stoics? He will, a few pages after 1.3 concludes, begin part two of the *Religion* by noting the error of the Stoics, but he does this while making clear how correct they were as well; furthermore, the Stoic Seneca is mentioned in a favorable light in the same breath as Rousseau earlier

in part one, when Kant first brings up the natural goodness in man (6.20). In hopes of answering this question, we must examine section three itself.

Section three appears to have the following purposes: to draw, from section two and on the basis of experience, the conclusion that man is by nature evil, and to provide the a priori rather than experiential “development of the concept” of evil (and so a fuller account of that begun in the previous section). The further purpose of the latter is to clarify the “actual quality” and the “ground of the opposition” of the propensity to evil.

Kant opens section three with an explanation of what is meant in its title by “evil” and “by nature,” and these explanations are based upon the contents of section two: “man is evil” refers to the incorporation of deviation from the moral law into his maxims, and “by nature” belongs to man as a member of his species, insofar as we have experience that forces us to make that inference. He continues to reiterate that the propensity to evil is not a natural tendency but is itself morally evil; it is a natural propensity, however, insofar as the “supreme subjective ground” of maxims of the *Willkür* contrary to the law were “in all cases somehow entwined with humanity itself and, as it were, rooted in it.” Because of this rootedness, we can call it “radical” (6.32). There is no need of “formal proof” of radical evil, for we have plenty of “woeful examples” in the state of nature, in the political state, and in the external relations of political states. After giving evidence from each of these sources,¹⁴⁷ Kant returns to the a priori account begun earlier: the ground of the evil cannot be placed either in man’s sensuousness – otherwise man would

¹⁴⁷ We shall put off commenting on this aspect of 1.3 until chapter four. For now we need only note that Kant has no trouble providing a variety of examples to manifest the truth of his assertion.

be a mere brute – or in a corruption of his “morally legislative reason” – or man would be demonic (6.35). And thus begins the heart of the section, a development of the concept of evil. The reader might object that, with section two’s layout of the three “levels” of the propensity to evil, he has already provided this concept, and done so with reference to the relationship of the free *Willkür* to the moral law. A comparison of sections two and three, however, clearly bears out the suggestion that two is merely preparatory for three and that the latter is the real account of the concept of evil that employs the ideas laid out noncommittally in the former.

Kant begins his account with the striking claim, in light of his recent dismissal of sensuousness as the source of moral evil in man, that, without the sensuousness, man “would be morally good” (6.36). Man is dependent on his sensuousness precisely because of his innocent natural tendency, and he “naturally” incorporates both the moral law and sensuous incentives into the same maxim: it is not conscious rebellion against the moral law but instead acting according to his own sensuous nature – though not determined by it – that makes moral evil possible in man. The formal – i.e. the arrangement according to which incentive (moral law or sensuous incentive) is subordinated such that one is the “condition” of the other – and not the material element of the maxim determines whether man is good or evil. Man “reverses the moral order of his incentives” when the “law of self-love” is the condition for the fulfillment of the moral law. Even so, as Kant noted previously in section two, the actions of evil men may themselves conform to the law “as if they had originated from true principles” (6.36). The “empirical character” is good while the “intelligible character” is “still evil” (6.37).

If a propensity to this reversal lies in human nature then there exists in man a natural propensity to evil which itself is evil because “it must ultimately be sought in a free *Willkür*.” It is radical in that it “corrupts the ground of all maxims”; inextirpable through human¹⁴⁸ forces because it is the very ground itself that is corrupted; and possible to overcome because man could not otherwise be called free.

Here Kant weaves together the three levels of the propensity to evil that he laid out in section two. The depravity of human nature is not demonic but rather a perversity (cf. 6.30). The perversity of the heart can be found in a generally good will “springs” from the “weakness” of human nature “bound” (*verbunden*) with the impurity of human nature, so the first two levels of the propensity to evil bound together lead to “seeing only the conformity of these incentives to the law” – with resulting deeds that are sometimes vicious, sometimes not – and thus the radical depravity of the way of thinking: “no attention is given to the incentives in the maxim but only to compliance with the letter of the law” (6.37).

This “inborn guilt” can be “judged” in two parts, full consideration of which brings Kant and his reader back to the original question of human moral betterment and to the further question, dealt with at length in part two, of man’s worthiness to be happy. The same consideration prompts Kant to give his most vivid description, as well as his most morally-charged condemnation, of this propensity in man. While the first two levels of guilt may be judged unintentional, the third, which is deliberate and in which the heart “deceives itself as regards its own good or evil disposition,” must be judged

¹⁴⁸ Here is an important qualification that becomes important soon.

intentional (6.38). The depravity of the human heart seems even more troubling to Kant in the cases where the resulting deed is not contrary to the letter of the moral law, since then the heart can avoid judging its disposition and thus is enabled to think itself justified: “From this so many men get their peace of conscience (conscientious in their opinion). . . .”

The problem does not remain in the realm of individual morality, however, and so Kant provides a clue as to the connection between (im)morality, religion, and social-political life: “This dishonesty¹⁴⁹ . . . extends itself¹⁵⁰ also externally toward falsity and deception of others”: to overcome radical evil is therefore not only a necessity of the moral life of the individual man but of the public life of social and political man. The public context of radical evil is further emphasized in the anecdote that is part of the climax of *Religion* 1.3. In a strictly political setting, a member of parliament revealed a truth that perhaps is revealed in only two possible situations, in the calm of philosophic reflection such as the *Religion* (or the *Satires*) or “in the heat of contention”, for nowhere else is man forced to utter the truth about the evil in him and according to which he operates in everyday life. But Kant is offering here only a hint at the larger context in which the problem of radical evil is operative. His more pressing task in 1.3 is to indicate that the nature of radical evil is in the subordination of the moral law to other incentives in the adoption of a maxim, combined with the dishonest convincing oneself of righteousness due to performing actions that do not explicitly contradict the letter of that law.

¹⁴⁹ This dishonesty might well be called unworthiness, which stands in obvious contrast to the notion of the worthiness to be happy, brought up at 6.46n and elsewhere in the *Religion*.

¹⁵⁰ It is remarkable that the phrase “*erweitert sich*” here echoes the key passage concluding the first half of the preface to the first edition (6.6).

The explicit concern of section four, “Concerning the Origin of Evil in Human Nature,” is whether the move from cause (the determination of the *Willkür*) to effect (moral evil) can be grasped temporally (in terms of the “happening” of that effect) or only rationally (in terms of its existence alone). By means of this question Kant emphasizes again in this section what has dogged his consideration of moral evil almost the start, the unintelligibility of its origin, whether in human history or in the human soul, and thus of its full nature.

That we can and do have an account of the rational origin of moral evil springs from what makes a man evil: as Kant argued much earlier in part one, “the ground of evil cannot lie in any object *determining* the *Willkür*... but only in a rule that the *Willkür* itself produces for the exercise of its freedom, i.e. a maxim” (6.21). The maxim, as the “determination of [and thus the cause of] the *Willkür* to the production” of moral evil as an effect, illuminates the rational origin in the sense that the existence of moral evil is accounted for by the priority of the maxim.¹⁵¹ Because the case of moral evil is one in which the cause and effect are “bound” (here again that ubiquitous word) not by laws of nature but by laws of freedom, the priority of the maxim as cause is to be understood as a priority not of temporal state or condition but only of being. The moral quality of man, by which Kant means “the ground of the *exercise* of freedom” (6.40), may therefore be grasped only according to the presentation of reason. This is only partially satisfying, but a practical purpose corresponds to Kant’s statement of theoretical ignorance.

¹⁵¹ Here Kant is speaking of the maxim that serves as the ground of all other evil maxims (cf. 6.20, end).

The purpose of Kant's distinction of rational and temporal origin is to avoid harming the moral force of the doctrine of radical evil, for casting that origin in temporal, and thus natural, terms would lead quickly to absolving man from moral blame from that evil which he seems to have authored. Aided by the notion of the rational origin of evil, Kant's reader is able to view every individual evil action as a fall from the tendency toward the good rather than as a weakness in the face of physical incentives or past bad habits.

... his action is free, and determined through none of these [natural] causes, so it can and must be judged as an *original* use of his *Willkür*. He should have omitted it, whatever circumstances and bonds may have been, because through no cause in the world can he stop being a free acting essence. [6.41]

This leads to the following statement that reminds the reader, again, of the question into decline into moral evil and of the "now" that is as old as history: "However evil someone has been up until an imminent free action... it is not only his duty to have been better; rather, it is now his duty to be better" (6.41; cf. 6.19). The beginning of an answer, then, to the dispute between priests and philosophic pedagogues is in a way indecisive, for as yet we have no evidence of decline or betterment. What Kant has given his readers, however, is the ground for a new means of asking and investigating the question, and thus for seeing the possibilities for decline and betterment, for now it appears that the moral struggle in man is removed – at least in its most important aspect – from its historical (and thus, as we shall find in increasing detail, from its theological-biblical) context. The struggle between good and evil is played out not in the social-political world so much as in the individual *Willkür*. (That the world does not however hang in

the balance has yet to be shown.¹⁵²) This is not to say that history or theology are ever far from Kant's mind in his investigation, for they often give him the means of further investigation; in the present text, theological-biblical claims serve to illuminate his rational presentation of the origin of evil.

The first occurrence takes place as an aside in which, turning for a moment from the question of origin and toward spreading and continuation, Kant rejects the notion of inheritance informing the account of evil. Although the error of inheritance may be found in law (as legal consequences to inherited debt) and medicine (inherited disease as represented by a tapeworm), the vehicle of this "unbecoming" way of presenting the spreading and continuation of moral evil is to be found in the use of scripture by the theology faculty. If we were to view sin as inherited, then we could say of our guilt, as the (in Ajax's view) deceitful and cowardly Ulysses puts it in another context quoted here by Kant from Ovid, "birth and ancestry, and what we have not ourselves made, I scarcely reckon ours"¹⁵³ – that is, if we inherit it, it is not fully our responsibility, coming as it does from another. Instead, as Kant points out, the Adam and Eve story, read properly, is a symbolic presentation of the existential struggle each time man is faced with the possibility of a free act.

¹⁵² The answer to the question posed at the beginning of part one is thus answered, in germ form, by the argument and conclusion of part one alone. Parts two and three of the *Religion* are elaborations and extensions of the last sentence of the body of part one, and part four is the settling of further complications that arise from two and three but which go back to the principles laid out in part one.

¹⁵³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 13.140-41. Kant changes Ovid's "voco" into the less neutral "puto."

Kant's rejection of the theological doctrine of inherited sin is followed two paragraphs later by the surprising observation that his teaching goes together well with "the manner of presentation made use of by scripture to depict the origin of evil in the human race as a *beginning*" (6.41). It is further puzzling that Kant frames the biblical presentation by mentioning that it makes its point by doing what he has just rejected, namely, showing the beginning of evil in a history,¹⁵⁴ "where what must be thought as the first according to the nature of the thing (without taking up the temporal condition) appears as a first in time." How this supports Kant's distinction of rational and temporal origins is not clear, and, furthermore, it is – as he must realize, in light of his forthcoming claim that he is not doing biblical exegesis – not a convincing interpretation of a biblical text.¹⁵⁵ At first, helped along by the quotation from Horace¹⁵⁶ that immediately follows, Kant's treatment of Genesis seems less a support for his argument about origins than a means by which he can force his reader to see his, the reader's, own desperate moral situation: it is clear that on a daily basis we sin, since "in Adam all have sinned" (6.42). How then does the Scripture bear out what Kant has argued?

¹⁵⁴ Kant thus reminds the reader of his "as old as history" and the poetic fiction of the priest-religion of 6.19.

¹⁵⁵ This interpretation is based upon three short passages from Genesis. First (Gen. 2:16-17), God's stated prohibition to the woman not to eat of the Tree is taken to present the going forth of the moral law as a prohibition, a prohibition that is necessary in light of man's temptation by his inclinations. Second (Gen. 3:5), the serpent's claim to the woman that if she eats of the tree she will become like God regarding knowledge of good and evil is taken to present the propensity to self-deception in interpreting the moral law. Third (Gen. 3:6), and of the three the least convincing of the interpretive glosses, the woman finding the eating of the fruit desirable for several reasons is taken to present the ignoring of the moral law as sufficient incentive and searching for other incentives that are good only conditionally. From this, Adam and Eve were led to "rationalize" in weakening the adoption of the moral law.

¹⁵⁶ "Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur" (*Satires* 1.1).

As a history, the Genesis account by necessity of its very form portrays the origin of moral evil in temporal terms – a history (*Geschichte*) cannot exist without a happening (*Geschehen*), for the mere existence there of the subject of the history is insufficient. Whether the Scripture offers an historical account of the origin of evil is not clear, or even necessary, for what is most telling about it is that it exists at all, that is, that it puts on display the human need to clarify that which is mysterious.¹⁵⁷ In attempting to give the temporal origin of evil, the author of Genesis presents the reader with the first man, endows him from the start with not only sensuous temptations but also with a fully-functioning rational faculty. Because of this endowment, Kant suggests, and instead of Kant's own suggestion that man has a "prior innate propensity" to evil, the biblical author gives to man a temporal condition of innocence. The first transgression of the first man is presented as a fall into sin, whereas Kant presents human transgression as resulting from that prior innate depravity. There is a resulting parallelism between Kant's argument and the Biblical portrayal of the origin of evil is as follows: one begin to trace the origin back in time, but eventually that attempt comes to a stop, whether with man's condition of innocence (Scripture) or with man's propensity innate propensity to evil,¹⁵⁸ before arriving at a complete account. More troubling, though philosophically intriguing, is that the failed attempt at a temporal origin illustrates not only the inability of the Bible

¹⁵⁷ At this point in the *Religion*, even with the note of clarification regarding whether he is engaged in Biblical exegesis, Kant is vague as to the human or divine origins of the Scripture itself. The present study takes up this question explicitly in chapter five below.

¹⁵⁸ It is useful to recall that, though innate, this propensity is also brought upon by man. It is equivocally natural, insofar as it is radical.

to grasp moral evil but also the inability of human reason to do so. The rational origin, too, “remains inscrutable to us,” and “there is no conceivable ground for us” by which to grasp the origin of moral evil in man (6.43). In framing the Genesis narrative of man’s fall within a larger cosmic struggle, between God and a being much more “sublime” than man (6.44), the Bible admits that the origin is inconceivable: the recourse to a mythical narrative is less a naïve pre-scientific account of the world than a knowing admission of the lack of a scientific or rational account in the first place.

The conclusion of section four is this tying together in failure the rational and temporal accounts of the origin of evil. In this tying together is the basis of the subsequent religious rather than (purely) moral tone of the *Religion*; it is thus the perfect transition into the first parergon. The rhetorical skill with which Kant makes this transition is noteworthy. It is fairly clear that Kant concludes the last paragraph of the section by still talking about the biblical admission of the inconceivability of the origin of moral evil, and yet it seems that Kant wants the reader to accept on its own terms the final clause: “and so for [man], who in spite of a depraved heart still always has a good will, there remains hope of a return to the good from which he has wandered” (6.44). This answers the question with which the *Religion* opens but without any support that is independent of the Bible. Although in section three Kant alluded to supernatural intervention in the project of moral progress¹⁵⁹, and he concludes the fourth section with a more explicit statement that prepares us for the first parergon, in which Kant makes the

¹⁵⁹ “This evil is... as natural propensity, through human power not to be *eradicated*” (6.37). When this passage appears Kant makes no attempt to explain the force of the qualification “human.”

transition from morality to religion, he leaves the reader somewhat mystified. The reader has at least made the observation that the unknowability of his own disposition is the key to living a human life.

C. The Disposition and Grace: The First Parergon

The General Remark concluding part one, titled “Concerning the Restoration of the Tendency to Good to its Power” and subtitled “Of the Effects of Grace” (see 6.52), is the first of the four parerga found in the *Religion* and the longest unit of text in part one. In this Remark, Kant, freed from the boundaries of mere reason that he set for himself in the body of the *Religion*, is able to proceed further in his exploration of human evil and moral betterment. Any temptation to view the Remark as less crucial and even less serious than the four sections of part one is mistaken, for here the question of the *Religion* is taken up in from an explicitly religious or theological point of view, and we see for the first time what Kant meant in the first preface by the extension of morality into religion.¹⁶⁰ As this is the first real glimpse of religion, rather than morality simply, that the reader encounters, the Remark is less an appendix or afterthought than the culmination of part one.¹⁶¹ Along with the benefit of this glimpse comes the introduction of the core principle that Kant will use in his critique of contemporary religion, and so to view the

¹⁶⁰ To be more precise we ought to write “revelation” instead of “religion”. Kant has moved from a priori reasoning into using revelation (or selected and sanitized elements of it) as the basis for further exploration of the same questions. Strictly speaking, even though parergon 1 does address religion by name, it does so briefly and then Kant lets a full examination wait until part 3, that is, after the exploration of ideas in part 2 that might be called theological (or theologically inspired) but not really religious.

¹⁶¹ That the contents of the first *parergon* are the culmination rather than an afterthought of part one becomes more clear upon the discovery that, when Kant first published part one as an essay in the *Berlin Monthly* (and when he published the first edition of the *Religion*), the *parergon* was then listed as a fifth section rather than as the passage of lesser importance as it appears in the second edition of the *Religion*.

ultimately political character of the work it is necessary to study the Remark.

Furthermore, it can be no accident that that principle of critique is introduced in the neutral zone of the *parerga*, rather in within the boundaries themselves of mere reason.

Reiterating the point that man makes himself good or evil based upon the propriety with which he incorporates the moral law into his maxims, Kant looks to the difficult question of moral progress once man has fallen. Two things, “some supernatural cooperation” and one’s making himself worthy of such cooperation, appear to be necessary for a man’s full restoration to good; with this latter requirement is the further stipulation that he makes positive use of that cooperation once he makes himself worthy of receiving it. Clearly the first requirement, supernatural assistance of some kind, is of a religious character insofar as it appeals to matters beyond human cognition, even the second requirement, a man’s making himself worthy of that assistance, “surpasses all our concepts” (6.45). It is not immediately clear where morality strictly speaking ends and religion begins; although one might suspect – and his suspicions are borne out – that the matter of making oneself worthy is a matter of the disposition and thus rational at least insofar as it deals with something derived a priori from empirical evidence (cf. 6.20), it is still odd that the bulk of the General Remark is devoted to discussing this rather than the question of the divine assistance. Then again, in the light of how speculative theology has been limited in the previous critical works, one might doubt that there is much to think or say about that divinity.

From the start of raising the question of whether moral improvement is possible, Kant appears to take the point of view of the moralists from Seneca to Rousseau in

claiming that the possibility of moral progress necessarily presupposes “that a germ of the good remains in its whole purity, [which germ] cannot be eradicated or corrupted” (6.45; cf. 6.20).¹⁶² Because the demand in our souls is that we become better men such a thing must be possible, even if complete betterment is possible only with “inscrutable higher support” (6.45); that this last statement recalls the opening lines of the preface to the first edition (i.e. the “idea of another essence above him” [6.3]) indicates the beginning of the departure from pure morality and the extension of morality through religion – but this is a passing comment, and Kant is not quite ready to cross that boundary yet. Instead, he remains on the level of discussing moral progress from the natural (or at least rational and hypothetical) and human point of view.

The restoration of the original tendency toward the good in us... is thus only the production of the purity [of law], as the highest ground of all our maxims, according to which it is not merely bound with other incentives, or subordinated to them (the inclinations) as conditions, but rather to be taken up in its whole purity as the sufficient determination of the *Willkür*. [6.46]

There is nothing particularly religious about this, although Kant suddenly relies on religious language to drive home the point – the man who incorporates into his maxims the purity of the moral law is “not yet holy himself” but yet “on the way into an unending progress” (6.47).

Apropos this road of endless progress Kant addresses the question of gradual moral improvement as seen in external actions that are taken to be virtuous; he thus embarks on one of many digressions in this General Remark, one that will be crucial to

¹⁶² This tendency toward the moralists and philosophical pedagogues and away from the priest-religion is crucial to the political analysis of religion, as will be shown in chapter four below.

later comments about civil society. For the present it is sufficient to note that Kant's analysis of virtue is an illustration of the larger question of the inscrutability of the disposition¹⁶³ and the resulting uncertainty about true moral progress: virtue in the legal sense, as an habitual, empirical, and phenomenal display of "lawful actions," is not sufficient to the *restoration* about which Kant writes, for it is ultimately "according to the principle of happiness": virtue "thus has the steadfast maxim of lawful actions, regardless of whence one takes the incentives that the *Willkür* needs" (6.47). It is not morally good, for example for an immoderate man to become moderate because his physical health is at risk.¹⁶⁴ By contrast, in the case of a man becoming morally good, he is "virtuous according to the intelligible character (*virtus noumenon*)" or in other words experiences a change in his very disposition. The noumenal change, therefore, precedes and makes possible the phenomenal change if the latter is to have any genuine moral worth. At this point the reader is reminded of the tenuous boundary between pure morality on one hand and religion on the other, for Kant equates moral, as opposed to legal, virtue with man's being "well-pleasing to God" (6.47); furthermore one notes the recurrence of the cognition of duty which Kant uses later as part of his definition of religion (cf. 6.153).

This reverberation of theological language culminates in the following passage:

[Becoming pleasing to God] is effected not through gradual reform, as long as the groundlaying of maxims remains impure, but rather through a revolution in the disposition in man (a transition to the maxim of holiness [of disposition]); and he

¹⁶³ In the previous section Kant defines virtue as "conformity of the disposition to the law of duty" (6.37). Later on, he identifies "virtue striving toward holiness" as the "true object" of faith, and thus as the source and value of religion (6.132). In a footnote added in the second edition, early in part one, Kant identifies virtue as "the firmly grounded disposition to fulfill one's duty strictly" (6.23n.)

¹⁶⁴ For more on this, see the discussion of "a glimmering delusion of virtue" (6.132).

can become a new man, only through a kind of rebirth, as a new creation (John 3:5; compare with Genesis 1:2) and a change of heart. [6.47]

By “gradual reform” Kant means the enumeration of particular cases of a man’s phenomenal appearance of acting according to duty; this is insufficient because it does not get to the root, to what is “radical,” in that still-impure groundlaying of maxims. Instead, to strike at the root of the problem, a “revolution” must completely alter the disposition and start again. The “new man” has directed his free *Willkür* to receive its influence from the original predisposition to good.

The challenge still facing Kant, however, is how to “reconcile” the opposed notions of (a) human inability to overcome the self-inflicted corruption of his very nature and (b) the command to be good, which as a command must be obeyed (here as before at 6.45 Kant states that ought implies can). The only possible answer, that this opposition suggests on one hand a revolution in the mode of thought and on the other a gradual reform in the mode of sense, preserves but refines the distinction into the following: provided he reverses his evil disposition (i.e. the supreme ground of his maxims) and thus becomes a new man, he makes himself according to principle and to the mode of thought “a subject susceptible to the good” (6.48) but yet in the mode of sense he can consider himself a “good man” only “continuous operation and becoming” and may hope to be on the path of moral progress. The second half of this formulation is necessary because the “judgment of men” regarding their moral worth and the strength of their maxims is limited to the temporal grasp of sensibility; they can only hope that the hard work of acting in accord with good maxims is a sign of the gradual reform of the propensity to

evil as well as of the perverted way of thinking. Only to God is the “intelligible ground of the heart (of all maxims of the *Willkür*)” and only to God can the “endless progress” of moral struggle be seen as a unity. For determining the line between morality and religion in Kant’s thought this is crucial, for if man achieves the revolution in his disposition, he is “actually a good man (pleasing to him).” One might wonder if Kant has answered his own question satisfactorily, but the ascendance of hope as the primary religious virtue – stripped of much of the theological character that it possessed prior to Kant – is key to his analysis of religion. Inasmuch as becoming pleasing to God (which itself is restoring the moral law to its priority in determining the *Willkür*) is the point of religion according to Kant, the argument of the first General Remark contains the best indication of the moral importance of religion. This view of the nature and purpose of religion is clearly opposed to many other views of religion, and thus it is not surprising that the Kant’s moral explanation of the character of religion is also useful as a tool of criticism of religion.

The succeeding paragraph of the General Remark is devoted to using the foregoing principles in outlining the type of “moral development” that is necessary for the transformation of the mode of thought and the grounding of a character, a transformation geared not to “a bettering of ethics,”¹⁶⁵ which is the traditional method, but rather toward attacking the “universal root” of the various vices (6.48). The new moral education – it is worth pausing to note that Kant indicates that the language of improvement, even to the point of trying to become well-pleasing to God, is geared to

¹⁶⁵ The striking use of “ethics” (*Sitten*) repeats Kant’s previous criticism of virtue of a merely legal and empirical character: this requires not a change of heart but only a change of ethics (6.47).

nothing more than the support of morality – although it cannot knowingly reverse the evil of the disposition, is a training in the hope that moral progress is possible and will transform into a being pleasing to God. In this formulation one sees the error of the customary moral education that focused on ethics and individual vices: whereas virtuous actions ought not to be provided to the student for mere admiration, the example of good men (whose goodness is understood in relation to the law) may profitably be judged by “apprentices” so that the predisposition to good of these apprentices is “cultivated” when critical judgment uncovers “the impurity of many maxims from actual incentives of their actions” (6.48). As a result of this education the predisposition to good “gradually changes into the way of thinking,” and the moral apprentice furthermore has the critical ability with which they can examine apparently good actions, an ability that will prove useful in Kant’s subsequent moral analysis of religious practice.

Instead of using virtuous actions as objects of admiration for moral apprentices, “something in our soul”¹⁶⁶ may be used instead. The incomprehensible tendency to good in every man, “proclaiming as it does a divine origin,” fills man “with the highest wonder” and is at the heart of moral education:

Often to make lively this feeling of the sublimity of his moral determination is, as a means of awakening ethical dispositions, especially to be praised, because it directly operates against the inborn propensity toward the perversity of the incentives in the maxims of our *Willkür*, in the unconditioned respect for the law as the highest condition of all adopted maxims, in order to restore the original ethical order among the incentives, and with it the tendency toward the good in the human heart in its purity. [6.50]

¹⁶⁶ The reader may be surprised, in one way or another, regarding Kant’s use of the word “soul” – that it appears so rarely in the *Religion*, or that it appears at all. Another appearance is at 6.45.

Again, the disposition is at the center of the argument.

Despite his talk of the moral student's profit by considering the sublimity of the original tendency to good, Kant is still unwilling to let the reader forget the nagging question of how all this is possible. It would seem that his two previous treatments of the question in the General Remark have not been sufficient, so he returns once more to the following question: "But does this restoration through one's own efforts stand directly against the statement of the inborn corruption of men for all good?" (6.50). The difficulty with his answer – yes, as regards our limited insight, but no, as regards the notion that ought implies can and in light of our ability to use our own effort and to hope for the best – is that it is virtually the same as the previous two answers, and so one must consider the reason for him to raise the question again. This becomes clear when he explains the purpose of the "statement of inborn evil" in moral dogmatics – the propensity to evil is inextirpable, and so moral education must emphasize this to the detriment of the tendency to good which is, after all, connatural. This would also explain the preponderance of discussion on the evil (sections two through four) rather than the good (section one only) in human nature in part one of the *Religion*.

The main line of argument in the General Remark at the end of part one is thus the fullest account of the relationship between religion and morality, and this is striking because the much larger share of authority is given to morality. One may ask whether there is anything left in the religious dimension of the hope for moral progress that in the least resembles more common notions of religion. The concluding paragraph of the Remark addresses this question in a way that would seem to indicate a negative answer,

suggesting that nonmoral conceptions of religion – that is, views of religion that are opposed to “this imposition of self-betterment” discussed in the preceding paragraphs – are result of the laziness of

reason, which, by nature annoyed at moral labor, now summons, under the pretext of natural impotence, all kinds of impure religious ideas (to which belongs: to impute to God Himself the principle of happiness as highest condition of his commands). [6.51]

What is the “natural impotence” from which reason claims to suffer and which prohibits reason from aspiring to hope in moral progress based largely if not completely on human exertion? Here is the entering wedge for a critique of religion based on moral principles of religion itself, and so subsequent pages of the *Religion* will be devoted to the analysis of nonmoral manifestations of the religious impulse – that is, of the attainment of happiness by means not initially one’s own. To aid this analysis, Kant provides a basic division of religions, into which all of them fall; they are either religions devoted to good life conduct, and thus may be considered moral religion, or they are religions based on the self-flattery of man that God will make him happy if he only wishes for it and without any necessary moral exertion.

At this point one might raise the question of how any of what Kant has thus far said is in the least controversial. Kant might be said to be devotedly purifying religion of all that makes it irreligious, and that if religion is meant to make men into better men, then this is precisely what Kant is doing. Kant is far from denying the existence of God – and in fact, in asserting the sublimity of the moral law and thus of man’s moral vocation, he seems to be speaking of matters more transcendent than one might expect in light of

his critical works. Yet this last point already admits of problems, for despite possible appearances there is nothing transcendent in any of this, inasmuch as Kant is presenting these matters as deduced a priori by reason. The preceding and all further discussions of religion in the *Religion* is centered on the reasonable possibility of the bad state and resuscitation of the disposition in man – a disposition which, despite the occasional Biblical language (e.g. good or bad heart) used to describe it, is not a supersensible entity in any traditional sense: it is merely an inscrutable but logically necessary element in human nature. Although the *Religion* is a part of Kant's doctrinal efforts, one could hardly claim that there is anything dogmatic in the book, at least thus far, but one is also difficult to see anything offensive to traditional orthodox (at least Christian orthodox) religion. Kant goes so far in the present text, when he divides the kinds of religion, to include Christianity (which, in comparison to other public expressions of faith or religion, stands alone) in the division of moral religion rather than in that of the religion of cult. (That Kant implicitly omits Judaism, from which Christianity springs, and Islam, which at least shares its heritage with Christianity and Judaism, allows the reader to wonder whether the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic elements of Christianity can be so easily disregarded. Kant will have more to say about this later.) One might very well say of Christianity the following:

It is a principle that everyone must, in order to become a better man, do as much as is in his power; and only then, if he has not buried his inborn talent (Luke 19:12-16), if he has used the original tendency toward the good in order to become a better man, he could hope that what is not in his ability will be supplied through a higher cooperation. [6.52]

Certainly no Christian thinker would argue that moral struggle has nothing to do with becoming pleasing to God, although members of different sects of Christianity might disagree as to the level of importance of such moral struggle. It is nevertheless far from clear that, for Kant as well as for most Christians, this is the sum total of the Christian religion. Whether a deposit of faith, aside from the moral faith of the individual man, is necessary to the moral religion seems to be doubtful here, and this will begin to raise the eyebrows of the orthodox:

Also, it is not utterly necessary that man knows in what this consists; perhaps it is quite inevitable that, if the way how it happens were revealed at a certain time, different men would, at another time, make different concepts of it, and no doubt with all sincerity.

The suggestion is not only that individual men, but also all sincere theologians, have no basis for assertoric statements about the nature of the needed moral cooperation.

Sincerity, both in one's conduct and in one's hope for cooperation in the improvement of the very basis of his conduct, is the active ingredient in adherence to the moral religion.

Part one of the *Religion* has introduced the notion of radical evil as a natural and inextirpable fact of human nature, and has suggested – tentatively, and vaguely, in the parergon – that it may be overcome in a way consistent with the moral freedom of man. The continuation of this inquiry in part two indicates that the suggestion is inadequate or inadequately formulated: part one has laid the grounds for the conflict between the good and evil principles, and part two, as we shall see, takes up the conflict itself and leads to the reasonable hope for the victory of the good but without yet addressing the manner of achieving that victory. In the meantime, Kant in the second part also illuminates the will

under the aspect of eternity, i.e. the possibility of its attaining, after death, the good or evil principle forever.

D. Morality Extended through (Moral) Theology

Part two of the *Religion*, consisting of a brief introduction, two sections, and an accompanying parergon, continues the moral analysis of evil that Kant began in part one, but something is now different. Whether it is merely the subject matter, or also the tone and even mode, the difference may be explained by the presence of the intervening parergon: whereas part one, with a few scattered fissures in the boundary line notwithstanding, went as far as it could without entering theological or mythical depths. Kant's treatment of the effects of grace in the first parergon, and the reliance, if even merely for the purpose of example or clarification, keeps a prominent role and is even the subject matter of part two. Of course, this does not mean that this part has a theological or dogmatic character so much as it constitutes a philosophical examination of data that are of an originally theological or dogmatic character. That Kant has not suddenly converted to traditional Christianity in part two's lengthy investigation, in more or less Christian terms, of the doctrine of justification, is clear from the beginning, in his identification of good and evil as principles rather than spiritual beings.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ It is curious to note the increased boldness with which Kant operates after having emerged from the safety of the first parergon. It is further curious that his reticence in part two, seemingly friendly to traditional Christianity, is in the second parergon. These observations partially support a more serious theological investigation than offered in the present study, an example of which may be found in Schulz. I do not mean to suggest that Kant does not take his own claims in part two seriously, but rather that he does not reach the brink of real theology and piety, as Schulz suggests he does.

Part two, especially the first section, is the least explicitly political or social text of the *Religion*; it is the greatest obstacle to considering the latter as a work of political philosophy. The theme of this part is the question of man's becoming worthy through moral struggle, and Kant sets it in the context of the doctrine of justification. It is, following and taking its bearing as it does from the first parergon, the most theological and abstract part, yet it serves to contribute to the answer of the question posed at the beginning of the *Religion* – the possibility of moral betterment – and Kant begins part two in a way that reminds his reader of the ultimately non-abstract, even non-theological, intention: the reader is constantly reminded of the need for active combat against the evil principle (6.57). Kant's reliance on the example of ancient stoicism leads him to observe the modern combination of misunderstanding and disrepute of the word "virtue" – and of the word "enlightenment", which is a revealing comparison.¹⁶⁸

Despite a serious error in their conception of the moral life, the ancient philosophers, and the Stoics in particular, are to be credited with the notion of virtue. Only to the extent that virtue has to do with brave combat with an enemy does Kant think it deserves its "lordly name." That it has often been "ostentatiously misused" despite or

¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, that there is a line connecting moral struggle, faith, religious practice, and social and political life is indicated from Kant's useful twofold division of part two. Section one is largely a furthering of the formal argumentation, though with the added presence of theological questions and terms, of part one, while section two, employing Christian scripture, is the application of what is discovered in section one's formal argument to an historical presentation. The difference between sections one and two of part two are similar to the transition from parts one and two to part three, i.e. a move from the moral/logical analysis of the concerns of religion to the social/political analysis. Only with the former analysis as a basis, even if the terms of that analysis largely disappear, can the latter analysis and critique operate.

because of its name, might be insofar as these misuses deviate from the Latin or Greek meanings of the name.

The curious comparison of the Stoic “password”, “virtue”, with the word “enlightenment” because both – recently in the case of the latter – are mocked makes sense only later (with Kant’s mention of “true enlightenment” at 6.176 [cf. 6.178], indicating that this word, too, has been ostentatiously misused), but it strikes the reader in bringing together two words whose significands were not necessarily thought possible to reconcile.

The error of Kant’s predecessors is directly connected to their otherwise centrally correct identification of virtue in relation to an enemy: they merely identified the wrong enemy and by extension an incomplete notion of transgression. Here, in identifying the true enemy, Kant relies on the language of deception and secrecy that he used in part one: the enemy is not the natural inclinations, which everyone can see, “but rather more or less invisible enemy hiding behind reason and therefore all the more dangerous” (6.57): the Stoics ought to have armed themselves “against the malice (of the human heart) which undermines the disposition with soul-corrupting principles.” The Stoic account lacked “a special positive principle” of evil in itself. Evil is not a failure to resist the inclinations but instead, as Kant showed in part one, the choice of a principle of all maxims. The introduction of principle to the notion of evil is important, as Kant can then show further that Biblical accounts of good combating evil are presentations by means of spiritual beings of what is a combat of principles, of starting points.

Kant takes the foundation laid in the discussions of human nature and the disposition and develops them through the rest of the *Religion*. The moral core of religion, and the centrality of the disposition, is especially clear in the portrayal of Christ as a prototype of the good moral disposition, in the resolution of theological puzzles of conversion and justification, and finally in the notion of the creation of the God within man – the last of these marking the full extent of morality extending itself through religion to the concept of a moral legislator.

Part two of the *Religion*, “On the Struggle of the Good with the Evil Principle for the Lordship over Men”, provides the development and subsequent application of the morally-informed principles of religion to explicitly traditional theological questions. This, of course, requires that it be a different kind of theology, for it treats the same matter as does St. Paul in his epistles but “in order to make for practical use a graphic concept of what is for us ungrounded” (6.59), thus relying on a modified version of Christian revelation in order to investigate further the question of the conflict in man between good and evil principles.¹⁶⁹ Kant’s employment of the central doctrine of the Christian faith – God’s becoming man – is useful because, he will later note that Christ taught that “only the pure moral disposition of the heart can make men well-pleasing to God” (6.159). As he notes early in part two, the hidden disposition, which in man is evil,

¹⁶⁹ The title of part two is the first occurrence in the *Religion* of the word *Prinzip*, which Kant does not take the trouble to define. Throughout part one he uses *Grundsatz* for what appear to be the same as *Prinzip*. In the second paragraph of part two, Kant uses *Grundsatz* instead of *Prinzip* (6.57), though the latter does appear in the accompanying footnote, apropos the stoic philosophers’ “universal moral principle.” Later in the footnote, however, he uses both *Grundsätze* and *Prinzip* (6.58n.). No effort is made here to differentiate between the two in translation, for, after several attempts, it was difficult to determine much difference in use.

is the “true enemy” of virtue (6.58n), and the transition in part two to religion is precisely so that man can put trust in his own moral disposition (6.62). That Christ is somehow divine will enable Kant to demonstrate the moral use of religion, and that he preached the necessity of a pure disposition will be part of the reinterpretation of Christianity in the service of the critique of false religion.

Of course, the way in which Christ may be understood to be divine is open to question inasmuch as He is “humanity¹⁷⁰... in its full moral perfection” (6.60). The discussion begins as follows, in a manner for which the reader of the *Religion* has not been prepared:

That which alone can make the world an object of divine decision and the purpose of creation is *humanity* (the rational world-essence in general) *in its full moral perfection*, from which happiness is the immediate result in the will of the highest essence as its highest condition. – This man, alone well-pleasing to God, “is in him from eternity”; the idea of him goes out from his essence, he is no created thing but rather his only born son; “the *Word*” (the becoming!) through which all other things are, and without which nothing which is made exists, (because for him, i.e. for a rational essence in the world... everything has been made). – “He is the reflection of his lordship.” -- “In him God has loved the world” and only in him and through the adoption of his disposition can we hope “to become children of God”; etc. [6.60-61]

Because of the sudden rapidity of biblical quotations and references here, one almost overlooks the strongly human, not to say Kantian, meaning of Kant’s introduction of the idea of Christ. Most striking is that Kant quotes several biblical passages referring to Christ but then, in the ensuing discussion, does not mention Him by name. Using passages about Christ as an application of the speech of presentation to the matter of the

¹⁷⁰ Cf. 6.26.

good principle, Kant at the same time relies on the automatic association by his reader of Christ with those passages. We get an indication of Kant's purpose from the title of the subsection, "Personified *Idea* of the Good Principle" (emphasis mine). Kant need not be discussing Christ at all, at least insofar as He is God Who became man at a determinate point in history. Rather, Kant is using this idea, provided historically by religion but logically springing from reason – as he notes, "we are not its authors" – as a means of settling a problem he laid out in the preface to the first edition of the *Religion*, namely, of the possibility of binding together the "purposiveness from freedom and the purposiveness of nature" (cf. 6.5-6): it offers the means by which man can reconcile "the world" with "divine *decision*" and the "purpose of the creation" (6.60). Even this insight, that man is the crown and thus somehow the purpose of creation, is taken from theological representation and transformed into a hypothetical teaching of practical reason. Further, however, not man himself but rather a particular way of being man – that is, "humanity (the rational world-essence in general) in its full moral perfection" – is the idea at work here. With this in mind the reader can proceed further and with the assurance that Kant is at present not necessarily urging belief in Christ. In the larger picture, however, the reader is also able to note that the slow extension of morality through religion is manifest here. In making Christ – or at least the idea that is represented biblically by Christ – the centerpiece of "practical faith," Kant turns from taking seriously His divinity as the second Person of the Trinity and toward considering

Him as an “ideal of moral perfection” or a “prototype of ethical disposition in its whole purity” (6.61).¹⁷¹ Yet Kant lingers in the realm of religion, for, as he writes,

We cannot think the ideal of humanity well-pleasing to God (consequently of a moral perfection possible for a world-essence contingent upon needs and inclinations) except as in the idea of a man, who exercises not only all human duties himself and at the same time spreads out through doctrine and example the good in the greatest possible circumference, but rather also although tempted through the greatest lures, to take over all suffering toward the most disgraceful death for the good of the world and even for his enemies. [6.61]

Kant’s derivation of imagery from accounts of the life of Christ is necessary for presentational purposes: man cannot conceive adequately the degree and strength of the moral disposition to become a good man. The goodness of the good man is already visible through the command of the natural law, while the path to becoming such a man is accessible only through ideals supplied by religious imagery. The ideal of a humanity well-pleasing to God is an object of faith but thus of “practical faith,” connected to practical reason and thus morality, and is the most concrete grounds given in the *Religion* for the man’s hope in becoming pleasing to God. The hope is based upon man’s consciousness of a similar “moral disposition within himself” (6.62).

No doubt aware that he has intrigued readers with his use of biblical quotations to Christ but with an explanation of those quotations that makes their subject appear to be a mere idea, Kant poses the question of “the objective reality of this idea” (6.62). From Kant’s point of view, this seems a useless investigation from the start – the idea of humanity pleasing to God “lies in our morally legislative reason” and thus “in a practical relation... has full reality in itself”. After a dense argument reminding the reader of the

¹⁷¹ The use of “ideal” brings to mind the discussion in the first critique of the Transcendental Ideal.

difference between concepts of nature and moral ideas or postulates and thus of the indemonstrable character of the latter, he concludes even more strongly: “No example from experience is thus needed in order to make the idea of man well-pleasing to God a model [Vorbild] for us; it lies as such a model already in our reason” (6.62). Of course, some would-be good men desire more, asking for evidence not through reason but through “miracles as credentials” of the possibility of a man being morally pleasing to God. Such an exhibition of “moral unbelief” (6.63) is a man’s demand for something beyond the visible and empirical evidence of true virtue, that is, of “more than what he sees.” The irony, of course, is that the moral doubter ignores the visible evidence of the invisible result of an hypothesis of practical reason (i.e. the disposition) in favor of something not only invisible but nonrational (i.e. miracles).¹⁷² More striking to the orthodox reader is the assertion that “according to the law, every man ought to appoint in himself an example of this idea,” for this plants the germ of a radical thought, the God within of one’s own making, that does not sprout fully until near the end of the *Religion*.

Although he has just asserted that it is impossible to demonstrate the possibility of the existence in objective reality of the prototype of humanity pleasing to God, Kant allows himself to speculate what it would mean to morality were “a man of such a truly

¹⁷² In bringing up, somewhat artificially in light of the context, the question of miracles, Kant provides a segue to the second parergon, which appears a dozen pages later. Although it has no title aside from “General Remark,” we learned from the note concluding the first parergon that it may rightly be titled “Miracles” (6.52). Aside from a serious critique of the possibility of miracles, based upon both morality and knowledge, the parergon is notable for its opening line, which states that “moral religion... is to be set on the disposition of the heart and the observation of all human duties as divine commands” and thus prepares for the full definition of religion that is only given later in the *Religion* (6.84; cf. 6.153-54).

divine disposition” to descend from heaven at a time in human history. Of the possible difficulties the gravest is the danger such a fact would cause to man in his moral life, for

the elevation of such a holy one over all the weakness of human nature would, from what insight we are able to have, be in the way of the practical adoption of this idea for our succession ... [because] this distance from natural man would again be so unendingly great that the divine man could not more furnish an example. [6.64]

The “natural man” would be led to think that holiness equates to a lack of moral struggle, and that virtue is an effortless result of one’s intrinsic holiness of disposition. The problem with the notion of Christ as God made man, as hypostasis, is that His divinity obliterates the possibility of serious moral struggle within Him insofar as He has a human nature. To take such a Christ as one’s prototype would thus mean to take on a view of moral life in which blessedness need not be earned, that is, that one need not make oneself worthy of God’s grace before receiving it. Following this consequence, the importance of hope as the primary religious virtue drops away as well, and the religious man is left once again deceiving himself about his own moral worth. Again we are reminded that reason itself is limited in these matters (6.64n) and that therefore the content of religious beliefs must somehow remain at the level of hypothesis or postulate. Anything beyond the consciously analogical level is sure to descend into anthropomorphism: although he is sure to deny that a hypostatization of God and man is absolutely impossible, the implications for Christian revelation are clear. The Gospel is

merely a presentation of the principles of moral reason within us in the language of presentation.¹⁷³

Having laid out the idea of humanity well-pleasing to God, Kant raises three “difficulties” that make its “reality” problematic. The three difficulties with which Kant proceeds to deal – the permanent deficiency of human acts; moral happiness and the danger of overconfidence; and, “apparently the greatest difficulty,” the impossibility of wiping out an evil origin – all rely on the disposition and the possibility of a change of heart for their solution. Insofar as the investigation into these difficulties is based upon moral rather than purely theological considerations, it comes as no surprise that the solutions themselves are of a rational-moral rather than theological nature. A brief look at each of these difficulties and their solutions will serve to display this and also to show Kant taking an increasingly critical position.

The first difficulty springs from the observation that an infinite distance between the evil in human nature and the good (that is, the holiness of the law) to which we ought to tend, so man must assume in the disposition this holiness in germ form. Also assumed, therefore, is the change of heart that makes possible the adoption by man of the “universal and pure maxim of the agreement of conduct with the law”; we can assume the change because it is a moral duty. At this point comes the difficulty: “how can this

¹⁷³ Kant *does* take up, in the following section of part two, the Gospel account of Christ’s life and death, and treats it as such – with several crucial differences. First, Kant still neither names Christ nor identifies Him as a God-man, but rather as a person of wisdom. Second, that the “Jewish theocracy” is overthrown by the people inspired by Greek philosophy and in particular a doctrine of moral freedom, seems not to match the Gospel accounts. One might go so far as to suggest that the person here has more of Kant in him than of Christ. Third, and this is curious for a different reason, Kant introduces this account of Christ with a long discussion of Adam’s fall – but claims that this comes from the “Christian portion” of the Bible.

disposition be worth the deed, which is *every time* deficient?” (6.67). Because we as men, the solution goes, are limited to temporal conditions when we conceive of cause-effect relations and thus can only see the deed as a continuous but indefinite advance and thus also our goodness as always inadequate to the law, “on account of the disposition, which is supersensuous, from which betterment is derived, we are able to think this endless betterment of our goodness towards conformity to the law even if it is thought as deed (life-conduct), judged by one who knows the heart, as a complete whole” (6.67).

Kant introduces the second difficulty by suggesting that if man is assured “of the reality and constancy of a disposition that always advances in goodness” then “the so-disposed man would be confident that to him ‘all the rest (whatver concerns physical happiness)’” (6.68; Matt. 6:33). But:

without *any* confidence in the disposition once taken up, steadfastness in it would hardly be possible. But one finds it without surrendering oneself to the sweet or anxious enthusiasm, from the comparison of life-conduct led until now with the purposefulness already seized. [6.68]

Such an effort is “a glance into an *immense* but wished-for and happy future” and a look into a “blessed *eternity*” and thus “reassurance and confirmation in the good” and an incentive that need not entail a dogmatic position concerning man’s eternal destiny and whether it be good or evil (6.69). This is an incentive without a transgression of the Schranken of reason’s insights, while the other choice is the taking up of “*childish questions*” whose considerations lead to uncommitted or dishonest hope (6.69-71n).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Concluding the rich footnote to this text, Kant writes, “Overall, if we confined our insight to the *regulative* principles (rather than to the *constitutive* principles of the cognition of supersensible objects, insight into which is impossible for us), which are satisfied with possible practical use, human wisdom

Yet at this point Kant does launch into theological language again, although clearly for metaphorical purposes:

The good and pure disposition (which one can call a good spirit ruling us) of which one is conscious thus leads also the confidence in its own steadfastness and sturdiness, although only mediately, and is the comforter (paraclete), when our missteps make us care about its steadfastness. [6.70-71]

It is remarkable that, although the ostensible subject of this problem was overconfidence, Kant focuses more of his concern on despair.

Spending far more time on the third, and seemingly greatest, problem than on the first two, Kant introduces it thus: regardless of a man's success in taking up a good disposition and however much he has been able to live it out, "*yet he began from evil*, and it is never possible to extinguish this guilt" (6.72). The chief problem is therefore that "the preceding guilt", i.e. radical evil, cannot be removed by another (6.72). Furthermore, "moral evil (a trespassing of the moral law *as divine command*, called *sin*)", carries an "infinity" of guilt primarily because evil is "in the *disposition* and the maxims overall" (6.72). In sum, we are right to be troubled that, even were we able, through a change of heart, to live in accord with a good disposition, our original debt of radical evil still remains and cannot be erased, not even by another. The solution of this third and apparently greatest difficulty shows Kant making very technical distinctions and is the best showcase of the three of his turning age-old theological puzzles into moral questions to be examined and resolved by practical reason. The heart of the solution is thus as

would stand better in many ways", and morality would not suffer as the result of sophistical claims to knowledge of things of which man will remain ignorant [6.71n].

follows: Insofar as he is a physical, sensible being with an empirical character, he is still subject to punishment and must be so judged. At the same time, according to his new disposition, which reflects his nature as an intelligible (not merely physical-empirical) essence, he is “morally another” essence (6.74). This sets up the quietly stated but astonishing and bold suggestion that his disposition

has as *proxy* of the sin-debt for him and for all who believe (practically) in him, as *savior* through suffering and death gives satisfaction to the highest justice, and as *advocate* causes [macht] that they can hope to appear before their judge as justified, except that (in this way of presentation) every suffering that the new man must take up in life while dying to the *old* is presented in the representative of humanity as death suffered once for all. [6.74]

Kant thus concludes, “Here is that excess over the merit of the works... which is supplied to us by *grace*.”

The question springing from this conclusion, however, is whether this idea of “justification” has any “practical use” (6.76). Here Kant emerges from the theological orientation of his questions and returns to the act of critique, for this question is useful in a primarily “negative use”: one sees that expiations, be they ceremonial or penitential, cannot substitute for a change of heart or obscure the defect which only that change can supply (6.76). So the “theological” solutions that arise from initially moral considerations are always subject to criticism on the basis of those moral considerations and by the practical reason that is concerned with them.¹⁷⁵

The more difficult question of what man can look to or fear with respect to the end of his life and in terms of his life conduct (6.76) has, based upon the preceding

¹⁷⁵ Through this account, deception and insincerity make another, and lasting, appearance in Kant’s development of the concept of religion.

treatment of the three difficulties, two possible answers depending on whom one asks: if one asks the “judge” in man himself, whose reason cannot be bought off, he will judge himself harshly, but if one posits a judge other than the man himself, this man to be judged will plead for mercy on the basis of human weakness. This “pretext” allows the man to think that he can avoid not only the harsh judgment but also the necessity of becoming disposed to moral betterment; at best he will rely on prayers and penances which do not have the change of heart at their core (6.77) Kant ends his discussion of the three difficulties on a bitter note, and his disgust at those men who calculate beforehand how much evil they may do, suggests that the solutions to those questions *can* lead to further moral evil.

We should recall that Kant’s examination of these three difficulties occurs within the larger context of the first half of part two of the *Religion*, “On the Legal Claim of the Good Principle on the Lordship over Men”, and that the second, albeit shorter, examination of the identical claim of the evil principle is yet to come. Rather than providing a precisely opposite account with the same philosophical-theological language, however, Kant chooses to present the latter claim by means of the “intelligible moral relation” that is found in the Christian part of the Bible, which is a “history” of the two opposed principles in man but “presented” as persons outside of him (6.78). Such language indicates that it would be useful to keep in mind Kant’s previous discussions of or allusions to the substance of and reports about the teachings and death of Christ, for here he continues in his rather tendentious interpretive manner. The reader should also

note in the passage in question the preponderance of legal language, which reflects the present concern of a claim of “right.”

Kant begins his analysis of the “Christian portion” of the Bible by turning to Genesis (!), and tells of Satan’s rebellion, Adam’s fall, and the subjection of Adam’s descendants to the kingdom of evil.¹⁷⁶ It is fitting for Kant’s position that the “evil essence” is a spirit and, thus not pleased by “earthly and bodily objects,” desires to dominate the minds of “the progenitors of all men” (6.79).¹⁷⁷ All men naturally (an interesting and, for the moment, unexplained qualification) descended from Adam were made willingly made subjects of the kingdom founded by this personification of the evil principle because the attractions of worldly goods distracted them from the “abyss of corruption” Thus far, one sees a deep agreement of the retold biblical narrative with the earlier moral account of the origin of evil insofar as the former echoes the latter’s predominant theme of willfulness and deception; although the biblical narrative might seem to differ from the moral narrative in the focus on “the good of this world” as the source of man’s moral misery (thus perhaps contradicting the opening of *Religion* part two), but this is to blur the distinctions Kant has already made in relating sensual incentives and the will in man’s moral life.

¹⁷⁶ Here one sees that the ambiguity, or even mystery, at the heart of Kant’s overall discussion of the origin of evil is made more clear by means of the Bible narrative, for “how [man] became so evil, so as to become untrue to his Lord, since there at the beginning he was good, is not known” (6.78); even the presentational version of man’s moral experience does not pretend to offer a full account.

¹⁷⁷ That God – the creator, owner, and overlord – does not destroy this rebel and his kingdom on earth gives Kant the opportunity to suggest that honesty about ignorance of things divine seems the most virtuous trait of the clergy (6.79n). For more on this see chapter four below.

Despite the worldly dominion of the evil principle over men, however, the good principle still has a claim of right to domination of man, and this is most manifest in the existence of the “Jewish theocracy” – “a form of rule, which was ordered merely to the public reverence for its name” (6.79). The ensuing discussion is a moral critique of the Jewish theocracy as a bastion of the good principle and sets the groundwork for the moral critique of religion as a whole that follows in much of the remainder of the *Religion*. At the heart of the failure of the Jewish theocracy to preserve man under the dominion of the good principle is that men’s minds “remained attuned” to the “goods of this world” as the sole incentive. For this reason they wanted to be ruled “through rewards and punishments in this life” (6.79). Of course, from Kant’s moral point of view, it does not seem problematic that men would be concerned in “this world” and “this life”; the problem is the incentive of goods and the governing by rewards and punishments, for this is hardly in agreement with the view of morality given in the first preface to the *Religion* and in Kant’s earlier moral writings. In other words, men under the Jewish theocracy erred not in living without regard to heaven or the future life but rather in the incentives themselves. Kant continues by adding that men in the Jewish theocracy were capable of obeying only those laws that demanded ceremonies and observances; that these laws were “partly ethical,” and indeed civil rather than moral, means little insofar as external compulsion (rather than virtue or a change of heart: the moral disposition was “not at all in consideration”) was the key factor. Nevertheless, especially because its slavish mind had been shaken by the Greek doctrines of moral freedom, the Jewish Volk felt “all the evils [Übel] in full measure of a hierarchical constitution” and was thus “ripe for a

revolution” (6.79-80). At just this time there appeared, as if descended from heaven, a “person whose wisdom was even purer than that of previous philosophers” – a person whose “doctrines and example” showed him to be “a true man” and yet also an envoy not subject to the contract between the evil principle personified and the rest of the human race (6.80). This point, the apparent moral innocence of this person, allows Kant the first of two lengthy footnotes on theological questions in this section of part two. The sentence introducing the first footnote is admirable in its deadpan delivery – “To think as possible a person free from the inborn propensity to evil, that one allows him to be born of a virgin mother, is an idea of reason in conformity with a moral instinct that is difficult to clarify and yet also not to be denied” (6.80n) – but the ensuing discussion is a mockery of scholastic theologizing. The conclusion of the footnote adds the following devastating punchline: “But for what is all this theory, pro and contra, if for the practical matter it is enough to present the idea as a symbol of humanity sublimating itself over the temptation toward evil (standing against it victorious)?” (6.80n).

To return to the rightful claims of the evil principle, Kant quotes John 14:30, showing that the advent of this person sets the evil principle’s lordship in danger, since this “man well-pleasing to God” may cause other men to take up his disposition (6.81). For this reason, the personified evil principle tempts and persecutes the man and eventually “haunted him to the most disgraceful death” (6.81). “And now to the outcome of this struggle!” If viewed in legal terms (those of freedom), the death of this man is a manifestation of the good principle, but if viewed in physical terms (those of necessity), the death is obviously a defeat (6.81-2). “But the good principle came down from heaven

into humanity not merely at one certain time but rather from the origin of the human race, invisibly... and has right of way in its residence” (6.82).

The moral outcome of this conflict is the breaking apart of rather than the overcoming of the evil principle, whose kingdom remains and who still offers earthly well-being as the final end of his kingdom. Human will is not limited to this dominion, however, since the other, new, moral lordship offers to man freedom in the subjection to that lordship and protection from the enemy (6.82-3).

The Biblical account of man’s position in relation to the good and evil principles, despite the mystical raiment of its manner of presentation, has a “spirit and a rational sense” that apply to, and bind, all men at all times, each of whom “cognizes” his duty in it (6.83). The rational sense of the Biblical account, the essence of the Christian religion, is identical to that of Kant’s account and it is threefold: without a “really ethical” change in the disposition, salvation is not possible for man; fraud or satanic tricks, and thus a “self-criminating perversity,” rather than sensuousness stands in the way of this salvation; neither superstition nor enthusiasm, that is, nothing other than a well-led life conduct will overcome man’s corruption. So concludes the main body of part two.

After this summary it remains to be seen what the reader, and what the present study, is to make of part two as a whole. Leaving aside for the moment the chief question of how part two does or does not conform to a reading of the *Religion* overall as Kantian political philosophy, one should first determine how or whether it follows from and builds on part one. Part one introduced the question about human moral betterment apropos human nature and the hiddenness of the disposition, followed by the parergon

making suggestions about the possible role of grace in that betterment. Part one was placed by its title in the context of a cohabitation in man of two opposed principles, and the connection with part two is obvious from the title of latter, in which the two opposed principles are shown in conflict. That part two is divided into two sections results in a rather pronounced difference between its halves, for the first, which deals with the legal claim of the good principle over man, takes up the theological questions as discussed above, while the second, which deals with the legal claim of the evil principles over man *and with* the struggle itself and its result, is less abstract and more biblical and historical, and religion itself is more visible to the reader. Yet the concluding paragraph of part two (if we exclude the parergon) does not shift the focus from the moral to the social or political, but rather turns the reader from thinking about Christianity as an historical event and toward thinking about what the Christian scripture presents as rather historically and theologically unlimited truth about human nature and the constant conflict within it. Salvation comes from a good disposition which does not defraud or engage in superstition or enthusiasm.

Part two, taken as a whole, therefore, is quite obviously not a discussion proper to political philosophy; its first half especially is the investigation of certain traditional theological questions that Kant now puts to practical use apart from claims of holding their revealed basis to be true or false. This nonpolitical character of part two ought not to give us pause, however, not only because later, more explicitly political texts of the *Religion* will rely on it, but also because some smaller social-political indications already exist. Chief among these is Kant's first reinterpreted presentation of Christianity as the

public emergence of a moral doctrine and the struggle against the evil principle (6.79-82, particularly 6.81-2n.). Furthermore, the argument of part two relies heavily on scripture and on theological questions that spring from it; that the scripture and the theology themselves play a role in supporting or subverting religion is therefore a question which is here introduced but not treated; it may be said to be a social or political question in that these things always occur in those contexts, among many and not lone moral agents. Also the idea of a humanity well-pleasing to God is first and foremost for the purpose of individual moral betterment, but it presents itself publicly, and has public effects. Finally, part two is full of legal terminology, which hints that the solution to the moral problem is not from within morality but from a public institution; this legal language is intensified and combined with explicitly political language in part three. From these observations we can conclude our consideration of the first half of the *Religion* by suggesting that morality necessarily extends itself through religion into political life, and in this way part two prepares for the more explicit political content of the rest of the book. At this point we have discussed morality at length and religion and politics much less so. We now turn to them head-on, by looking first at the beginning of part one again and second at the third part of the *Religion*; these texts together suggest a new beginning to the book¹⁷⁸ and lead to its central teaching, which is taken up in the next two chapters.

¹⁷⁸ See the introductory comments in chapter one. Additionally, Schweitzer has observed a real break between parts two and three of the *Religion* as well: "If we keep in mind that in the second [part] it is as a matter of man considered as an individual, and that man in general (in so far as he comprehends within himself the societal bond with mankind) is the subject under consideration and dominating the presentation in the third; and if, furthermore, one is aware of how little the third [part] refers back to the second one, one will rather incline toward the assumption that in both [parts] basically the same problem is treated under different presuppositions about the subject" (Schweitzer, p. 301).

4. As Soon as He is Among Men: The *Religion* and Political Life

Thus far we have considered the *Religion* in the light of its continuation and extension of Kant's account of the moral life; now we turn more directly to those elements of the book which take up religion in relation to political life. The most explicitly political discussions are found in part three, which is both a continuation of and a departure from the first two parts of the *Religion*. It is a continuation insofar as it situates religion, as an extension of morals discussed in parts one and two, in the larger context of politics, history, and culture; the placement in this larger context, however, also suggests a departure in that the discussion of religion is recommenced from a different point of view, as if to suggest the inadequacy of the previous analysis. This is true, but only partly so, for if we look again to the initial discussions of human nature and morality, especially as presented in part one, we see from the start that Kant is not thinking of man's moral life in abstraction from his natural as an animal that lives in proximity to others.¹⁷⁹ In a larger sense, if we keep in mind that the four parts comprise a unity, we find that only in part three does Kant address fully the initial challenges posed by the very opening of part one, i.e. what we have called the third beginning of the *Religion*.¹⁸⁰ The intervening part two, largely an exploration of issues related to certain elements of part one and to the preface to the first edition, both completes part one in its moral

¹⁷⁹ Compare, for instance, the discussion of the comparative element in animality at 6.26 to the discussion of the sociality of evil in the second paragraph of part three, at 6.93-94.

¹⁸⁰ The passage in question is the original introduction to the work, insofar as part one, published by itself in the *Berlin Monthly* with the title "On Radical Evil in Human Nature," had no introduction aside from its opening sentences. For this reason one can say that this is the foremost of the introductions to the *Religion* as a whole. Here one sees the statement of the problem to be worked out, rather than a synoptic statement of the relationship of morality and religion or of rational and revealed religion.

questioning and interrupts the resolution to its opening political-historical setting. Despite the centrality of morals to the *Religion*, then, only by considering religion in a political-historical context do we read the *Religion* properly. This is not to suggest that the moral element of the doctrine of religion can be ignored without either misreading the argument of the book or distorting the very basis of the political discussion.¹⁸¹

Thus far we have followed Kant's argument for the inevitability of religion, of moral faith, and seen how it would respond to long-standing questions of Christian theology such as justification and presumption. There is, however, the unsettling thought that Kant has not provided us with an adequate notion of what religion¹⁸² itself is or does, and that what he has provided is largely an abstraction. Many of his readers, in his time and now, would expect a book about religion to take up its public character, for common usage of the word, at least in the present time, identifies religion with public life; the life of the individual might by us be called "spiritual" but not "religious" unless that individual derived some or all of his determination from membership in a church. Furthermore, many of us would say that religion with the paucity of dogmatic beliefs and observational practices that Kant has so far presented seems less a religion than a personal code. These very confusions that we hold are dispelled in Kant's treatment of

¹⁸¹ Kant's moral thought very clearly animates his political thought, as is clear from not only the *Religion* but also from *Toward Eternal Peace*, published not long after the *Religion*, which is a firm call to political life to accommodate the demands of morality; only were the path cleared through a reform of religion, and thus of ethics, would this call be met with any success. If there is to be improvement in political life, it will be by way of the *Religion*, which itself takes as its starting point Kant's moral thought. An interesting side note is that the essay on peace was written at a time when Kant was forbidden to write on religion (see chapter five below for details), but the close connection between the religion book and the peace essay suggests that the latter is a surrogate for a fully articulated continuation of the former.

¹⁸² Earlier, chapter two examined his definition of religion, but recall that that definition does not appear until the beginning of part four.

religion in its social context. This treatment will consist in an argument for the necessity of religion through church-faith, which is a necessary continuation of the extension of morality into religion; a critique of church-faiths as they have existed in history insofar as they deviate from morality and have grave political as well as moral consequences; and finally the plans for a reform of church-faith. Although the *Religion* is identified as a doctrinal and not a critical work, Kant's doctrinal efforts are always preceded and aided by the spirit of critique.

Although Kant's treatment of religion in public life seems dependent on the moral (and perhaps epistemological) teaching already examined, the social or political aspect of religion is sounded as a concern at the very beginning of part one. Let us therefore return to part one, which we have already treated in the light of the first preface, and begin again.

A. The Historical Problem and Human Nature: Rereading Part One

The book begins with a "complaint,"¹⁸³ and a serious one at that: "That the world lies in evil" (6.19).¹⁸⁴ That the complaint, and the opening words of the *Religion*, comes from the Christian Bible is not adequate to gain Kant's approval or immediate agreement, for it is not unique. It is a complaint "as old as history, even as old as the still older poetry, yes equally old with the oldest among fictions, the religion of priests." So the complaint,

¹⁸³ That "Klage" may also connote "lawsuit" is useful to keep in mind, in light of the preponderance of legal terminology to be found throughout the *Religion*.

¹⁸⁴ Kant, quoting 1 John 5:19, uses "Arg" and not, as elsewhere in the book, "Böse," for "evil." Also, in the passage about to be quoted, Kant speaks of a fall into "Böse" and toward the "Ärgern". Cf. "Der Mensch (selbst der ärgeste)" (6.36).

which we might note is not part of a larger complaint but quite the contrary,¹⁸⁵ in its antiquity surpasses history and equals poetry and priest-religion; perhaps it is as old as man himself, and thus a complaint bound up with who or what man is. It is not entirely clear that Kant claims that poetry and the priest-religion are of the same age, but that they together predate history and are both fictions¹⁸⁶ gives them a prerational or prescientific character. Prior to man's historical self-consciousness of himself and his actions, man expressed his self-consciousness through these fabrications.

The complaint, bound up with the fiction of the priest-religion, takes its bearings from another human fictional or poetic utterance: "All allow, nevertheless, that the world began from good: from a golden age, from life in paradise, or from an even happier life, in communion with a heavenly essence." The unanimity is striking; "all," presumably all men, assert the beginning of the world from goodness.¹⁸⁷ Obviously this assertion of the original goodness of the world is understood in opposition to the claim always made that the world now lies in evil, whereby the present world is held in contempt by its

¹⁸⁵ The context of the passage is as follows: "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (RSV trans.)

¹⁸⁶ The priest-religion is one of many fictions (Dichtungen), and thus has some relation to poetry (Dichtkunst).

¹⁸⁷ This echoes the clause from 1 John 5:19 ("We know that we are of God...") that precedes the quoted complaint.

inhabitants because it does not compare favorably with the golden age, life in paradise, or communion with a heavenly essence.¹⁸⁸

Then, with the third and last sentence of the paragraph, pregnant with foreboding and more characteristic of the author than is generally thought, Kant presents the full problem with which he will concern himself in the *Religion*:

But they allow this happiness to vanish as a dream;
And now they hurry the fall into (moral) evil
(with which the physical always goes in the same pair)
toward the evil one with an accelerating fall:
so that now¹⁸⁹ (but this “now” is as old as history) we live in the last time,
the youngest day and the destruction of the world is at the door,
and in some regions of the Hindu lands,
the world-judge and destroyer Rutra (otherwise called Shiva or Shiwa)
is already venerated as the now powerful god,
after the world-holder Vishnu,
tired of his office that he accepted from the world-creator Brahma,
laid it down centuries ago. [6.19]

The reader is struck first by the appearance of “happiness” and then wonders what Kant claims about it. According to this conception of a golden age, happiness was not a moral problematic such that desiring it caused its possessors to weaken the command of the moral law: happiness was already a possession, and so its possessors might at the same time have been worthy to be happy. At least in this conception, then, there is no moral evil. One might wonder about Kant speech in that not the conception of happiness so

¹⁸⁸ The phrase, “communion with a heavenly essence”, reminds of other passages about highest or superior essences in the *Religion*, for instance at the insistence that no higher essence above man is necessary for him to cognize or observe his moral duty (6.3). This original communion is perhaps restored or improved upon by means of the notion of the God within or further by means of the ethical community described in parts three and four.

¹⁸⁹ The word translated as “now” is “jetzt”, which, in that it has wider connotations than another German word for “now” – “nun”, can also mean “already”.

much as the happiness itself vanishes: Kant suggests that to lose this conception is to lose the reality of happiness as well, and so man has created for himself his own fall. The reader is also forced to puzzle about the identity of the “they” in the “they allow... to vanish”; is it the “all” of the previous sentence, or is it the agents of the priest-religion, of the first sentence?¹⁹⁰ Intriguing ambiguity aside, it seems more likely that the “they” is the “all” who hold the good origin of the world, but this does raise the question of why they would allow this happiness to remain only as the remembrance of a dream. That the happiness vanishes as a dream does not indicate whether the happiness can be recovered or whether, even if it were recovered, it would have the status of anything more than a dream.

Yet, as the next clause of the sentence indicates, that happiness vanishes as a dream is not the result of the passivity (as the “allow” might suggest) alone of the “they,” for “they” furthermore now hurry the fall into evil toward the evil one with an accelerating fall. Here again is a question that is suggested but not answered: why would “they” willingly hurry this fall? (One is at first glance tempted to take advantage of Kant’s use of biblical language here, but the moral argument of the *Religion* makes clear that the representational language of the scripture limits our cognition of the matters that it addresses. As we shall see later, that the representational language is of an historical character cannot be used by Kant in the explanation itself of the history.) Also worth noting is Kant’s parenthetical illumination of the kind of “evil” that he has in mind.

¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, one could also inquire into the relationship of the use of “lassen” in the second sentence with the use of the same word in the third sentence, i.e., whether “lassen” might be meant differently.

Rather than a mythical or spiritual idea of a demon or devil, despite the imagery borrowed from Hinduism and the quotation from John, the evil he has in mind is both moral and physical; suggested is a growing degeneration or perversion of moral life accompanied by physical effects whether war or disease or plague.

Kant underlines the gravity of the situation and the pessimism that might well accompany it, for – at least according to the “they” – “we now live in the last age, the youngest day and the destruction of the world is at the door,”¹⁹¹ and this is reflected in the eastern veneration of the world-judge and destroyer in place of the abdicated world-holder. Not only is the world held to lie under the evil one; it is about to end amidst moral and physical evil, and even its sustaining gods are seen to be exhausted. Strangely, Kant inserts into the comment that this “now” is as old as history (thus not necessarily as old as poetry or the priest-religion). First one notes a suggestion that we may reasonably be cynical about the claim of an accelerating fall, but second we see the linking of the beginning of human history, of human self-knowledge perhaps, with the conscience of this pending destruction. It is strange because both the dream of happiness and the complaint that the world lies under the evil one are *older than* history, whereas the awareness of the destruction is not contemporaneous with the dream or the complaint. One implication is that the knowledge of the accelerating fall (whatever this means) initiates history in the first place, so that history is the working-out of the knowledge of this falling.

¹⁹¹ From the second and third sentences of the first paragraph we thus have three sets of opposites of beginning / now – golden age / last age; life in paradise / youngest day; communion with heavenly essences / the destruction of the world.

Kant has thus provided us with several themes in this first paragraph of part one of the *Religion*: the collective human notion of a golden age; the willful passing away of this age and the hurrying into moral and physical evil; the rule of the evil one; the destruction of the world; the antiquity of these widespread beliefs; and the nearly co-extensive antiquity of the “now.” Either the world itself or at least man’s idea of his own place within it and its survival is a matter of serious doubt. For this reason Kant can be said to be tackling the question of the dominion of the world by the evil one and the subsequent coming destruction of the world on two simultaneous levels, one in terms of whether the world may well be destroyed, and the other in terms of what makes man think that this is so.¹⁹² All told, this is a terrifying depiction of the course of the world and of man’s view of his moral and physical future. That there is any hope in this view is denied in the quotation from Horace that is linked to the statement of the accelerating fall: “The age of our parents, worse than that of our grandparents, bears us, more worthless and soon about to give more vicious offspring.”¹⁹³ This poetic gloss on acceleration indicates the certainty that future generations are increasingly deprived. Horace begins this ode by providing the context in which this continuous degeneration is to be understood and the conditions under which it might be halted and even reversed: “Innocent Roman, you will expiate the faults of your elders, until you rebuild the temples and the tottering sanctuaries of the gods and the statues filthy with black smoke. You

¹⁹² These questions are again raised, and treated somewhat differently, in “The End of All Things,” the essay written just after the *Religion*. For an examination of this essay, see chapter six below.

¹⁹³ *Aetas parentum, peior avis, tulit nos nequiores, mox daturos progenitum vitiosiore* (Horace, *Odes*, III.6.46-48).

rule, lesser than the gods you cherish: every beginning is from this; attribute a happy outcome to this. The neglected gods have given to Italy many sorrowful evils.”¹⁹⁴ From what we have seen already from parts one and two, Kant does not share fully Horace’s opinion of the addressee’s innocence, that he is undeserving of his moral situation. Horace indicates the need for an expiation that is explicitly religious in terms of veneration or worship rather than of moral conduct, but the suggestion from the middle part of the ode is that the two are linked at least as cause and effect. It is a question for readers of the *Religion*, then, to what extent Kant sees the relation similarly. On the basis of what we have already seen, though, we are led to wonder whether Kant is about to display much concern with the restoration of temples, sanctuaries, and statues of gods. By the end of our examination of his teaching on religion and church-faith, we shall be certain that he is not – generally speaking.

Fortunately, for those readers of Kant who are not so pessimistic, there is another opinion offered for consideration. The “newer but far less widespread... contrary heroic opinion” that is currently held only by philosophers and pedagogues – “that the world moves straight ahead in the reverse course, namely from bad to better, incessantly (although hardly noticeably)” (6.19-20) – takes into account the human tendency toward improvement. The problem with this opinion, however, is that while it might be true of an improvement of “civilization,” the experience found in “the history of all times” shows that we cannot hold such an improvement in terms of moral good itself. Because

¹⁹⁴ Delicta maiorum immeritus lues, romane, donec templa refeceris aedesque labentes deorum et foeda nigra simulacra fumo. Dis te minorem quod geris, imperas: hinc omne principium; huc refer exitum: di multa neglecti dederunt Hesperiae mala luctuosae (*Odes*, III.6.1-8).

neither the priestly nor the philosophico-pedagogical opinion seems fully acceptable, Kant attempts to find a middle way, and does this by launching into the a priori analysis of human nature and the will that has been sketched out in the previous chapter of this study. As we have noted at the beginning of the present chapter, however, that early analysis illuminates not only Kant's explicit concerns about the relationship of morality and religion but also, as one would expect, sheds light on the question about whether man (and the world along with him) is morally (and physically) progressing or degenerating. Let us look again to the analysis in part one of the human tendency toward good and propensity to evil, where we find even at the start the view of the possibility of the sociality of moral evil.

An application of Kant's presentation of human nature directly to political life may seem problematic insofar as his immediate concern is not with "unlawful actions" but with maxims that are unobservable. And yet it is the submoral elements in human nature that contribute to the taking up of maxims that are morally evil which in turn may (or may not) result in unlawful actions. We must proceed with care, and not attribute to the argument what is not there, namely a purely materialist/determinist account of evil in human beings: "the ground of evil cannot lie in any object *determining* the Willkür through inclination, not in any natural impulses, but only in a rule that the Willkür itself produces for the exercise of its freedom, i.e., in a maxim" (6.21).¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ It is important to note that here Kant is speaking of all human beings, i.e. as a species, rather than about individuals; if some were by nature good and others evil, then Kant would be unable to investigate them as members of the same species. Further "anthropological research" is necessary on this matter (6.25).

Kant proceeds to examine the human tendency to good and propensity to evil. As we saw in our previous chapter, Kant's depiction of the fundamental "determination of man" is a combination of elements some of which might be reminiscent of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant's earlier writings on morality. Looking again at the original tendency (or at least the first two of its three stages), one sees that with the tendency and thus potency toward good, there seems also a real possibility for evil, almost as if to make the tendency morally neutral. For example, Kant describes the tendency to animality as "physical or merely *mechanized* self-love" whose chief interests are self-preservation, reproduction, and community or society. Reason is not "required" for this tendency, and perhaps it is because of this that "all sorts of vices" "can be grafted" onto the tendency. Although Kant is quick to assert that the vices "do not of themselves issue from this tendency as a root" (6.26), it is curious that Kant defines "propensity" as "actually only the *tendency* to desire and enjoyment which, when the subject has experienced it, arouses *inclination* to it" (6.29 note); thus the propensity to evil is an inevitable alteration of the tendency to animality, and thus of the tendency to good in general. Whereas the description of animality reminds the reader very much of Hobbes in the early chapters of *Leviathan*, the description of the tendency to humanity recalls Rousseau second *Discourse*;¹⁹⁶ here Kant moves from "physical or merely *mechanical* self-love" to "a self-love which is physical and yet *involves comparison*" so that "only in comparison

¹⁹⁶ This distinction between the teaching of Hobbes and Rousseau might be misleading, insofar as Hobbes, although his initial account of man is mechanical, certainly does not omit the tendency toward comparison and supereminence, and Rousseau, although this latter has a primary role in his account, is building upon rather than working against Hobbes' initial mechanical account. The comparison is nevertheless useful provided it is not taken too strictly.

with others does one judge oneself happy or unhappy” (6.27). While there is an elevation from man as merely mechanical to an evaluative or comparative being, the original appearance of value-neutrality still remains. Yet, as in the case of the tendency to animality, the tendency to humanity possesses a neutrality only “originally” – that is, the original tendency to humanity causes in man a desire of equal worth in others’ opinion, while they can lead to “vices,” such as jealousy and rivalry, that are caused by the gradual development of “an unjust desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others.” Particularly noteworthy is the description of just what kind of vices would be “grafted” onto the tendency to humanity – “the greatest vices of secret and public hostility” (6.27).¹⁹⁷ It is among the first references in the *Religion* to deception and Kant’s special revulsion toward it. It is also clearly an indication that society, not just the moral life of the individual, will bear the brunt of such vices. Moral evil inevitably extends itself to social and political evil.

With the third element of the tendency to good, the tendency to personality, this changes, for now the moral law – rather than natural desire or need for esteem – is for man “*a sufficient incentive to the Willkür*” (6.27). Personality is the most important of the tendencies for moral life because of the increased role of reason, which was absent in animality and which was “subservient to other incentives” in humanity (6.28). The

¹⁹⁷ These so-called “vices of *culture*,” though “grafted” onto the tendency to humanity, “do not really issue from nature as their root but are rather inclinations... for nature itself wanted to use the idea of such a competitiveness (which in itself does not exclude [or: promote] reciprocal love) as only an incentive to culture.” That the tendency to humanity can be so perverted as to take on “the idea of a maximum of evil that surpasses humanity” (6.27) means that the tendency itself is not responsible for the evil possibilities – and, then, it could hardly be credited with good results either. The question thus remains how the first two tendencies can be called tendencies to good, rather than tendencies to the possibility of good or evil.

autonomy of practical reason results in a “susceptibility to mere respect for the moral law in us” (6.27). The moral law, as seen by the element of personality, is the sufficient determinant or incentive of the Willkür. Although personality determines man morally, and is thus the most crucial element of the tendency to good for purely moral purposes, the presence in man of animality and humanity has effects that cannot be ignored, for only by the effort of personality is man able to control or channel them; this must be understood in such a way, though, as not to suggest that Kant is a stoic who sees physical incentives as the cause themselves of moral evil.

Nevertheless, in concluding the discussion of the tendency to good, Kant adds more definition to particular matters. “All these tendencies in man are not only (negatively) *good* (they do not resist the moral law) but they are also tendencies *to the good* (they demand compliance with it)” (6.28). This is puzzling, as the question of the moral law does not even enter into the analysis of animality or humanity; furthermore, on their own terms (i.e. so long as they are not informed or incorporated into personality), both animality and humanity are quite easily grafted onto vices, and it thus seems that these two tendencies do not conflict with the moral law because they are never confronted with it. Kant’s analysis and conclusion to the contrary, there seems no reason to suggest that the first two tendencies will comply with the moral law, and quite a bit of reason to suggest that they will resist and conflict with it.

Furthermore, the tendencies are important because they “are *original*, for they belong to the possibility of human nature” (6.28). So the tendency to good is a potency rather than a guaranteed actuality. Human nature, then, is not determined but rather

directed toward the tendency to good. Because this is only possibility, the tendencies to animality and humanity, as one would suspect, can be used “against their purpose” but man “cannot eradicate” them. Despite vice, then, the tendency to good remains a possibility, if not the possibility.

In turning from the subjective ground of good to the subjective ground of evil in human nature, Kant also shifts from the concept of tendency to one of propensity. This propensity exists in man universally, and man has a propensity to evil just as a savage has a propensity to alcoholic intoxication (6.29n). Like the tendency to good, the propensity to evil may be divided into three levels – of frailty, impurity, and depravity. They all relate to the level of weakness or absence of the moral law in one’s adopted maxims. Any incentive other than the moral law can lead to agreement with or violation of the moral law, and so any of them must be viewed as potentially evil. “The maxim, by the goodness of which all the moral worth of the person must be assessed, is therefore contrary to law, and man, despite all his good actions, is nevertheless evil” (6.31). Kant has thus laid out an understanding of man that makes possible good actions and good maxims while preserving the evil that remains in his heart, for the “mere propensity” to evil “cannot be eradicated” (6.31).

This more complete account of the human tendencies and predispositions, as well as their possible social and political consequences, now leads more clearly into the empirical proofs offered by Kant in section three of part one, “Man is by Nature Evil.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ *Religion* 1.3 was treated very briefly in chapter three above, but see that chapter’s discussion of Kant’s use of Horace, *Satires*, 1.3.68.

These proofs give clear evidence that the concerns of Kant in the *Religion* are the concerns of the political philosopher, perhaps especially to one who is sympathetic to the early modern project of Machiavelli, Bacon, and Hobbes. Relying on what has been said in the two preceding sections, Kant explains that the statement, “man is evil,” indicates man’s conscious “(occasional) deviation” from the moral law (6.32). To make the additional statement that man is by nature evil is a reflection of the human race, based upon the knowledge of man from experience, according to which one cannot judge him to be other than evil. So section three is a confirmation from experience of what Kant has attempted (and will continue to attempt later in section three itself) to show from a priori considerations about man’s disposition (but with an exclusive emphasis on the propensity to evil). As Kant himself says in a note concluding section three, “this contains only the confirmation of this [moral judgment] through experience” (6.39n).

From the examples which Kant provides it is clear that the human propensity to dishonesty is an underlying fact, linked even to those instances of evil deeds that would seem to be derived merely from aggression or bloodlust.¹⁹⁹ It is not only the evil deeds themselves that are social and political, but the very justification for them, as a willing deception, is, too – as Kant concludes by stating that “This dishonesty, with which we obscure our sight, which halts in us the grounding of a genuinely moral disposition, then

¹⁹⁹ An indication of this is provided in Kant’s elaboration on the example of purposeless cruelty as seen in the “enduring war” between two Indian tribes: as with civilized peoples, the praise of bravery is the stated reason for the cruelties of warfare that is truly without benefit. Although something is to be said in admiration for occasions in which honor is seen to be more desirable than any other goal, beneath the praise of bravery not honor but rather superiority and destruction that are “actually” the good and the purpose for the deeds. The participants in the wars, then, are deceptive or dishonest as to what really motivates them.

extends itself also externally toward falsity and deception of others” (6.38). Underlying the evil deeds is this dishonesty, which indicates that we are, to use terms already introduced by Kant, unworthy if not malicious.²⁰⁰ To bear this out, let us examine the particular examples Kant provides.

It does not seem necessary to prove the existence of the natural propensity to evil, thanks to “the crowd of howling examples, which the experience of the *deeds* of men place before our eyes” (6.32-3). Kant’s examples of bloodshed and dishonesty²⁰¹ counter the hope of any philosophers who desire to “come upon the natural goodness of human nature”, whether in the savage or the civilized state. Our expectations of simple and peaceful noble savages are disappointed by “the scene of unprovoked cruelty”, “never-ceasing [cruelty]”, “ever-enduring war”, and “vices of rawness.” The “civilized state,” in which the tendency to good ought to be and *is* “more fully developed,”²⁰² is rife with “a long melancholy litany of accusations against humanity”²⁰³ as follows: of “secret falsity” even among the most intimate friends; of “restraint of trust” as a “universal maxim of prudence” in such friendships; of a “propensity to hate him to whom one is bound”; a

²⁰⁰ Regarding dishonesty, Kant continues as follows: “This dishonesty... lies in the radical evil of human nature, which... constitutes the foul spot of our race...” (6.38). The germ of good will not develop without until we bring it forth.

²⁰¹ As we shall see, even though here his explicit task is to show the grounds we have for accepting the existence of radical evil in man, these marks of radical evil also characterize much of the effect of churches and church-faith in the world.

²⁰² Although moral evil becomes an unremitting danger when man is surrounded by his fellows, if he were not among them his tendency toward good might well remain a mere potency, or at least would not exist in its fullness.

²⁰³ “Accusations” translates “Anklagen,” which thus echoes the “Klage” that opens part one. “Humanity” is the second tendency that Kant outlines in section one of part one and has the prototype as its exemplification in part two.

“heartfelt well-wishing” that nevertheless does not overcome pleasure in the misfortunes of friends; many other vices “concealed under the appearance of virtue” as well as others which are not hidden. By this time we must turn our eyes away from these vices of culture and civilization, for fear of acquiring the vice of misanthropy (6.33). But if we turn to the international situation we find further examples, and in so doing we are also led to consider the present concern of Kant in the *Religion* in comparison or in relation to the concern of his essay “Toward Eternal Peace.” Civilized peoples exist toward one another “in the relation of raw condition of nature (a state of standing warfare)” and hold stubbornly to remaining in this relation (6.34). War, Kant notes, is the “this scourge of the human race” (6.34n), but one sees also at work the “foul stain” of human nature: states, the “great societies” of which the peoples are members, extend the dishonesty and deception in the very conduct in relation to their neighbors, for they operate according to basic-statements which directly contradict “public pretext” and which no philosopher has been able to reconcile with morality. The situation of international relations, a wondrous placing together of the natural state and the civilized state, thus offers the viewer of humanity no more hope for optimism than did either of its constituent parts on its own. Even if the state is some utilitarian cessation of open warfare between its members, the war continues beneath the surface for them and at the same time extends in a more or less open manner to neighboring states. The state is no haven for morality.

In expanding on the significance of the state for his portrait of the evil of man, Kant employs his darkest language and looks with his most grave eye regarding the course of human life. “If one looks at the history of these merely as the phenomenon of

the mostly concealed inner tendencies of humanity, so one can become aware of of a certain machinelike going of nature, according to purposes which are not theirs (the folk) but rather the purposes of nature” (6.34n). A state, hoping to show its own preeminence, conquers its neighbors and in so doing reaches out for monarchical rule of the civilized world, until, becoming a monster by destroying freedom and law within and without through consuming its neighbors, it eventually breaks apart from “uproar” and “dissension”. This swallowing up and breaking apart occurs over and over, thus maintaining the existence of war, that which “makes more evil men than it takes away.” This footnote meditation of the state in history is puzzling because Kant seems to have turned to a mechanical determinism when considering international relations and also, in identifying war as the maker of evil men, identified war, not the human disposition, as the author of evil.

Although the reflection on the relations of states is helpful as an illustration of the evil in human nature that he is showing in experience, it is such a captivating problem as to distract from Kant’s present purpose. This is clear when Kant points out that the hope for a reasonable solution to the international problem (eternal peace through a union of peoples as a world republic) is ridiculed just as is the hope for the “perfected moral betterment of the entire human race”: both philosophical and theological chiliasm are seen as enthusiasm (6.34). The hope of the philosophical and the hope of the theological chiliast would then seem two separate things. Is the doctrine of religion thus not political philosophy? First of all, one would have to determine whether Kant would name himself either (apropos the problems taken up in “Toward Eternal Peace”) a philosophical or

(apropos those in the *Religion*) a theological chiliast. Despite the seeming moral naivete of some of Kant's pronouncements about morality and politics and the peace essay, the same essay communicates a hesitation and even doubt about the success of a world republic. Is Kant a theological chiliast? It would seem that he is, and the qualification "perfect" quoted above, unlikely a result as it would seem, does seem to be part of Kant's project of hope, for hope in no way is wishful thinking or self-delusion based on vague desire.²⁰⁴

Getting back to the original question of whether, if Kant is a theological chiliast, the political teaching of the *Religion* can be said to be political philosophy, perhaps we are forced to call it social philosophy insofar as it does not deal directly with states. On the other hand, the concern of philosophical chiasm, as it arises in Kant's presentation of international relations, seems to be founded on the concern of theological chiasm: if the moral-ethical-religious problem can be solved or at least softened in its effects (i.e. if, through the success of religion as Kant understands it, the everyday relations of men might be bettered due to firm resistance to the propensity to evil), this solution or softening might well be extended into the international problem. One would think that the path toward international reform would be cleared by the success of religion and thus the successful resistance of (if not overcoming of) radical evil. We could thus argue that

²⁰⁴ Yet George Kelly asserts that the "decisive argument against chiasm... is made in Kant's treatise on religion... In the 'End of All Things' he uses similar arguments to repel the notion of spatio-temporal apocalypse. Reactionary providence and revolutionary consummation are rejected... The only revolution that Kant really endorses is the moral one, as described in his work on religion... What Kant wished for, above all, was this revolution in thought on the part of rulers, so that their people might receive discipline, enlightenment and justice, and on the part of teachers, so that the cultural base of morality might be gradually expanded" (Kelly, pp. 152-3, 158).

what seems to be social philosophy or social theology in Kant is rather a preliminary step in addressing a problem of political philosophy; perhaps in a similar way much of the *Wealth of Nations*, erroneously called economics, provides a solution to a problem of political philosophy without being purely political in nature. Of course, this assumes what is not yet clear, namely what Kant means by religion and what exactly it has to do with political life in the first place.

In the first place, or shortly thereafter, many of Kant's readers might be struck that religion often seems pernicious rather than beneficial, whether one is thinking of individual or political cases. There is much evidence in the *Religion* to convince those readers that they are correct, but an important set of distinctions goes along with that evidence.

Setting aside that "On Radical Evil in Human Nature" is only the first of four parts in the *Religion*, it would be useful to consider it as it was originally published by itself, that is, to see to what extent the answer it begins by proposing is answered within its own pages. Such a consideration leads the reader to the last clause of section four (i.e. the clause preceding the beginning of section five, known in later printings as the first parergon): for man, who "despite a corrupted heart yet always has a good will, remains hope of a return to the good, from which he has wandered" (6.44). Part one thus answers the beginning problem of moral progress as drawn out by Kant from the original complaint about the world, but it does not answer the complaint itself, inasmuch as the complaint extends to more than the problem of individual good and evil. The complaint

ultimately points to the political, or social, question of morality and religion,²⁰⁵ which Kant begins to address explicitly at the beginning of part three.²⁰⁶

B. The Necessity and Nature of Church-faith: A First Reading of Part Three

Our second reading of part one of the *Religion* has given support to the suspicion that even those opening considerations of morality and religion are not completely abstracted from matters of social and political importance. Even before reading part three, “The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle, and the Grounding of a Kingdom of God on Earth”, we know from experience that the very setting of religion itself is not in abstraction either, but part three shows us why that is. In part three, particularly in the first of its two divisions, “Philosophical Presentation of the Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle under a Grounding of a Kingdom of God on Earth”, Kant reveals the social necessity of not only the religion that he has presented but also of churches. Churches are an object of study for the political philosopher not only because they appear in and influence public life but also because their necessity springs from it.

Part three follows directly upon part two. The main thread of part two culminated in Kant’s demystified account of the revelation of “moral lordship” as a serious rival of

²⁰⁵ One might object, from the following passage, that the *Religion* does not offer a political or social interpretation of religion: “From religion on earth (in the narrowest meaning of the word) one can demand no universal history of the human race; for it is, grounded on pure moral faith, no public condition but rather each man can be conscious of the progress which he has made in it only for himself.” (6.124). The sentence immediately following, however, admits that such a history is possible based upon observation of churches, which, one might expect, manifest the agreement with or deviation from that pure moral faith.

²⁰⁶ The last sentences of 3.1.7 (i.e. pp. 6.123-4) represent the completion of Kant’s attempt to answer the question with which part one (and the *Religion* proper) begins. The rest (3.2 and 4) is elaboration and critique, not doctrine. Part two, as well, displays its social-political importance in the way in which Kant sets up the analysis of justification: it is pertinent to “our species” and it will alter public teachings concerning what is meant by virtue and enlightenment.

the evil principle, which has not destroyed the lordship of the latter so much as disintegrated its unchallenged ability to rule (6.82-83). Freedom from the lordship of the evil principle is the most that the morally well-disposed man can expect “in this life,” but because he remains an open target for the evil principle “he must from then on always remain armed for battle”, and he is “*bound*”, insofar as this constant openness to attack is his own fault, to do all he can “to work his way out of” his “dangerous condition” (6.93).²⁰⁷ The force working against him is not a personified evil principle, and it is not his natural passions either.

If he looks around for the causes and circumstances which draw him toward and hold him in this danger, so he can easily convince himself that they come to him not from his own raw nature, insofar as he exists as isolated, but rather from men with whom he stands in relation or in combination. [6.93]

If left to themselves, his natural needs are “only small” and his condition of mind is “moderate and still.” This reminds very much of Rousseau’s picture of the natural man, and this should lead us to recall the discussion of quasi-Rousseauan humanity in part one of the *Religion*. That tendency toward humanity, especially as regards the inclination of competitiveness that is connected to it – i.e. of the “vices of culture” (6.27) – seems to be at work in the dangerous condition Kant is now describing:

²⁰⁷ The word for “bound” is *verbunden*, which is in italics in the original. The word has many appearances in Kant’s earlier writings on morality. In this section of the *Religion* Kant uses many times variations on the words *Verbindung* (“combination”) and *verbinden* (“to bind” / “to combine”), and an effort has been made for the English renderings to share the common idea. At times there is an unfortunate oddness, as will be seen when “combination” appears instead of something like “association”; the reason for this is not only to preserve the etymological relation to *Verbindung* but also to underline the connection in meaning to *religio*. The word for “condition” is *Zustand*, which when necessary is otherwise translated as “state.” One is tempted to be consistent in translating *Zustand* as “condition” – both because the English “state” carries with it the connotation of a necessarily political entity, and to avoid confusion with Kant’s occasional use of *Staat* – but English philosophical speech has a tradition that makes “ethical natural condition” sound pedantic or odd.

Envy, domination, greed, and the hostile inclinations combined with them presently bombard his in itself satisfied nature, *when he is among men*, and it is not even necessary that they are already sunk in as if in evil and are set out as misleading examples; and it is sufficient that they exist, that they surround him, and that they are men, in order to spoil one another mutually in their moral tendency and to make one another evil. [6.95]

Again one sees that Kant links evil not with something otherworldly and demonic, or even with something terribly dramatic, but rather with ordinary human beings. The only element necessary for the dangerous condition is that a man be in proximity to his fellows; they need not be evil at all to threaten his own moral disposition.

Because evil exists in a social context, the only protection against the constant danger of falling into evil, the only cause for hope in victory of the good over the evil principle, is also social: “The lordship of the good principle, insofar as men can work thereto, is therefore, so far as we have insight, not otherwise reachable, as though the erection and extension of a society according to, and on behalf of, laws of virtue” (6.94). The idea of a society is not an accident of history but the act of reason as it “puts out the flag of virtue” that will unite men in an effort to gain the “upper hand” on the evil principle.

But here Kant speaks not of religion but of virtue. In all of the synonyms he suggests for names of the proposed combination under laws of virtue – ethico-civil society, ethical community, ethical state, kingdom of virtue – not one includes the words “religion,” “faith,” or “church.” “An *ethico-civil condition* is that which [men] are united under... pure *laws of virtue*” (6.95). The transition from part two to part three of the *Religion*, from personal morality to (apparently) public virtue, which mirrors the activity

of reason itself, is thus striking in several ways. First, as just noted, there is an early absence of the talk about religious faith and dogma that the reader would now expect. Second, the emphasis is now on virtue, an external quality that may or may not reveal a change of heart and thus a disposition turned toward the good.²⁰⁸ Third, as the reader has already begun to see, part three of the *Religion* takes on the language and some of the thought of Hobbesian political philosophy, whose notion of a state of nature, in which man is abstracted from political life, is recycled into Kant's presentation of an ethical state of nature, which exists even within political society (6.95). These three observations indicate that Kant proposes to undertake first a philosophical and then an historical, rather than a theological, presentation; this goes hand in hand with the overall structure of part three, which is divided into a philosophical presentation and then an historical presentation of the victory of the good principle. A look at the order of the seven sections of division one further illuminates the philosophical character of the discussion, for we see Kant beginning with the theme of society and laws of virtue, then moving to the people of God, then to the proper interpretation of scripture, and lastly back to the pure religious faith whose public establishment and maintenance is the chief concern of this part of the book. Within these seven divisions is the basis and development of the idea of the transmission of a public faith, acting as a vehicle or surrogate for pure religious faith, made present and maintained in a church.

1. "On the ethical state of nature": In the ethical state of nature, as in the political state of nature, there is no common public authority, but the ethical state of nature can continue to exist even when and where a political state of nature has been

²⁰⁸ On the significance of virtue, see chapter three above.

abandoned and a political community entered. Because of its very relationship to moral freedom, no man can be compelled to leave the ethical state of nature. The ethical community, i.e. that for which man leaves the ethical state of nature, is transpolitical but subject to political laws insofar as its existence is public.

2. “Man ought to depart from the ethical state of nature, in order to become a member of an ethical community”: Because there exists a common human end of promoting the highest good as a common good, the human race has a special duty to itself to leave the ethical state of nature and to join the ethical community. Implicit in this special duty is the idea of a higher moral essence.
3. “The concept of an ethical community is the concept of a people of God under ethical laws”: The ethical community is not legislated by the people, for moral laws require the idea of a legislator whose commands are also true duties and who can penetrate to the disposition of every man. This ethical community, a people of God under the laws of virtue, can be contrasted to a people of God under the laws of statutes in that the latter is an historical reality rather than a philosophico-moral necessity.
4. “The idea of a people of God (under human organization) is not carried out other than in the form of a church”: Human hands, i.e. human Sinnlichkeit, limit the attainment of the ethical community, but man must still hope for divine assistance in that attainment. In preparation for this assistance men must rely on the true visible church, which can be identified by its four marks and which is a mere representative of God’s state and has no resemblance in its constitution to a political community.
5. “The constitution of each church goes out every time from some historical (revealed) faith, which one can call church-faith, and this is grounded, in the best case, on a holy scripture”: Because human nature is weak, pure faith is not a sufficient grounding for a church. Statutory faith is often a necessary vehicle for that pure faith, and so a book of holy writings might on fortunate occasion harmonize the two. From this it becomes clear that there is one true religion but many faiths (and with them churches). A church usually tries to identify itself as the one true church, and comes up with notions of unbelief, heresy, and orthodoxy, the latter being either despotic or liberal; variations in this last characteristic, rather than specific theological positions, serve as the chief differentiation of Catholic and Protestant.
6. “The church-faith has the pure religion-faith as its highest exegete”: Because of the human need for concepts to be transmitted in terms of sensuous experience, a preexisting church-faith is a necessary means of introducing the pure rational religion; this process often involves a (sometimes forceful) exposition of a

revealed text. Since the moral bettering of man is the purpose of the rational religion, it will also be the criterion used in the exposition of these texts. There are three claimants to the office of expositor (exegite, scholar, and man of feeling), but only the first has genuine claim to authentic exposition. Public freedom of thought can preserve the benefits of the second.

7. “The gradual crossing-over of the church-faith to sole leadership of the pure religion-faith is the approach of the kingdom of God”: In contrast to the universality of the true church, every historical church-faith is particular; if the latter is consciously attached to the former as a mere vehicle, one may call this phenomenon the true church – that is, the true church “militant,” with the prospect of becoming the church triumphant upon uncovering the pure moral religion. Saving faith is the faith held by those living worthy lives, and can be found within any church-faith that moves toward becoming the religion of reason. If this crossing-over is accomplished merely in principle and not fully in actuality, one is still right to see that the good principle is approaching its lordship in men, a lordship which “assures the world of eternal peace.”

Such is the main argument, with some important qualifications left out for later consideration, of the first division of part three. Having expressed the main argument let us examine more closely the origin of religion in public life, the difference between religion and faith, and the nature of the church and its relationship to political government.

The Hobbesian picture of the political state of nature, in which every man is his own judge and in which there is no common external or public law, is translated into an ethical context: without an ethical community, even while within a political community, man is in a state of nature, ethically speaking. What does this amount to, aside from its appeal as an analogy between Hobbes and Kant? Kant has already begun to show, at the beginning of part three, what that ethical state of nature looks like, and now reiterates using much the same language (6.97; cf. 6.93-94), but with a further elaboration with the language of Hobbes:

As the condition of a lawless external (brutal) freedom and independence and of a war of all against all, from which men ought to exit, in order to enter a political-civil condition, so is the ethical natural condition a *public* battle of principles of virtue and a condition of inner unethicity, out of which natural man ought, so much as possible, attempt to exit. [6.97]

The solution for Hobbes was that man in the state of nature sees that his own reason commands him, for the sake of self-preservation, to quit his dangerous condition and to agree to live under a powerful sovereign power and its laws.²⁰⁹ One imagines that Kant cannot keep up the analogy with Hobbes much longer without being forced to posit the necessity of coercive laws of virtue, whose authority he has just (6.95) denied. It is crucial to keep in mind that, even though it has a public bearing insofar as it determines actions, it is “(inner) morality which here is alone the concern” (6.99). The reader then wonders who or what will be offered by Kant as a replacement for the sovereign. Certainly someone or something will be necessary, or the exit from the ethical state of nature would seem to be an illusion.

In revealing that God is the lawgiver – though this must be understood very carefully – Kant, in a manner that is merely suggestive in comparison to its companion passage in the earlier *Critique of Practical Reason*,²¹⁰ produces the concept of God. The first reaction to the possibility that God is the legislator of the ethical community is to recall Kant’s assertion in the first preface, in seeming contradiction to the present point,

²⁰⁹ The most relevant passages are from *Leviathan*, chapter 13.

²¹⁰ Kant considers the existence of God as a postulate of pure practical reason in the second *Critique* is at 5.124-32. In those pages Kant argues the moral necessity of assuming God’s existence; provides the definition of religion that is later given in part four of the *Religion*; and provides a clear relationship of morals and religion in that the former teaches how to become worthy of happiness and the latter offers hope of that happiness to the degree that one is worthy of it.

that morality does not need the idea of an essence above man for the cognition of his duty (6.5). And in the present discussion, Kant agrees that such a source of moral legislation, without further qualification (see the “not as merely” in the present text), would not produce laws that were ethical or that would result in virtue (6.99). Rather,

Only one such can be thought as the highest lawgiver of an ethical community, in respect of which all true duties, consequently also the ethical, at the same time must be presented as his commands; from there it must also be a noticer of hearts, in order also to see through the innermost of the dispositions of each and every one and, as his deeds are worthy, to allow what is due. But this is the concept of God as a moral lord²¹¹ of the world. [6.99]

Kant escapes contradiction because he never claims that the duties themselves are determined or given to man directly or originally from God alone. Rather, upon seeing the command of the moral law within him, and thus his duty, man is to cognize that duty *as* a command of God. The connection between the concept of God and the concept of religion follows from this, insofar as the will of God is at the “ground” of religion:

Since all religion consists therein, that we regard, for all our duties, God the lawgiver to be universally revered, so it comes with the determination of religion in intention our behavior, to know how God wills to be revered (and obeyed)... In regard to [purely moral laws], each man can himself cognize through his own reason the will of God, which lies at the ground of his religion; for the concept of the divinity actually originates solely from the consciousness of these laws and from reason’s need to assume a power capable of procuring for them the full effect possible in this world in conformity with the moral final purpose. The concept of a divine will, determined merely according to purely moral laws, allows us to think of only one religion which is purely moral... [6.103-4]

This is a very striking claim, that at the ground of religion is the will of God, and that this will of God can be cognized by man himself “through his own reason”: there truly is no essential dogmatic component of religion, for its first principle seems to come from

²¹¹ Compare the discussion of the evil principle at 6.79.

within man or at least to be defined from within man. It is not surprising later in the *Religion* that Kant speaks of the need for man to make for himself a “God within.” Kant’s claim about origination of the concept of divinity brings the reader back to the opening concerns of the first preface; not morality itself but human reason has a need for assurance of the efficacy of “conformity with the moral final end” (cf. 6.5). Because of the need of reason morality extends itself through religion (6.6).

The present concern is not directly with the moral religion but with a philosophical account of religion in public life, and Kant’s exploration into the origin of the concept of God is a beginning step toward the development of religion in public life. Although Kant has not provided evidence that such a concept of God, and such an explicit desire for the ethical community as an exit from a perceived ethical state of nature, was consciously at work in the founding of any religious group in history, the suggestion is that such things were, at least unconsciously, at the basis of each of them. He has not, however, claimed that the ethical community as presented has ever been erected in history, and reason to think its concrete existence unlikely springs directly from human nature: the “sublime” idea of an ethical community is “never fully reachable” and is “very much diminished” in human hands²¹² due to the restrictions imposed by the conditions of sensuous²¹³ human nature (6.100). Kant is not explicit

²¹² The problem of “human hands” is not new in the *Religion*; cf. 6.7 and the opening line of the first book of Rousseau’s *Emile*.

²¹³ While the first edition of the *Religion* has “sensuous” (sinnlichen) here, the second edition has “ethical” (sittlichen). Assuming for a moment that the change in the second edition is not a typographical error, that man’s *ethical* nature is responsible for making the sublime ethical community unreachable is a curious claim.

about how human sensuousness inhibits the erection of an ethical community,²¹⁴ but, in light of the moral danger in which man finds himself when surrounded by his fellows, something approaching that community must be attempted. An institution (Anstalt) “able to present only the pure form” of this community is the best possibility. That man’s nature makes impossible the realization of the ethical community, and that man is nonetheless able to present – in some degree of purity – the form of that community in an institutional establishment, indicates again the simultaneous human need for religion and the human propensity to corrupt it. “But how can one expect something so perfectly straight to be built from such crooked wood?”

Kant then reformulates the relationship between the idea of the ethical community and the best possible approximation of it: “An ethical community under the divine moral legislation is a *church*, which, as it is no object of possible experience, is called an *invisible church*” (6.101). This is the prototype – the same term Kant used in his part two discussion of the envoy – for the humanly governed institution that replaces the idea of the ethical community. “The *visible* is the actual union of men toward a whole which is attuned to this ideal” (6.101), although one must be clear that it is “considered as a pure presentation of a state²¹⁵ [governed by] God” rather than that state itself (6.102). One would expect, as a result of Kant’s emphasis on the primacy of the internal moral law over external human authority, that his notion of the visible church lacks distinction among its members, but, there is a necessary subordination insofar as it is a society with

²¹⁴ One possible reason is found at the bottom of 6.109.

²¹⁵ The word for “state” here is *Staat*, not *Zustand*.

public laws that are to be obeyed. The “congregation”²¹⁶ is therefore overseen by the “servants” who see to the concerns of the invisible head of the church.

Details as to what this church would look like are scarce, but Kant does list the four marks of “a true church”.²¹⁷ He replaces one, holy, catholic, and apostolic with universality, quality, relation, and modality. Some readers might find these new marks of a true church oddly familiar, as if part of some Kantian joke,²¹⁸ but they do seem to illustrate the nature of the church that Kant has in mind. The first mark, universality, is similar to its counterpart insofar as the universality reflects unity of principles within the church rather than the quality of being widespread or common to all humanity; this latter quality, which would seem to necessitate a constant missionary project, might always be called universality, although Kant does not seem interested in it. According to the mark of universality in his idea of the church, diversity of opinions on accidental matters is to be expected, but there can be no schism as concerns the “essential intention”. Universality is crucial in the considerations of the church that follow in the next sections.²¹⁹ The mark of quality is glossed “purity” and thus reminds of the second

²¹⁶ The word translated here is *Gemeinde*.

²¹⁷ The indefinite article seems to allow for more than one true church and to suggest that the truth of the church is less the possession of a doctrine than the honesty in according to which it exists in relation to virtue and the moral law – yet the inference of a multiplicity of true churches is seemingly rejected by the mark of universality. Further, the indefinite article in sections four and five turns into a definite article in the title of the all-important section seven.

²¹⁸ See KrV A80/B106 and KpV 5.66.

²¹⁹ In section five Kant makes clear that the degree to which a church is not grounded on pure religious faith makes impossible that it be a universal church (6.102-3); in section six he reiterates this and further mentions that universality is “the most important mark” of a church’s “truth” (6.109); and in section seven

grade of the propensity to evil (cf. 6.30), and the equation of *Lauterkeit* with an absence of “superstition” and “enthusiasm” points toward the moral critique of church-faith (see part four). A church identified by the mark of quality will unite its members under purely moral incentives and will thus avoid feeding them on “nonsense” and “madness” (6.102). The mark of relation is understood and is to be seen in terms of internal and external freedom, according to which the members of the church are not constrained by each other and the church itself is not constrained by the political power or powers in which it exists. The fourth mark, modality, means that the constitution of the church is, except when it comes to matters of administration that are linked to context of circumstance, unchangeable. The unchangeableness is rooted not in a conservative or reactionary insistence of fidelity to old traditions that were arbitrarily determined but in the realization that the principle on which the church was founded was the unchanging purpose of the moral life.

In short, then, Kant’s idea of a true church is that it be free of internal disagreement concerning fundamental principles; that its members are united through purely moral incentives; that its members have the relationship of freedom to each other and that it itself is free in relation to the political state; and that it does not deviate from the unchanging principles on which it was founded. Kant concludes his short sketch of what the church would look like by denying a perfect analogy between it and a political constitution: the former resembles a family with an invisible father much more than it

reiterates this second point by stating that the “Distinguishing mark of the true church is its universality” is that the church is necessary and determinable in only one way.

resembles a monarchy, aristocracy, or a democracy. There is no pope, patriarch, bishop, or illuminatus: a true church is rather “a free, universal, and continuing union of hearts” (6.102). We need not wait for Kant’s historical analysis of churches to see that, especially in the light these comments and of the mark of quality, his philosophical presentation of a true church excludes both Catholic and Lutheran churches but that it might allow for something in the Unitarian vein.

This consideration of the necessity and nature of a true church, since we were led to differentiate between pure ethical community (and thus religion) and church, leads us to the point of clarifying the difference between religious faith and church faith. Compared to the other, each has a very different effect in a public context. In his brief presentation of the relationship of “revelation” and the “pure rational religion” as concentric circles (6.12), Kant has, from the early pages of the *Religion*, laid out a distinction between what, in part three, are called “true religion” and historical “church-faith.” Part five of Kant’s philosophical presentation of the victory of the good principle is particularly clear on the distinction.

The basis for the difference between the faith of moral-rational religion and the historical-revealed faith of a church springs, like the necessary substitution of the church for the ideal of the ethical community, from human weakness. The example of earthly lords, who are honored by their subjects’ expressions of submission, indicates to man that moral activity is not sufficient to God the legislator; rather, like the earthly lords, God expects the service of men in their performance of morally indifferent actions (6.103). But whereas the basis of the moral religion is human reason in each man, the basis of the

divine service to God must come from another, and external, source, from some (“alleged” as he writes in the second preface) historical revelation (6.104). The particular revelation informs the particular “statutory” requirements for service that a church will prescribe, and so the church in this case will be animated by a faith which, insofar as it departs from what is universally known by human reason, cannot be considered moral and thus as true religion: statutory legislation “can be considered only as accidental and as such a thing that has not come to every man, nor can, consequently not binding men generally” (6.105). The only service that we know is owed God is moral conduct.

It would then seem that any church-faith, except insofar as a means by which the moral faith of religion might be spread, will not “ground” a universal church (6.102-03). But in this part of the argument Kant was considering man as an individual moral agent: insofar as we are bound to other men in a church in order that we fulfill our common human moral determination, the differing dispositions and experiences that the members of that church possess require the human invention of public statutory requirements (6.105). Thus we have the differentiation of the “Jewish, Mohammedan, Christian, Catholic, Lutheran” faiths without any necessary plurality of true religions. The singleness of true religion lies in the unvariability in the command of the moral law, not in that the truth of one set of doctrines necessitates the falsity of all others. In the fact that if one set of doctrines is true then the others opposed to it are untrue. This is not to deny, however, that in one *or more* of those faiths one might meet the one true religion. The inability of men to see this has led to public strife.

Also, the so-called religious conflicts, which have so often shaken the world and sprayed it with blood, have never been anything other than quarrels about church-faiths, and the oppressed did not really complain about it that one hindered them from hanging on to their religion (because no external force can do so), but rather that one did not allow them to follow their church-faith publicly. [6.108]

This passage not only drive home the problem but also sharpens the difference between the religion and church-faith: whereas the latter, because it is public, is capable of being suppressed, the former, because it comes from man's reason and because it has no requirements other than the performance of his moral duties, cannot be suppressed merely by an external power.

Because of the public existence of historical-revealed faith and of the church which combines its members by proclaiming it, it is now pertinent to turn to a comparison of a political constitution and a church constitution, and to see how the two entities relate.

Despite a "certain analogy" between them, the ethical and the political communities are different (6.94). For example, that a political community exists does not necessitate the existence of an ethical community nor that political citizens must become members of the ethical community (6.95). Further, the ends themselves of politics and ethics are sufficiently different that to order the former by the principles of the latter (or vice versa) is to contradict the purposes of both and to cause real damage to political life (6.96). More problematic from the point of view of political rulers is the nonpolitical or transpolitical character of the membership of the ethical community: "the concept of an ethical community always refers to the ideal of a totality of men, and in this it distinguishes itself from the concept of a political community" (6.96). And ultimately, as

we have seen in its inability to be compared to monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy, “an ethical community really has nothing in its principles that resembles a political constitution” (6.102).

In addition to being different, however, the ethical and political communities are by necessity also separate. Even if they contain the same members they exist separately (6.94). The political community would contradict the very concept of the ethical community, which is freedom, by coercing membership of its citizens (6.95). For this reason, “[i]t is self-evident that [the rational religion and the scripture-learning that supports it] must not on any account be hindered by the secular arm in the public use of their insights and discoveries... or be bound to certain dogmas” (6.113). Of course it would seem efficacious for a political community to have control over the ethical community, for then it could (as ethical) reach its subjects where it cannot (as political), in their very “dispositions to virtue.” As we have already noted, however, that the ends of ethics and politics differ means that they must be kept separate. Further, that one of the marks of a true church (i.e. the human-maintained stand-in for the ethical community) is freedom further keeps the two communities separate: this mark is in “external relation of the church to the political power” (6.102). Particular churches, insofar as they take their bearings from a book rather than nonwritten tradition, further illustrate the separation of church and political community in extreme situations: “history proves that never could a faith based on scripture be eradicated by even the most devastating political revolutions” (6.107). Thus even when a particular political community (which, again, necessarily precedes in existence the ethical community or church) be overturned or

eliminated, the church, in surviving, displays its character as transpolitical or subpolitical or as epiphenomenal but surviving the death of the phenomenon.

The ethical community is, however, in some ways subordinate to the political community, particularly because only through the existence of the latter can the former even be a possibility (6.94). Although the state may not meddle in the affairs of the ethical community, the ethical community, insofar as it “must rest on public laws and have a constitution of its own, must have those [joining it]... allow limitations, namely the condition that nothing be included in this constitution which contradicts the duty of its members as *citizens of the state*” (6.96). Of course, since nothing should conflict in this relationship if the ethical community is true to its concept (cf. 6.99n), i.e. “if the ethical combination is of a genuine kind, [the condition] is not in any case to be a concern” (6.96). The state does have both the authority and the duty to concern itself that the church has enough teachers and governors, but satisfaction of this concern is the extent of its duty and its authority to interfere. Obviously, the other qualification, that the state does not determine the teachings of those teachers (6.113) greatly reduces the force of even the authority that does exist.²²⁰

Despite the partial subordination of the ethical to the political community, Kant suggests that, at the same time, the ethical community is necessary for the survival of the political. In speaking of the possibility and desirability of reformulating popular faith in light of the rational religion, Kant cautions that it is inadvisable to “exterminate” the

²²⁰ In the *Rechtslehre* Kant takes up several particular questions.

popular faith, “because the atheism resulting from it could have been further dangerous to the state” (6.111). Perhaps this is part of the reason (aside from a morally educative one) for the state’s duty and authority to stock the church with governors and teachers (6.113). According to the priests, the service of God “was introduced so as to reconcile the people with heaven and to repel calamity from the state” (6.120). The full import of this claim, and of those who make it, will be explored later, but it suffices now to note that one intention, though not perhaps the greatest, of the religionists is to secure the state by means of public religion. By means of public church-faith the state is more closely bound together.²²¹

The public ethical spread of truth and good are different from political life so much that political and civil life can place obstacles in the way of that spreading (6.123).

C. The Question of Part One Answered: Saving Faith and Progress

Now, having put into place the necessary moral, political, and even (in part two) theological considerations, Kant is able to lay out, in section seven of *Religion* 3.1, an answer to the challenge he posed to himself at the beginning of part one, as to whether the priests or the philosophical pedagogues were correct about human moral betterment or decline. After this, in the second division of part three, he will provide an historical presentation of the victory of the good principle that will bear out the more abstract points he is about to make in the culmination of his philosophical presentation. The

²²¹ Although Lincoln in his Lyceum Speech is not speaking of church-faith, his notion of “political religion” and the presence throughout the speech of the notion of “attachment” are illuminating for this point.

middle of part three, then, is the high point of the *Religion* insofar as it concerns religion in political life.

Despite the clear importance of section seven that is announced by its title, the argument of the section almost lulls the reader to sleep by seeming to reiterate some of the puzzles about justification from part two in light of the religion-church distinction recently made in part three. By the end of the section, this impression is clearly corrected, and the reader is led to see more clearly than before why Kant puzzled about those earlier matters which did not seem directly related to the question of the moral determination of the human race.

Section seven begins with another distinction, this one of kinds of faith. Just as true religion exists amidst the many church-faiths that are related to it as a vehicle, so there is only one faith that saves. The one true faith differs from the others in the same way that moral religion differs from a religion of divine service; unlike the latter, the faith of the former is “free” and “grounded on laudable dispositions of the heart” (6.115). Saving faith is a composite, made up of faith in a divinely supplied satisfaction for one’s sinful past life and faith in one’s ability to become pleasing to God by good conduct in the future. As they make up a composite it is reasonable to expect that one precedes the other, but to pose this as a question is to confront an antinomy of human reason. The way in which the antinomy is treated – whether it is resolved or, as turns out to be the case, at least settled – constitutes whether church-faith must remain an “essential part” of saving faith or whether it will finally, as a “mere guiding means”, cross over into pure religious faith (6.116). As might be expected, each half of the antinomy requires the other to make

sense. No “thoughtful” man can bring himself to believe that mere acceptance of the notion of satisfaction by divine intervention will lead to future good life conduct; instead, he will accept that satisfaction as conditioned upon bettering his life conduct first – and so pure moral faith takes precedence over church-faith. On the other hand, man cannot believe that his own efforts to overcome his corrupt nature will make him pleasing to God; without satisfaction of atonement he cannot become the new man who begins a new life according to the good principle – and thus the effort to good life conduct is preceded by faith in merit, not one’s own, by which one is reconciled to God. There is no theoretical resolution of this antinomy because we are unable to look at the “causal determination of the freedom of man” (6.117). “Practically, however,” from a moral point of we must decide in favor of starting from the attempt to become worthy of God’s assistance. If this is so, the pure faith of religion, which is practical and thus pertains to action, takes precedence over church-faith, which is theoretical and thus pertains to science. The reader is led to expect that the antinomy, if not resolved, at least must be taken as settled in favor of expecting the pure moral faith of religion eventually to shed its guiding means of historical church-faith.

In a lengthy paragraph Kant settles the question in that direction and in so doing ties together the first two and a half parts of the *Religion* and effectively answers its explicit opening question.

Adherence to either principle may lead in the first case to “virtual superstition” and in the second to “natural unbelief” (6.118-19). Faith in the prototype, insofar as it is a moral idea of reason, amounts to the same thing as taking as one’s principle good life

conduct. Faith in the prototype, insofar as it is taken to be an empirical, historical person, is church-faith and thus does not amount to the same thing as a principle of good life conduct. Insofar as the Son of God is a prototype in our reason,²²² faith in it is a saving faith. Therefore we need not think that we have two different principles and thus two differing ways but rather one “practical idea.” The antinomy is thus apparent, and comes about only with a claim related to the prototype as an actual “appearance.” This immediately removes universality as a mark of that faith. Further, “History proves that, in all forms of religion, this conflict of two principles of faith has prevailed” (6.120). Then, with the dispute between the moralists and the priests, Kant brings his reader right back to the opening of part one. The faith of the priest, by which the sacrament of confession smoothes over the “grossest vices”, ultimately leads to the “deadly leap of human reason” (6.121).

The “necessary consequence” of Kant’s exposition is that religion will “finally” shake off the church-faith and its statutes. In language and tone reminiscent of his essay, “What is Enlightenment?”, Kant describes the full emergence of the pure faith of religion as a the coming to maturity of the human race. This will occur not by means of a revolution but with “gradual reform” (6.122). We need not wait for that full emergence to say that “the Kingdom of god is come into us”, for with the bringing of its “root” into public existence – even though it may face political and civil obstacles – it is well on the way: “But the true and the good, to which in the natural tendency of every man lies the

²²² Not merely implied but even stated at this point is that faith in the historical Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God is not universal or moral and thus not saving faith.

ground of both the insight and the sympathetic heart, does not fail, if once it becomes public, due to its natural affinity with the moral tendency of rational essences, to communicate itself throughout.”

Thus having worked out the problem raised at the beginning of part one, Kant concludes the main argument of the *Religion*:

Thus is the labor of the good principle, to the human eye unmarked but steadily going forward, erecting for itself in the human race, as a common essence according to the laws of virtue, a power and a kingdom, which announces the victory over evil and, under its lordship, assures the world of an eternal peace. [6.124]

Here, then, is the social solution to the moral problem raised by the *Religion*, along with its political implications. Kant clearly sides with the philosophical pedagogues against the priests. He has taken the middle way by adopting a modified version of human nature fallen through original sin, and yet the direction of human moral determination is a hopeful one of moving from bad to better.

D. History and Critique of Church-faith: The Moral Core of Parts Three and Four

Companion to the new hope which Kant has provided through his “Philosophical Presentation” is the chastening fact that “men have attempted many forms of a church with unhappy success” (6.105). Examples of the unhappy success include the “so-called religious conflicts which have so often shaken the world and sprayed it with blood” (6.108), and even a church approaching the true faith is called “militant” because “conflict over historical ways of belief²²³ can never be avoided” (6.115). Whereas the

²²³ This translates *Glaubensarten*, which echoes *Denkungsart*.

“crowd of howling examples” offered in part one provided empirical evidence of the presence of the evil principle in man (6.33), Kant offers further evidence of the evil in man manifesting itself in what should be the promotion of the pure faith of religion. Although some of these examples are scattered throughout the *Religion*, the most concentrated collection is to be found in part three, in its second division, the “Historical Presentation of the Gradual Grounding of the Lordship of the Good Principle on Earth.”²²⁴ The historical presentation is not purely negative as regards the unhappy results of the institution of churches, but one cannot escape that the history and the problem of church faith appear indivisible.

That the contentious movement – one is tempted to call it a dialectic – between church faith and religious faith is a focal point of the presentation is clear from Kant’s introduction to it: since “religion is not a public condition” the student of religion cannot arrive at a “universal history of the human race from religion on earth (in the strictest sense of the word)” (6.124). We can, however, arrive at a universal historical account by comparing church-faith with pure religious faith to the extent that the former realizes its own dependence on, and necessary conformity to, the latter. This realization, and the alteration that follows from it, is not easily accomplished: “One can foresee that this history will be nothing other than the account of the standing battle between the faith of divine service and of moral religion.” Thus we are prepared to perform on an historical

²²⁴ It is worth noting that the two divisions of part three, which is titled “The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle, and the Grounding of a kingdom of God on Earth”, are parallel in that one is a philosophical and the other an historical presentation. That the divisions are titled rather differently, however, indicates a further differentiation: the titles “Philosophical Presentation of the Victory of the Good Principle under a Grounding of a Kingdom of God on Earth” and “Historical Presentation of the Gradual Grounding of the Lordship of the Good Principle on Earth” do not necessarily present the same outcome.

faith, Christianity as it turns out, the second “experiment” or “trial” which Kant has suggested in the preface to the second edition (6.12). Because we can foresee the battle between the two faiths, and because we have been brought to see the validity of one and the immorality of the other, we can further expect that statements made about the historical faith in question are going to be negative with the exception of those points in history when it expresses open willingness to make way for the faith of moral religion. And so, fairly quickly, the Christian faiths and churches become the primary target for Kant’s new critique.

The explicit reason for the ensuing focus on Christianity is not that this faith should be the target of critique but rather that only Christianity fits the requirement of the attempted universal history of church-faith, for only the Christian church has, in the course of its development, showed a “tendency” toward the unity that is the primary mark of the true church (6.124): “Because it must be a unity of principle, if one ought to reckon the sequence of different ways of faith one after the other to the modification of one and the same church, and the history of the latter is specifically that with which we now occupy ourselves” (6.125). From its first beginning only the Christian church contained within itself the “germ” and principle of the objective unity of the true and universal religious faith.²²⁵ Even though the Jewish faith precedes the Christian, it is not a

²²⁵ To put the point more particularly, although the Christian faith is historical and not purely moral, it has a double nature on which Kant reflects in the first part of part four. One can regard the Christian religion (a curious deviation from the strictness of Kant’s distinction between religion and church-faith as given at 6.108) as a “natural” religion and as a “learned” religion, that is, as rational and universal on one hand and communicated by revealed dogma on the other. Because it has both these qualities, Christianity can be studied as an historical faith that at the same time is clearly a “guiding means” for the pure faith of religion.

religious faith due to the importance it places on statutory laws, even in the grounding of the political constitution of the Jewish state. The “proof” of its lack of religious-constitution is threefold: its laws dealt only with external actions with no claim on the moral disposition (6.125); its rewards and punishments were geared to this world and without faith in a future life (6.126); and, as a faith, it has no desire for universality (6.127).²²⁶

Thus far, with the exception of an unsettling (but expected) note casting doubt on the historical veracity of Christ’s resurrection and ascension (6.128n), Kant’s introductory account of the history of Christianity would be acceptable to the traditional Christian, if not to the Jew. The portrayal might become troubling, however, as Kant begins to reflect on the degree to which we have a dependable history of early Christianity. The doubt serves to cut the moorings from a dependence upon any historical (and thus miraculous and dogmatic) doctrines of Christianity. The doubt surfaces as follows: every historical faith “needs... a learned public” (6.129), but since early Christianity lacked a learned public, the early history of the Christian church is cloudy (6.130). Eventually, Christianity did “became” a learned public, but with the undesired result that “its history, which the beneficent effect concerns, which one with right expect from a moral religion, in no way does it justice to the recommendation”

²²⁶ Christianity springs from Judaism, so that fact might cause a problem for someone trying to make the case for the purity of the former. The origin of Christianity, however, was a “full abandonment of Judaism” and “grounded on a wholly new principle” and “made actual a complete revolution in faith-doctrines” (6.127). Judaism was handy as a prudential guiding means for the new principle of Christianity (just as Christianity, it would seem, is the guiding means for the rational religion). Thanks to the Greek wisdom that “enlightened” many Jews by means of its “concepts of virtue,” the revolution occurred in an already-changing Judaism (6.127).

(6.130). Instead of clear proof of a progression toward moral betterment, we are offered a detailed list of abuses by holders of the Christian faith (6.130-31), which is then tied back to a “bad propensity in human nature” (6.131). The nature of that propensity is already known; how it exists at the core of historical Christianity will soon be clear, but what is already clear is the truth of Kant’s presupposition: the history of the Christian faith is a history of battle against the moral faith of religion. Furthermore, the effects of this moral battle have had serious and wide-ranging political effects. In his “philosophical presentation” Kant spoke of what may and should tend to happen now, in the “historical presentation” he lists what has happened in such a way as to inspire in his reader at least a momentary pessimism that one should hope for the victory of the good principle in historical time. The list appears in a long sentence, the parts of which are broken up as follows:

1. The praise of hermetic, monastic, and celibate ways of life “made a great number of men useless for the world.”
2. The accompanying “ostensible miracles” press the people beneath a “blind superstition” by means of “heavy fetters.”
3. As a result of “the hierarchy pressed upon free men, the frightful voice of *correct-faith* escaped from the mouths” of “self-appointed scripture exegites” – thus “separated the Christian world, on account of faith-opinions, into embittered parties.”
4. In the East, “the state itself, in a laughable manner, engaged itself with the faith-statutes of the priests and with popery” with the result that “this state finally in an inevitable way had to fall prey to external enemies, who at last brought about an end to its lording faith.”
5. In the West, “where faith had erected its own throne independent of worldly power, the civil order together with the sciences (which preserve it) were disorganized and made powerless by an arrogant governor of God.”
6. Just as dying plants and animals attract insects to complete their decomposition, Christian East and West alike were beset and overcome by barbarians.
7. In the West the “spiritual head lorded over and trained kings, as children through the magic wand of his threatened excommunication, [and] incited them to external

wars (the Crusades) in order to depopulate another part of the world, toward making war on one another, toward the rebellion of subjects against their authorities, and toward the bloodthirsty hate against their other-thinking comrades of the one and same universal so-called Christianity.”

8. And “to this lack of peace, which even now²²⁷ is restrained from violent outbreaks only through political interests, the root lies secretly in the ground proposition of a despotically commanding church-faith and ever after allows one to be concerned about scenes similar to them.”

Following this litany of accusations against the history of the Christian church, Kant quickly ensures that his reader will not lapse into despair by reminding him that, despite this history, from it is nevertheless clear that the “true first intention” of Christianity is to introduce a pure religious faith.

Although Kant’s overall intention in his “Historical Presentation” is thus to show to the reader that the “the present” is the “best” period of all of Christian history, the evidence that he musters in favor of hope cannot be anything but a devastating rebuke to the Christian who does not share his position on the development or on the necessity and desirability of the “germ” of “true religious faith” coming into fuller development. The moral and political disasters that Kant has just listed can only mean that their causes – monasticism, faith in miracles, hierarchies, orthodoxy, and so on – must be eliminated. There is hope for the moralist and the philosophical pedagogue but a direct challenge to the priest. Along these lines it would be illuminating to consider the quotation given here from Lucretius. The quote, “such evils religion has been able to recommend!”²²⁸ is presented as something that one might exclaim were he to view the history of Christianity

²²⁷ The “jetzt”, again, brings us back to the opening concerns of the *Religion*.

²²⁸ From *De Rerum Natura* 1.101: tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.

“under one glance, as a painting” (6.131). There is a terrible aspect to it if it is taken all at once.

The quote from Lucretius is from early in the *De Rerum Natura* with the opening praise of Epicurus for being the first openly to oppose religion, which had crushed his fellow men. Epicurus’ investigation into nature put religion beneath his feet. Lucretius continues by writing, “religion has quite often brought forth wicked and impious actions”²²⁹, and then proves it with the example of the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulus, then makes the announcement quoted by Kant. The rest of the context is Lucretius’ attempt to persuade the reader that no punishment after death is to be feared. The lines immediately following that quoted by Kant are particularly revealing in the light of the Kant’s concerns with Christianity:

In time, you, subdued by the fear-speaking of the soothsayers, will presently flee from us. Indeed, how many dreams they are able presently to touch you, dreams which they would be able to turn the directions of your life and to confuse all your fortunes with fear! And with merit do I say this...²³⁰

Again, Kant quickly turns from the necessity of making the Lucretian exclamation, and thus from the dire situation in which it has its context, but we also repeat that it is with Lucretian philosophical boldness that Kant is able to do so. That the present is the best period of Christian history is so only if we see something in the beginning of that history – the intention of planting a seed of true religious faith that is to be sown later – that is not necessarily held by most or any believing Christians. Our reason for hope is that men

²²⁹ *De Rerum Natura* 1.82-83: saepius illa / religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta.

²³⁰ *De Rerum Natura* 1.102-07: Tutemet a nobis iam quovis tempore vatum / terriloquis victus dictis descisere quaeres. / Quippe etenim quam multa tibi iam fingere possunt / somnia quae vitae rationes vertere possint / fortunasque tuas omnis turbare timore! / Et merito...

– whether Christian or not is not clear – small in number but public in profession are beginning the slow development toward the unity of all men in the “visible presentation” of the “invisible kingdom of God on earth” (6.131). The reform already mentioned (122) has begun not merely in theory but also in history. The rest of the second division of part three is a continued reflection on this fact.

Kant’s explicit message, despite the many individual awful scenes in the history of Christianity, is that the present, in the light of the original purpose of the grounding of Christianity, should cause us to hope in religious-moral reform. Before looking further at the nature and extent of that reform, and at Kant’s role in it, we are prompted by Kant’s reminders, throughout the rest of the *Religion*, to be fully aware of the cause of “all that bustle through which the human race has been wrecked and is still divided” (6.131).

There is a sole cause, which Kant identifies as a “bad propensity in human nature”, thus reminding us of the subject of earlier parts of the *Religion* and putting them into wider context whereby the moral and the seemingly internal and private have in fact brought about what is apparently the most devastating public moral-political damage to humanity. The historical point at which this occurred was in the early Christian period, when human nature took its revelation, which was meant to serve the Jewish people as a transition from their own, less morally oriented revelation, and made it, rather than the pure moral faith of religion to which it was supposed to lead, the supreme condition of the Christian faith. The sacramental and dogmatic trappings of early Christianity, meant to replace those of the Jews and thus to move the Jews closer to the moral faith, were thus seen to be the chief matters of religious importance.

In the present context Kant does not tell his reader much about the propensity in human nature that is responsible for this religious-moral-social disaster, but, with the observations made about human nature in part one in mind, the reader should not be surprised by the second half of part four, where Kant takes up the propensity more fully.²³¹ The link between the propensity mentioned in Kant's history of Christianity and the critique of religious delusion in part four is clear from the introduction to the latter text as follows: "to hold this statutory faith... as essential to the service of God in general, and to make it the supreme condition... is religious delusion" (6.168). So, before turning fully to the reform of the Christian church-faith, let us look closely at the ground of what makes that reform so necessary.

Part four of the *Religion*, "On Service and Antiservice Under the Lordship of the Good Principle, or, On Religion and Popery", is made up of two parts, the first devoted to service and the second to antiservice.²³² The second part is further divided into four closely related sections, whose overall purpose is to lay out the principle of religious delusion and then its manifestation and promotion.

Section one, "On the Universal Subjective Ground of Religious Delusion", observes that service to God is usually offered by means of festivals, public games, penances, and pilgrimages. That service is offered in these ways shows "the propensity

²³¹ The structure of the *Religion* is in some way reminiscent of the structure of *Leviathan*, with part four of the latter taking up the "Kingdom of Darkness" and part four of the former taking up the similar theme of popery. Much of the argument of part four of Kant's book is already present by implication, and sometimes more, in earlier parts, and yet the extensive treatment given in part four is too large to have worked it into the middle of part three.

²³² The first part, divided further into sections on Christianity as a natural and as a learned religion, have been treated in chapters two and three of the present study.

to a procedure which in itself has no moral worth” (6.169). Kant calls this delusion, since we suffer from it whenever “in our opinion we put to this [procedure] the worth of the purpose itself” (6.170; cf. 6.168n). Whenever men put on a festival or go on pilgrimage they act according to a “maxim” by which they accept this reversal, and the resulting delusion manifests “a hidden inclination to fraud”, so called because we put it in our heads that one thing is another and try to pass it off as such; we defraud ourselves about the worth of these actions. Again, with this mention of fraud, we are reminded of part one of the *Religion* and its connection with radical evil. Unfortunately, man cannot completely avoid the danger of delusion, for he cannot avoid the anthropomorphism that leads to it. Anthropomorphism seems inevitable in man, whether theoretically (which is generally harmless, in and of itself) or practically (which, as Kant warns here, and before at 6.65n and 6.168-9, is dangerous). It is necessary to make a God for oneself, for only then can one judge whether a being claimed by someone else as God is in fact worthy of reverence. In making this God, however, we are prone to make Him in such a way as to be undemanding in moral matters. Thus the service of God in religion is thought to be not doing our moral duty but instead signifying our utter and “unlimited” subjection to the divine will. If we have a public celebration by which we acknowledge our subjection to God we thus expect Him to look on us with favor; if we go on a pilgrimage or make a fast we expect the same result. The less useful, the less morally consequent, the act, the more pleasing to God, for there is a nobility in efforts made without any practical purpose in mind. We might even recognize that God has not been served by the act itself, but that He recognizes the act as a sign of subsequent obedience. He will favor us just as the

earthly lord looks kindly upon the grovelling of his subjects. Claiming that in these activities themselves, rather than in the good life conduct (against which they are not necessarily opposed and might even promote), is to be found the supreme condition of religious practice, members of a church suffer from delusion. As has already been indicated, the suffering from delusion is not limited to the individual moral dispositions of the churchmen in questions – which would be bad enough, from Kant’s point of view – but, insofar as a church is a visible public entity, translates into public life. This becomes increasingly clear in the second and third sections of *Religion* 4.2.

Section two, “The Moral Principle of Religion Opposed to Religious Delusion”, has premises and conclusions that are familiar to the reader of earlier parts of the *Religion*. New to the considerations, however, are the observations he makes along the way, including distinctions between enthusiasm and superstition; an objection to the traditional distinction between nature and grace, which leads to unfortunate religious expectations; and a more explicit levelling of religious practices among different churches and faiths. The chief consideration of section two springs from Kant’s assertion that, while some mystery of divine wisdom might well make men fully well-pleasing to Him, it would be “a dangerous religious delusion” for a church to “proclaim” that the mystery in question has been revealed to it. It is dangerous because part of that church’s faith would become the cognition of that mystery as superior to good life-conduct, something which “sincere” members of the congregation would be unwilling to accept into their very moral disposition. The church would thus promote its central teachings by fear and by condemning to damnation all those outside the church who were unable to

gain knowledge of the mystery by their own reason. To this opening consideration Kant adds the unsurprising point that faith is subject to the Willkur as soon as one moves away from the “principle” of good-life conduct as the service of God. Nothing, whether one sacrifices through mumbled prayer, tithing, or offering oneself in monastery life, is an offering to God as long as the moral disposition itself is not offered. Therefore all offerings of service to God apart from moral service are of equal worth or worthlessness. Churches are also responsible for originating and encouraging two other religious delusions, enthusiasm and superstition, the latter of which is only indirectly a moral problem since its purpose may well not conflict with morality. The section concludes with the necessary observation that the delusion of religion can be avoided or corrected in a church only if the church professes, in addition to its statutory articles of faith, the principle of “bringing about the religion of good life conduct as its true goal” (6.174). This is not easily accomplished, as the next section indicates, for the opposition from within the church is not merely from ignorant and intransigent traditionalism but one of the more unfortunate manifestations of moral evil itself.

Section three, “On Popery as a Rule in Antiservice of the Good Principle”, is a narrowing of the moral critique of section two, for here the chief culprit is clearly in view. With this section Kant makes thematic the problem of the priest in his doctrine of religion, but the presence in Kant’s mind of this problem has been noticeable from the start; the complaint with which part one begins is associated with the priest-religion, and references have also been made to actions and offices of priests that are to Kantian eyes immoral. In the priest one seems to find the worst tendencies of human nature as regards

morality and religion, and because of the public presence of a church, the priest is at the center of immoral social and political life. The precise meaning of Kant's "priest," however, is not immediately clear: he belongs to no one denomination but is a universal type apparently found in all religions at all times. In the second edition of the *Religion*, Kant adds an explanatory footnote to the word "popery" in the title of section three. Aside from an appearance in the alternate title of part four (6.151), this is the only place in the book where Kant uses the word, whereas he has often used Priest and Geistliche. For this reason an explanation of what is meant by popery is necessary:

This name characterizing merely the authority of a spiritual father (papa) obtains the meaning of blame only through the accompanying concept of a spiritual despotism, which can be met in all churchly forms, so those announced as unpretentious and popular. [6.175]

The notion of fatherhood is thus not problematic (though if it were Kant could quickly invoke Christ's injunction to "call no man father"). Instead, "spiritual despotism" is the danger, and one found in "all churchly forms." Although it calls to mind the papacy or "popery," it is a danger common even to the lowest of the churches. Whether it is identical to the priest-religion, or whether the Pfaff, or "papa" or "pope" (this noun does not appear, however) is identical to the priest, is not yet clear.

The meaning of "spiritual despotism" is the theme of the section to which the preceding comments are an introduction. The section begins with Kant pulling away from his development of the concept of religion from moral principles in favor of looking at the "natural" (cf. 6.106 and note) origin of church-faith – or, more precisely, of the "slavish service" (6.176). The origin provided reminds of several passages in *Leviathan*

that pertain to religion, as Kant explains the beginning of this service in the Verehrung that was “extorted from helpless men through the natural fear grounded on the consciousness of his impotence.”²³³ As a result, the reverence for “mighty invisible essences” by means of service historically precedes a religion. As soon as the service took on a “certain public-legal form” it became a “temple-service” (cf. 6.106) and then became a “church-service... only after the moral formation of men gradually was bound with these laws.” Even after a degree of “moral formation” (in which there is already some crucial transformation, i.e. from temple to church, from priest to divine) there remains the presence of what have elsewhere been called statutory laws. It would seem that a further step, which Kant is attempting either to further or to initiate, is required to make even the second morally legitimate: “an historical faith lies at the ground of both, until one finally has *begun* to see these merely as provisional, and [to see] in them the symbolic portrayal and the means of furtherance of a pure religious-faith” (6.176). This observation contains nothing new to the argument of the *Religion*, but in recalling the claim that an historical faith that possesses the “consciousness of its contingency” and is attached as a guiding means to pure religious faith may be “called” a true church (6.115), Kant prepares the way for a more devastating, and more political, critique of historical church-faith.

This critique, which relies upon and further develops distinctions already made, begins with the observation that, “in manner,” there may exist a “mighty distance”

²³³ From *Leviathan* 1.6.36: “Fear of power, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, [we call] Religion...”

between “heads” or “leaders” of different faiths, such Tungus shaman and a European prelate who rules both church and state, and between different “tendencies of faith,” such as the “wholly sensuous” Wogulite and the “sublimated” Puritan. (One would think that Kant would elevate the Puritan because of his rigorized moral code and simplified theology, but there still remain Puritan statutory laws.) There is no difference, however, in the important matter of “principle,” for they commonly set God-service in things that are (from Kant’s point of view) not sufficient to “constitute a better man.” The following point is where Kant begins to sharpen the earlier distinctions into a more direct critique: “The one intention that they all have is to steer to their advantage the invisible power, which has control over the destiny of men.” The man, therefore, who uses morally indifferent actions as a “means” of acquiring God’s “immediate pleasure” “stands in the delusion of possession of an art to bring through wholly natural means a supernatural effect” (6.177). This is “fetishism” (cf. 6.193). At the bottom of fetishism is an “absurdity in its concept,” for it holds that man “supposedly works on God and makes use of Him as means to produce an effect in the world” (6.177). On the other hand, it is not immediately absurd to supplement his “active disposition to good life-conduct” with “certain formalities” in order to render himself more “receptive” to possible divine assistance, for he makes no claim to work on God (6.178). But since even “the wickedest man” can be equally adept in working these formalities – which include formulas of appeal, confessions of wage-faith, and churchly observances – one deludes himself in relying on these “natural” and morally indifferent actions, for it amounts to thinking that he can “conjure up, so to speak, the support of the divinity” (6.178).

“Whoever” makes this error – for instance by giving precedence to statutory laws, by requiring revelation for religion as a condition of pleasing God, or by preferring historical faith to striving to live a good life – “transforms the service of God into a mere fetishism, and exercises an antiservice, which makes all the work [cf. 6.106 and 124] toward true religion retrogressive” (6.179). And what is the ultimate principle of fetishism? It is a principle of radical evil as discussed in part one, now put with dramatic emphasis and with religious language: “So much lies, when one wishes to combine two good things, on the order in which one combines them!” (6.179). Ironically, the problem in human nature, which church-faith is directed toward overcoming, is given further strength and amplification as it perverts that very church-faith. A “yoke” is thereby “imposed,” which

that it as unconditional necessity to believe something that only can be cognized historically, and therefore can not be convincing for everyone, is a yoke still more difficult for a conscientious man than the whole heap of piously imposed observances may ever be, while it is sufficient for these [observances] that one celebrate them in order to match with an established church community, without that someone needs internally or externally to lay out the confession of his faith that he holds it for an ordination founded by God: because through this especially the conscience is annoyed. [6.179; cf. 6.105, 108]²³⁴

Kant thus summarizes: “Popery is thus the constitution of a church, insofar as a fetish-service rules in it” (6.179).

Excursion: Further Analysis of the Priestly Character

²³⁴ For a further explication of conscience – “the moral faculty of judgment, passing judgment upon itself” – and its relation to religion and church-faith, see section 4 of 4.2, titled “On the Guiding-Thread of the Conscience in Matters of Faith.”

Kant concludes the criticism of popery by moving from the moral to the political context of corruption. Before looking at this conclusion, however, it would be useful to go further into the details of Kant's critique of the priest as it appears throughout the *Religion*,²³⁵ particularly because it will stand in helpful contrast to the heroic picture of the philosopher-pedagogues discussed in the next chapter.

The priests of the churches in Kant's day continue in the tradition of the priesthood that has its origins before recorded history. Despite their existence over a period of several millennia, the priest of Kant's time shares noticeable traits with his predecessors in history and also across the dogmatic separations of different creeds. The Kantian depiction of the priest can be taken as his characterization of the religious man par excellence – that is, the man who accepts the dogmas of a faith and pushes them to their logical limits, thus obliterating a proper grasp of the moral and physical worlds as they appear not only to philosophers but also to common men. Kant's analysis of the priest is therefore a penetration into the core of the antihuman and immoral nature of religious faith once it is corrupted.

As can be seen from the list of negative traits constitutive of the priest – e.g. dishonesty, insincerity, and fetishism – Kant's analysis and critique of the priest is grounded not only on his prior moral writings but on his interpretation of radical evil as well. While religion serves as the response to and rejection of original sin but yet (in its historical forms as a church-faith) embraces it wholeheartedly, the priest is the exemplification in the individual man of this embrace. In accord with his moral

²³⁵ It would be further useful to compare it with Rousseau's very tough critique in the *Social Contract*.

philosophy in general and with his teaching on radical evil in human nature in particular, Kant connects the evil of the priest to the evils of insincerity and dishonesty – the core of radical evil itself: the priest is the man whose natural propensity to evil has been allowed to flower and to pervert him fully. While it would seem that religion, or rather church-faith, is capable of good, the priesthood is a manifestation of evil. Yet, just as the need for religion is ineradicable as radical evil, the priesthood is a tendency in human nature that might be channeled through a certain kind of education. In fact, Kant’s attempted reform of religion has the taming of the priest as its Archimedean point.

Before outlining the priestly education proposed by Kant – which is in large part the practical and immediate goal of the *Religion* – it is necessary to work through Kant’s analysis itself of the priest. By examining their most noteworthy characteristics, in light of radical evil, it will be possible to identify the nature of the priest and to examine what in this nature makes him as he is.²³⁶ Furthermore, it is necessary to ask Kant’s purpose in examining the character of the priest: is Kant merely yet another Enlightenment-era anticlericist, or does he, as already suggested, have in mind not simple rebellion but rather a plan of active reform?

Kant’s analysis of the priest is difficult to examine on two counts. The first difficulty is that, like other topics touched upon in the *Religion*, it is not done systematically; rather, one has to gather many scattered references, take account of their different contexts, and find common threads that illustrate a basic idea. The second

²³⁶ This examination will not be complete without a reading of “The End of All Things,” the essay published shortly after the *Religion*.

difficulty is more particular, as it concerns a matter of terminology: Kant refers sometimes to *der Priest*, other times to *die Geistliche*, and yet the two meanings seem interchangeable.²³⁷ The one occasion in which Kant uses both so as to suggest a distinction is not very helpful.

This distinction appears in one of Kant's several histories of the development of faiths and churches. He finds "in the labor of men toward a common ethical essence" both the priest and the divine. Priests are "consecrated custodians of pious practices," while divines are "teachers of the pure moral religion" (6.106). It would seem that the priest is the villain and the divine is the hero,²³⁸ but since the passage occurs well into a book whose terminology changes as the argument develops, one must be wary that here the "divine" is not the Lutheran or even Pietist divine but rather a convinced Kantian. A look at other examples of Kant's use of *die Geistliche* will bear this out. For example, only a "vernünftige Geistliche" (rather than any *Geistliche*) will prevent his charges from absorbing "histories from the hellish Proteus" (6.87). So this examination of Kant on the character of the priest will, at least in the beginning, assume the identity of the two terms while preserving Kant's difference of usage.

As far as political life is concerned the most notorious and the most fatal characteristic of the priest is his unbridgeable distance from the world as it is: the priest hates the present world and sees no redeemable future for the world, and thus he escapes

²³⁷ Kant uses *der Priest* in the following passages: 6.19, 100, 106, 120, 125, 130; *die Geistliche* in the following passages: 6.8, 87, 106; and *der Kleriker* in the following passages: 6.69n, 113, 122, 164, 180, 200.

²³⁸ If this were the case, Kant would be making the Hegelian elevation of Lutheran Protestantism to the position of true and full teaching of Christianity.

into eschatology and the hope not for a world of the future but rather for the future world. In the priest is found the desire opposite that of the early modern philosophers – the heavenly city not on earth but in heaven. This priestly hatred of the present world and of human temporality is an ineradicable element of his psychology and is the motivation behind his actions in political life. Taken in combination with his tendency toward dishonesty, this psychology of the priest magnifies the evil principle in man and poses serious challenges for moral and political progress, and this spite for the world in the priest is a prime target in Kant’s doctrine of religion.

The hatred of the priest for the world may be divided into hatred for the world as it is and hatred for any attempt to improve the world as it is.

The *Religion* presents early evidence of the first kind of hatred, and echoes it many times, for the “complaint” of the priests in their religion. “All allow, nevertheless, that the world began from good... But they allow this happiness to vanish as a dream” (6.19). In the recesses of the human culture itself is the conflict between two basic principles – this ancient complaint, and the priest-religion of the golden age which utters the complaint and which shares its antiquity. Linked, therefore to the image of the golden age is the impression (conveyed by Kant’s suggestion) that, even if it once existed, it was never recognized by man at the time. Something intrinsic to man’s history, or at least to the priest’s, whose religion is the link between these two elements, poses both an ideal and its simultaneous negation.

Kant’s discussion here is unclear, for he writes that “all” grant the goodness of the world in the beginning, but it is not certain whether the “they” who “soon let this

happiness disappear as if a dream” is the “all” of the preceding sentence or the priests of the first sentence. Kant indicates the priests by suggestion, insofar as the complaint is conterminous with the priest-religion, and also because, in other parts of the *Religion*, to be a priest largely is to be one who complains. Assuming this link between the complaint about the descent of the world into evil with the antiquity of the priest-religion, then the problem of the priest ever wishing to obliterate the “now” with his condemnation is a crucial theme of the *Religion*; the priest is the key to interpreting the argument as introduced by this opening of part one. The focal point of the priest in the history of human culture and religion is echoed in the same terms later in the book:

But at all times the priests complained more than the moralists, that is to say, loudly (and under the summons of the authorities to steer the mischief), about the neglect of divine service, which was introduced so as to reconcile the people with heaven and to repel calamity from the state... [6.120]

The connection of the priest with the antiworldly complaint is more explicit here. With the insistence of the priest for the observance of the cultus, of divine service, Kant uncovers the direct connection between the priest and the evil principle, the predisposition to evil: he talks at one point “the propensity of [man] to a divine service of religion (cultus)” (6.106).

In a political light, the priest’s complaint against the world, as well as against attempts to improve it, has obvious ramifications, is the most dangerous element of the priest’s character – although it is necessarily connected to those other traits that make up his nature. Kant’s concern with the priest is not one of simple political pragmatism – whereby he would be satisfied with the priest’s private immorality so long as the priest

left politics alone (of course this would run counter to the priest's own nature in the first place). Yet, precisely because there exists, or should exist, no absolute barrier between the moral and the political for Kant, and because political evil is a clear indication of moral evil, Kant must deal with religion on the political as well as the purely moral level. Kant's critique of the priest is necessary because the moral evil embraced by the priest results in political evil, which itself further binds man to moral blindness and immaturity. With the exception of the few, man will not be freed by the arguments of the first critique or even by the essay on enlightenment, but he will gain moral freedom and maturity if the priest can be tamed by the *Religion*.

The priest, as history shows, is not content with dishonest rule in the confessional or with spinning fictions from the pulpit:

... how in the east, where the state itself, in a laughable way, concerned itself with the articles of faith of the priest and popery, instead of holding [the priests] within narrow limits of a mere teaching position (out of which they at all times are prone to trespass into ruling), how, I say, this state finally had to become the loot of external enemies who at last made an end to the faith that lorded over it; how in the west, where faith had erected a throne independent of worldly power the civil order was rattled and made weak, together with the sciences (which maintain it) by a pretending office-holder under God... [6.130-31]

With the hatred of the world comes the spiteful wish to do away with it and with those who would assert its goodness and capacity for (non-apocalyptic) improvement. Particular targets of this animus are philosophers, scientists, and moralists – in short, all those agents of culture and progress.

In less explicit but equally important conflict with Kant's moral and religious vision are several other varieties of the priestly dishonesty and insincerity. The most

immediately condemnable type of priestly dishonesty is that which marks the priest's unwillingness to perform the duties as he has promised. At first, the tendency of the priest toward deception appears to result from the rigorous moral and spiritual doctrine which he represents, as he is forced to choose between adherence to a strict norm and giving comfort to a man who has failed to live according to that norm. For instance, a *Geistlich*, in facing a dying sinner, "will have to hold out to him the hope of not being punished at all" (6.69n) – even though the pledge "to transform him in a hurry into a man well-pleasing to God" offends the basic principles not merely of Kantian but also dogmatic Christian morality. In the very discharge of a duty crucial to his vocation, the priest granting last-minute absolutions acts dishonestly and misrepresents God's moral call. This "shimmering sophistry" is "ultimately *found out as a disadvantage for morality*" (6.71n).²³⁹ The fault lies with the priest for cowing in the face of his moral responsibility and with the dogmas of his church for placing him in an untenable position in the first place.

The situation is again discussed in a footnote to the second edition, and this passage reiterates the implicit and dishonest agreement between the *Geistlich* and the dying sinner. The intention of the latter is "to have a comforter" at "the end of life," rather than a judge. Rather than "stirring up" the guilty conscience toward a last gasp of moral striving, the *Geistlich* instead offers "opium to the conscience" (6.78n), by offering the comfort that "All's well that ends well." Kant is not condemning the comfort given to a dying man, but rather only the comfort that comes at the expense of moral

²³⁹ Cf. 6.118 bottom and 6.120 middle.

exhortation. By releasing the sinner from the moral consequences of his sins – and thus thwarting the moral claims of God’s justice (even if such a thing does not exist, objectively speaking) – the *Geistlich* exemplifies the radical evil of dishonesty that mars human freedom and brings immorality to religion. One could object that a priest lying to a dying man (or releasing him from the condemnation of sins for which he has not repented or repented sufficiently) is a minor or negligible evil, say, for the greater good of pastoral care. It is precisely Kant’s point, however, that these little, seemingly harmless, deceptions amount to a wholesale and conscious rejection of the importance to the moral law and a cheapening of that which is worthwhile in religion. This is the complaint of the moralists, that “the priests have made it easy for everyone to be reconciled with the godhood over the grossest vices” (6.120).

One can easily find another sort of priestly dishonesty at the other extreme as well, namely the priest who affirms the beliefs of his church without admitting to himself that he cannot honestly know if they are true. Insofar as the priest acts not only as a private confessor but also has an active role in political life, this element of his character is cause for concern. Using the somewhat extreme example of the medieval inquisitor,²⁴⁰ Kant displays the combination of the priest’s insincerity with political influence, and although he did not experience the force of the medieval inquisitors in his time, it was not hard to discern that theological censors in Kant’s time took their lineage from this source. Appearing late in the final part of the *Religion*, the passage discussing the inquisitor

²⁴⁰ Nowhere in the passage does Kant identify the inquisitor as a priest or divine, but clearly the example stirs up that image to any reader’s mind. Furthermore, the picture of the inquisitor will match the character of the priest.

follows the now familiar pattern of the priest being forced to enforce a rigid orthodoxy which he himself asserts to be true, and doing so at the expense of an innocent victim.

One takes, for example, an inquisitor who holds fast to the exclusivity of his statutory faith to the point of martyrdom, and who had to judge a so-called heretic (otherwise a good citizen)... it is certain that to take the life of a man on account of his religious faith is unjust: unless (to make room for an extreme situation) a divine will, becoming known to him by extraordinary means, had ordered otherwise. But that God has expressed this terrible will touches on historical documentation, and is never apodictically certain. Revelation, after all, has come to him only through men and is interpreted by them... [6.186-87]

In previous examples Kant had depicted men of the church acting dishonestly against their duty, motivated by an unjust mercy for a sinful man who did not merit it. Here the opposite occurs, as the inquisitor, in accord with his duty, deals out harsh punishment – on intellectually and thus morally unclear grounds – to an “otherwise good citizen.” That Kant identifies the victim not as a good man but as a good citizen indicates the length of damage done by the inquisitor and the faith which he represents: the crime is not only moral, as in the case of the confessional, but explicitly political as well. In enforcing the dictates of orthodoxy when their truth cannot be demonstrated, the inquisitor “acts without conscience” (cf.6.189-90). Aside from serving as another example of the opposition to the truth on the part of the priest-type, the passage also indicates both the explicit means of the priest’s dishonesty and the key to reforming the church and eliminating – or taming – the priest. To tame the priest-inquisitor, one must take the “revelation” that informs his actions and alter the interpretation of the “historical-documents” by which that revelation is transmitted. As the analysis of the priest proceeds, the means of this alteration will become clearer.

In addition to these banal examples of priestly dishonesty there are more explicitly serious examples which not only make possible but encourage the lesser ones as well as create serious moral and political problems. This characteristic of the priestly dishonesty is also the first commented upon in the *Religion*. From the beginning of part one Kant has accused the priest of dishonesty, and at the heart of his dishonesty is “the oldest among all fictions, the priest-religion” (6.19).²⁴¹ The mark of the priest-religion is the fiction, as in depictions of a past Golden Age, or paradise, or communion with heavenly beings. The purpose of these fictions is not immediately clear, but their function has been to illustrate, by virtue of the increasing distance from the hallowed past, the ever-accelerating decline of human and natural history into destruction, and their effect according to Kant has been to make the realization of this destruction quite possible in thought if not in reality. The suggestion is that these fictions were devised intentionally for the destruction of the world. How this is so is a crucial matter for extended analysis.

First, however, it is clear that there exist more concrete motivations for the priest to invent and promulgate their fictions: they provide means of giving to the priest the power over moral and political (including cultural and scientific) life. The fact of churchly faith as means of political control is well documented in Kant as well as in history. We have Kant’s testimony on the subject from not only the essay on enlightenment but also throughout the *Religion*, for religion supplies not only a harness

²⁴¹ It is provocative that Kant uses the word “religion” here, rather than “faith,” due to his revision (or resuscitation) of their respective meanings. One might suggest that “*Priesterglauben*” would be a better fit, until considering the later analysis of priestcraft: the priest-religion is an anti-religion rather than merely one among many faiths.

on the many by the secular ruling power, but also on both of these by the churchly powers. The rule, spiritual (i.e. ultimately moral) and temporal, of the laity by the clergy is a problem yet to be overcome. Particularly offensive to Kant is the rule of the scholar and the university by the clergyman and the churches.²⁴² The basis of this rule is the promulgation of and belief in the fictions invented by the priest.

After dropping the theme for many pages, Kant picks it up again later in the book, this time more explicitly discussing the priest's purpose in the making of fictions. The opportunity for renewed discussion arises as Kant appeals to the history of religion as proof that churchly faith takes its full meaning from pure religious (i.e. moral) faith (6.109-110). He begins by stating that, to maintain a link between a moral faith and an "empirical" faith ("which to us seems to have been dealt to our hand by chance" – a crucial statement), one needs to employ an interpretation of a particular sort – "that harmonizes with the universal practical rules of a pure rational religion" (6.110; cf. 6.12). "This interpretation may often appear to us as forced, in view of the text (of revelation)" and yet is preferred to a literal interpretation that works against or does not promote morality. So far, Kant has called into question the divine nature of the revelation and proposed a single interpretive method, which though forced and not necessarily literal, is valid for all religions.²⁴³ Setting this foundation, he returns to the theme of the priest and his fictions.

²⁴² This theme is central to the next chapter.

²⁴³ A detailed examination of his biblical hermeneutic, and the means by which he presents it, will be found in the following section.

In a more particular manner, however, the label of priest is also meant to apply to some known individuals in Kant's time, individuals who had gained ascendancy in the present rule of Prussia and especially in its power of censor. The most notorious enemy of Kant's in this regard was Wöllner, who eventually succeeded in getting from the ruler of Prussia the command for Kant to refrain from writing on religious matters. So not only is there a psychological component to Kant's critique of the priestly type but also an immediate and personal one; Wöllner exemplified the perverted excesses of radical evil.

Let us return from our excursion to Kant more focused criticism of popery in part four of the *Religion*. As far as we have yet seen, this critique has been primarily moral only remotely political in nature, but in concluding his argument against it Kant brings his concern to politics. After summarizing the argument thus far – from the choice of the “highest binding principle” to the loss of the mass of its “moral freedom” and the resulting “despotic” constitution of the “clergy” (6.180) – Kant examines the result on the laity (which includes “the head of the political community”):

... at last the church lords over the state, not through force but rather through influence over minds and also through the false appearance of utility which the state could ostensibly draw from the unconditional obedience to which a spiritual discipline has accustomed the *thinking* itself of the people; but, unnoticed, the custom of hypocrisy undermines the honesty and fidelity of the subjects, sharpens them in the seeming service also in civil duties and, as with all erroneously adopted principles, produces the direct opposite of what was intended. [6.180]

But Kant has not finished his historical presentation of the victory of the good principle, for in the realization of the scandalous history of Christianity the Christian faith has consciousness of its role as a vehicle for true religious faith. Implicit in the continuation of the presentation is the gradual replacement of critique with plan for

reform. Because of the “germ of the true religious faith... already in Christianity... but not publicly”, the “present [jetztige] time” is “the best” of “church history” (6.131; cf. 6.19). Since reason “has wriggled loose from the load of a faith constantly exposed to the Willkür of the interpreter” (6.132) and has “accepted” two principles, one of reasonable moderation in claims of revelation and one of sacred narrative always being employed to promote morality. It is the duty of rulers not to hinder public spread of these principles (6.133); the argument for this duty is striking: “very much is thereby wagered... encroaching on the way of divine providence, favoring certain historical church doctrines and... exposing the consciences of the subjects to temptation” (6.133-4). As a result there occurs “the damage which thereby occurs to a freedom that is in this case holy can hardly make good citizens” (6.134.)

The remainder of the “historical presentation” is less historical than prophetic – or, as Kant notes, “This presentation of an historical narrative of the future world, which is no history, is a beautiful ideal” (6.135).

The kingdom of heaven is finally presented, as concerns the guidance of Providence, in this history not only as a lingering at certain times, but never a wholly unbroken approach, but also in its entry. One can now interpret it as a mere symbolic presentation aimed at stimulating greater hope and courage and effort in achieving it, if to this narrative there is attached a prophecy... of the consummation of this great cosmic revolution, in the image of a visible Kingdom of God on earth... so that the *end of the world* makes the conclusion of history. [6.134]

Yet, since this is a natural procession “on a moral way,” there is “nothing mystical” about it (6.136).

E. The Reform of Church-faith: Scripture Interpretation and Divine Worship

Three elements are crucial to Kant's proposed reform of the Christian faith and are all related to the pernicious influence of the priest and his fictions on moral and political life. First, since Scripture is the basis of a church-faith and furthermore its teachings influence the beliefs and actions of the congregation, the interpretation of Scripture must be restricted in a certain way. Second, in order to cultivate in the public the tendency toward the pure moral faith and the life of virtue, the reformed church must sponsor suitable preaching and sacramental life. Third, and most difficult, the training of the clergy must overcome the propensity to popery and instead predispose its divines to the practice of and exhortation to the moral rather than cultic life. Although Kant could hardly guarantee that a moral or political transformation would result from these reforms, they certainly remove serious impediments to a moral conversion. One should note about these reforms that most of them are not presented as reforms but rather appear as necessary and, in part, unquestioned elements of the doctrine of religion itself; this is to see, however, that the doctrine of religion in this regard is not merely an abstract set of principles but rather also a putting into work those principles already.²⁴⁴

The first reform, that of scriptural interpretation, is treated implicitly throughout the *Religion*.²⁴⁵ In addition to several lengthy passages that offer substantial presentation of Kant's position on this matter there are smaller references that fill out the larger

²⁴⁴ Cf. Bielfeldt's discussion of the "systematic critique of Christianity, which Kant undertakes in three main areas: (a) the Bible, (b) religious dogmas, and (c) religious worship" (p. 172ff).

²⁴⁵ For a comparison of Spinoza and Kant on this matter, see Yovel, pp. 3-26. See Fortin, pp. 107-16, for a helpful discussion of Spinoza and Augustine on the question of hermeneutics.

discussions. After examining Kant's treatment of the character and then the use and misuse of the scripture, we shall examine in detail his principles for and applications of the proper interpretation of scripture.

The *Religion* lacks a detailed treatment of the character itself of scripture in general or the Bible in particular, but several of its characteristics inform Kant's account of its use and interpretation. First, as it is "come to human hands" (6.107), it is of an unclear origin. Because it claims to display the truth of divine objects as they reveal themselves to men they are presented in the manner of a history. Among the varieties of revelation, scripture, as opposed to spoken tradition, takes on a special and lasting authority because it is written:

A holy book gains the greatest respect even among those (and those most of all) who do not read it, or at least can make no coherent concept of religion from it; and all sophistry does nothing against the powerful dictum knocking down all objections, Thus it is written. [6.107]

Kant does not here explain why this is so, but later gives a reason:

Every faith which, as historical faith, grounds itself on books has need of the guarantee of a learned public, in which it could be controlled, through scribes as contemporaries, who stand in no suspicion of special arrangement with the first propagators and whose connection with our present scribes are unbroken. [6.129]

A link thus exists between the original revelation of the truth and the men to whom it currently is presented, and the preservation of this link is the responsibility of those who understand it in some way. This suggests that an immediate sense of scripture, i.e. one that is communicated to readers of different times, places, and intellectual abilities, is not possible. This is especially true when scripture tells of something like the Holy Trinity:

For the rest, the theoretical profession of faith in the divine nature in this threefold quality belongs to the mere classical formula of a church faith, so as to distinguish it from other ways of faith drawn from historical sources, [a formula] with which few men find themselves combining a distinct and determinate concept (not set out in the open for confusion); its examination pertains rather to teachers in their relation to one another (as philosophical and learned interpreters of a holy book), that they may agree on its sense, not all of which is for the general comprehension or to the needs of the time, while purely literal faith ruins rather than betters the true religious disposition. [6.147]

Also because it is written it and the faith which it grounds can survive, as “history proves,” “devastating political revolutions” (6.107). Were one determined to eradicate a church-faith he would not be able to do it by eradicating its founding documents (6.107).

Although reason and scripture (the record of an “alleged revelation”) are clearly separate, they are not irremediably opposed; that is, there is not only “compatibility” but also “unity” between them, “so that he who follows the one (under the guidance of moral concepts) does not fail to meet up with the other also” (6.12-13). Much later in the *Religion* (in the first part of part four), in commencing a study of the Christian religion as a natural religion on one hand and a learned religion on the other, Kant, echoing this proposal, indicates the necessity of taking up historical examples of revealed religion:

But we could do no better than to take, as an intermediate for the explanations of our ideas of a revealed religion in general, some book which contains such [historical] instances, especially such a book which is interwoven with ethical and consequently with rationally relevant doctrines, [a book] which we then hold before us as one of various books which treat of religion and virtue under the credit of a revelation, as an example of this practice, useful in itself, of seeking out what in this [book] may be for us a pure and thus rational religion, without thereby wishing to interfere in the business of those to whom the interpretation of the same book as the embodiment of positive revealed doctrines, thereby challenging their interpretation which is founded on scholarship. [6.156-7]

For this reason the scriptures themselves are suitable only for the few, as already pointed out in the conclusion to part three (6.147). Because it grounds a church-faith, and because the church-faith as subject to human sensuousness is prone to corruption, the wrongful use or misinterpretation of scripture has negative consequences. A chief concern is the orthodoxy that is promoted by “self-styled interpreters” of scripture (6.107, 164-5). Scripture scholarship is the safeguard against their total abandonment of reason (6.180). With these limitations and dangers of scripture in mind, Kant sets out the proper understanding of its interpretation and use.

The use of scripture begins with the happy statement, apropos Kant’s moral-philosophical analysis of the origin of evil in human nature, that the way of presentation which the scripture makes use of... goes very well” with that analysis. The “history” which scripture uses to “present” the “beginning” agrees with Kant regarding the order of priority, though using time where Kant uses nature (6.42). Kant proceeds to read the Genesis account of the Fall with the language of moral law, propensity, and maxim, successfully uniting the two accounts. Nevertheless, there are difficulties with the scripture account after all, which is striking since it ostensibly was brought in as a confirmation of Kant’s own account. The chief difficulty hinges on what seemed to be the crucial point of agreement between the two, that is, the notion of an “origin” of evil and an order to the process of origination:

But we must seek no temporal origin of a moral character for which we ought to be judged; this is also so inevitable if we want to *clarify* its contingent existence (thus the scriptures have made it so presented, corresponding to our own weakness). [6.43]

Thus, even before Kant introduces the notion of religion (which does not surface explicitly until part three) and the need (due to human sensuousness²⁴⁶) to promote the moral religion through the vehicular means of a church-faith and the scripture on which it is grounded, Kant prepares the reader for that position by using the implications of this early passage. It is further provocative that Kant places the scriptural quotes among quotations from Ovid and Horace – other ancient texts regarding gods and human origins – as if to suggest a relativity to their accounts and a sheer temporal necessity in treating the Christian scripture as opposed to any other document.²⁴⁷ We might also recall the connection he made – in the context again of history and fiction – between 1 John and Horace at the beginning of part one and between Horace and St. Paul at the beginning and end of section three of part one. (One might object to this observation that Kant is simply peppering his arguments with classical quotations, in the manner of a Renaissance humanist or an academic pedant, but a look at the choice and placement of Kant’s references to classical literature, not only in the *Religion* but in many of his other works as well, demonstrates that they are never done from a desire to adorn, but rather from a desire to illuminate further what he has said explicitly.)

This is not to disparage scripture unduly, for it can supply what is otherwise lacking to us. A rational account of the origin of the “bad tuning of our Willkür” is inconceivable to us, and so it is to our benefit that

²⁴⁶ This is the source of much of the error made possible by scripture. For example, it can lead to anthropomorphism in its presentation of God’s love of man (6.64-5n) and to unfounded assertions on supernatural matters like resurrection and ascension (6.128n).

²⁴⁷ Kant chooses to use the Christian scripture at 6.156-7 because it is a good example from history.

The scriptures express this incomprehensibility in a historical narrative, which adds a more proximate determination of the depravity of our species, that it proposes the evil to be at the beginning of the world, though not in man but rather in a *spirit* of our originally more sublime determination... and so for man, who despite a corrupted heart yet always possesses a good will, there still remains hope of a return to the good from which he has strayed. [6.43-4]

At this point of conclusion Kant attaches a cautious explanation of what he has just done, or rather, of what he has *not* just done:

That which is said here must not be seen as if it ought to be scriptural interpretation, which lies outside the boundaries of the authority of mere reason. One can clarify how one makes a moral use for a historical account without thereby deciding whether this is also the sense of the scribe or only our reading into it, if this sense is true in itself without respect to all historical proof, and thereby the only sense according to which we can derive some betterment from the work of a scribe which would otherwise be only a fruitless increase of our historical cognition. [6.43n]

Scripture interpretation lies beyond the scope of the *Religion*; “our sense” or “moral use” of this “historical performance” need not be done according to the “sense” of the author or with concern for “all historical proof.” The only requirements for the present activity, whatever that activity be called, is that the “sense” be “in itself true” and that it also be “for moral betterment.” Anything else would treat the scripture as a “fruitless increase of our historical cognition.” This amounts to claiming that any interpretation of scripture that is within the boundaries of mere reason must be self-evidently true and moral. At this point, because of that important provision, there is nothing controversial here. The remainder of the note, however, furthers the defensive move, as if the author is aware of his tenuous position or as if preparing the reader for something more drastic:

One should not without need come to conflict over something, and over its historical prestige, when, however we understand it, it does not contribute anything to our becoming a better man, if what can make a contribution in this

respect is as cognized without historical proof and must even be known without it. Historical cognition that has no inner connection, valid for everyone, to this, belongs among the adiaphora, which each may handle as one finds edifying. [6.43-4n]

The provision of “within the boundaries of mere reason” both allows the philosopher to search for a moral meaning from scripture while also protecting him from any charges that he is corrupting or endangering sacred doctrine.

The key treatment in the *Religion* of the interpretation of Scripture, though several other brief comments are found throughout, is found in the middle of the first division of part three – subsection six, titled “Church Faith has the Pure Religious Faith as its Highest Interpreter.” In about five pages, Kant reiterates the necessity of scripture, explains its proper use and principle of interpretation, determines its proper interpreters, and considers the public roles of these interpretations. As a whole this passage may be considered not only his guide to the interpretation of scripture but also a plan for the reform of church-faith insofar as that faith is grounded on scripture.

A church, because of the “natural needs of all men” for a “*sensuously tenable*” “experiential confirmation,” cannot merely preach the “highest rational-concepts and grounds” (6.109). This has already been noted and is the reason for a church-faith as opposed to an unassisted pure rational religion in the first place, and so it is not surprising that, even when a church-faith is consciously (on the part of a few of its members) a vehicle for the latter, the core religious principles animating it are not presented without the language and manner of presentation of historical revelation. This is true even when the church-faith in question has not originated self-consciously as a vehicle; left uncertain

at this point is whether Kant thinks Christianity or any other historical faith is self-consciously a vehicle.

With this in mind Kant turns to the question of interpretation, the fundamental principle of which is that “the theoretical aspect of church faith cannot interest us morally, if it is toward the fulfillment of all human duties as divine commands” (6.110). Here again is the application of the Kantian understanding of the meaning of religion, as opposed to faith, in the first place. It thus provides a more particular example of the religio-moral critique of church-faith. The roots of the corruption of religion through church-faith may thus be traced, at least in part, to the way in which the founding documents of that faith are read. It thus follows that a reform of that faith must spring, again, at least in part, from a reform of that reading. The principle that Kant just offered is the manner in which the reform is to be carried out, as we shall see. If what Kant says about religion is true, and if his principle were applied, then “an interpretation of the revelation that has come into our hands is required, that is, a thoroughgoing explanation of it in the sense that is in tune with the universal practical rules of rational religion” (6.110). Realizing the possible controversies that might result from such an interpretation, Kant again (as he has earlier in a brief comment on the Bible’s presentation of human evil at 6.43n) admits that “this interpretation may often appear to be strained”; the strain, however, is not merely in appearance, but also “often actually.” One will see the strain right on the surface of the interpretation, in plain “intention of the [scriptural] text,” but the strain is preferable to a “literal” interpretation that either ignores morality or works against its incentives (6.110). A striking example of such a literal

interpretation is the “*prayer for revenge*, which goes to the verge of the horrible” in Psalm 59:11-16. The footnote in which this example is given provides Kant the opportunity for a further sharpening of the interpretive problem, reminiscent this time of Plato’s *Euthyphro*: “Here I halt... and ask if morality must be interpreted according to the Bible, or the Bible on the contrary according to morality” (6.110n). The manner in which he answers, in which the use of “my ethical principles which stand by themselves” answers, reminds the reader of the opening sentence of the first preface, and of all that it implies.

If this defense of a strained but moral interpretation is not sufficient to calm concerns about conflicting moral and literal interpretations of scripture, then there is the further historical example that gives the former credence. “One will also find that it is so with all old and new ways of faith, some written in holy scriptures, have been handled” (6.110). Behind these ways of faith have been “rational and well-thinking teachers of the people” who through their “explanations” have “brought” the “essential content” of historical faith “into tune with the universal moral statements of faith” (6.110-11). The examples of such teachers of people stretch from Greek and Roman moral philosophers to Christianity and later Judaism and to Muslims and Hindus. Behind the manner of presentation in popular historical faiths is at least the potential for an “intelligible moral doctrine” (6.111).

If this is still not enough to assuage the pious reader’s concern, Kant adds to the practical and historical defenses of strained moral interpretation the moral argument itself which animates the *Religion*:

But that this can be done without ever and again greatly violating the literal sense of the popular faith comes to this: long before this faith, the tendency to moral religion lay secret in human reason, from which its first raw expressions aimed at merely the use of divine service and, for its sake, induced those alleged revelations, but they thereby also situated in their fictions, though unintentionally, something of the character of their supersensible origin. [6.111]

This is striking not merely because it goes further in asserting the ontological unnecessary and moral obstacle caused by historical church-faith but in also bringing the reader back to a consideration of the priest and his fictions. The conflict between this and the pure faith of moral religion is indeed historical and perhaps even prehistorical. It has all the air of a huge mistake that has perpetuated itself, or nearly perpetuated itself, throughout human history – until now.

Kant goes even further, however, in justifying his proposed method of interpretation, for he states – as opposed to the implied moral evil of their priestly counterparts – about them the following careful words:

One cannot charge this interpretation with dishonesty, provided that one does not wish to maintain that the sense which we give to the symbols of the popular faith, or also the holy book, is entirely as intended by them, but rather let this matter sit, and assume only the *possibility* that the authors so understood them. The reading of these holy scriptures, or the inquiry into their content, has the final intention to make men better; but the historical [inquiry] which to this contributes nothing is something in itself wholly indifferent, with which one can handle as one wishes. [6.111]

Historical faith then is meaningless unless as an intended concession to human ethical existence with an underlying moral purpose. Although this has been implied and stated earlier, only at this point does one see how truly “dead” Kant wants it to appear.

After a brief paragraph in which he employs scripture itself to reiterate “the uppermost principle of all scripture-interpretation” (6.112), Kant moves on to discuss two

other pretenders to the interpretation of scripture. Thus far, he has been arguing on behalf of the scripture interpreter; now he will treat first the scripture scholar (who is subordinated to him) and then the “man of feeling” (who is subordinate to them both).

To introduce the scripture scholar, Kant restates again:

The prestige of scripture, as the worthiest and in the enlightened part of the world now the only instrument of union of all men into one church, constitutes the church faith which, as popular faith, cannot be ignored, because no doctrine grounded merely on reason would seem to the people to be an unchangeable norm; and the people demand a divine revelation, hence also a historical authentication of its prestige through the deduction of its origin. [6.112]

Yet, since all we have on which to rely are very ancient “human reports” in “[old] now-dead languages,” and further because there are many “unlearned” reading the scripture, we have need of scripture scholarship, first to justify and then to interpret the scripture for the benefit of the public. The task of the scripture scholar is thus twofold, and this task exists – we should note – because it is not the concern of the scripture interpreter, who has a purely religio-moral task. The first part of the task of the scripture scholar is directly related to supporting in its “authority a church grounded on a holy scripture”; this “*authentication*” is sufficiently accomplished if scripture scholarship can show “that the origin [of the scripture] contains nothing in itself which would make the adoption of it as immediate divine revelation impossible” (6.112-13). The second part of the task is similar and has to do with the “interpretation” of the scripture for the benefit of the “unlearned,” who are not certain of the sense of the scripture they read. That Kant gives to this operation the same name (i.e. *Auslegung*, “interpretation”) that he gives to the

moral interpreter²⁴⁸ of the scripture suggests the tricky relationship between the two (cf. 6.9-10). The scripture scholar who performed the operation of interpretation shares this with the man to whom he is subordinate because he too necessarily employs tools from beyond the literal surface of the allegedly revealed text:

the expositor, who has the foundational language, must also have a wide historical knowledge and critical ability, in order to draw the ethos and opinions (the popular religion) from the condition of an earlier time the means whereby to open up the understanding of the church community. [6.113]

What, then, is the proper relationship between the two? Do they serve the same or different purposes? The two seem to be conflated at times, as the following sentence shows: “Rational religion and scripture scholarship are, therefore, the properly appointed interpreters and custodians of a holy document” (6.113).²⁴⁹ Are the two collapsed into one, for all intents and purposes – thus displaying Kant’s full intentions? It certainly appears that Kant suddenly demands on behalf of the subordinate what only the ordinate needs.

When the state concerns itself only that there is not a lack of scholars and of men standing in good repute of morality who manage the whole of the church body, to whose consciences it can entrust this task, it has already done all that its duty and authority bring with themselves. That he extend this into the schools, and concern himself with their conflicts (which, so long as they are not extended from the pulpit, leave the church-public in perfect peace), is an imposition, which the public cannot make on the legislator without being pushy, for it is beneath his worth.[6.113]

Beneath these two – and there is no clear reason why Kant brings up this third – is a third “pretender” to the “office” of scripture interpretation. This unnamed third “needs neither

²⁴⁸ The counterpart of the scripture scholar is the *Schriftausleger*.

²⁴⁹ Later he states that the same scholarship “sets out toward one and the same purpose as the philosophers, namely the morally good”, although they take another road.

reason nor learning” and relies instead upon an “inner *feeling*” in his cognition of the “true sense” and “divine origin” of scripture (6.113). It is impossible to judge the basis of his method, i.e. the feeling itself:

... each man has [feeling] only himself and he cannot impose it on others, thus also he cannot recommend feeling as a touchstone of the genuineness of a revelation, because it teaches utterly nothing but rather contains only the way that the subject is affected in consideration of his pleasure or lack of pleasure, on which no cognition can be grounded. [6.114]

For whatever reason he has decided to do this, Kant quickly dispatches the man of feeling as a pretender to the office of scripture interpretation and leaves only two in contention.

Although seemingly conflating them, or at least certain elements of their methodology, Kant now separates again the scripture interpreter and the scripture scholar by designating the first an “*authentic*” and the second “only a *doctrinal*” interpreter. In so doing, he also indicates the nature of their difference: the scholar acts as the interpreter but on a much more particular basis; while the interpreter works to show the religious-moral core of an historical faith, the scholar attempts to “transform” a particular historical church-faith “into determinate and steadily self-maintaining system” (6.114). Kant thus suggests that the scholar is the agent of the interpreter. And, at the end of this discussion Kant emphasizes again the difference between the two, in terms of a danger to what the subordinate is prone. It is undeniable that

historical faith finally becomes merely a faith in scripture scholars and in their insight: which of course does not do justice to the honor of human nature, but which can be made good through public freedom of thought, and this is all the more justified since only if scholars set their interpretations out to public examination, and themselves remain always open and susceptible to better insight, can they count on the confidence of the community in their decisions. [6.114]

The identity of those performing the examination is curiously not noted.

That the suggested moral interpretation of scripture is at the heart of Kant's reform of Christianity is clear if we turn again to the conclusion of his "Historical Presentation of the Gradual Grounding of the Dominion of the Good Principle on Earth." After relating in a page-long sentence the unfortunate history of Christianity, Kant poses the question, "which time of the whole known church history up to now is the best, I do not pause for thought" (6.131). The reason for his instant reply of "the present" (thus flying in the face of the "now" of 6.19)²⁵⁰ is that "reason has wriggled loose from the load of a faith constantly exposed to the *Willkür* of the interpreter" (6.132). Reason accepts two principles, that of "modesty in expressions about everything that is called revelation" and that sacred history "always be taught and clarified for a moral end-purpose" (6.132-3). In the course of this reply it is clear that the interpretation of scripture and the spreading of that interpretation is a public (social if not political) matter:

Not to hinder the public diffusion of these basic principles in their becoming public is the duty of the ruler; on the contrary, very much is wagered and undertaken, and at one's own having to answer for it when interfering with the road of divine providence by favoring certain historical church doctrines, which at best have in their favor only an appearance of truth to be established by scholars, and, through their offer or refusal of certain civil advantages otherwise available to everyone, by exposing the subjects' conscience to temptation – all of which, apart from the damage which thereby befalls a freedom which is in this case holy, can hardly produce good citizens for the state. Who... would wish, after thinking with the advice of the conscience, to answer for all the evil which can arise from such violent interventions and hamper, perhaps for a long time to come, or indeed even set back the progress in the good intended by the world's government, even though no human power or institution could ever wholly destroy it? [6.133-4]

²⁵⁰ Here, "the present" is "*die jetzige*", calling to mind the "*jetzt*".

Thus the interpretation and preaching of the scripture must be free and unhindered by those in political power. The character of Kant's reform of biblical interpretation is thus moral but with political or social freedom as a necessary condition.²⁵¹

The second means by which the Christian church-faith may be reformed into a more pure vehicle of the rational religion is that of a new understanding of sacramental practice which is to be found in the parergon following part four of the *Religion*. The importance of Kant's sacramental revisionism is clear from Kant's speaking of the "alleged service of God, when brought back to its spirit and its true meaning, namely to a disposition ordained to the kingdom of God within us and outside us" (6.192). Eight paragraphs of introduction precede the analysis of the four sacramental expressions of prayer, churchgoing, baptism, and communion. Kant begins with the general observation that the "concept of supernatural intervention... is a transcendent concept" (6.191). Even if "its impossibility... cannot be proven... we cannot make any further use of this idea at all" and "keep a respectful distance from it" because "escapes us" and might tempt us to "moral passivity" (6.191). As we have already seen, the "only means of becoming worthy of heavenly assistance" is the "endeavor to improve one's moral nature"; the concept of "means of grace" on the other hand is "self-contradictory" and really a "means

²⁵¹ To the question of what such an interpretation would look like one could point to several examples in the *Religion*. One such is Kant's explanation of the meaning of "invisible enemy" mentioned in Ephesians 6:12 (6.59-60). Another is the employment of the scriptural account of Christ as support for the depiction of the prototype (6.78-84) and the progress in human history of the rational religion (6.159-63). An understanding of the nature of moral religion, church-faith, and scripture can help to explain the purpose of miracles in scripture as symbolic rather than historical (6.84). The scriptural prophecy of the end of the world and the apocalypse can serve as a symbolic presentation of the gradual victory of the good principle (6.134). The words of the Lord's Prayer can be given a moral interpretation (6.195n). Beyond the *Religion* itself are several essays, such as "The Conjectural Beginnings of Human History" and "The End of All Things," whose use of scriptural passages is with a moral intent.

of self-deception” (6.192). Although it is only the moral service of God that constitutes true religion, man needs (for reasons already addressed) to present the invisible by visible means, and with the satisfaction of this need comes the great risk of the “delusion” that the visible means themselves are the service of God, rather than a concession to the demands of human sensuousness (6.192). The resulting “alleged service of God”

... can be divided through reason into four observances of duty, to which certain formalities, which do not stand in necessary connection with them, have however been assigned to correspond to them, because they have from antiquity been found to be good sensible means that serve as schemata for the duties, thus awakening and maintaining our attentiveness to the true service of God. They are grounded, all together, upon the intention of promoting the ethically good.
[6.192-3]

It is merely a task of “bringing them back” to their original ethical sense, a task that involves eliminating the illusion of a “necessary binding.” Nevertheless, that this task will be difficult is illustrated by the fact that, “even where the conviction has already taken hold that everything in these matters depends on the moral good... the sensuous man still searches for an escape route by which to circumvent that arduous condition” thus leading to “a grace dreamed up in slothful trust, or itself perhaps an instance of hypocritical trust” (6.193). Here again one finds the continuation of man’s original self-deception. This constitutes the third of the three “ways of *deluded faith*” – the first two, faith in miracles and faith in mysteries, already having been discussed in parerga two and three.

The analysis of each of the four kinds of service includes first a depiction of what the service is meant “in itself” – that is, from the point of view of morality – and second of the manner of corruption of the service in question. Each corruption springs from self-

deception and, by the fourth, extends into the social or public world; clearly the abusive practice of these services, often known by Christians as sacraments, like historical Christianity as a whole, mirrors, builds upon, and extends into public life human sensuousness and radical evil. As Kant notes in concluding his analysis of these services, “All such feigned self-deception in religious matters have a common ground” (6.200). This “common ground” is the human “appeal” to divine mercy “in order to avoid the forbidding condition of conforming to the requirements” of holiness. To “satisfy himself” in the possibility of success in this endeavor, “he usually transfers his conception of a man (his faults included) over to the Divinity” and “hope[s] to achieve [his goal]... by appealing exclusively to His grace” and thus ignores God’s lacking a human way of thinking that even the best human rulers have, by which notions of adherence to law, mercy, and justice are “blended” (6.200). The process of adopting this ground should be obvious by now, based upon Kant’s earlier discussions of the delusion of anti-service. The resulting moral crisis is also thus clear: “If the delusion... reaches heights of enthusiasm... virtue finally becomes loathsome to him and an object of contempt” (6.201). The criticism concludes with a striking reiteration of the beginning of part one: “it is therefore no wonder if it is publicly complained: that religion still contributes ever so little to the betterment of men” (6.201).²⁵² The *Religion* thus ends as it begins, with a complaint, but the two complaints are different in that the opening

²⁵² The purpose of all this exposition is not to repeat earlier moral criticism of the *Religion* but to show that, since fetishism (as has already been shown) supports popery and false religion, its reform is an essential element to returning man to the pure moral faith of religion. This is not simply critique but the basis for reform.

complaint is the vengeful world-hating cry of the priest and the closing complaint is the justified charge of the moral educator and philosopher.

A brief look at the treatment of the four kinds of service will suffice to show Kant's prescriptions for reform and his method in presenting them.

The first kind of service,²⁵³ or deluded faith, is private prayer.²⁵⁴ Originally prayer was meant to be a means "of establishing this [moral] good firmly within us, and repeatedly to awaken in our heart the disposition for it" (6.193). Now, when it takes on the character of "an inner service of God" and thus a means of grace, it "is a superstitious delusion" (6.194) because, in the mere "declaring of a wish to a being who has no need of any declaration regarding the inner disposition of the wisher" (6.194), does not really serve God. The "spirit of prayer" is a "sincere wish to please God in all our doing and nondoinings" and is thus "the disposition... to pursue these as though they occurred in the service of God... But to clothe this wish in words and formulas... can, at best, only carry with it the means for the continual stimulation of that disposition within us" (6.195). This means is not necessary to all men; what is necessary is "to endeavor that, through progressive purification and elevation of the moral disposition" so that "the spirit of

²⁵³ In this section is a useful universal comment: "Besides, men, corresponding to the tuning of their minds toward religion, like to transform into court-service whatever has a proper connection only to moral betterment" (6.197-8). Children should be warned away from this, "because otherwise all the devout attestations of awe bring nothing other than hypocritical reverence of God instead of practical service...."

²⁵⁴ That this purely internal and individual act should receive the first and the most extensive treatment by Kant is explained by its status as the root of the other practices, just as the historical and political effects of radical evil must be traced back to nonpolitical source in the *Willkür*. Again, the political has the roots of its progress or decline in the moral. Kant's treatment of the four kinds of service accordingly begins with the most private and leads to the most public.

prayer alone should be sufficiently stimulated within us, and that its letter... could finally fall away” (6.197).

Churchgoing began as a means of “propagating [the moral good] externally through public assembly on days legally consecrated thereto, in order that religious doctrines and wishes (together with wishes of the same kind) be loudly proclaimed and thereby fully shared” (6.193). It is for the purposes of “betterment” – in the sense of “the actual betterment of man” whereby “man systematically sets to work, lays firm principles deep in his heart in accordance with well-understood concepts, erects thereupon dispositions appropriate to the relative importance of the duties connected with these principles, strengthens them and secures them against the attack of the inclinations and, as it were, *builds up* a new man as a *temple of God*” (6.198n). The restriction placed upon this is that “the church does not contain formalities that might lead to idolatry and can thus burden the conscience” (6.199). An example of this abuse is the adoration of Christ! Unfortunately, however, the church-goer is tempted to use this as a means of grace, and thus falls prey to the delusion that “might indeed suit the way of thinking of a good *citizen* in a *political community*.” The “external propriety” that is found in churchgoing “debases” “the quality of the citizen as citizen in the kingdom of God” and “serves to hide under a deceptive veneer, from the eyes of others and even from his own, the bad moral content of his disposition” (6.199).

Rites of initiation, such as baptism in Christianity, were originally a means “of transmitting [the moral good] to posterity through the reception of new members joining the fellowship of faith, it being a duty also to instruct them in this faith” (6.193). It is “a

solemnity rich in meaning which imposes grave obligations either upon the initiate... or upon the witnesses” and it “has something holy for its end (the formation of man...)” (6.199). But, as with the other ways of service in their original purpose, it “is not, in itself, a holy action” in the way of a “means of grace.” The notion of washing away all sins through baptism, as claimed the “early Greek church,” is “a delusion that openly betrayed its ties to an almost more than pagan superstition” (6.199). What makes it “almost more than pagan”?

The fourth kind of service, communion, was meant to be a means “of maintaining this fellowship through repeated public formalities which stabilize the union of its members into an ethical body – this, according to the principle of the mutual equality of the members’ rights and their sharing in all the fruits of moral goodness” (6.193). Understood properly, this follows the “example” and preserves the “memory” of the founder of the church, and “may well assume the form of a ritual communal partaking at the same table” (6.199). In this way it “has in it something great which expands people’s narrow, selfish, and intolerant way of thinking, especially in religious matters, to the idea of a cosmopolitan *moral community*” (6.199). It is a “good means of enlivening a community to the moral disposition of brotherly love which it presents” (6.200). But: “to boast that God has attached special graces” to it, “and to incorporate among the articles of faith the proposition that the ritual, though a purely churchly action, is in addition a *means of grace*” – “this is a delusion of religion which cannot but work counter to the spirit of religion” (6.200).

In a final comment on communion, which may be taken as a statement regarding all the forms of deluded service, Kant notes that “priestcraft would thus be, in general, the dominion which the clergy has usurped over minds by pretending to have exclusive possession of the means of grace” (6.200). In raising the spectre of popery, Kant indicates a third and the greatest kind of reform necessary to historical Christianity (and to historical church-faith as a whole), the reorientation and reeducation of the priest.

The greatest suggestion for the reform of the education is the *Religion* book, as a doctrine of religion, itself. As he announces in the second half of the preface to the first edition,

I even dare to bring in a proposal: whether it would not do some good, every time upon completion of the academic instruction in biblical theology, to add by way of conclusion, as requisite to the complete equipping of the candidate, a special lecture on the pure philosophical doctrine of religion (which could make use of everything, even the Bible) according to a guide like this book (or another also, if a better one of the same kind can be had). [6.10]

This will enable the potential biblical theologian to see that he cannot dismiss reason as a necessary tool of theology. Furthermore, because it amounts to a priestly capitulation to the point of view of the philosopher-pedagogues, it will also reestablish the prominence of the moral matter at the heart of the doctrine of religion –

the matter itself is contained in the most popular instruction for children or in sermons, if even in other words, and is easily understandable. If only one could claim as much about the mysteries of divine nature, which are considered part of religious doctrine and are brought into the catechisms as though they were wholly popular but must later be transformed into moral concepts if they are to become understandable to everyone. [6.14]

The priest, as the protector, interpreter, and intermediary between historical faith and the members of the church community, is – insofar as he is the bearer of the moral worth or

unworth of that faith – the pivot of Kant’s reform of Christianity. The doctrine of religion, forming the new enlightened – or at least illuminated – priest, will then be transformed to the faithful, and will provide the basis of the moral education for which Kant has called, on both a personal²⁵⁵ and social²⁵⁶ level.²⁵⁷ With the presence of a religion within the boundaries of mere reason, and which overarches and informs all concrete church-faiths and ways of faith, “tolerance”²⁵⁸ is possible (6.123n). Kantian politics is not possible without this moral reform of Christian man’s social existence. Yet, as the sudden reference above to the second half of the preface to the first edition, there is more to the *Religion* than noted thus far. It is appropriate to bring up the additional, and ultimate, concern at this point, for it underlies the raising of all of the problems treated in the *Religion* and itself is the cause of the chief “problem” in Kant’s professional life. Found in all the strands of argument in the *Religion* – religion vs. reason, religion vs. morality, religion vs. political life – is the conflict between the theologian and the philosopher, that is, the (for Kant) irreconcilable ways of life of faith and knowledge. We shall turn to this central conflict now.

²⁵⁵ See 6.48-9, 182.

²⁵⁶ See 6.105-6, 122-3, 145, 162-3, 175-6.

²⁵⁷ One can also look to Kant’s discussion of the “rational clergyman” in his teaching about miracles (6.87).

²⁵⁸ *Verträglichkeit* may also be rendered “agreement”.

5. An Example of Obedience: The *Religion* and the Philosopher

By laying out the doctrine of religion, Kant has displayed to the reader several important divisions – for example, theoretical knowledge versus practical faith; rational versus cultic religion; and moral versus churchly faith; -- but there remains one not yet addressed, a division that animates all of the doctrine of religion (at least in its presentation in the *Religion*). This division, its thematic importance underscored by its initial treatment in the second half of the first preface,²⁵⁹ is the relationship of the philosopher himself to religion and its theologians.²⁶⁰ With this theme the present study comes full circle to the questions of the boundaries of mere reason and of reason's task as the judge of religion, only now the questions are posed in more practical terms. As a result, in combination with the philosophical examination of the religious roots of social-political life (treated in chapter four), this practical depiction of philosophy's self-conduct as a part of that political life,²⁶¹ one can see that Kant's book on religion is a work of political philosophy in its twofold and full sense.

²⁵⁹ As was pointed out in chapter three, the first half of the preface to the first edition deals with the relationship of morals to religion. The second half commences after a clear break in the text.

²⁶⁰ Karth Barth writes as follows: "Kant... did not first wait for the theologians to declare their attitude to his philosophy, but immediately advanced to meet them – in accordance with the careful thought and precision he devoted to all his work – by dictating his own terms for peace, i.e. by giving an explicit and exhaustive explanation of the way he thought this attitude should be formed. These terms for peace are contained in his philosophy of religion..." (Barth, p. 162).

²⁶¹ Kuehn: the *Religion* "was not just a theoretical treatise, meant as a contribution to the philosophy of religion; it was also a political act. In fact, it was primarily a political act." (p. 371) I agree with Kuehn this far, but suggest that this political act was more than just the following: "Kant hoped (perhaps naively) to alter the conduct of his readers, including that of the king." This is true, too, but it was furthermore a political act in the way in which it presented an act for consideration in the speculative mode: it was aimed not only (or perhaps even primarily) reform but rather thought. Kuehn would be at odds with the earlier assertion of Fackenheim: the turn to radical evil "is not due to political considerations of any kind, to a desire to appease intolerant theologians or the Prussian censor. Nor is it due to the encroachment of

A. The Philosopher and the Theologian: The First Preface Again

Kant's introduction to the question of philosophy's relationship to theology²⁶² does not begin as such; instead the third preface brings us to this question indirectly, first by a summing up of what much of the book will show (and which chapters two through four have discussed). Its tone is half-triumphant, half-cautionary, mentioning first the moral necessity and desirability of religion and second the moral and political dangers involved with its actual practice:

If morality cognizes in the holiness of its law an object worthy of the greatest *respect*, at the level of religion it presents an object of *worship* in the highest cause that carries out this law, and thus morality appears in its majesty. Everything, however, even the most sublime, is diminished under the hands of men whenever they apply its idea to their use. [6.6-7]²⁶³

None of this is new, but one begins to wonder what Kant is up to as the rest of the paragraph unfolds:

What can be truthfully revered only as respect for it is free, is compelled to accommodate itself to forms which can obtain prestige only through coercive laws, and what of itself exposes itself to the public criticism of all men, must submit to a criticism which has authority, i.e. to censorship. [6.8]

theological upon philosophical principles" (Fackenheim, p. 20). He continues in a footnote: "one group of critics accused him of seeking to undermine revealed theology, whereas the other group accused him of giving a mere theological apologetic in pseudo-philosophical form. As far as Kant's intentions are concerned, both accusations are equally unjust. And as regards performance, there may be some justice in the former criticism, but (as this paper seeks to show) there is none whatever in the latter" (p. 195).

²⁶² One must keep in mind that religion and theology are not identical.

²⁶³ This mention of the hands of men not only recalls the formulation of Rousseau at the beginning of *Emile* but also foreshadows two passages occurring later in the *Religion*: "The sublime but never fully reachable idea of an ethical community diminishes under human hands..." (6.100). "Lucky! If such a book came to human hands and contains, alongside its statutes, as laws of faith the purest moral doctrine of religion with completeness..." (6.107).

With this introduction of what appears to be legitimate censorship, Kant in turn submits himself and his work to the same judgment: if religion itself must obey authority, “it is proper for an essay, which is devoted to the determinate concept of [religion] to give itself over as an example of this obedience” (6.8).²⁶⁴ At first glance, Kant would seem to deport himself in a manner unbecoming the author of the essay, “What is Enlightenment?” with its command, “Dare to Think,”²⁶⁵ but at least his obedience is posterior to his argument. Kant’s stated desire to be obedient initiates a discussion, at first noncommittal in tone and then darkly prophetic, of the appropriate judge of his efforts.

Kant’s discussion of the appropriate censor successfully puts off, for another moment, a clash between philosopher and theologian by putting theologians into opposition with each other. In presenting the theologian as the proper censor of books such as the *Religion* Kant merely reiterates the established order, and all but avoids an argument justifying the theologian’s right as judge. To the extent that he does show the theologian to be the right censor, it is in terms of his concern for the Heil either of souls alone or also of the sciences. The two different objects of concern allow Kant to make a

²⁶⁴ Kuehn is correct in observing that, if one combines this with the opening of the first half of the preface, one finds a clear statement of defiance. Furthermore, Kuehn observes that “Kant admits that the censorship decree is indeed a law, but he suggests that insofar as it is incompatible with the large majority of the laws (passed under Frederick, one might add), it is obedience that makes defiance necessary.” (Kuehn, p. 366).

²⁶⁵ “For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but freedom, and indeed the most harmless among all the things to which this term can properly be applied. It is the freedom to make public use of one’s reason at every point. But I hear on all sides, ‘Do not argue!’ The officer says: ‘Do not argue but drill!’ The tax collector: ‘Do not argue but pay!’ The cleric: ‘Do not argue but believe!’ Only one prince in the world says, ‘Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, but obey!’ Everywhere there is restriction on freedom.” (8.36-7; Beck trans. Cf. KrV A752/B780.) Clarke notes in his interpretation of this short but deceptive essay that “To put the worst possible construction on it, the famous formula ‘argue as much as you like only obey’ seems to purchase freedom of speech at the price of making it politically irrelevant.” As Clarke shows, however, “Kant makes a point of saying that restrictions on the private use of reason are conducive to enlightenment” (Clarke, p. 62).

distinction of theologians, calling the former “divines” and the latter “scholars.” Despite the distinction both types of theologian share the principle of being *biblical* theologians,²⁶⁶ and yet, because of his membership in a university faculty, it is the scholar who has primacy over the divine in matters of censorship.²⁶⁷ That Kant agrees with this common practice and shows it in a favorable light once again displays his mode of taking the middle way, for it would be rash to assert that no theologian should have the authority to judge books on religion and a disastrous concession to put the judgment in the hands of a divine who lacks knowledge of science beyond biblical theology. Of course, there is no need for him to think about this very much:

If departs from this rule, so must it finally come to the point where it has already once been (for example, at the time of Galileo), namely that the biblical theologian, so as to humble the pride of the sciences and spare himself the bother on them, might break into astronomy or other sciences, the ancient history of the earth for example, and take charge of all the attempts of the human understanding, just as those peoples who, finding in themselves neither ability nor resolution enough to defend themselves against threats of attack, transform all about them into a wilderness. [6.8-9]

²⁶⁶ In using the label of “biblical theologian” rather than theologian simply, Barth suggests, Kant indicates something: he ponders “the possibility of a theology which would be different from the philosophical theology he himself was propounding. He explicitly calls this other theology, which limits philosophical theology, ‘biblical theology’, and it is his wish that the affairs of this biblical theology should not ‘be allowed to mingle’ with those of philosophy. He wants rather to form for it a definite distinct idea as befits its own peculiar nature.” (Barth, p. 192)

²⁶⁷ The reader is led to wonder how this discussion figures in with the subordination of the scripture scholar to the scripture interpreter in part three (6.112-13), wherein is also curiously asserted that “Rational religion and scripture scholarship are thus the peculiarly appointed interpreters and custodians of a holy document. It falls to the eye that these, in their public use of their insights and discoveries in this field, cannot at all be hindered by the worldly arm nor be bound in certain statements of faith; for otherwise the laity would compel the clergy to champion their opinion which they have only from their learning from these men.” The paragraph concludes by stressing the importance of the state trusting the consciences of moral scholars and men with the governance of the church, which thus points to the conclusion of part four, which treats conscience.

The reference to Galileo is no mere aside, and brings to the reader's attention the Galileo case as a paradigm of the early modern encounters between philosophy and religion.²⁶⁸

Other philosophers previous to Kant, Descartes for example, point to the Galileo precedent as a cause for concern.²⁶⁹ The biblical theologian who for sinister reasons would harm the sciences and “transform everything around him into a wasteland” recalls the priest who makes the happiness of the Golden Age disappear as a dream.

Although this seems to be a prudent move, it might also strike the reader that in trusting his ability to publish to biblical theologians – even if they be scholars – Kant is hanging his hat on a loose nail: what is to prevent even the scholarly theologians from giving in to the propensity of the priest?²⁷⁰ That this question is on Kant's mind as well is clear from the passage just quoted, when he refers to the danger not of a divine but of a biblical theologian: it is as a biblical theologian, not as a simple caretaker of souls, that he poses the threat. Kant has thus shifted the conflict from theologian versus theologian to

²⁶⁸ Knippenberg observes that, unlike the modern political philosophers, the works of classical political philosophers reflect the two aspects of political philosophy “and are inspired by the life and death of Socrates” (p. 155). Kant presents a modern stand-in for Socrates in the person of Galileo.

²⁶⁹ In part five of his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes obliquely mentions his treatise on *The World*, which “certain considerations prevented me from publishing” – except in the measured presentation in the *Discourse*. Three years earlier, Descartes had written the following in a letter to Marin Mersenne: “You doubtless know that Galileo has recently been censured by the Inquisitors of the Faith, and that his opinion concerning the motion of the earth has been condemned as heretical... I know very well that it could be said that everything that the Inquisitors of Rome have decided is not for all that automatically an article of faith... But I am not so much in love with my own opinions as to want to make use of such exceptions, in order to have the means of maintaining them. And the desire that I have to live in peace and to continue the life I have embarked on, taking as my device the motto: he lives well who hides well, means that I am happy to be freed from the fear I had of acquiring, by means of my writing, more knowledge than I desire...” (April 1634; Ariew trans.) Whether Kant follows Descartes in his actions, or at least is as successful, remains to be seen. Hobbes alludes to Galileo in the illuminating last paragraph of *Leviathan*, ch. 46.

²⁷⁰ In the *Conflict of the Faculties*, as Barth (p. 194) observes, Kant is more clear about the theologian's limitations.

biblical theologian versus nonbiblical theologian. We have further confirmation that this is Kant's view if we look at the beginning of the succeeding paragraph, where he presents a counterweight not to the divine but to the biblical theologian generally: "But there stands against biblical theology in the field of the sciences a philosophical theology, which is a good entrusted to another faculty" (6.9). Philosophical theology would seem to be the hero in this drama, but it would also seem to be subordinate to biblical theology anyway, but before addressing that problem, let us examine what Kant says about that philosophical theology itself, for he provides a reflection on his own mode of action in the *Religion*.

For philosophical theology Kant claims perfect freedom of operation in using, among other sources, the Bible "toward the corroboration and explanation of its statements", "if only it remains within the boundaries of mere reason" (6.9), thus calling to mind the discussion of the concentric circles that he would go on to provide in the second preface and exemplify in the argument of the *Religion*. To calm the concerns of both types of theologians Kant promises that philosophical theology will keep its findings to itself for its own purposes, "without carrying these statements into biblical theology and its public doctrines, which is the privilege of the Geistliche": both the pulpits and the departments of theology will be safe from the efforts of the philosophical theologians. It would seem that an "essay" determining the concept of religion, if properly conducted, would have statements that have no connection or implication to academic or public religious life, but this is hard to believe about the *Religion*, in light of our analysis in the previous chapters; certainly they do not read like mere intellectual exercises or puzzles

disconnected from moral and political (and, as we see even more now, academic) life. Passing over such thoughts in silence, Kant repeats that if the philosophical theologian does trespass his boundaries, both the divine and the scholar have authority of censorship, though the scholar has primacy because of his membership in a faculty and care for the sciences.

All this talk of trespassing boundaries leads one to wonder further about Kant's image of concentric circles, for if rational religion is a part of revealed religion then there is nothing of the former that is alien to the latter: what, then, would constitute a trespass of boundaries, and how could one even be possible? Further, why should theology have priority over philosophy? These very questions are addressed in the next part of the preface now under consideration. After repeating the authority of the biblical theologians to censor and the primacy of the scholar over the divine in this right, Kant writes the following:

And indeed in such a case the prime censorship stands with [the theology] faculty, not the philosophical; for it is privileged for certain doctrines, but [the other] pursues its own business freely, and therefore only [the theological] can wield the complaint that its exclusive right has experience damage. [6.9]

Those "certain doctrines" are, for example, the historical accounts of the miracles of Christ, as opposed to the essence of God – the latter a part of both circles and the former only of one. Since biblical theology has every right to address the question of God's essence, philosophical theology has no right of censorship in this matter – but once philosophical theologians trespass into questions related to the miracles of Christ, since

these doctrines are properly biblical rather than philosophical in nature, the biblical theologian has right of censorship.

The unsettling fact, however, is that Kant *has* treated of them in his philosophical doctrine of religion.²⁷¹ Is the reader expected to overlook the skeptical or at least agnostic treatment of miracles and keep it in mind only when thinking philosophically about religious questions? It is difficult to imagine that this is so, especially since the book, or at least the point of view it expresses, can be communicated to everyone, including women and children. Other examples of this problem may be provided.²⁷²

Ultimately, the philosophical theologian's trespass of theological boundaries is a matter not of improper borrowing but of improper importation.²⁷³ The importance of this distinction is that the philosopher's borrowing of material belonging to biblical theology does not at all harm biblical theology, whereas importing foreign material into biblical theology carries with it the possibility of harm – although there can be no absolute

²⁷¹ See chapter two above for its discussion of the second parergon.

²⁷² See, for example the following, which concludes part one: “That which is said here must not be seen as if it ought to be scriptural interpretation, which lies outside the boundaries of the authority of mere reason. One can clarify how one makes a moral use of a historical account without thereby deciding whether this is also the sense of the scribe or only our reading into it, if this sense is true in itself, without respect to all historical proof, and thereby the only sense according to which we can derive some betterment from [scripture] which would otherwise be only a fruitless increase of our historical cognition” (6.43-4n).

²⁷³ “But doubt on account of the encroachment, regardless of the approach of the two complete doctrines to each other, and the concern of the overstepping of the boundaries on the part of philosophical theology, is easily to be averted, if one only considers that this nuisance does not happen in that the philosopher *borrow*s from biblical theology in order to use it for his own intention (for the latter will itself not wish to be in denial that it does not contain much in common with the doctrines of mere reason, and moreover also much pertaining to historiography or language scholarship and subject to their censorship); assuming that he uses what he borrows from it in a meaning adequate to mere reason but perhaps not pleasing to the [biblical theologian]! – but rather only insofar as he *brings* something *into* [biblical theology], and thereby wishes to set it for another purpose than its setup permits.” (6.9-10)

restriction on importing, since biblical theology itself borrows not only some things held in common with philosophy but also history and linguistics. To insist on an absolute restriction would thus force the theologian to avoid trespassing onto philosophical property, in short, to operate without the use of reason itself. Biblical theology, it turns out, depends upon reason and thus philosophy, a faculty that would seem to be subordinate. Kant's argument is therefore directed not toward complete fideists but rather toward reasonable (if not fully rational or philosophical) partisans of theology. If the biblical theologian wishes to close himself off from philosophy entirely,

... one can easily foresee on which side the loss would be; for a religion which unthinkingly announces a war on reason will not hold out at length against it. [6.10]

Despite the conciliatory tone, this passage indirectly states the authority of philosophy rather than its subordination. Philosophy is the handmaiden carrying the torch rather than the coattails.

Amongst this discussion remains the unanswered question as to Kant's overconfident reliance on the biblical theologians in the university faculty, for how can they, even as scientists, be relied upon to prevent the divines and even their priestly selves from overzealous censorship of the philosophers? Now comes the answer:

I even dare to bring in a proposal: whether it would not do some good, every time upon completion of the academic instruction in biblical theology, to add by way of conclusion, as requisite to the complete equipping of the candidate, a special lecture on the pure philosophical doctrine of religion (which could make use of everything, even the Bible) according to a guide like this book (or another also, if a better one of the same kind can be had). [6.10]

The culmination of the training of biblical theologians – one would assume not only the future scholars but the potential divines as well – would thus be something very much like the argument of the *Religion* book. Much more likely, therefore, would be the sympathy of the theology faculty for the philosophical faculty, but furthermore the exposure of the potential divines to even the suspicion cast on the historical accuracy of the Bible would seem to liberalize (or corrupt, depending on whom one asks) the new generations of divines. Thus, even if not in doctrine, at least in act, the philosopher in Kant’s plan would trespass the boundaries but in so doing would guarantee his safety in doing that very thing.

Kant’s prudential suggestions for seminary education do not stop there, for, as outrageous as they are, they must be made agreeable to the most fervent of the biblical theologians. To this end Kant suggest they do what, if we recall the doctrine of method in the *Critique of Pure Reason*,²⁷⁴ will surely lead to their downfall: “Then the biblical theologian may be of one mind with the philosopher, or believe that he must refute him; if only he hears him. For thus alone can he be armed in advance against all the difficulties which this one [i.e. the philosopher] may make for him” (6.10).²⁷⁵ If the

²⁷⁴ See, especially, “The Discipline of Pure Reason in Regard to its Polemic Use” (A738/B766-A757/B785). On this issue see Michael Clark and Stanley Rosen articles.

²⁷⁵ Barth writes as follows: “The contemplation of revelation, or alternatively of the reason which believes positively and concretely as such and in itself, has for the philosopher the significance of contemplating the border beyond which he feels, declares and conducts himself as one not competent, as a spectator, as a member of another faculty which is not qualified to judge of the matter, giving way respectfully and a little maliciously to the theologian, not contesting what he says, but not expressing agreement either, interested, but disclaiming all responsibility, waiting to see whether the other, the theologian, will find the desire and the courage really to take up the position which is his due as the proclaimer of revelation, of religion, that is, within and without the limits of reason alone.” (pp. 164-5)

philosopher has the stronger argument, or at least the argument that seems the strongest, the theologian, if he is to remain faithful to reason, would have to give his assent to it.²⁷⁶

The second half of the first preface brings to the reader's attention the possible tension between philosophy and theology and more immediately both that Kant's own work – were it itself not an example of obedience – will be an example of and a cure for this tension.²⁷⁷ Our examination of other themes in the *Religion* has also brought out, at least implicitly, some examples of this tension. Most prominent among these examples is the striking comparison at the beginning of part one (and thus the starting-point for the examination of the relationship of religion and political life) of priestly pessimism and philosophical heroism (6.19-20). Another, which is the capstone to the political analysis of the work and the entryway into the more explicitly political essay "Towards Eternal Peace," is the differentiation of philosophical from theological chiasm (6.32-4).

We shall continue the investigation of the conflict between philosopher and theologian by looking at Kant's treatment of conscience. In this text the reader encounters a more general conflict, that between a representative of a statutory church-faith and the heretical but good citizen whom he is charged to judge. This conflict goes out of focus as Kant locates a more profound potential conflict within the churchman

²⁷⁶ Compare the last sentence of 6.10 to KrV A749/B777.

²⁷⁷ This is not to say that peculiar examples of cooperation are absent from the work. There is, for example the Christian improvement on the doctrines of moral philosophers (6.59, 78-82), as well as the harmony in ancient Greece of philosophers and myth (6.110-11). Further, one also reads that the goals of the philosopher and scripture scholar may be the same when moral improvement is the question (6.156-7). In all of these examples, however, one sees the Kantian doctrine of religion already reinterpreting the religious matters, for the cooperation occurs, or seems to occur, because Kant has restricted the meaning of religion already.

himself; in proclaiming the moral centrality of conscience, Kant turns the inquisitor against himself and in so doing contributes to the liberation of the good citizen who simply cannot hold as certain the teaching of a particular church-faith. Even though the situation depicted is not as narrow as that of the philosopher (for this situation pertains to every man) it still corresponds to the overall theme of philosophy's relation to theology and church-faith, and furthermore informs a comparison of the second half of the first preface to the real political effects caused by the publication of the *Religion*.

B. Conscience in Matters of Faith

The last section of part four, and thus the last text of the main body of the *Religion*, takes up the role of conscience in matters of faith.²⁷⁸ The twentieth-century reader might expect this treatment to pertain to the relationship of the philosopher to religion and political life as has just been discussed, and to expect a doctrine of freedom of conscience to be laid out, whereby the philosopher is proclaimed to be free to think and utter whatever he think true of faith, whether of the moral or the church type. These expectations will be met in substance if not in letter, for what Kant offers is not a blanket allowance for the free-thinker but rather a serious admonition for those who would limit that free-thinker.

The obvious rhetorical strategy of forcing the believer to grant (or otherwise to take the gravest of risks) freedom to the individual rather than of asserting the freedom of the individual (at the risk of facing the frustration of that assertion) has been prepared in

²⁷⁸ For a helpful account of the thought of some of Kant's predecessors regarding conscience, see Fortin, pp. 65-84.

earlier mentions of conscience.²⁷⁹ To distort or overcome the conscience is to put oneself at great moral risk, and so to assert the guidance of the conscience is meant as a restriction rather than a liberation – depending on whose conscious is invoked. So much for the foreground of this section.

The question at hand in the section on conscience is how it could operate as a “guiding thread in the most ticklish moral decisions” (6.185). To arrive at the answer Kant offers, and proceeds from, two statements²⁸⁰ about conscience, but relies more heavily on the second in the answer itself. The reason for this largely seems to be that the first statement allows Kant to indicate what conscience is not (i.e. it is not, and it does not do the tasks of, either the understanding or practical reason²⁸¹), whereas the second he writes directly about what conscience is. In exploring the first statement, he utters a “moral principle” that “one ought to wager nothing on the danger that he is not right”, so as to point out the responsibility we have to determine the rectitude of our proposed actions. Of further interest, however, is the Latin gloss to Kant’s utterance – yet another

²⁷⁹ See especially 6.38, which mentions those self-deceivers who are “conscientious in their opinion” and 6.120, which states the moralists’ criticism of the priests for attempting to overcome the conscience of the faithful. The importance of conscience is suggested to the reader by Kant’s words “guiding thread of conscience” in the section title echoing the earlier “Guiding thread of the ethical need” at 6.98.

²⁸⁰ First he writes that “*The conscience is a consciousness that is for itself a duty*” (6.185). This seems less a definition than a statement of one of the characteristics of conscience. After an exploration of the question resulting from this statement, Kant offers a second articulation, this one more definitional: “*the moral power of judgment judging itself*” (6.186).

²⁸¹ Conscience does not do the work of the understanding: “Whether an action is generally right or not right is given to the understanding”, although it is related to understanding in that conscience disposes me to be certain (gewiss) of the rightness of my proposed action.

classical quotation, this one from a letter of Pliny to the historian Suetonius.²⁸² Pliny writes to his client, who is worried about a lawsuit of which he is a party, warning Suetonius that his “terrifying dream” is not cause for concern about the outcome of the lawsuit. The lawyer advises his client to turn the dream to a good meaning and thus not to be troubled by it, and at this point he gives the advice which is the “precept” offered by the “most cautious” persons: “Quod dubites, ne feceris.” The sense of the quotation, and the character of its “most cautious” sources, correspond to the admonition Kant is about to give with respect to conscience, so the use of the quotation is illustrative of the point about to be made. But Kant’s use of Pliny may go further: Pliny’s own letter contains a quotation from the *Iliad*, in which Zeus is claimed to be the source of dreams,²⁸³ a remarkable coincidence in light of what Kant is about to write in the next couple of paragraphs.

After emphasizing the aspect of duty to be found in conscience Kant turns to a more direct consideration of what conscience is and does. The central point springs from a comparison of the relative roles of conscience and freedom, for although they are not identical,²⁸⁴ they are related: by conscience reason judges itself, and man judges himself, as to whether his reason has properly determined the righteousness of a proposed action. Conscience seems to be that by which man and his reason keep themselves honest.

²⁸² *C. Plinii Caecilii Secundi Epistularum*, I.18.

²⁸³ *Iliad*, 1.63. Achilles suggests to Agamemnon that he inquire into the cause of Apollo’s anger.

²⁸⁴ “The conscience does not judge actions as cases which stand under the law; for that is what reason does so far as it is subjectively practical”.

Again we see that for Kant the conscience is a restrictive rather than permissive force in human morality. That Kant wishes to inspire the consciences not of philosophers or pedagogues but of the guardians of established faith, and thus to make more free the latter by reminding the former of their duty, is suggested by the example he offers.

The example is of an inquisitor²⁸⁵ who must judge a “so-called” heretic who is in all other aspects a “good citizen”. Kant asks in his own name whether a death sentence in the case reflects the inquisitor’s judgement according to his conscience. The other possibility, that the inquisitor made the judgment without conscience, springs from the observation that he cannot be “certain” that he did not act unrighteously: since the basis of his judgment is the revealed doctrine supporting his statutory faith, both that doctrine and his interpretation of it must be without doubt. Can the inquisitor be said to be “certain” of the truth and meaning of that revelation? What *is* “certain” is that unless directly instructed by divine will, one cannot put a man to death for his religious faith. Further, where is that divine will asserted but in historical documents such as the Abraham story – documents themselves which must be interpreted carefully. Kant claims quite categorically: “Thus it is situated with all historical and apparitional faiths: namely, that there always remains the possibility to meet an error in it”, and any following a like faith in the example would be “unconscionable”. Human duty is certain, divine command not.

²⁸⁵ The German is *Ketzerrichter*, which has a resonance not in the English to heretic (*Ketzer*). The English also obscures the “-richter” in the German word, which echoes the verb used severeral times in the previous and following paragraphs apropos reason’s estimation of itself and man’s of himself.

Kant takes the truth drawn out of the extreme example of the inquisitor and the heretic and extends it into more banal situations, such as clerical expectation of Sunday worship and professions of faith by those who do not at all understand the content of the profession. It would seem that any expectation of a churchman as traditionally understood has bad conscience at its root. By replacing the “so-called” security maxim²⁸⁶ in matters of faith with a “genuine” one possessing “true moral security”²⁸⁷, Kant sets up the inquisitor and every other cleric and priest as the judge of himself rather than of his current or would-be congregation.

Although rather wide in scope in terms of religious practice alone, Kant’s thoughts regarding conscience extend into human freedom as it emerges not only in church but also in household and state. Thus we see that in considering religion Kant is prompted by necessity to touch on the social and political aspects of human life wherein a question of justice is asked. The present instance occurs in a footnote to the paragraph which presents the maxims of security. In the course of reiterating the distinction between the faithful who have made a small step toward the freedom to think and those faithful who remain fully under the yoke of priestly faith, Kant offers a note correcting the language of this distinction:

²⁸⁶ “If what I profess about God be true, so I have hit the mark; if not true and also nothing in itself otherwise prohibited: I have merely believed it superflously, which was not at all necessary, but I have merely saddled myself with some trouble, which is no crime” (6.188). This maxim is in turn grounded on the delusion that makes insincerity in religious confessions a principle.

²⁸⁷ “Whatever can be known to me as a means or as a condition of blessedness, not through my own reason but rather only through revelation into my profession solely by means of a historical faith, does not however contradict pure moral principles, I can in no way believe and assert for certain, but also so little can I deny it as certainly false. Nevertheless, without determining something about this, I figure that what beneficial matter it may contain, for me it will come to good insofar as I not make myself unworthy through some deficiency of moral disposition in a good life-conduct.” (6.189)

I admit that I cannot find myself well in the expression which rather clever men use... According to such a premise, freedom will never enter; for one cannot *ripen* to freedom whenever one is not set in freedom beforehand (one must be free so as to be able to use one's powers with purpose in freedom). [6.188n]

This is not to deny the necessity, depending on the temporal circumstances, of delaying the release of men into political, economic, and religious freedom, but to make this delay an unending principle is “an interference in the regalia of the godhood itself, which created men for freedom.” To commit such an interference and to achieve success doing it may be helpful to the ruler, but whether it is just is at best doubtful – which again returns us to the role of conscience and its connection to certainty.

Kant concludes his investigation into conscience as guiding thread in matters of faith by posing a question for every author of a creed, every teacher of a church, every man, and thus (most importantly) every reader of the *Religion*: “do you dare to affirm the truth of those statements in the presence of the knower of hearts, with [the risk of] the renunciation of all that to you has value and is holy?” (6.189). Kant's concept of human nature leads him to suspect that no one, not even the “boldest teacher of the faith”, is willing to put his own eternal soul on the line in answer to this question, but he thus encounters the puzzle as to why the name of “conscientiousness” is given to insistences that ignore the question articulated to every man about the truth of the statements of his faith. Such a confused notion of the conscience at work leads to the punishment of “good wills” who claim faith and beg for deliverance from the deficiencies of that faith. The sincerity of the faithful good will is met with deluded claims to service of God, resulting in “striking the freedom of man wholly to the ground” (6.190).

Thus, the main body of the *Religion* comes to a close with the quotation from Mark 9:24. Yet Kant appends a final note to this quotation, and unleashing one of his most rhapsodic statements, an encomium to sincerity.

Kant's teaching on conscience connects the essential themes of the *Religion* previously discussed: public reform of church-faith by true religion, the conflict between the priest and the philosopher-pedagogue, and dishonesty and delusion in opposition to sincerity. As the final text of the main four parts of the *Religion* it is the last word and thus the conclusion toward which the various levels of the text must lead. But, as the last word and furthermore as a public challenge to the enemies of true religion and moral faith, it also provides the terms in which we may understand Kant's public conflict with, and silencing by, those enemies. Insofar as the discussion of conscience reflects back to the second half of the first preface, it can be said to connect that preface to the public effect of the *Religion* as a published book. Has Kant grounded toleration through altering the way of thinking of the priest and his congregation? For that matter, was this Kant's real intention in the first place? Before answering these questions let us look briefly at the immediate reception to the published *Religion*.

C. The Public Life of the *Religion*

In the light of Kant's own presentation of his doctrine of religion the reader is led to ask what fate the book had in the hands of the theological censor.²⁸⁸ This is a question less of

²⁸⁸ Barth, of course one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, refers to "the Kant who, upon the border between philosophy and theology and in that he was not able to avoid taking half a step over this border, did in effect intrude upon theological matters as a philosopher." (Barth, p. 192)

historical interest than of bearing out our contention that the writing and publishing²⁸⁹ of the book is itself an act of political philosophizing. Before examining parts of the well-documented publication history of the *Religion*, we can raise a bit of internal evidence from the preface to the second edition, wherein Kant answers a few objections or suspicions about the book. The first of these, which prompted the concentric-circles image and the language of experiment, is the suspicion about the title and perhaps the whole of the book. (The grammar of the sentence is ambiguous.) And this raises the question of whether Kant is an esoteric writer: is he concealing something?²⁹⁰

It can hardly be expected that Kant, who all his life despised liars and devoted a great deal of philosophical energy against lying, himself could have engaged in any form of literary duplicity.²⁹¹ But nor can it be denied that a fog of vagueness hangs over many of his writings, and that his book on religion is a prime example of a vagueness that is even intentional and revealing of something. In illustrating the perceived distinction between one's conduct in politics as opposed to morals, Kant calls upon the command to

²⁸⁹ In the same way, and more obviously, the writing and not-publishing (for several years) of the *Conflict of the Faculties* is such an act, whereby Kant is, in Isaac Babel's words, a "conspirator of silence" who then shows that conspiracy in print.

²⁹⁰ "His philosophy of religion was written subject to the pressure, or in the shadow, at least, of Wöllner's edict of religion. We must therefore certainly bear in mind the fact that he was prevented from developing a decidedly anti-theological absolutism by restraints imposed from without, too. But he cannot be understood solely from this point of view either, unless we intend to question his character in a way for which we have no reason." (Barth, p. 195) But Barth interestingly adds a few sentences later: "Perhaps the placing of philosophy and theology side by side is after all a matter which cannot be spoken without irony – and from the theological side too!"

²⁹¹ "I would think... that surely nothing in the world is reconcilable more poorly with the aim of maintaining a good cause than are insidiousness, dissimulation, and fraud." (KrV A749/B777)

be wise as serpents yet innocent as doves.²⁹² Especially in the short political works and the works on religion this command can be said to illuminate the careful and sly character of his writing.

One might conclude these particular remarks by noting Strauss' own cautious statements about Kant's manner of writing. In one book he lists Kant among the many philosophical authors whose biographies and even book-titles suggest

that they witnessed or suffered, during at least part of their lifetimes, a kind of persecution which was more tangible than social ostracism. Nor should be overlook the fact, not sufficiently stressed by all authorities, that religious persecution and persecution of free inquiry are not identical. There were times and countries in which all kinds, or at least a great variety of kinds, of worship were permitted, but free inquiry was not.²⁹³

He then continues in a footnote as follows:

In regard to Kant, whose case is in a class by itself, even a historian so little given to suspicion or any other sort of skepticism as C.E. Vaughan remarks: "We are almost led to suspect Kant of having trifled with his readers, and of nursing an esoteric sympathy with Revolution." (*Studies in the History of Political Philosophy*, Manchester, 1939, II, 83.)²⁹⁴

In a later essay, however, he makes the following apparent amendment:

After Lessing, who died in the year in which Kant published his Critique of Pure Reason, the question of exotericism seems to have been lost sight of almost completely, at least among scholars and philosophers as distinguished from novelists.²⁹⁵

²⁹² "Toward Eternal Peace" (8.370); Mt. 10:16.

²⁹³ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988 [1952]), p. 33. At the end of this passage Strauss refers the reader to H.S. Reimarus, "Von Duldung der Deisten."

²⁹⁴ Strauss, *Persecution*, p. 33 n. 12.

²⁹⁵ Leo Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 67. In a related essay, "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing," Strauss notes that a critic of his *Persecution* book "asserts that very careful philosophers like Leibniz and Kant have not been very careful readers. I had not spoken of careful philosophers but of careful writers.

The curious phrasing of this last statement reminds us of the caginess of Strauss' own manner of writing, but it remains clear that for Strauss – who is caricatured as able to find a secret meaning in everything – Kant is not a completely open book.

Yet Strauss is hardly the only commentator to mention this element of Kant's writing. For instance, Ernest Cassirer²⁹⁶ commented on the “character of compromise” that especially marks the book on religion.²⁹⁷ This apparent compromise, however, is not the result of “the purely accidental limitations of Kant's personality and character” but rather Kant's “outward consideration for the political and ecclesiastical authorities...”²⁹⁸ Because of this consideration Kant employed the “method” of Enlightenment thinkers of employing esotericism for “pedagogical” purposes.

A skeptical reader of our time might question whether, as late as the late eighteenth century, such a friction existed between philosopher and city. There is plenty of evidence and historical precedent, however, that make certain that that friction, and the resultant dangers, did exist.²⁹⁹ A puzzled reader might ask this question: if Kant wrote so

Belavel has not proved that the *Nouveaux Essais* and the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* are carefully written in the sense in which the *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di T. Livio* are carefully written” (OFKW, p. 230).

²⁹⁶ Brian Magee, too, notes that Kant “seems to have regarded the Christian religion as an importantly good thing even though insufficient; and of course the insufficiency is never explicitly asserted.” *Confessions of a Philosopher* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), p. 249. Schweitzer agrees that we must regret “that Kant, forced by unfavorable circumstances, cloaked his up-to-date thoughts in the stiff dogmatic form of the church language of his day” (Schweitzer, p. 306).

²⁹⁷ Cassirer 1981, p. 386.

²⁹⁸ Cassirer 1981, p. 387.

²⁹⁹ See Kuehn, p. 365 (on Schulz), and Winter.

carefully because of the threat to life and freedom from ecclesiastical or political authorities, where is that care? After all, while he does not write a critique of religion in the manner of Nietzsche's *Antichrist*, he is not so subtle so as to make the implicit conclusions available to any reasonably careful reader. Furthermore, he *was* caught and forbidden to write on religion again, which suggests either that he wrote very carefully and was caught by supersensitive esoteric bloodhounds, or he wrote boldly enough such that being caught was no real surprise, or (as is claimed of Machiavelli and Spinoza) his boldness in writing was a means of concealing, except for a few, a deeper boldness. One more possibility, to use Strauss' distinction, is that Kant, though he may well be a careful philosopher, is not a careful writer.³⁰⁰

The publication history of the *Religion* has received a great deal of scholarly comment, and so I shall provide only a sketch.³⁰¹ This history clearly displays Kant having full awareness of the dangers of publishing a work such as the *Religion* in the current political and cultural atmosphere, and that he decided to publish anyway leads one almost to suggest that he himself forced a confrontation. Kant originally intended for what is now the *Religion* to be published as four installments in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, a publication that had previously carried works authored by him. Whereas the first essay received the approval of the philosophy censor, the second, because it was

³⁰⁰ One cannot claim rhetorical carelessness *overall* in Kant's authorship of the *Religion*, in light of many observations made in this study, or in the face of the nuanced clues to reading it offered by Fenves, especially pp. 75-91.

³⁰¹ The following sketch relies on the detailed accounts provided by Cassirer, Hoffe, Kuehn, and Wood-diGiovanni.

seen to deal with biblical theology and thus come under the examination of the theology censor, did not.³⁰² As a result, Kant decided to publish, without substantive modification of the essays, them together as a book with only the first essay having a previous publication.³⁰³ The remaining problem of whether a philosophy or a theology faculty (Kant sent it directly to a faculty this time, and not to the censor's office) should examine a philosophical book written on theology was decided in favor of the former, perhaps because, the second part notwithstanding, the bulk of the work was philosophical rather than theological. That the book was indeed published signals a happy outcome, but Kant's failure to elude the theology censor in attempting to publish part two as an essay – with no substantive or particular criticism ever offered by that censor – no doubt brought about the prefatory remarks upon which we have been commenting. Unlike Descartes, however, who was able to maneuver past the inquisition by means of the *Meditations on First Philosophy*,³⁰⁴ it was the *Religion* itself³⁰⁵ and the short essays³⁰⁶ written about the

³⁰² It should be noted that even the first essay was sent to Berlin, where restrictions were less severe, for approval.

³⁰³ Kuehn notes that “The [second] article seemed doomed – at least as long as Kant persisted in playing by the rules.” (Kuehn, p. 363)

³⁰⁴ The cause for the writing of the *Meditations* was ecclesiastical suspicion of Descartes. See especially the prefatory letter to the Sorbonne, which, combined with the meditations themselves, is a masterpiece of rhetoric.

³⁰⁵ Kuehn observes that “Part of the book, namely the chapter on the struggle between the good and evil principles, had already been banned by the Berlin censors. Accordingly, its publication could only be construed as a slap in the face of Wöllner and his censors. They could not possibly let this pass... It almost appears as if he was trying to force their hand, that he was picking a fight with the censors.” (Kuehn, p. 365) One is reminded of Socrates in the *Apology* and the *Crito*, of a philosopher so advanced in age that he need fear very little if able to make a point. And for both men the point was the same, i.e. that the philosopher and the city exist in a state of great tension. Kant, however, moderate Enlightenment man that he was, just possibly hoped that a different precedent (not possible until the future) would be prepared for by his situation. For Kuehn, Kant's publication of the book on religion “meant not only religious freedom,

same time that prompted the royal power to prevent him from further publishing works related to religion.³⁰⁷ At the end of this forced silence, Kant published the *Conflict of the Faculties* and prefaced it with a defense of the writings that had put him in disfavor.³⁰⁸

The preface begins with a brief recounting of the situation at the time of the *Religion*.³⁰⁹ From the beginning Kant asserts his bona fides: if he had decided to be sneaky, he could have published the work without punishment if he had chosen not to sign his name to it. Because he did not, he received a letter from Woellner,³¹⁰ which until now he kept concealed from the public and to which he responded at once in writing and only now in public writing. Kant begins by expressing his “most submissive

but also civil freedom and freedom from any kind of bondage. One might have expected a swift and decisive response from the powers that be” (p. 372). The question for political philosophy is whether this should – ever – come as a surprise or whether it is an ineradicable element of the relationship of philosophy and religion/city. Contrary to Barth’s and Kuehn’s claims about Kant’s boldness we have Saner’s claim that “after the death of Frederick the Great, when the political authorities began to curtail his literary freedom, Kant let it pass, not without reservations, but in a wholly unheroic posture: ‘When the world’s strong men are in a state of intoxication, a pygmy who values his skin is well advised to stay clear of their quarrels’” (Saner, p. 2, quoting a letter to Spener). This is not quite fair to Kant, who, it seems, forced this curtailment.

³⁰⁶ Among these is “The End of All Things,” discussed in the next chapter below.

³⁰⁷ This is not to say that the *Metaphysics of Morals* and “Toward Eternal Peace,” written and published during the forbidden time, do not rely on the *Religion* and illuminate it. A further essay on the relationship of the theology and philosophy faculties, written not long after the *Religion* was published, was shelved by Kant until it became the first essay of the *Conflict of the Faculties*, itself published after Kant felt the prohibition had been lifted by the death of the sovereign.

³⁰⁸ The present dissertation will examine only a part of the preface to this work. Sensitive readings of the *Conflict* as a whole include those of Shell, Clarke, and Saner.

³⁰⁹ Quotations from this work are taken from Mary Gregor’s translation.

³¹⁰ Woellner’s phrasing of the charge is interesting. He has “long observed with great displeasure how you misuse your philosophy to distort and disparage many of the cardinal and basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures and of Christianity; how you have done this particularly in your book *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason*, as well as in other shorter treatises... [You] yourself must realize how irresponsibly you have acted against your duty as a teacher of youth and against our paternal purpose...” (SF, preface; Gregor trans.)

obedience” and then protests that his students have never witnessed his “evaluation” of the Bible and Christianity in his lectures. As for his books, particularly the *Religion*, though, the defense is more extensive.

... I have done no harm to the public *religion of the land*. This is already clear from the fact that the book in question is not at all suitable for the public: to them it is an unintelligible, closed book, only a debate among scholars of the faculty, of which people take no notice.

Rather, the higher faculties, with the guidance of the government, are free to present the findings of the book – or not – to the public as they desire. Kant offers the further defense that “Since, in the book mentioned, I make no appraisal of Christianity, I cannot be guilty of disparaging it. In fact, it is only natural religion that I appraise.” Because of this, he continues, he did not do anything other than what Michaelis did before him and followed the rules that he himself set down in the second half of the first preface to the *Religion*: he borrowed, but did not import. At the center of the *Religion* is “the highest tribute of respect to Christianity” due to its “harmony with the purest moral belief of religion.” In short, Kant relies on the rhetorical safeguards that he built into the religion book but in using them only called attention again to the very elements of the book that probably angered Woellner in the first place.

Although Knippenberg’s paper on the political character of Kant’s philosophy does not focus on, or even mention, the *Religion*, it does examine the political situation that resulted in the *Religion* controversy:

After the death of Friedrich, the intellectual climate in Prussia changed substantially... Where once it had been rather easy for scholars publicly to say almost anything they wished, they were now called to account for their writings, especially in matters of religion... The age of enlightenment seemed to have come

to an end. The government would no longer ignore the potential political consequences of scholarly activity. As a result of this experience, Kant trod more lightly...³¹¹

The question that results from this comment is whether Kant provoked his censorship or was the mere innocent victim who suffers at the hands of a suddenly repressive government. He was, after all, already aware of the political situation before he published the *Religion*, and the book itself, a strange mixture of caution and boldness, presented itself as a challenge to church faith as it existed in Prussia.³¹² “Kant’s insistence on the orthodoxy of his philosophic accounts of Christianity does not seem to have fooled anybody in the 1790s”³¹³ – and it is difficult to see how it could.

In light of what has been displayed in this chapter we must ask again the question of Kant’s political intention in writing the *Religion*. The difficulty in answering that question is exemplified in the apparent contradiction of the boldness with which Kant writes and the external obedience with which he responds to the political response to the publication. Granting Kant’s knowledge of the religious tensions, and the possible intensification of them due to Woellner’s ascendancy, and considering Kant’s occasional small but firm displays throughout adult life of religious nonconformity, it seems reasonable to conclude at least that the intention was to provoke and that the response to the provocation was expected. In the short term, then, Kant had no hope of directly altering the social-political landscape with respect to religion. This is not to suggest that

³¹¹ Knippenberg, pp. 166-67.

³¹² Even if the *Religion* did not provoke, “The End of All Things” most certainly did. See chapter six below.

³¹³ Clarke, p. 65.

he had a rather private landscape in mind when writing the *Religion*, for, as has also been seen, far too much of that book extends beyond the private moral life of the individual man; the purpose in writing was not limited to individual moral reform but rather to offer social criticism in order to bring about – eventually – religious and eventually social-political reform as a result. Whether this explains the necessity or prudence in putting his ability to write freely at risk is not clear, but perhaps the direct intention was to illustrate for his intellectual contemporaries and philosophical descendants the real situation of philosophy and religion in political life: that the way of thinking maintained by church-faith is difficult if not impossible to alter, that philosophy must remain intransigent in the face of everything that it intends to study and critique, and that theology and philosophy remain in open or concealed conflict, despite the adoption (whether sincere or merely crafty) of religion by the latter.

6. Christianity from a Liberal Standpoint: “The End of All Things”

Philosophy has often concerned itself with the obscure but important relationship between death and politics, but the investigations of Plato, Rousseau, or Hegel³¹⁴ do not equal the quirky inquisitiveness of Kant’s effort for popular readers. Despite its obvious brevity and apparent simplicity, Kant’s essay on “The End of All Things” is a contribution to this investigation and, more importantly for our purposes, to the working out of themes presented in the earlier book on religion. It was published in the same year as the *Religion* (which itself contains in scattered pages what might be seen as fragments of the shorter work³¹⁵). Clearly, a glance toward the conclusion of “The End of All Things” reveals the role of a “religion within the boundaries of mere reason,” and this is especially obvious when Kant speaks of liberal Christianity (8.338). It follows by four years the *Critique of Judgment* whose aesthetic considerations, as noted above, influence both the form (in the manner of presentation) and the content (in the manner of specific terminology and concepts within the argument) of the essay. Perhaps most revealingly, “The End of All Things” follows the “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” by eight years and precedes “Toward Perpetual Peace” by one. The former is important in light of its presentations of a “beginning” (*Anfang*) and a “conclusion” (or “resolution”; *Beschluß*)³¹⁶ to “history” (*Geschichte*); additionally, it employs an odd interpretation of

³¹⁴ For example, Plato’s *Phaedo*, Rousseau’s *Emile* (bk. 5, particularly), and Hegel’s discussions of the family and the master-slave relationship, etc.

³¹⁵ Among others, 6.65,134-36,159-60.

³¹⁶ 8.118.

the opening of Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew bible. “The End of All Things,” in contrast, examines neither a beginning nor a conclusion, but an end -- something more final than a conclusion; and it turns to Revelation, the last book of the Christian bible. This pair of essays thus represents in some way the alpha and omega of Kant’s popular writings on the human world, or at least the beginning and end of that for which we can hope from past and future history.

“Toward Perpetual Peace” is useful for consideration, for in it Kant uses as a chief theme, as he does in “The End of All Things,” the physical and moral catastrophes of the present and recent past, and several times discloses his bitterness towards patronizing religion,³¹⁷ greedy mercantilists,³¹⁸ and most notably political rulers.³¹⁹ I say “most notably,” because not only are they the most ringing denunciations in “Toward Perpetual Peace,” but they also seem to reveal a desire for revolution, that which Kant is not willing to justify. As “The End of All Things” will show, Kant’s “revolution” is not limited to the intellectual; rather, he intends to effect revolution in the practical world, but indirectly in religion rather than directly in politics proper. As I hope will become clear, “The End of All Things” is an enactment of the dictum of *Sapere aude* from the “Enlightenment” essay of ten years previous.³²⁰ By means of a humorous biblical freeplay, Kant makes possible a new conversion (*Bekehrung*) (8.332). Although its argument is popular and

³¹⁷ 8.344,367,385.

³¹⁸ 8.345,351,358-59.

³¹⁹ 8..344,351,354.

³²⁰ 8.35

self-contained, therefore, a reading of “The End of All Things” read in context helps to illuminate the whole of Kant’s political philosophy.

The argument of “The End of All Things” turns out to be completely different upon conclusion from what it is at its beginning. We can note several obvious changes, the most obvious perhaps being the turn from the individual element of the first paragraph to the quite political element of the last paragraph. Similarly, there is a change from common speech of religious belief to epistemological hairsplitting, to questions of moral right and wrong, to aesthetic principles, and finally to a political reinterpretation of Christianity. While this paper cannot make note of every twist and turn of Kant’s argument, it is obviously important at least to make note of the important ones.

One last preliminary clue to reading “The End of All Things” remains, and this is Kant’s own advice on how to read the essay. In a letter to his friend Beister written shortly before the essay’s publication, Kant claims that it might best be read as “partly miserable” (*theils kläglich*) and “partly merry” (*theils lustig*).³²¹ Such a hint suggests that this essay offers the same mixture of optimism and bitter pessimism which runs throughout “Towards Perpetual Peace.”

An Overview of the Essay

The essay begins with a common expression (*üblicher Ausdruck*) from pious language (*frommen Sprache*). A dying man goes “out of time into eternity” (8.327). Like Socrates, Kant wishes to clarify what is meant by this expression and thus to illuminate a

³²¹ Excerpts of the letter are printed in Heinrich Maier’s editorial notes in 8.504-5; the entire letter is found in 11.477f.

meaningful part of human experience. Yet Kant's desire for clarification in this instance is not for the sake of the expression itself, but rather as an introduction to a much more expansive problem; time and eternity cannot coexist, and so Kant turns ostensibly to investigate the question of eternity.³²² The following paragraphs of the essay thus purport to be an examination of the meaning or significance of eternity. We cannot blame Kant for this sudden change, or for apparently abandoning the common expression which opens the essay, for he argues that all reasoning *Volk* find in death the terrifying idea of eternity; this transcendental idea is inevitably woven (*muß verwebt sein*), like death, into human experience itself. As the essay proceeds, however, Kant uses this omnipresent idea to his own philosophical and political ends: a concern with eternity falls away as quickly as the concern for the common expression.

The contemplation of one's own death, itself a terrible thought, gives way to thinking of what happens after death. The nonscientific common man thinks of after-death eternity euphemistically but cannot always avoid darker thoughts, which lead to an abyss. For behind the common-expression understanding of eternity is an unending end, or a duration without time in nothingness. Such a thought is dreadful (*Grausendes*), attractive (*Anziehendes*), and frighteningly sublime (*furchtbar-erhaben*). Because of its obscurity and simultaneous necessity for human beings, timeless eternity is the object of insistent yet fruitless obsessive thought. Because of its sublimity, however, Kant finds in it the traces of a wondrous way (*wundersame Weise*), for it is a mark of universal human

³²² The importance of eternity is not merely a motif on which Kant hangs this popular essay, as a passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A613/B641) shows. Cf. *Critique of Judgment*, 5.483f.

reason. Admitting that such thoughts themselves about eternity cannot yield much in terms of theoretical cognition, the thinking actions itself yields practical fruit. Here the end (*Ende*) of things is reconsidered as the purpose (*Zweck*) of moral actions; we thus move from thoughts in terms of the *Prolegomena* (physical science) to those in terms of the *Grounding* (moral science). At this point one might turn to the discussions of the sublime and of the *sensus communis* from the third *Critique* for a further indication of what is going on here.

Rather from turning to moral and practical considerations immediately, Kant wishes to preserve the religious and mythical significance behind the introductory common expression. He begins by restating the inescapable turning to thoughts of death and eternity by human beings, this time by using the example of his native language (8.328). The *jüngster Tag* marks the end of the physical world, and yet because Kant points out the incompatibility of time with eternity, it itself can only be the herald of the end of time and the coming of eternity. The *jüngster Tag* is associated with the physical collapse of the world as foretold in apocalyptic writings, but it mirrors Kant's own purposes, springing as it does from originally moral and practical concerns.

Following this discussion is Kant's odd introduction of the systems of the unitists (*Unitarier*) and the dualists (*Dualisten*), and the moral difficulties of each of them (8.329). Neither seems worthy of moral reasoning, yet Kant accepts for practical reasons a reformed version of the dualistic system: he preserves the idea of the salvation of some and damnation of many, but collapses the two opposing deities into one. The reason behind this is clear, for the single-deity idea parallels that of Christianity (and, covertly,

atheistic Kantianism), while the preservation of moral culpability ensures the necessity of rectitude and not mere grace. Yet there remains a problem for this system due to the superficial self-knowledge (*oberflächlichen Selbsterkenntnis*) of human beings: who, left on his own, can really judge himself (8.330)? A further problem has arisen which Kant allows his readers to ignore: this discussion of reward and punishment after death ignores the earlier separation of time and eternity. From a theoretical and speculative standpoint, the thought of any such moral system is impossible; again, for practical purposes the modified dualism is the more desirable and useful. From this point Kant returns to his chief argument.

In investigating the physical end of the world as a contemplation by moralists as well as seeming wise-men (*dünkende Weise*) and philosophers, Kant raises the question of why such an end must exist in the first place (8.331). Again the question of *ende* becomes a matter of *zweck*; in fact, *endzweck*, that word of such technical importance in the third *Critique*, now surfaces.³²³ Without an end-purpose to the world, there would be no meaning which humans could give to physical causes and ends. Furthermore, pessimistic moralists have condemned the world to a terrible end because of their view of the moral corruption of man.³²⁴ The *Vorzeichen des jüngster Tages* are held by many to be catastrophes moral (injustice, poverty, irreligion, war) or physical (earthquakes, storms, floods, comets, and *Luftzeichen*) (8.332). The moral pessimism of Kant's

³²³ Some relevant passages in the *Critique of Judgment* are found in 5.370f and 425-436.

³²⁴ The opening discussion of the *Religion* expresses Kant's public teaching on this matter. Of course, the reinterpretation of Genesis in the "Conjectural Beginning" is revealing as well.

contemporaries, he thinks, is due to the increase of morals and culture, for the latter outruns the former until one day a world judge ascends the throne. A consideration of the necessity of hope and heroic faith concludes the first half of the essay.

The second half of “The End of All Things” opens with the admission that the first half was mostly the result of “playing” around with an idea so transcendental as to have little cognitive possibility for the human mind (8.332). Yet insofar as this field of idea which reason constructs and upon which the author and his reader may play, it is not necessarily “empty.” By viewing the manner in which human beings think about the meaning of the end of all things, one might profit from the practical standpoint. Due to its overall cognitive murkiness, however, the idea inspired by the contemplation of death and eternity must be broken up from a whole (*das Ganze*) into three divisions (*Abtheilung*). While Kant notes that the first of these need not be investigated further, as it has already been discussed, it is the natural point of view which illuminates and selects the points of analysis in the second and third divisions. Thus, despite Kant’s claim to the contrary, the second half of the essay is determined according to the principles of the first; the former is merely disguised in still more mystical and apocalyptic language and imagery. It is easy, however, to determine the smirk on the face of the author in discussing these matters even though he does so with the utmost seriousness.

Kant’s explication of the mystical or supernatural (*übernatürliche*) end, which he prefaces with the admission that human reason can understand nothing of these matters, begins tellingly enough with a quote from the book of Revelation (8.333). Representing a disregard for the end as the purpose of the moral order (as the “natural” understand

would eventually have it, i.e. as following the moral order and/or physically necessary [8.333, note]), the mystic or supernatural thinker focuses on what is said literally to happen according to Revelation. He seeks not a moral purpose but the divine purpose behind *der Ordnung der wirkenden Ursachen*, which approximates the goal of a perverse Aristotelian (thus perhaps a Thomist). For reasons introduced in the second paragraph of his essay (8.327), dealing with such “objects of sense” goes beyond human conceptual ability and results in self-contradiction (8.333-34). The simultaneous presence of an eternal “Alleluia!” and a lack of all change is impossible (8.335), is conceptually impossible, and because of this mystics lock themselves up in dark rooms, hopefully letting themselves be swallowed into the divine abyss. For Kant this effort is a disaster and is the end of thinking rather than the purpose (8.336).

The third division of the whole is the contranatural (*widernatürliche*) or perverse (*verkehrte*) end of all things. Whereas the division of the natural sense understands very well the end for practical purposes, and the supernatural understands nothing of the *Ursachen*, the contranatural end of all things is a result of the misunderstanding of the *Endzweck*. Rather than resulting in the annihilation of thought as does the supernatural view, the contranatural end of all things brings about nothing less than the antichrist (8.339). In less apocalyptic words, the perverse end of all things has political significance, resulting as it does from foolish human hands (8.336). Continuing the religious theme of the preceding paragraphs, Kant notes that the most dangerous human error is to try to control that which is thought by some to be divine -- when there are “projects” (*Entwürfe*) of making religion simultaneously “genuine” (*lauter*) and

“powerful” (*kraftvoll*). With this statement begins the rhetorical and political core of “The End of All Things.” In this final section, by analyzing the conditions of the perverse end of all things, Kant lays out his modest (as he claims on 8.337) project for an enlightened Christianity and reveals his own status as a neutral liberal thinker (8.338).

Nothing in Christianity need be changed, Kant suggests (8.337). It has the “greatest respect” (*der größten Achtung*) of people because of its irresistible laws (*Gesetze unwiderstehlich*). This recalls Kant’s discussion in the *Grounding* of respect for the moral law.³²⁵ Christianity is Kantianism for the masses; the founding by Christ of the moral constitution (*sittlichen Verfassung*) seems to be the popularization of the rational moral law. For this reason Kant finds Christianity “worthy of love” (*Liebenswertigkeit*): often known as the religion of love, Christianity is marked by love only inasmuch as it earns it by promulgating law. If not completely unorthodox, this description of Christianity strikes one as a departure from its common manifestations of Kant’s day. It is hard to conceive of many people loving Christianity for making life such a burden to them.³²⁶

Kant, seemingly pleased with the current status of Christianity, notes disparagingly again those who wish to fortify it -- *um es recht gut zu machen* (8.338). By adding to it any authority (*Autorität*) apart from the respect for its laws, evaporates Christianity’s worthiness of love, for it creates the contradiction of commanding believers to obey happily (thus no need for command). Here is a second slippery departure from

³²⁵ 4.400,403,426,428,435,436,439,440, and especially the note on 4.401

³²⁶ Cf. 8.331 and 332 -- which do not make an explicit connection between Christianity and human misery, but suggest it.

orthodox Christianity, for Kant now asserts that Christ offers not commandments but rather only a promulgator of the creed of practical reason, an assertion that contradicts John 14:15,22-23 and 15:10-12 (especially this last verse).

Following these two odd points, Kant makes the observation that heavenly rewards for good actions are bribes and punishments for bad actions are blackmail (p. 338); this they are not to be taken seriously as commandments (though the above passages from John contradict this assessment), but rather one may see this merely as a *liebreiche Warnung*. This is necessarily true since it seems that not even God the creator can alter the effects of the moral law (8.339). Certainly there is by now a clear departure from Christianity; Kant, not the proponents of a more authoritarian Christianity, is the innovator. This becomes clearer still when Kant mentions liberal thought's necessary *interpretation (Auslegung)* of the promises of Christianity. Then follows a further diminishment of love's importance for liberal Christianity in favor of the good will of the moral actor.

These considerations lead Kant to offer a general political comment on the role of Christianity. Its worthiness of love still shines in the *Zeit der größten Aufklärung, die je unter Menschen war* (8.339). This is despite the rapid changes of human opinion resulting from the possibly corrosive Enlightenment. The incredulous assertion reminds of Kant's earlier discussion of the hearing given by the community (*Gemeinwesen*) of the two elements necessary for a religion (*einer Religion*) -- but not necessarily Christianity ("the religion" [cf. 8.339]), he implies -- doctrine and reason (8.336). Clearly Kant wishes to reconstitute the founding brought about by Christ. This is not a hard

interpretation to accept once one notes that Kant makes Christianity's worthiness of love contingent rather than intrinsic. What it might do, rather than what it is, is what *might* destine Christianity to be the world religion. If Christianity were convinced by violent zealots, secretive clerics, or other authorities to turn its back on being worthy of love, then rule would be seized by the antichrist, and the perverse of all things would come. There would be no physical or material end of the world (although one can never rule out a comet or two), but the moral order would be destroyed. Upon these miserable warnings, Kant's essay comes to a close, but the irony with which it ends is visible, for one might already see in Christianity the dictatorship of the antichrist. Such a possibility underlines the practical urgency which animates Kant's essay; it is not fanciful exploration into an abstract idea, but the beginning of a critique of religion.

In order to achieve his reformation of Christianity Kant builds upon the efforts of his predecessors, Spinoza and Locke; while quoting the bible, he simultaneously alters doctrine. Respect, not love, is the force of Christianity (8.337); Christ suggests and does not command (8.338-9); Christianity is worthy of love not inherently but as long as it lives up to liberal standards (8.338). These are the precepts which Kant gives to his version of Christianity, and with which he combats the forms of Christianity already in existence.

Philosophy and Religion

The centrality of religion in "The End of All Things" is obvious from the imagery which appears by the third paragraph of the essay (8.328). The especially apocalyptic flavor of Kant's selective quotations provides still more effect to the evidence of a coming end, for

the book of Revelation also contains moral and physical catastrophes such as the persecution of the faithful, Armageddon-like wars, and assorted *Luftzeichen* (8.332). Like Kant's essay, Revelation too is occasionally humorous, inasmuch as it parodies itself as well as some of the proclamations of Christian faith. Due to its connection between destruction and salvation, and persecution and rule, the Revelation to John takes on the following characteristic: "So I took it out of the angel's hand, and I ate it and it tasted as sweet as honey, but when I had eaten it my stomach turned sour" (Rev. 10:10-11);³²⁷ this is a striking point of comparison with Kant's essay, especially in light of his letter to Beister. Unlike Kant's essay, however, Revelation takes seriously Christianity's ultimate victory over Rome and evil generally. Most importantly, whereas Revelation pokes fun at itself, John expressly prohibits others from distorting its teachings: "This is my solemn attestation to all who hear the prophecies in this book; if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him every plague mentioned in the book; if anyone cuts anything out of the prophecies in this book, God will cut off his share of the tree of life and of the holy city, which are described in the book" (Rev. 22: 18-19). Kant's own "partly miserable, partly merry" retelling of Revelation is therefore an unannounced attack on the scriptures. His blithe selectivity defies the above warning as if to deny for certain a divine *Gerichtstag*.

In addition to the inspiration which Revelation provided him regarding the

³²⁷ Translations from the bible not found in Kant's German are taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, ed. Henry Wansbrough (Doubleday: New York, 1985).

jüngster Tag,³²⁸ Kant also draws upon its condemnation of false prophets³²⁹ and its references to divine secrets.³³⁰ Kant's view of the idea of eternity as leading to an abyss also has possible biblical origins.³³¹ Therefore one can see that the book of Revelation has itself become an object of freeplay, into which Kant pulls his reader, and out of which Kant will reinterpret all of Christian teaching. The quotations from scripture which are meant to illustrate or give authority to either unimportant or purely secular matters is part of the humor with which Kant goes about this business.

One might object that this is an overinterpretation of Kant himself, yet Kant occasionally lets the ropes show for those who want to see them. The most obvious example is his quotation, in the context of Christian rewards, of Matthew 5:12: "*Seid fröhlich und getrost, es wird Euch im himmel alles wohl vergolten werden*" (8.339). This is not odd in itself, but it is in light of the passages which enclose it and which Kant omits: "Blessed are you when people abuse you and prosecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account... this is how they persecuted the prophets before you" (Matt. 5:11-12). Kant thus makes himself into a prophet³³² whose words might open him to persecution. This quotation takes on further prominence when read in conjunction with Rev. 22:18-19.

³²⁸ Rev. 1:19-20; 4:1-2; 6:17; 10:7; 14:6-7; 22:10-11.

³²⁹ Rev. 2:3,8-9,20; 3:9-15; 19:20; 21:8; 22:15.

³³⁰ Rev. 5:1-5; 10:4-5.

³³¹ Rev. 9:1-3; 11:7-8; 17:8; 20:1-3.

³³² For Kant as a prophet of the practical, see "Toward Eternal Peace," 8.368.

Philosophy and Poetry

As a prophet, charged with releasing religious secrets by means of weakening religion, and faced with the persecution of the religious and political authorities, Kant must engage in a guarded manner of presentation. In his other popular works, such as “Toward Eternal Peace,” he unfolds the distasteful elements of his teaching by means of quoting classical poets -- often at apparently inappropriate times and with disconnected meanings. This method appears several times in “The End of All Things,” in conjunction with the odd use of biblical quotations as explained above, which mirrors the composition of the “Conjectural Beginning.”

Kant’s first quotation in the present essay is, however, of a modern poet. Albrecht Haller, who published the cited poem in 1736, was both a scientist and a poet. In his “Imperfect Poems about Eternity,” he contemplates the apparent infinity which horribly envelops death, particularly the death of his close friend. Nevertheless, toward the end Haller offers the final resolution of what turns out to be the greatest *deus ex machina*, the Christian God. Kant, on the contrary, centers on Haller’s depiction of infinite eternity which is terrifying and sublime (8.327).³³³ In another text, quoting a more pious segment of a different poem, Kant refers to Haller as a “philosophical poet” (*philosophischer Dichter*);³³⁴ here, altering Haller’s teaching, Kant intends to supplant

³³³ From the *Opus Postumum* we have the following statement: “Confess to yourself. To have religion, the concept of God is not required (still less the postulate: ‘There is a God’)” (21.81, E. Förster trans.). Combined with at least three references to Zoroaster (a.k.a. Zarathustra), this work demonstrates the need for the philosopher-poet.

³³⁴ 6.65.

Haller's as philosopher-poet. To label Kant a philosophical poet may appear odd, due to the alleged prosaic nature of his most well-known works, but can one not say that he offers, through the presentation of the noumenal and phenomenal words (and all that goes with them) for the sake of moral faith,³³⁵ a noble lie? And further, the importance of conflating poetry and philosophy in Kant's explicitly political writings is clear from "Towards Perpetual Peace" -- in which Virgil, the poet who "founded" Rome, helps to illustrate the motivation of this modern author (*Verfasser*)³³⁶ to envision a new constitution (*Verfassung*).³³⁷

Sometimes Kant employs the classical poets as mere illustration or to provide ancient authority for his utterances. An example of this employment of classical poetry occurs early in "The End of All Things" when he quotes from Virgil's *Aeneid*; there is little obvious significance in the passage, possibly because sometimes Kant quotes poetry as he quotes the bible -- for the sake of humor. Yet in the general context from which the quoted passage comes is the explanation of ancient religious rituals, which honor Hercules' assistance in the founding of a city. Kant might be asserting his self-identification with the poet-founder which he soon repeats in the essay on perpetual peace; he might also be using the passage as a comparison with the current religious

³³⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.

³³⁶ 8.343 and 349.

³³⁷ I do not intend to say that Kant desired to found a utopia or to effect political revolutions, but that such things were possible, within realistic limits, on the basis of individuals in the context of thinking and moral action. His writings, technical as well as popular (or "epistemological" as well as "political"/ "moral") all point in this direction. "The End of All Things" is so valuable as it makes no programmatic or doctrinal plans but operates as pure critique (unlike, say, the *Religion* book).

situation.

In other places, however, Kant's use of poetry is more revealing. Such is the case in his quotation from Horace, which appears midway through the essay (8.332). Kant cites it to give credence to his assertion that, due to the progress of the human race, the development of culture outruns the development of morality (*Sittlichkeit*) until some day (*dereinst*, not any form of *Tag*, unfortunately -- or *revealingly*) in the future. The initially slow course of moral development in the world, Kant claims, is like Horace's understanding of *poene pede claudo*; but the context of this quotation is illuminating upon investigation:

est et fideli tuta silentio
merces: vetabo, qui Cereris sacrum
volgarit arcanae, sub isdem
sit trabibus fragilemque mecum

solvat phaselon; saepe Diespiter
neglectus incesto addidit integrum,
raro antecedentem scelestum
deseruit pede Poena claudo. (*Odes*, III.2.25-32)

This praise for *tuta silentio* recalls the secrets of the Revelation of which John makes mention. Kant thus ridicules his own irreligious action of unveiling sacred doctrines; this action is done in direct opposition to the actions of the clergy (*Klerus*), which engages in secret undertakings (*unter sich genommene Abreden*) so as to preserve its political power (8.336).

A second revealing use of classical texts is Kant's quotation from the poetic historian Livy; this example, too, deals with the immoral and political activities of the clergy. In speaking of Christian punishment through hell, Kant questions whether this

can be anything more than blackmail, and therefore pronounces that Christ means the threat of punishment only as a “loving warning” (8.338-39). The power of the law itself, rather than any threat of punishment, is enough to guarantee proper conduct, for as Kant quotes, *lex est res surda et inexorabilis* (*History of Rome*, II.3).

Kant, schooled in the classics, does not note the context from which this is taken. Livy is in the midst of reporting the betrayal of the recently-established Roman senate, planned by a group of youths raised in the manner of princes and not comfortable under the new rule. With *aequato iure* now established among the citizens, these privileged few now felt enslaved. The statement which Kant cites comes from Livy’s account of the feelings of the newly-demoted and treacherous youths, who believed the law to be much less powerful, and much less worthy of respect, than Kant’s version purports to be. Livy has no discussion of a rationally-legislated moral law, and, additionally, Kant has changed Livy’s *leges* into *lex*.

Kant employs this reference to compare the casuist evil of the reigning religion with the self-gratifying lawlessness of the young princes. There is no rapprochement of Christian authority and *aequato iure*, Kant admits (8.338-39); the further hint is that there is a similar chasm between the pious doctrines (*frommen Lehren*) and illuminated practical reason (*erleuchteten praktischen Vernunft*) -- which is one basis for *aequato iure*, or at least the “feeling of freedom” (*Das Gefühl der Freiheit*) -- which Kant insists is

absolutely necessary (*schlechterdings nothwendig*) for a religion (8.336).³³⁸ This speculation leads back to Kant's quotation of Revelation 10:3, which he instantly *corrects* so as to ensure that the angel, left in the apparently incapable authorial hands of John, does not speak "nonsense" (*Unsinn*) (8.333): the bible, without illuminated practical reason, is nonsense. The believer of pious doctrine might charge this assessment as blasphemous; he would charge that the bible combined with illuminated practical reason is no longer The Bible. It is equally possible, however, that Kant has loosened the reader's faith with a combination of misery and merriment.

Philosophy, Religion, and Politics

The goal of Kant's poetic-biblical *Spiel* (8.332) is twofold. First, he intends to undermine the reader's piety and thus his individual allegiance to the clergy; this is accomplished first by appealing both to his sense of humor and to his feeling of conscience.³³⁹ Second, he intends to build upon the success of this first project the experiences of both radical utopianism and pessimism then dominating Europe immediately after the Terror;³⁴⁰ this is accomplished by bringing into question whether there is any need to believe either in an inevitable physical end of all things (8.330-31) or in an inevitable collapse of the

³³⁸ Obviously, it is hard to miss Kant's attitude in this regard toward pious doctrine (*frommen Lehren*) in the first place, for from the opening of this very essay he sets about correcting the error of a common expression of pious speech (*frommen Sprache*).

³³⁹ And further, the role of the individual as conscience turns from basic questions of *Gericht* to even more fundamental questions of *Urtheil*; this is one way in which Kantian moral philosophy ultimately depends upon Kantian "aesthetics" (or is at least ultimately aesthetic rather than "legal"). See, among other passages, the interchanging of *Gericht* and *Urtheil*, 8. 328 (lines 9-10) and 329 (lines 15,22). I might also include the turn from God as judge on Judgment Day (*Gerichtstag*, 8.328) to the judgment of "each man" (8.329).

³⁴⁰ "Towards Perpetual Peace" has much the same intention.

moral order (8.339). Thus, by means of playing around with an idea of which we can have no conception, Kant manages to offer a critique of religious dictatorship as well as political anarchy. He describes his own point of view as follows: “the liberal thinking-manner -- equally distant from slave-sense and from boundlessness” (8.338); from this standpoint he criticizes Christianity, but the question which remains is whether Kant’s position does not isolate him *a priori* from such a critique. That is to say, by accepting the principles of the first *Critique*, he can only dismiss the possibility of religious experience or the validity of dictatorial Christianity. This is not meant to be the rabid objection of an irrationalist, but merely an observation that, even in comparison to other rigorous philosophers, Kant’s system is too slippery to allow the Kantian to venture outside. Kant’s argument is convincing on Kantian grounds, and most supporters of modern culture and philosophy would no doubt agree with it, wittingly or not (this last possibility suggests the obvious fact that one does not have to have read or understood the first *Critique* in order to agree with the argument of “The End of All Things” -- but such a person reading the article probably has sympathy for Kant in the first place, or else will react as did the censors to Kant’s *Religion*).

7. Rereading and Rebinding: Summary and Conclusion

This study has splintered the *Religion* into four or five elements that are different in character than its own most explicit division of four parts. This manner of reading came in response to the difficulty of locating a singular and linear argument in the book, combined with the appearance of several different starting-points – and thus different subject-matter – to the work. The *Religion*, nevertheless, is a unity, and so the next task is to recombine those elements into one whole that answers the question with which the study began, namely, to what extent, if any, can the *Religion* be claimed as a work of Kant’s political philosophy?

First, then, let us answer the question that initiated this study, and let us begin to do so by representing what this study as a whole has shown or suggested about the *Religion* as a whole. We might a general sketch as follows: the propensity to cult and to superstition, and thus to a religion of anti-service (part 4) is countered with moral religion (parts 2 and 4), maintained by the grounding of a true church (part 3), thus overcoming the influence of the priestly way of thinking (part 1, “End” essay). This makes possible, and is also made possible by, the ability of the philosopher to educate, whether in the university, the seminary, or the cultural press. The political effect of this social-moral reform is the (gradual) transformation hoped for in the essay “Toward Eternal Peace”, which was published not merely as a replacement for but as a surrogate for further

writing on religion. The political existence of the moral religion and the political mode of philosophy are thus combined in Kant's published doctrine of religion.³⁴¹

Curiously, the notion of religion as presented by the definition (given toward the beginning of part four) has no political or social reference; this would give one reason to view the *Religion* as a work of moral philosophy or ethics and nothing more. Yet this view seems insufficient not only because of the context in which the question of human good and evil is raised, i.e. in the presentation of the end of the world and the dispute between priests and philosopher-pedagogues, but also because of the way in which religion is presented in connection with an ethical community or church. Even though religion proceeds from morality, it stops not at the individual moral (or religious) agent but is understandable only in terms of public life; the church, one recalls, is presented in the context of man as he exists in the company of other men. Further, the concluding discussion of that part of the *Religion* most directly concerned with religion itself is a discussion of the conscience in relation to limits to that conscience that are imposed from outside, by other men – men of church-faith if not of true religion. On the basis of these observations one sees the social and ultimately political character and intention of Kant's presentation of the concept of religion.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Strictly speaking, one might admit that the public existence of the moral religion is social rather than political, and thus would grant that according to the differentiation offered by Strauss (quoted in chapter one) Kant's work is (in part) social rather than political philosophy.

³⁴² Although it is necessary to raise the evaluative questions of the previous section, the incompleteness of the study begun by this dissertation necessitate as well caution in answering them too quickly. More work must be done on the *Religion* before a final evaluation is appropriate. For instance, and perhaps this is the most glaring example, our focus here has been almost entirely on the *Religion*, running the risk of making a fetishism of the work and operating in willful ignorance of Kant's larger body of work. One could also deepen the interpretation of the *Religion* by drawing closer connections between it and the works of Kant's

Assuming that not all believers will be persuaded by Kant's doctrine of religion, one might expect some of them to initiate a refutation. He would look at the critique of reason in the first place, which is no small task. Much of the *Religion* is grounded on the limitations of what reason can do and the limitlessness of what it wants to do, and extending that to ways of thinking that lead to enthusiasm or anti-service. While looking to counter Kant's criticisms of anti-service would be part of a refutation, it is to what those criticisms are based on that one must ultimately turn. The refutation of the *Religion* would therefore largely consist in a refutation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Even then, the would-be refuter of Kant would be forced to acknowledge that Kant does more for the protecting the existence of religion (granted, at a distance from the church-faiths that sometimes go by the name of religion) than any of his predecessors. If the Kant refuter does discredit the critical works, he must be prepared to face the difficulties for religion (and human life in general) posed by David Hume, whom (among others) Kant was intending to answer by authoring the critical enterprise. Ultimately, the believer who wishes to refute the doctrine of religion must do battle with modernity itself.

predecessors, giving particular attention to David Hume's *Natural History of Religion* and the works of Rousseau and Lessing that pertain to religion.

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