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**The religious framework of Kant's philosophy:  
practical knowledge, evil and religious faith**

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## Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
1. Preface .....	1
2. Theodicy and Evil in Kant’s Pre-Critical Works – Optimism in the 1750s .....	13
2.1 Introduction – Kant in the 1750s .....	13
2.2 Leibniz and his <i>Theodicy</i> .....	16
2.3 Optimism and the <i>Manuscript Reflections</i> .....	34
2.4 Further <i>Reflections on Optimism</i> (and a puzzle).....	39
2.5 Kant and the Lisbon Earthquake .....	50
2.6 <i>Universal Natural History</i> as a Transitional Text.....	57
2.7 Concluding Remarks on Kant in the 1750s .....	65
3. Faith, Philosophy, and the Problem of Evil in the 1760s .....	67
3.1 Introduction – Kant in the 1760s .....	67
3.2 Themes in <i>The Only Possible Argument</i> .....	70
3.3 Morality and Faith in the <i>Prize Essay</i> .....	93
3.4 The Impact of Swedenborg.....	106
3.5 Concluding Remarks on Kant in the 1760s .....	118
4. Religious Epistemology and the Problem of Evil in Kant’s <i>Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion</i> .....	122
4.1 Introduction – Kant’s Lecture Notes .....	122
4.2 Using Kant’s Lecture Notes – A Defence.....	124
4.3 Themes from the Lecture Notes .....	130
4.4 Concluding Remarks on the Lecture Notes.....	150
5. Interlude: The Three Critiques and the Anthropological Works.....	152
6. Kant’s Reflections on Theodicy, the Example of Job and Eschatology .....	153
6.1 Introduction – Two essays on Theodicy and Eschatology .....	153
6.2 Theodicy and the Example of Job .....	155
6.3 Eschatology .....	165
6.4 Concluding remarks on Eschatology and Theodicy.....	177
7. Interpreting <i>Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason</i> .....	179
7.1 Introduction – <i>Religion</i> as apologetics and the influence of Pietism .....	179
7.2 Radical Evil .....	198
7.2.1 Introducing Radical Evil.....	198

7.2.2 Descriptive or Prescriptive? .....	208
7.2.3 The Social Interpretation .....	216
7.2.4 The 'Missing Proof' for Radical Evil .....	221
7.3 The Moral Archetype .....	227
7.4 Scripture.....	234
7.5 The Ethical Community .....	247
8. Conclusion.....	254
Referenced works .....	260

## Abstract

This thesis explores the religious underpinnings of Kant's thought through a consideration of the related topics of the problem of evil, the nature of religious faith, the possibility of practical knowledge, and the nature of philosophy, as well as his approach to various aspects of Christian theology, such as Scripture, eschatology, and Christology. Texts from both the pre-Critical and Critical period of Kant's works are considered, building up a picture of Kant as a philosopher deeply concerned with the cultivation and maintenance of religious faith within the bounds of reason. The links between the philosophies of Kant, Leibniz and the Pietists are also considered in order to emphasise their shared commitments in using philosophy to complement moral faith. Further, it is argued that Kant is also concerned to combat superstition, enthusiasm and immorality in the Church, which are seen as barriers to 'true' faith. Through these considerations, we also discern an underlying realist religious framework to discussions on religious topics in Kant's works, even in the Critical philosophy. It is argued that Kant's philosophy of religion and ethical theory are intended to be not only compatible with but complementary to orthodox Christianity. As a result, a number of contemporary interpretive lines surrounding Kant's philosophy of religion that intend to dilute the Christian commitments of the Critical system are rejected. These discussions are then employed to provide context for a reading of *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1793) as lying within a realist religious framework. Current interpretive issues in the literature surrounding *Religion* are discussed in relation to this framework.

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Where is truth? In religion... Oh, yes, he went on with a twisted smile of violent scorn... Perhaps it is to be found in pure forms of Christianity, where the priests are no more paid than were the Apostles? But St. Paul was rewarded by the pleasures of command, of preaching, of making himself talked about...

Ah! If only there were a true religion... Fool that I am! I see a gothic cathedral, ancient stained glass; my vulnerable heart conjures up the figure of a priest within that window... My soul embraces it, my soul has need of it... What do I meet but a fop with greasy hair...

A true priest... With him there would be a space in the world where feeling souls could unite... We would not all be isolated from one another... This good father could talk to us of God. But of what God? Not the God of the Bible, a petty despot, cruel and avid for vengeance... rather the God of Voltaire, just, good, infinite...

He was disturbed by all his memories of the Bible that he knew by heart... But how, whenever *two or three are gathered together*, how to believe in that mighty name GOD, after the frightful way our priests have abused it?

To live in isolation!... What torture!...

Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*



## 1. Preface

This thesis was written with one particular guiding thought in mind, namely, that there is much yet to be explored in the realm of Kant's philosophy of religion. As scholarship on Kant has progressed, and a greater number of texts have become more easily available to an English-language audience, the horizons of Kant scholars have expanded, and so has our understanding of Kant and his complex philosophy. My thesis is quite consciously intended to enter into a significant debate in the literature, one which asks a question that is incredibly important for our understanding of Kant's philosophy and his place in the history of philosophy, namely, whether Kant (of the critical period at least) should be considered a theist, a deist, or an atheist, with a subsidiary question regarding whether Kant intended his philosophy to commit us to one of these positions.

The distinction between theism, deism and atheism should be familiar. Theism and deism (or at least the kind we are interested in here) are both committed to the existence of God, but differ with regard to their beliefs about God's action in the world; whilst theism holds to the existence of a God familiar to the Abrahamic religions, a personal agent who is very much involved in worldly affairs, deism believes in a creator God that no longer interacts with our world, and so does not do many of the things the Abrahamic religions traditionally suppose, such as answer prayers, bring about miracles, or participate in any sort of 'end of days' where the moral destiny of humankind is realised. Atheism, of course, is a position that holds that God does not exist, or at least that the balance of the evidence decisively points that way. There are groups of scholars who argue for each of these positions as being assumed by Kant's critical philosophy<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Agnostic readings of Kant with regards to religious belief have most notably been offered by Strawson and Ray. Strawson writes that, with regard to beliefs that concern the supersensible, such as belief in God, Kant "[leaves] room for certain morally based convictions, not amounting to knowledge" (1966: 240-41), whilst

My thesis will argue that Kant is decisively a theist. However, that is not the end of the issue, for there are debates amongst scholars as to how orthodox Kant is as part of the Christian tradition (if we are to hold Kant as being a Christian), or to put it in slightly different terms (because orthodoxy in Christianity can be surprisingly flexible), how *authentically* Christian the Critical philosophy is. I will argue that Kant's critical philosophy *is* authentically Christian, and sits largely happily in the Lutheran-Pietist tradition that he was raised and lived in, though with caveats given the lessons of the Enlightenment.

Such a view is controversial, and quite new (or at least experiencing a resurgence) in the literature. One major scholar promoting the idea that a radically new understanding of Kant's approach to religious faith and religion more generally could be available to us, and exploring the possibility of his being placed within an authentic Christian tradition, is Stephen Palmquist, in his *Kant's System of Perspectives* (1993), *Kant's Critical Religion* (2000), and numerous papers<sup>2</sup>. I will also explore and emphasise the extent to which Kant can genuinely be called a Christian; in this thesis, I will attempt to do so by considering the development of his thought concerning evil and the nature of philosophy and religious faith, and the interrelations between various texts that form part of his corpus. Though a side-issue to some extent, I will conclude that Kant's reflections upon the problem of evil and the nature of faith show him to stand securely within the tradition of Christian reflection on these topics – at points, I will attempt to show that it is Kant's intention

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Ray argues that the "critical philosophy... shifted God out of ontological consideration on wholly epistemological terms which ultimately [leaves] the Kantian metaphysic not only agnostic but... also arguably liable to be read in atheistic terms" (2003: 110).

<sup>2</sup> As a selection of perhaps the more significant interpretations, in addition to Palmquist, a number of other scholars have also explored the possibility of Kant standing with the tradition of Christian reflection upon philosophical topics. These include; Michel Despland, who connects Kant's writings on history with reflections upon religion and theodicy in the Kantian corpus (1973: 6 and *passim.*); Ronald M. Green, who argues that "Kant's thinking on religion reveals a constant movement between various traditional theistic affirmations and what could be called a mysticism of reason" (1978: 77); Vincent McCarthy, who explores *Religion's* view of the superiority of Christianity as a historical religion and the special role granted to Christ as moral archetype (1986); Curtis H. Peters, who places the religious notion of hope at the centre of Kant's Critical system (1993); John E. Hare, who argues that religion plays a vital role in Kant's system in aiding us to overcome our moral shortcomings, part of which involves rejecting the traditional view of Kant as a deist (1996: 41-45 and *passim.*); Chris L. Firestone, who has explored the foundations for a 'transcendental theology' in the Critical system (2009); and Christopher J. Insole, who places Kant's philosophical reflections within the wider tradition of Christian thought concerning divine and human freedom (2013).

to defend a genuine theist belief in God, and that he draws upon ideas from the Lutheran-Pietist tradition, as well as Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Leibniz. It is still the case, however, that many will, despite the evidence to the contrary, believe it incredible that Kant could be called an ‘authentic Christian’, and as such may dismiss this thesis out of hand. In response, it is hoped that such readers will at least find some interest in what a Christian rendering of Kant’s philosophy of religion would look like, if that were what he really intended.

Part of my reason for pursuing this line of interpretation regarding Kant is an underlying suspicion of what I have come to think of as the ‘noble lie Kant’. There is, in my mind, a worrying tendency in much of recent scholarship regarding Kant’s philosophy of religion to characterise him as in some way leading us astray with regard to his reflections on religion and in essence ‘tricking’ us into being moral agents (a supposition that may not even be possible within the Critical system given the separation of the spheres of nature and freedom). As an example, I see such a tendency at work in Pablo Muchnik’s recent paper ‘Kant’s Religious Constructivism’. It is a very interesting paper in itself, but claims such as “Kantian religion is tailored to encourage this kind of affiliation and restrain those aspects of religious claims that set people at odds – Kant’s God is *made* so that religion can promote the conversation of humankind” (2014: 193) cannot but give the impression that Kant *qua* philosopher of religion is embarking on some form of social project, and carefully constructing a new religion such that humankind can redeem *itself*.

Such a view is challenged by Kant’s distinction in the First Preface to *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* between the biblical and philosophical theologian, where the former is to be concerned only with the ‘care of souls’ (6:8-9), whilst the latter (which he counts himself as) investigates religion as it pertains to reason. Of course, Kant was very interested in social issues, and even in the moral improvement of humankind, but he was a *philosopher* who very much believed in the ‘truth’ of things, and wished to mine the depths of our minds and the world we live in. We must hold that Kant really thought he was getting at something substantial in his

treatment of religion and faith, and not just seeking to influence people morally. We should be uncomfortable with a view that simply portrays Kant as a proto-psychologist, attempting to trick us into being more moral. As such, the line of interpretation I am taking, that Kant's treatment of religion is grounded in a Christian realism, sharply dissents from that kind of interpretive position.

Affirming the underlying Christianity of *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*<sup>3</sup> (perhaps the most important text to consider with regard to Kant's philosophy of religion) has great implications for how we understand the text and what it meant for Kant. At the beginning of the thesis, I have included a quotation from the 1830 Stendhal novel, *The Red and the Black*, a reflection upon the hypocrisy, immorality and impiety that can so often come to affect organised religion. The quotation comes from close to the end of the novel, where the protagonist Julian Sorel, an ambitious but fundamentally flawed individual from a low background, awaits capital punishment after attempting to kill his lover. He reflects both upon his desperate need for satisfactory religious counsel, something that is not easy to find given the self-interest at the centre of the average priest's mind (at least in the context of the novel), and the exact same path he would have tread to make a name for himself in the world, namely go into the Church and secure a prominent position for himself (the only way to the top for someone of his background at the time); as such, he sees the Church at the time for the social game it is, and feels lost despite some vestige of underlying faith in God. Without wishing to put words into Kant's mouth, I believe these considerations reflect well what he thought of Christianity and the Church throughout his philosophical career. *Religion*, as I interpret it, is a rescue-job for true Christianity, given a stark negative evaluation of the state of its historical form. It crystallises Kant's desire to go back to what is really important in religion, faith and the building of God's kingdom through virtuous actions, and move away from hypocrisy in much organised religion<sup>4</sup>. As part of this wide project of

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<sup>3</sup> This text will generally be referred to as *Religion* throughout the thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Kant reveals his dislike for hypocrisy and his desire to cultivate an honest faith as a free response to the divine in a letter from 1775, where he describes himself as:

engendering true faith on the personal level, and also bringing about great social change on the long road to the establishment of ‘God’s kingdom on earth’, philosophy itself can play a part. This is one of the major themes of the thesis, namely, the possible power of religious faith (as Kant sees it) on both the personal and social level, and the way in which it can interlink with philosophy to achieve its aims.

In addition, whilst I have great sympathies for his position, I wish to distance myself from interpretations of *Religion*, such as that put forward by Pasternack (2014), which characterise Kant as replacing Christianity with a new form of religion, a ‘Pure rational religion’ or something of that ilk. One gets the sense that what Kant intends is not a complete *revolution* in religion, but rather an *evolution* within a distinctively Christian framework (still quite a project in itself). Pasternack rejects an underlying Christian agenda on both textual and historical grounds, and I will go on to consider some of these arguments, but I will make one point now in response to the following quote:

[There are] interpreters who want to bolster Kant’s Christian credentials, pressing for even more than *Religion* explicitly suggests... This approach strikes me as neither textually supported nor one that fits the circumstances of Kant’s life, especially during the conservative reign of Frederick William II. While the far more secular environment of contemporary

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“[a] man who believes that, in the final moment, only the purest candour concerning our most hidden inner convictions can stand the test and who, like Job, takes it to be a crime to flatter God and make inner confessions, perhaps forced out by fear, that fail to agree with what we freely believe” (10: 175-76).

I will return to the importance Kant attaches to the example of Job in 6.2.

In the same letter, Kant also reveals his view of the primary importance of morality for a religion that is going to reflect the kind of true, honest faith that he takes himself to hold:

“I distinguish the *teachings* of Christ from the *report* we have of those teachings. In order that the former may be seen in their purity, I seek above all to separate out the moral teachings from all the dogmas of the New Testament. These moral teachings are certainly the fundamental doctrine of the Gospels, and the remainder can only serve as auxiliary to them” (10: 176).

This thesis will trace out Kant’s view of what ideal religious faith looks like, an ideal that resurfaces throughout his philosophical works, and the implications for philosophy of attempting to cultivate this kind of faith (part of which will be responding in some way to the problem of evil). A further part of my argument will be that this kind of faith is *recognisably Christian*, and thus marks Kant out as a theist. Kant’s continuing reflections upon these issues find their culmination in his religious works of the early 1790s, in particular *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, which will be considered in Chapters 6 and 7.

academia may be less welcoming to such commitments, that was not the case during Kant's day. Hence, an interpretation of *Religion* shaped by the view that behind its Enlightenment veneer there are traditional Christian commitments that Kant chose to mask strikes me as built upon a misunderstanding of his historical and political circumstances (*Ibid.*: 15-16n.).

In response to this, I would argue that my line of interpretation regarding Kant's *Religion* does not claim that Kant is 'masking' his Christian commitments; in fact, they are up-front and centre throughout the text. Any intelligent reader of *Religion* can easily identify classic Christian doctrines referred to and explained throughout, from original sin, to grace, to atonement, the Incarnation, and so forth; not only that, Kant *accepts* these doctrines, albeit with his own spin on them, but never so much as to stray far from Christian orthodoxy. So, I agree with Pasternack to a certain extent, in that Kant absolutely had no reason to hide a Christian foundation to the *Religion*, but I do not think that he *does* hide it (if he was trying to hide it, he certainly did not do a very good job, and we should perhaps give his genius more credit than that). Granted, there is also an extent (in my opinion, a small extent) to which Kant could have been more explicit about his project for the Christian religion (for example, he quite easily could have talked about 'original sin' as opposed to 'radical evil'). There are a couple of main reasons for this, namely his desire to distance himself from the historical Church, as well as a desire to respect the autonomy of the religious believer who could quite easily allow themselves to be heteronomously influenced by Kant's use of the language of the organised Church and the Christian tradition more generally. Again, I will further expand on these points in the context of my interpretation of *Religion* towards the end of the thesis.

However, putting forward the case that Kant can legitimately be called a Christian is just one of the aims of this thesis. In addition, I aim to offer an interpretation of Kant's position in the pre-Critical and Critical periods (culminating in the publication of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*) on the problem of evil, theodicy, and the nature of religious faith. My

interpretation will be informed by the development of Kant's thought on such issues throughout his career, and as such, much of this thesis will involve discussing pre-Critical works, lecture notes and letters. It is my contention that one may be missing a great deal if one does not take into account, when interpreting Kant on religion, the themes and ideas that continually appear in the corpus. I will attempt in this thesis to 'take the road less travelled', that is, leave behind the texts that have already been examined in exhaustive detail, and instead focus on those that may be relevant for our understanding of the religious framework of Kant's thought and our interpretation of *Religion* but have yet to be examined in great detail on the points we are interested in. In particular, I will focus on texts that are particularly salient for offering a sense of the religious framework of Kant's philosophy, that is, the way in which religion shapes the aims and methods of his philosophy. Such a strategy, I argue, gives a greatly enhanced context for our reading of *Religion*, through considering Kant's evolving thoughts from the very beginnings of his philosophical career onwards.

I will now offer a short guide through the various chapters of my thesis. The structure of the thesis as a whole is quite straightforward. Most of the thesis follows Kant's thought on the problem of evil and related topics chronologically, starting from some of his very earliest work in the 1750s, going through the pre-Critical period, and through the 1780s (the Critical period), up to a text written just prior to *Religion*, namely *On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*, as well as a text written just after, *The End of All Things*. The aim of this chronological approach is to explore the religious framework of Kant's thought and provide a wide context for my interpretation of *Religion* – I will do so by carefully examining the relevant texts, noting recurring themes and their significance, and exploring the possible influence of other thinkers at various points. I will argue that Kant holds, throughout his career, recurring thoughts about how the problem of evil and theodicy could and should be dealt with, as well as the nature of religious faith and its connection to philosophy, and I will attempt to explore and emphasise these points.

The thesis concludes with an interpretation of the culmination of Kant's thought regarding evil and religious faith, *Religion* (published in 1793), given the lessons that we learned from the development of his thought. Note that the narrative of my thesis will end with *Religion* – there is undoubtedly later salient material in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the *Opus Postumum*, and other works. Indeed, Stephen Palmquist holds that ideas in the *Opus Postumum* are crucial for our understanding of Kant's philosophy of religion (see 2000: ch. 11). The extent to which Palmquist is correct about *OP* on that score is still a live issue of debate in the literature, and not one that I wish to involve myself in at this point. Given this, and the necessary space constraints of this thesis, I believe *Religion* to be a natural finishing point for my argument in this thesis.

Following this preface, the first chapter will focus on the 1750s and some of the very earliest philosophical texts by Kant. The intention is to assess Kant's attitude towards Leibniz's famous 'best possible world' theodicy in this period, in relation to his own evolving views regarding the challenge to faith posed by the problem of evil. We will see that Kant is not altogether satisfied with Leibniz's theodicy, but does see it as offering a valuable way forward in responding to the problem of evil. I will touch on five texts by Kant in the course of the discussion: *Manuscript Reflections on Optimism* (1753/4), *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), *Concerning the cause of the Terrestrial Convulsions on the Occasion of the Disaster which afflicted the Western Countries of Europe towards the End of Last Year* (1756), *History and Natural Description of the Most Remarkable Occurrences associated with the Earthquake* (1756), and *Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism* (1759). The chapter concludes by arguing that Kant is interested in religious faith and the problem of evil from the very beginnings of his philosophical writings, such that it fundamentally shapes his thoughts on even seemingly non-religious topics such as the occurrence of earthquakes. Furthermore, I argue that Kant, in relation to religious topics, adopts a theory-praxis approach, trialled by Leibniz in his *Theodicy*, which, whilst seeking the 'truth about things' in some sense, balances such a pursuit



with a need for a philosophical approach that is sensitive to the practical<sup>5</sup> aspects of religious faith and for a right approach to matters concerning God, given our limited intellectual capabilities and ‘fallen’ state. Such an approach will recur frequently throughout Kant’s corpus.

After considering salient Kantian works from the 1750s, I will then go on to focus on three texts from the 1760s: *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1762), *Inquiry concerning the distinctness of the principles of natural theology and morality* (1762), and *Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by dreams of metaphysics* (1766). The main aim of the discussion is to stress the continuity of Kant’s thinking regarding faith and the theistic response to the problem of evil, and to continue digging deeply into his concerns regarding the relation between religious faith and philosophy. I will argue that these texts continue and expand upon the project inaugurated in the previous decade. We see Kant’s attempt to defend religious faith as involving the careful circumscription of the bounds of philosophy, theology, and natural science. Philosophy can be used to legitimately ground a sense of the divine, and the three texts we will consider in this chapter all elaborate upon this approach. I will also comment on the controversial relation between Kant’s pre-Critical works and that of the mystic Swedenborg, arguing that though some similar ideas from Swedenborg occur in the Critical works, Kant nevertheless is careful to distance himself from overly-speculative mysticism.

After reviewing what we have learned about the pre-Critical Kant with regard to the issues we are concerned with, and stressing the continuity of his concerns throughout his philosophical career, we will move on to salient Critical texts leading up to the publication of *Religion*. Of course, in the space of this thesis I will not be able to touch upon every text that may be relevant for an interpretation of *Religion* – the interlinking nature of the Critical system makes this inevitable. As such, I have had to be selective regarding the texts that I consider, and my

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that the use of ‘practical’ generally throughout the thesis is intended in the sense connected to praxis and practice, rather than in the technical Kantian sense or the sense of advantageous or feasible. Where I do intend the technical Kantian sense, it will be clear from the context.

selection was made with an attempt to strike a balance between relevance for understanding the religious framework of Kant's thought and relative attention in the current literature in relation to Kant's philosophy of religion. My examination of the Critical Kant begins with the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, which in my view is too potentially illuminating to ignore. Apart from the interesting points that Kant makes in this text, I also undertake to defend my use of this text in 4.2, answering objections to its use that have been either put to me personally or are to be found in the literature. In this regard, I compare the relevant parts of Kant's lecture notes and the text on which they are based, Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*, and stress the originality and independence to be found in the former.

With regard to the *Lectures* themselves, I will argue that, whilst the notes offer substantial new details regarding Kant's thoughts on religious faith and the problem of evil, there is a fundamental continuity between the pre-Critical and the Critical Kant on these issues. As such, lessons we have learned from our examination of pre-Critical texts can aid us in guiding our interpretation of Critical texts such as *Religion*. I will also argue, in this chapter, that Kant offers us a programmatic statement of a new kind of theology based on the 'inner revelation' of reason and the moral law implanted within all of us. Nevertheless, this kind of theology is not as innovative as it may appear on the surface, and owes much to key Christian theologians, such as Augustine and Aquinas, as well as to the key Christian tradition of *Imago dei*. I argue that there is space for a genuine theology (i.e. one in which we are able to cognise something of the divine) within the new sphere of the Critical system, and the lecture notes are invaluable in giving us a glimpse into how it is supposed to be justified within that system.

In the following chapter, prior to our final consideration of *Religion*, I will consider two minor essays written by Kant on religious topics around the same time as *Religion*, namely, *On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy* (1790) and *The End of All Things* (1793). We will use these two texts to reflect upon Kant's thoughts regarding two key religious issues at the time

of *Religion*; namely, theodicy and eschatology (two topics that interest Kant throughout his work on the philosophy of religion, and appear also in *Religion* itself). Kant, in *Theodicy*, continues his reflections upon the problem of evil and theodicy in a way that reveals very little has changed from his writings on the same topics in the pre-Critical period. In this text, he systematically rejects all of the strategies hitherto employed by philosophers to justify God's goodness in the face of evil, and sets out a project for a new type of theodicy, based on humble faith and a moral approach to religion. In this regard, Kant offers a fascinating discussion of a passage from the Book of Job, in which Job discusses his misfortunes with his friends and thereby reveals a specific approach to the problem of evil. I will argue that such a project not only marks a continuation of a decades-long campaign against superstition and religious enthusiasm, but also sees Kant standing firmly in the Lutheran tradition regarding the effects of 'true' religious faith.

In the section following our discussion of *Theodicy*, we move on to *The End of All Things*, an illuminating discussion of eschatology from a Kantian perspective. As with his discussion of theodicy, the keyword is *humility*; just as one should not make confident assertions regarding God's plans regarding the past and the present (such as saying 'God has not removed evil from the world because of x' and 'God has brought about a miracle in this event'), one must also be humble about the future. Believing that one can lay out in great detail the end of the world leads very easily into superstition, with the potential for a detrimental personal and social impact. However, in *The End of All Things*, we can still discern something of a method for gaining some vague sense of how things may proceed at the end of all things, given the moral law implanted within us and the cognition of God as an all-powerful, all-good being. I will explore this method, one which places faith and morality at the very heart of the proper philosophical and theological method to religious issues such as the problem of evil and eschatology.

Finally, we come to a chapter on *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* itself. In this final chapter, I will examine major themes in the text, such as radical evil, the moral archetype,

Scripture, and the 'ethical community', and seek to deal with some of the interpretive difficulties surrounding these themes, in light of the preceding discussions on the religious framework of Kant's thought. Another major aim of the chapter will be to compare aspects of *Religion* with the Pietist tradition which Kant was brought up in, both by his family and the educational institutions of Königsberg at the time of his childhood. I hope that my approach to Kant, part of which is affirming the Christian elements of his philosophy, will gain plausibility through its explanation of various elements of the argument of *Religion*, as well as some of the ways in which it is able to give us a new perspective on interpretive difficulties with the text. The thesis will then end with a short concluding discussion.

## 2. Theodicy and Evil in Kant's Pre-Critical Works – Optimism in the 1750s

### 2.1 Introduction – Kant in the 1750s

We begin the discussion proper with a consideration of some of Kant's texts from the 1750s, and as such some of his very earliest writings. We shall not only consider works that are primarily concerned with our main topic of discussion, the problem of evil and theodicy, but also some of his scientific texts, which also at times touch upon religious issues relevant to our interests. This chapter thereby forms part of our project to understand the trajectory of Kant's philosophical reflections upon issues related to religious faith throughout his career, including the pre-Critical works. I wish to also show that Kant's reflections upon the problem of evil and its relation to faith and philosophy are driven by an interest in and underlying sympathy with a Leibnizian approach to theodicy<sup>6</sup>.

Before we begin discussing Kant, Section 2.2 briefly considers Leibniz's approach to the problem of evil in his key text, *Theodicy: Essays on the Justice of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*<sup>7</sup>. Instead of following the well-trod ground of the details of Leibniz's theodicy in itself, I wish to consider instead the *metaphilosophy*<sup>8</sup> underlying his approach, which, I will argue, marks a point of continuity between his work on the problem of evil and Kant's various reflections upon evil and religious faith, which we shall go on to consider. We will discover that Leibniz has a

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<sup>6</sup> Linking Kant with Leibniz in such a way is not novel. As an example of a scholar taking a similar line, Loades writes, "Kant's handling of the problem of evil in all its aspects is one element in his life-long preoccupation with the work of Leibniz" (1975: 361), and that for Kant, "the concern with Leibniz's work is persistent and demanding, and Leibniz's posing of the problem of theodicy in particular was an inescapable topic in Kant's reflection on theology" (*Ibid.*: 362). In this chapter, I wish to pursue this line of argument in greater depth than in Loades, with an emphasis on metaphilosophy as well as the problem of evil in Kant's works that touch on theodicy in the 1750s.

<sup>7</sup> This text will be referred to as *Theodicy* in what follows.

<sup>8</sup> 'Metaphilosophy' here is understood as a general conception of the aims and methods of philosophy.

rather overlooked, and yet quite crucial, metaphilosophical approach underlying *Theodicy* – an understanding of his project as both theoretical and practical, seeking knowledge of God’s perfections alongside a drive to cultivate moral goodness. Misguided attempts to deal with the problem of evil, no matter how noble the intention may be, will only result in the perversion of faith, or even the destruction of it altogether. Instead, we must interpret the world through our knowledge of God’s love, the result of which will be, Leibniz believes, the dissolving of the problem of evil and the dawn of a true theodicy that does justice to God’s greatness.

The following section (2.3) sees us considering some of the very earliest works from the Kantian corpus, namely, *Three manuscript reflections on optimism*. In these unpublished notes, we find Kant reacting strongly against the Leibnizian approach to theodicy, arguing (amongst other things) that such an approach is taken in an attitude of deference and servility, rather than in true faith and trust in God’s goodness. Following this (in 2.4), we find in a later text, *An attempt at some reflections on optimism*, Kant taking a more positive stance towards a Leibnizian approach to theodicy. I argue that this work shows a shift in focus on the part of Kant, encapsulated in a greater sensitivity towards the theory-praxis approach to the problem of evil found in Leibniz’s *Theodicy*, one which he feels naturally inclined towards. He notes, I argue, that Leibniz’s philosophical project is not a cold, purely academic exercise, undertaken in an attitude of servility, but in fact one with one eye on the world, and the moral improvement of humankind.

I argue (in 2.5) that Kant’s positive attitude towards Leibnizian theodicy is reflected in texts occasioned by the disaster of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, an event which sent intellectual shockwaves throughout Europe, and occasioned much renewed reflection on religious issues connected to God’s goodness and creative power. These scientific texts, written on the subject of earthquakes following the disaster, tread a somewhat Leibnizian line. In 2.6, we will come to the end of our reflections on Kant’s corpus from the 1750s by briefly considering a major pre-Critical text: *Universal natural history and theory of the heavens*. Our considerations here will

build upon the previous section by highlighting again how religious considerations guide Kant's seemingly more objective 'scientific' works, which may also suggest to us that the same might be true of his philosophical works also. The chapter ends with some remarks on Kant in the 1750s, and looks forward to the development of his thought on the problem of evil and the nature of religious faith throughout the 1760s.

## 2.2 Leibniz and his *Theodicy*

We begin with a reflection upon Kant's relation to Leibniz on the question of evil and faith, and what this may mean for our interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion. Such a reflection may potentially be quite important due to the fact that, as Jauernig points out, "with the exception of God, Leibniz is the most mentioned individual in the Kantian corpus overall... [which] indicates that Leibniz plays a prominent role in Kant's thinking during the latter's whole philosophical career" (2008: 41). Indeed, in her paper, Jauernig argues quite convincingly that Leibniz not only set the terms for much of Kant's philosophical reflections throughout his career, but ultimately set down the tradition that the Critical system stands in, in that the latter's metaphysics remain thoroughly Leibnizian<sup>9</sup>. Whilst one, of course, may quibble with such a view in the particulars (and Garber (2008) does this thoroughly), I want to argue more generally for a methodological similarity between Leibniz's and Kant's approaches to philosophy and what it can achieve.

Leibniz's classic work *Theodicy – Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* is perhaps the best example of the philosopher writing self-consciously about philosophy as a discipline and his philosophy in particular, and so it is this text that we shall focus on. Even more specifically, we will focus primarily on the Preface to the *Essays*, which, as Mercer (2014) has argued, sets out programmatically Leibniz's metaphilosophical assumptions and the aims that he has when discussing issues such as the problem of evil. For our purposes, we shall especially note the theory-praxis approach to the problem of evil and other religious issues that underlies Leibniz's reflections. As Antognazza notes, Leibniz had grand aims in mind throughout all his writings, both philosophical and non-philosophical:

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<sup>9</sup> Kant's thought is also highly indebted to the work of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, whose *Metaphysics* was the basis of a number of lecture courses that Kant gave throughout his teaching career. I will discuss Baumgarten in Chapter 4.



His final aim was the improvement of the human condition and thereby the celebration of the glory of God in His creation. Even the most theoretical reflections on logic, mathematics, metaphysics, physics, ethics, and theology were therefore, ultimately, *ad usum vitae* (in the service of life) and aimed at the happiness of humankind... [H]is regulative ideal was to wed *Theoria cum Praxi* (2009: 5).

In other words, Leibniz understood all of his works within a theistic scheme, one that is soteriological in tenor in focusing upon the ultimate moral development of humankind for the glory of God. Given such a context for Leibniz's works, we cannot simply read his philosophical works in a straightforward manner, for we always need to bear in mind the religious tinge imparted upon all his ideas by his wider project, even those that seemingly have little to do with religion itself. In the Preface to *Theodicy*, we find Leibniz directly connecting his theoretical work on the problem of evil and theodicy to his wider practical aims regarding faith and the development of humankind. I will argue later in the chapter that Kant holds sympathy for the approach of placing aims from the point of view of theory and praxis alongside each other in philosophy, and this can be seen from the very beginnings of his philosophical career, even in texts supposedly concentrating on natural science alone.

Leibniz begins the Preface with a stridently negative view of the state of religion not only at the time of writing, but throughout human history. He argues that in the context of organised religion, outward forms of the expression of faith, such as ceremonies and various doctrinal formulae, have been emphasised at the expense of true faith and piety. Ceremonies and doctrines may imitate and purport to reflect true faith, but this is not necessarily the case, writing that "it is only too often that religion is choked in ceremonial, and that the divine light is obscured by the opinions of men" (50<sup>10</sup>). Of course, religious formulae and sacraments have their place in the practice and expression of true faith. Rather, Leibniz's complaint is that such outward forms of

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<sup>10</sup> Unattributed references in this section are from Leibniz (1985).

religion have been granted too much importance and have come to outweigh that which is truly important, namely piety and virtue.

Leibniz offers an abridged history of the development of organised religion from early humanity. Pagan worship, he argues, was ultimately focused on the attempt to influence human events, a reflection of the fears that their precarious existence gave to them. Ceremonies were the centre of their religion, with little in the way of set formulas that might comprise a dogmatic theology. Most importantly for Leibniz, such pagan religion did not look forward to the possibility of a future life, nor (related to this) did they postulate a monotheistic God or an individual soul. As such, this religion also lacked a moral dimension, with the focus of religion directed outward (to questions regarding the weather and so forth), with the inward (the moral character and moral development of the individual) forgotten. In this vein, Leibniz argues that the advent of Judaism was an improvement upon pagan customs in formulating a moral dimension to religion that had hitherto not existed. Though not explicitly holding a doctrine of the immortality of souls, they had an oral tradition to that effect, and held the dogma of belief in one God who was a law-giver (thus passing from dogma to law). Leibniz argues that this process was completed with the coming of Jesus Christ who taught the immortality of the soul and the divine justice that will be visited upon it, so that whereas

Moses had already expressed the beautiful conceptions of the greatness and the goodness of God..., Jesus Christ demonstrated fully the results of these ideas, proclaiming that divine goodness and justice are shown forth to perfection in God's designs for the souls of men (50-51).

Another key innovation brought by Christ, Leibniz argues, was the idea that God must be loved as well as being treated with due fear and reverence. The influence of such love upon individuals is multi-faceted. For one thing, it deeply alters the way in which we approach our own lives and the world we live in by offering us hope through "a foretaste of future felicity" (51). In

delighting in God's love and taking "pleasure in the perfections of the object of our love" (*Ibid.*), we are able to catch a small glimpse of a future life containing a more intimate relation with God. The perfections that we are to delight in can be found in imperfect reflection everywhere, both inside (in the attributes of our soul) and out (in the harmony, order and beauty of the natural world). As such, true love of God not only brings the practical benefits of piety and virtue, and hope for a coming future life, but also insights into ourselves and others that would otherwise be shielded from us. We discover that our actions have cosmic and social significance, through a feeling of pleasure in undertaking virtuous actions and the communitarian sense of directing one's efforts towards the common good (hence, Leibniz writes that "[t]here is no piety where there is not charity; and without being kindly and beneficent one cannot show sincere religion" (52)). As a result, we become interested in pursuing the course of action that is most compatible with God's commands, and become more aware of the myriad ways in which we fall short of this standard. The interconnection, for Leibniz, between right beliefs and right action in a true love of God is spelled out by Poma, who writes that

[t]rue piety is principally a practical attitude. Love is a 'mental state' (affection), not an intellectual stance. The primacy of the intellect simply implies that the correct use of the intellect is an indispensable condition in order to direct love to a fitting object, to God, avoiding that it deviates to other illusory and false objects. Yet, if light is a necessary condition for its orientation, piety is nevertheless a fervour and its practical nature can by no means be reduced to an intellectual condition (2013: 34-35).

In true piety, then, behaviour that pleases God and belief in God will be complementary and grow alongside each other. A lack of one will indicate a lack of the other.

Through this new experience of God's love and its impact upon our own willing, we can also come to perfect our understanding through the formulation of moral principles. Leibniz emphasises that with true faith and piety, praxis and theory develop together, or as he puts it,

“the perfecting of our understanding must accomplish the perfecting of our will”<sup>11</sup> (52). This ensures that virtue and love of God are truly internalised, rather than a result of habit or mere preference. With a foundation in *knowledge* of God’s perfections<sup>12</sup>, virtue has a basis upon which it can be *reasonable* and work towards God’s will<sup>13</sup>. Leibniz states that the primary function of religion should be to encourage in the religious believer such a development of theory and praxis, as well as a growing knowledge of God’s perfections, with a corollary of love of God and virtuous actions. However, he criticises the Christian tradition in standing in the way of such a process through overemphasis on ceremonies and religious formulae, with the result that

[t]here are diverse persons who speak much of piety, of devotion, of religion, who are even busied with the teaching of such things, and who yet prove to be by no means versed in the divine perfections. They ill understand the goodness and the justice of the Sovereign of the universe; they imagine a God who deserves neither to be imitated nor to be loved (53).

It is here that Leibniz connects the contemporary state of the Christian tradition with the paucity of responses to the problem of evil, which is a perennial question that confronts those who reflect on religious matters. The lack of knowledge of God’s perfections, aided by an overemphasis on ritual and doctrine in church matters, has led to responses to the problem of evil that miss the crucial fact of God’s love for us, and instead focus on his power, apart from any influence of his perfect wisdom. Leibniz argues further that connected notions such as ‘freedom’, ‘necessity’, and ‘destiny’, have all been misunderstood and resulted in illegitimate attempts at theodicy due to a lack of knowledge of God’s perfections. It is the task of the *Theodicy* to attempt to rectify such a shortcoming in previous attempts at answering the problem of evil.

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<sup>11</sup> For Leibniz, the will “consists in the inclination to do something in proportion to the good it contains” (136), whilst the understanding is an umbrella term for general operations of the mind (see 101).

<sup>12</sup> Knowledge of God’s perfections arises out of the power of ‘inner light’, granted to us by God (see Mercer 2014: 35). Such knowledge, when used to cultivate true faith, can come to be a kind of ‘inward grace’, which Rutherford characterises as grounded in “[a]ll human beings [having] the capacity to know God as a supremely just creator and Jesus Christ as the redeemer of mankind, so for them there is at least the possibility of loving God above all things and of being moved to act by this love” (2014: 83).

<sup>13</sup> I will expand on Leibniz’s quite novel notion of reason and its connection to the divine later on in this section.

The intertwining of epistemological and practical issues in *Theodicy* has been noted by Poma, who writes of Leibniz that “he by no means underestimates the influence of the practical sphere on the possibility of an individual being deceived on the falsehood of appearances” (2013: 21)<sup>14</sup>. Both the intellect and the will are culpable in leading us into falsehood. If the will is influenced in a non-moral way, be it through sensible appearances or through bad habits, then the intellect can be led into misapplying its attention with regards to questions of right belief and right action, and as such, “[d]eception thus emerges as a perversion of the individual’s rational judgement, which has practical origins” (*Ibid.*). Such a view ties into the critique of overemphasis on religious ceremonies and formulae that we noted earlier. The will of the impious individual leads the intellect astray in shifting attention away from virtue and moral principles more generally, and towards issues of ceremony and dogma. If such ceremonies and formulae are reflections of right belief and right action, that is, if they are ‘truthful’ and not the outcome of deception, then they form part of a genuine theism. False ceremonies and formulae, on the other hand, are especially pernicious because they take on the guise of truth. The truth that the intellect and will should be grounded in, as we have seen, is knowledge of God’s perfections, discovered by reason itself.

Leibniz then focuses his attention on the notion of necessity in relation to events in general and human actions in particular. He warns against an easy slide into fatalism once we see necessity in the world, either grounded in the foreknowledge of the deity, or in a pre-established course of events by the deity, because all events happen in a strict causal field, or in the already-fixed truth or falsity of assertions regarding the future. The practical effects of holding such a theory are great, in that “it tended towards doing nothing, or at least towards being careful for nothing and only following inclination for the pleasure of the moment” (54). Fatalism signals in the individual a loss of hope for the future, a loss of the feeling of responsibility for shaping events

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<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Rutherford also writes that, for Leibniz, “The path to the highest happiness leads through the pursuit of intellectual knowledge and the practice of justice” (2014: 76).

in the world, or possibly a slide into hedonism, with a potentially damaging focus on that which is immediately present. In this vein, Leibniz discusses *Fatum Mahometanum*, the kind of fatalism that he argues is held in the religion of Islam, in which the will of God is so absolute that all things are taken to be governed by absolute necessity.

Another kind of fatalism occurs in Stoicism, which is not quite as damaging, as it fosters a relaxed tranquillity towards events as they occur in the spirit of obedience towards the divine. Even Stoicism, however, falls short of what true faith in God can offer; the stance it takes towards the future is a “forced patience” (*Ibid.*), in that Stoic practice, with the desire to cultivate a certain kind of tranquillity in response to life, is pursued with the open possibility that there is no divine care for the world and we have no means of substantively improving the world in which we find ourselves (it is this that give Stoicism its fatalistic aspect for Leibniz)<sup>15</sup>. Stoicism appears here as an unnatural position that does not give us true confidence in what is to come, and certainly falling short of offering a hope that is ultimately satisfactory for the human understanding. In addition, the *Fatum Stoicum*, as Poma (2013: 48-49) points out, shares certain theoretical underpinnings with the *Fatum Mahometanum*. If one stresses the absolute will of God to the extent that is found in the *Fatum Mahometanum*, then the actions of the divine are seen as ultimately arbitrary, with no underlying providential plan underlying the structure of the created world. Leibniz sees the *Fatum Stoicum* as ultimately committing the same error as attributing all events to the arbitrary will of God, giving a sense of randomness rather than providential order to nature<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Rutherford has noted that the key difference for Leibniz between Stoicism and Christianity concerns the question of divine grace: “Where the Stoic is limited to assenting to the order of nature as right and necessary whatever hardships it may bring, the Christian can live with the assurance that she will be taken care of by God” (2014: 87).

<sup>16</sup> Worries surrounding an arbitrary will of God also figure in Leibniz’s critique of Cartesian voluntarism, according to which necessary truths are taken to depend on God’s will. As Adams writes, Leibniz worried that in the Cartesian view, “God would be arbitrary in ways that would fatally undermine belief in divine goodness and justice” (1994: 190). In *Theodicy*, Leibniz links his critique of Descartes to the topic of divine freedom, arguing that a Cartesian voluntarism ultimately negates any notion of God being free, for “if the affirmation of necessary truths were actions of the will of the most perfect mind, these actions would be anything but free, for there is nothing to choose” (245).

In contrast to these two types of fatalism, a proper stance of contentment and hope towards the future is to be found only in knowledge of God's perfections, which gives us the knowledge that God has ultimate wisdom and care towards the world in which we live. In this lies the final rejection of the problem of evil, for we come to see that "our confidence in [God] ought to be entire... [and that] if we were capable of understanding him, that it is not even possible to wish for anything better (as much in general as for ourselves) than what he does" (55). We come to see, in other words, that our worries regarding the existence of evil in the world, in whatever form it may take, are ultimately groundless in the face of the truth concerning God's wisdom, love, and care for all who reside in it. Of course, we still live in a world ruled by a divine plan, and the nature of things will have an impact, but acting in accordance with God's will, for the reason that it is precisely God's will, is the only true freedom we could have. As Poma notes, for Leibniz, "[f]reedom... is perfect in God, in the sense that there is a perfect self-determination to the good", and thus with regards to human freedom, "[t]rue freedom... lies in moral autonomy. Only this lifts us up and brings us closer to divine perfection" (2013: 146).

Leibniz allows that there is a kind of fatalism in Christianity (a *Fatum Christianum*), but it is crucially different from the other types of fatalism discussed above in adhering to different approaches to the necessity guiding the development of creation and fostering a different kind of response to the imperfect world in which we find ourselves. It is emphasised, however, that even when we have safely reached *Fatum Christianum*, we should be ever vigilant against sliding back into pernicious forms of fatalism and the loss of responsibility and hope that this entails. Leibniz here gives an example of failing to look after one's health properly when ill-health and death may seem far off, given the view of "lazy reason... [that] our days are numbered and that it avails of nothing to try to struggle against that which God destinies for us" (55), or of leaving potentially difficult, life-changing decisions to fortune-tellers in an attempt to avoid reasoning properly about the situation. A fatalistic optimism too must be avoided, as alongside pessimistic outlooks, "[t]hey overlook the fact that there is usually an ebb and flow in fortune" (56). A soldier may take heart

from a previous set of successful battles and face his next one with an extra dose of bravery, but the practical value of truth (in this case, a realistic evaluation of the danger of a given situation) will always be higher than a useful error (unrealistic evaluations may aid him in some situations, but the balance of probabilities tell us they will ultimately be his undoing), as after all, the line between bravery and foolhardiness is notoriously difficult to draw.

Looking forward to our discussion of Kant, we see Leibniz here indicating a preference for a middle way between optimism and pessimistic views about the course of human history and the existence of evil in the world. Such a view is realistic in being grounded in knowledge of God and of his perfections, and reflects more genuinely the difficulty that faces us in attempting to draw a neat narrative over human events.

Leibniz also again points to a deep relation between theory and praxis, this time in relation to fatalism. If fate decides all things, and correspondingly the notion of our own free will is empty, then we will have no reason to attempt to cultivate virtue in ourselves and others. As a result, we will fall into a state of moral inactivity and lack of moral development. Fatalism lends itself, as he has already argued, to hedonism and a ‘living in the moment’ which will ultimately prove destructive. Leibniz argues that we need to “note the different degrees of necessity, and to show that there are some which cannot do harm [to our notion of freedom], as there are others which cannot be admitted without giving rise to evil consequences” (57). The kind of necessity<sup>17</sup> held to by the fatalists is much stronger, and has the kind of ‘evil consequences’ that we have already touched upon, whilst the affirmation of causal determinism within a Christian view of the universe assumes a lower degree of necessity that in fact makes true freedom possible, rather

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<sup>17</sup> Borst (1992) outlines a number of features of Leibniz’s account of free will that helps us to understand what Leibniz might mean by differing degrees of necessity and our response to necessity in the world in the *Theodicy*. Despite denying indifference of equilibrium, the fact that we are inclined by our natures does not affect our freedom. The only kind of fatalism that Leibniz will allow in his system is connected to God’s foreknowledge and foreordination – however, this does not impact upon our actions insofar as whilst what is foreknown is true, the foreknowledge does not make it necessarily true. The ‘moral necessity’, in which everything follows from God’s best choice, does not entail brute necessity, in which we are ‘forced’ into performing the actions that we choose. Exploring Leibniz’s complex views regarding human and divine freedom in relation to necessity any further would take us beyond the scope of this thesis.



than negating it. Once we understand that a lower degree of necessity attaches to causal determinism, and the free will is thus safeguarded, our moral discourse will no longer be liable to be distorted or to collapse under the seductive weight of fatalism.

Partly, the Christian tradition of creation *ex nihilo* can go some of the way to explaining the temptation to fatalism. If God has created all things out of nothing, and thus is responsible for all things, then he, it would appear, can be held responsible for all of our bad actions and the evil events that take place in the world. Leibniz rejects various ways of attempting to avoid this difficulty, for example, to deny God's foreknowledge of future events or to state that the problem of evil, as far as our reason is concerned, is simply intractable (he attributes this latter view to Bayle (58)), or to argue that 'might is right' and that God's power should be simply accepted regardless of his justice. What unites these views, he argues, is their obscuring of God's justice and ultimate goodness, for "one must attribute to the true God sentiments that render him worthy to be called the good Principle" (59). The Christian view of the universe, that affirms God as a 'good Principle', is able to affirm what *must* be to the extent that necessity is present in the created world, as ultimately something that is for the best – though this may entail switching from a stricter, logical view of necessity to a broader, moral view.

In order to explicate Leibniz's response to evil on the basis of his account of God's creation of the world, we need to reflect briefly upon his rather complex views concerning necessity. Griffin (2013) discusses at length the kind of necessitarianism that can be seen as a consistent position throughout much of Leibniz's philosophical works. He summarises Leibniz's necessitarian commitments as two theses, "everything actual is metaphysically necessary and everything metaphysically possible is actual" (2013: 58), both of which are linked to his doctrine of God and creation. Leibniz's account begins with the stipulation that God is intrinsically necessary, that is, exists by virtue of his own essence, and that everything else that exists is extrinsically necessary with respect to being entailed by that which is intrinsically necessary, i.e.

the existence of God (given necessity being closed under entailment and all things falling under the principle of sufficient reason). However, possibility is not confined to that which is actual. There may be conceivable possibles that are not actualised, 'intrinsically possible' in themselves, but nevertheless are not *metaphysically* possible due to the role of God in actualisation – for a conceivable thing may not be in the world God would create. With regards to the problem of evil, Leibniz focuses on the wisdom and goodness of God that follows from his necessary essence. Griffin writes that,

[i]t is important to [Leibniz] that the actual world be intrinsically contingent, since otherwise God's wisdom and goodness play no role in explaining why this world is actual. But even if everything actual is metaphysically necessary, so long as it's extrinsically necessary, there is a place for God's wisdom and goodness in the explanation of its actuality. In fact, God's wisdom and goodness explain not only [our world's] actuality, but also its necessity. It is only because God is wise and good that this world is actual. And it's only because God's wisdom and goodness are essential that this world's actual existence is metaphysically necessary (*Ibid.*: 65).

Leibniz's brand of necessitarianism, grounded in God's wise and good choice in creating the world, allows him to balance the contingency of the world (thus preserving God's actualisation choice as non-trivial) with the notion that everything that happens in this world (including evil) is morally necessary, and thus not imputable to God, in some sense. We can sustain a sense in which there are possible worlds, and thus a non-trivial conception that things might have been otherwise, whilst at the same time affirming that all the evil in creation could not have been avoided.

Another key doctrine of the Christian tradition that poses problems for our understanding of freedom and of God's justice is that of original sin and predestination. The myth of the Fall generally holds that as the result of a first sin committed by Adam, the first human individual to

be created, human nature (and indeed nature in general) was tainted in some way, such that all human beings have a disposition towards sinning and require salvation from their sinful ways. Such a view seems to absolve us of our responsibility for the sinful actions we take, for they ultimately have a ground in someone else's action, i.e. in the first sin undertaken by Adam. We may also wonder if God himself should be held responsible for the Fall as presumably he will have foreseen that Adam would commit a sin eventually. Furthermore, such a view may be taken to mean that God, in his goodness and justice, could not act other than to grant grace to all, which would arguably make any scheme of divine justice ultimately meaningless. Leaving behind the difficulties regarding original sin, the divine scheme of salvation held in the Christian tradition can also raise up puzzles that may challenge our knowledge of God's love and of our freedom, for example, even if we admit that God may deem some not worthy of his grace, there is still a question of justice regarding the lack of faith they have and other salient circumstances that they have been placed into by God.

We see, then, that in the Preface to his *Theodicy*, Leibniz takes us through a wide range of different pitfalls that face us in our quest to a true understanding of God's perfections, our freedom, and the existence of evil in the world. Nevertheless, he states boldly, "I hope to remove all these difficulties" (61), and such a project will involve a number of interconnected tasks. As already alluded to, he will first defend the freedom of the will by making clear that absolute necessity cannot and in fact does not attach to actions (neither divine nor human). Rather, the determination of God's will upon the world, and the expression of this in the laws of nature, should be taken as operating at a lower level of necessity, a middle point in between absolute necessity and arbitrariness. As such, whilst there is ultimate dependence of all things upon God, our actions still have a degree of spontaneity such that we can legitimately claim that they are free.

Further, Leibniz affirms that knowledge of God's perfections can reveal compatibility between his goodness and the permission he gives for evil things to occur in the world, and the fact that he wills the salvation of all, even though he condemns some who have an evil will. Once we understand God's nature, we can, due to this nature manifesting itself in creation, understand the world around us as involving both evil and an ultimate divine plan without incompatibility. As Rutherford writes, reflection upon the problem of evil and theodicy in the light of knowledge of God's perfections brings a further benefit of consolation in the face of evil, for,

in understanding God's justice, we acquire confidence in the rightness of all his actions. With this confidence, we are insulated from the disturbing effect of worldly evil; or if we are disturbed, we have the means of recovering our tranquillity through reflection on the nature of divine justice... In understanding the larger context in which God exercises his justice, we are aided in dealing with loss, grief, and perceived injustice – circumstances that reflect our limited power and vulnerability to fortune (2014: 76).

Through the consolation offered by (Christian) faith, we are able to face the problem of evil with new confidence that justice will reign throughout creation, even if we come across overriding evil in the course of our lives.

As the issues of right faith and reflection upon the problem of evil are so interconnected for Leibniz, it is part of his purpose to defend faith and God by combatting various misguided attempts to state and deal with the problem of evil. He writes, "[m]y hope for success therein is all the greater because it is the cause of God I plead, and because one of the maxims here upheld states that God's help is never lacking for those that lack not good will" (62). In doing so, he will attempt to strike a balance between religion and reason, fostering "such knowledge of God as is needed to awaken piety and to foster virtue" (63). Reason plays an instrumental role, then, in providing the theory needed to foster that right praxis that follows naturally from true faith and knowledge of God's perfections. As already mentioned, Mercer (2014) has noted the importance

of the metaphilosophical ideas (regarding the aims and methods of the philosophical project in *Theodicy*) being expressed in the Preface. She argues that there are two major metaphilosophical claims that Leibniz makes here (*Ibid.*: 13): first, what she calls ‘rational rationalism’, which is the claim that any rational being (regardless of religious tradition) is capable of garnering knowledge of God’s perfections, and, second, the claim that the search for knowledge of God’s perfections is a corollary of seeking virtue. If one uses reason in the right way in seeking cognition of God, one’s virtue will naturally increase. As Poma notes, “the relationship between knowledge and practice in faith is one of reciprocal influence. Just as knowledge is a condition of virtue, so practical conduct is a condition of knowledge” (2013: 32).

The wrong approach to the problem of evil, then, is a reflection of a lack of true knowledge of God’s reflections, which in turn is a reflection of the primacy of self-love in guiding the pursuits of the intellect. Given these two assumptions, the *Theodicy* is intended to aid the reader in such a theoretical-practical pursuit, with the ultimate aim of bringing about pious and virtuous people who have a clear sense of God’s perfections. As such, Leibniz’s approach to the problem of evil needs to be understood in such a metaphilosophical context. We will see in the discussion that follows that Kant holds a similar view regarding the metaphilosophy underlying the proper approach to the problem of evil and theodicy, as well as the capacity the human individual has to gain some sense of God’s creative act and wisdom underlying the world in which we find ourselves (though he would refrain from straightforwardly labelling it knowledge).

Moving on from the *Preface*, we can gain further insights into the connection between knowledge of God’s perfections, true piety, and virtue in the following *Preliminary Dissertation on the Conformity of Faith with Reason*. The *Preliminary Dissertation* is lengthy and complex in its argument, so I will offer a brief summary of the key points to be found that are relevant for our purposes. It is in this section that Leibniz’s theodicy comes to be seen as fundamentally *a priori*, that is one that can be accessed individually and can be cognized to be true purely through

introspection. One of Leibniz's main targets in this work is Pierre Bayle, with whom Leibniz had corresponded on issues key to *Theodicy* since 1695<sup>18</sup>. On the question of a possible conflict between faith and reason, Bayle had prioritised faith, and painted reason as a limited faculty that pales in comparison to the epistemic weight of religious faith (see Irwin 2014: 44-47). Leibniz characterises Bayle as seeking to “[display] the power of faith by showing that the truths it teaches cannot sustain the attacks of reason and that it nevertheless holds its own in the heart of the faithful” (96). Bayle argues that despite rational attacks upon the commitments of religious faith, those who have true piety remain strong, secure in their certain knowledge of the God of Christianity. Certain truths including those of the Christian religion, can be contrary to reason, and thus when it comes to mysteries such as the Trinity and Incarnation, revelation and faith must be trusted.

Leibniz, on the other hand, wishes to argue for the compatibility of faith and reason in the *Preliminary Dissertation*, thus vindicating both the commitments of religious faith and the workings of our rationality, though agreeing more generally with Bayle as regards the superiority of faith over reason, for, through faith, we can come to a kind of moral certainty, which can override any worries concerning the possibility of theoretical error through the operations of our rationality (see 76)<sup>19</sup>. The power of faith is shown through its practical impact upon the life of believers, as

divine faith itself, when it is kindled in the soul, is something more than an opinion, and depends not upon the occasions or the motives that have given it birth; it advances beyond the intellect, and takes possession of the will and of the heart, to make us act with zeal and joyfully as the law of God commands. Then we have no further need to think of reasons or to pause over the difficulties of argument which the mind may anticipate (91).

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<sup>18</sup> More information of the history of dispatches between the two can be found in Farrer's introduction to *Theodicy*, esp. 34-47.

<sup>19</sup> See Adams (1994): 195-198 for an in-depth discussion of the priority of moral certainty.

Religious faith can perhaps be said to be given its own justification through the evidence of its impact upon the life of the believer, granting a kind of certainty to the pious that has an impact beyond our beliefs and fundamentally shapes the way they live. Leibniz is careful to stress, though, that reason can work happily alongside true religious faith.

Part of Leibniz's vindication of reason (characterised as a faculty of "linking together of truths" (73), which he describes as an "inviolable" activity (88)) against the position of Bayle, lies in his emphasis of reason as given to us by God, and as an imperfect version of divine reason, despite any possible taint from original sin. Poma writes that,

[f]or Leibniz,... there is only one reason (divine and human) and it is unswervingly good. Evil may instead lie in the use of reason in judging on appearances – or rather the 'abuse' of reason, resulting in a 'seeming' reason which, according to the common conception limits itself to judging things 'according to the usual course of Nature', without considering the 'convenience' which inspired the choice of such an order – that is to say, without any *a priori* basis (2013: 65).

Human reason, due to its participation in divine reason, is ultimately trustworthy due to an inherent connection to the truth of things lying in some form of access to eternal truths, for "[s]ince... eternal truths exist in the divine intellect, reason represents, first and foremost, the divine intellect itself. Only as a consequence of this does it also constitute the human knowledge of the connection between truths" (*Ibid.*: 66). As reason is a mental faculty granted us to God in his act of creation<sup>20</sup>, and can represent a perfect divine intellect, nothing that is revealed to us can conflict with its operations, though it may often be beyond our comprehension. In this vein, Leibniz distinguishes between possible objects of belief being against reason (that which is "contrary to the absolutely certain and inevitable truths") and those above reason (that which "is

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<sup>20</sup> Leibniz characterises reason as a 'gift', and as God giving part of himself to us (96; see Poma 2013: 70, for an explication of the significance of this imagery).

in opposition only to what one is wont to experience or to understand” (88)). Mysteries of the Christian tradition are taken not to be against reason, in the sense that reason tells against them in some sense, but instead are said to be above reason, merely beyond our comprehension and alien to the normal course of things in our experience. Key truths of the Christian revelation cannot be grasped by human reason, but because “a truth can never be contrary to reason” (*Ibid.*), these truths cannot be said to be in opposition to gleanings of our rationality. Thus, reason and faith are compatible.

However, in addition to this, reason can be positively used in defence of faith. As Irwin notes (2014: 48), Leibnizian reason not only has a methodological role of linking truths, but also acts as a source of non-sensory truths. As such, we can garner from reason, “two distinct kinds of truths: ‘mixed truths’, whose content is provided by experience and tradition, but whose relations are determined by reason; and ‘pure’ truths, whose actual content is provided by reason independently of experience” (*Ibid.*). If we characterise the mysteries of the Christian religion as such ‘mixed truths’, with the implication that they are on a par with beliefs sourced from our everyday sensory experience, then we can treat them in the same manner as we treat our everyday beliefs, namely, we can accept or at least presume them as true as long as they have not been disproven. Leibniz writes that,

[w]hen one is content to uphold [the] truth [of a mystery], without attempting to render it comprehensible, one has no need to resort to philosophic maxims, general or particular, for the proof; and when another brings up some philosophic maxims against us, it is not for us to prove clearly and distinctly that these maxims are consistent with our dogma, but it is for our opponent to prove that they are contrary thereto (118).

In addition to this, Rutherford has noted that, for Leibniz, reason also gives us the capacity to “conceive of [our] moral personality on analogy with the moral personality of God” (2014: 73).



Once we have an understanding of God's justice, our reason can be used to infer that we should try to act according to the same standard. In this way, theory and praxis intertwine.

On the Leibnizian scheme, then, reason has a complex role to play with regards to faith and revelation. Due to operations of reason, we can presume the truth of mysteries even though they are 'above reason', that is incomprehensible by our rationality. In relation to this, Adams (1994: 194-202) notes the connections Leibniz draws between theology and jurisprudence, which both involve hypotheses that are presumed until being overturned by evidence. Such a connection also brings in questions of action – for example, if there is insufficient evidence to convict an individual, even if we may believe that individual to be guilty or we are unsure, we must, in the interests of justice, behave towards them as though they are innocent. Our presumption of innocence in this respect can override our beliefs and shape our behaviour. Leibniz advocates a parallel approach to the mysteries of faith. Though our religious beliefs may be vague, or directed at truths that are incomprehensible to us, or even if other evidence tells against them, the presumption must be on the side of God and must be allowed to shape our behaviour in a positive manner (i.e. towards virtue and creating an environment in accordance with God's wishes). Such an approach ties directly into Leibniz's response to the problem of evil. God must be presumed innocent until proven guilty, and even though our reason cannot comprehend why the existence of evil would be compatible with God's existence, we can nevertheless give our assent to it and shape our behaviour accordingly.

Having explored some of Leibniz's metaphilosophy, in particular his philosophical approach to the nature of religious faith and the problem of evil, we can now turn to Kant's early works on such topics in order to carry out an evaluation of his reaction to the Leibnizian approach.

### 2.3 Optimism and the *Manuscript Reflections*

The story of Kant's reflections on the problem of evil, coming to its fruition in the doctrine of radical evil found in *Religion*, begins forty years before the publication of that work, in *Three manuscript reflections on optimism*<sup>21</sup>, dated to the early 1750s<sup>22</sup>. I will argue that the same underlying approach on the part of Kant to the nature of religious faith and the problem of evil is present throughout his works, and thus our discussion of these early works is relevant for our understanding of the religious framework of Kant's thought and its impact upon *Religion*. The *Manuscript Reflections* are a part of an apparently unsuccessful attempt to write an essay for a prize-essay competition set by the Prussian Royal Academy of Sciences, with a theme of the optimism of Alexander Pope, who, similarly to Leibniz, argues for the ultimate goodness of the world in which we find ourselves in the face of evidence to the contrary in moral and natural evil. These texts show that Kant had been concerned with issues surrounding the problem of evil and theodicy for a long time, in that they betray an active and longstanding reflection upon the 'optimisms' espoused by both Pope and Leibniz. Given our understanding of Leibniz's approach to freedom and evil, and the philosophical approach that he takes in the *Theodicy*, we can approach the important topic of what parallels there are between Kant of the 1750s and Leibniz on evil with more confidence, with an ultimate view to understanding the evolution of the former's views regarding the problem of evil and freedom leading up to *Religion*. If, as I will argue, Kant's views are developed against a Leibnizian background, we can now successfully examine salient early works in the right context having reflected upon Leibniz's approach in the *Theodicy*.

Kant, in Reflection 3704, begins by outlining what he understands to be the main claims of Leibniz's optimistic position with regards to the problem of evil. The existence of evil in the world,

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<sup>21</sup> This text will be referred to as *Manuscript Reflections* in what follows.

<sup>22</sup> See the editorial note on pg. 77 of *Theoretical Philosophy: 1755-1770* in the Cambridge edition. Details of the volume are in the 'Referenced works' section.

according to such a view, is not to be taken as evidence against an all-good, all-powerful being. Indeed, God is wholly justified in creating our world, with the evils it contains. It is good for God to have created the world, and out of all the possible worlds he could cognize, he would have created the most perfect one. The evils we experience in the world are an inevitable by-product of a world that contains finite things. However, if we could see things from God's perspective, we would understand that all will ultimately be for the best, and God's goodness will prevail and reward all those who have suffered. Kant characterises God's goodness

as the current of a river which, with even force, sweeps along everything to be found within it, except that the heavy cargo vessels, which have more natural inertia than those vessels of smaller mass, are carried along more slowly than these latter (79 – page references to *Manuscript Reflections* are from the *Cambridge Edition*, all other references to Kant are from *AK* (German) edition).

The Leibnizian position seems to have a note of universalism here, in that all will eventually be a part of the glorious, all-good end-point of history that is the fruition of God's plan for creation. From our position, though, given that we cannot adopt God's perspective on the world, we must be satisfied with hope alone, expecting nothing "other than an eventual perfect satisfaction, or at least a complete justification of God's justice and goodness" (*Ibid.*).

Despite Kant clearly supporting a general Leibnizian line with regard to the existence of evil, he also has some reservations, and goes on to outline why he thinks Pope's view is in some ways superior. One of the important differences, it would appear, between Leibniz and Pope for Kant is over the issue of the existence of true imperfections. Kant seems to believe that Leibniz's position, allowing for imperfection in the world in which we find ourselves, will not satisfy all those "who are willing to acknowledge that contemplating the world reveals traces of God" (80). Pope's account, on the other hand, "subjects every possibility to the dominion of an all-sufficient original Being; under this Being things can have no other properties, not even those which are

called essentially necessary, apart from those which harmonise together to give complete expression to His perfection”<sup>23</sup>, and, through this, “he shows that each thing, which we might see removed from the scheme of greatest perfection, is also, when considered in itself, good” (*Ibid.*). Kant, then, seems to applaud Pope in stressing the necessity of all things, given God’s moral perfection, as a way of avoiding the acceptance of true imperfections in a world created by a perfect being. In addition, Kant praises the *spirit* in which Pope’s account is given, in contrast to Leibniz, in that “[Pope] also shows that we should not beforehand entertain an advantageous prejudice in favour of the wisdom of the Organising Being, in order to win applause for Him” (*Ibid.*). Kant seems to think that Pope conducts his inquiries in a more objective manner, not in an attitude of servility towards the divine, but instead that of open inquiry.

In Reflection 3075, Kant goes on to suggest some objections to Leibniz’s attempt at theodicy, with the result that he states “[t]he errors of this theory are indeed too serious for us to be able accept it” (81). The first aspect of Leibniz’s view that Kant attacks is the assumption that there is some necessary feature of a created, material world that would always lead to the existence of natural and moral evil, arguing that Leibniz fails to deal with “the serious question [of] why the eternal necessity should have something about it which conflicts with the will of God, and constrains Him to admit evils without their having won His approval”, and that “[t]he whole mistake consists in the fact that Leibniz identifies the scheme of the best world on the one hand with a kind of independence, and on the other hand with dependence on the will of God. All possibility is spread out before God” (82). Kant’s objection here seems to be that Leibniz underestimates the sphere of possibility open to God in deciding which possible world to actualise, in that there seems no obvious reason why there could not be a possible world that is finite, material, and yet contains no evil. Kant seems to find wanting a reason for Leibniz’s argument that the best possible world that God could have created had to have involved evil.

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<sup>23</sup> Such properties would be the standard primary attributes of the God of classical theism such as omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and so forth.

Why, in the entire sphere of possible worlds that God could actualise, is there no finite world that does not involve evil? Leibniz's argumentative strategy has a tension between the claim that what is possible is independent of what God wills, and thus God's choice is constrained in some way, and the claim that God chose the best possible world.

The Reflection ends with a final point against Leibniz's theodicy, namely that "the evils and irregularities which are perceived in the world are only excused on the assumption that God exists" (*Ibid.*). Not only is the theodicy never going to convince people whose minds are wholly set against the possibility of God's existing, but, Kant goes on to state, there is a much better way through which to persuade such people. Kant argues for a kind of teleological argument, that we should emphasize the 'universal agreement' of all things in the world, as ultimately the best way to engender hope in people that God's goodness will eventually reign completely over all creation. Leibniz's position will only ever serve to undermine such an argument from apparent design, as it begs the question regarding precisely the extent to which God's providence stretches over creation, and thus his status as an all-powerful being. He imagines Epicurus concluding that,

if the wise first cause was not able to bring all things into a scheme of harmonious beauty, then it follows that not all things, at least, are subject, in respect of their properties, to the pleasure of that first cause. Eternal fate, which so much limits the power of the potent cause, and which extorts from it the agreement to the existence of crude evils, thereby deprives that power of its all-sufficiency, and makes it subject to the necessity of those very evils (83).

As such, then, we see a wide-ranging critique of Leibnizian theodicy in these unpublished notes.

However, we should be clear that these notes do not offer a wholesale rejection of Leibniz's approach to the problem of evil. The first point to make is that these are just exploratory notes, and do not constitute a systematically worked-out response to Leibniz's or Pope's brand of optimism. The notes are fragmentary in nature, and appear to be the very first stages of an essay

that was never written. Further to this, the critique of Leibniz offered here has a more narrow focus than we might suppose on first reading. Kant certainly questions Leibniz's views concerning the sphere of possibility open to God's creative act, as well as a potential insensitivity in overlooking specific evils in the world, and the need for an underlying assumption of God's existence to get the theodicy off the ground. However, these questions do not add up to a wholesale rejection of a Leibnizian approach to the problem of evil, even though at the time Kant does write of Leibniz's position that "[t]he errors of this theory are indeed too serious for us to be able to accept" (81). What these notes *do* show is that Kant, at this very early stage in his career, is very interested in Leibniz and various responses to the problem of evil. Indeed, the sustained critique of Leibnizian theodicy here reveals that Kant sees such an approach as a live option for him to explore. The metaphysical basis of Leibniz's approach in *Theodicy* is largely left alone for now, and this is, as well shall see, one of the key reasons for Kant's more positive stance in later works.

## 2.4 Further *Reflections on Optimism* (and a puzzle)

Following these manuscript reflections, we find similar themes in *An attempt at some reflections on optimism*<sup>24</sup>, as part of an advertisement of his forthcoming lectures for the semester at the end of 1759. However, notably in this later text, we find something of a shift in focus, leading towards a more positive reaction to the Leibnizian approach to theodicy. Such a shift highlights Kant's continued reflection upon the challenge the problem of evil poses to religious faith. In *Reflections on Optimism*, we discover a series of arguments that constitute a thoroughly Leibnizian response to the problem of evil. As such, Kant clearly has a positive stance towards Leibniz's position, even though he has some misgivings on some points, as we saw in the previous section.

Kant's stated target in these arguments is those who deny that God chose to actualise the world we live in because it is the best of all possible worlds that was within his power to actualise, and instead argue that God simply chose the world because it merely pleased him to do so. Kant indicates that he believes the perversity of such a view to be the main cause of its popularity, as "it is often the case with some of the things we know that they are highly esteemed, not because they are right, but because they have been gained at a cost. We do not care for truth at bargain price" (2:29). There are four main arguments that are used in *Reflections on Optimism* to defend Leibniz against this position, and I will go through these in turn.

Argument 1 – The first argument we are presented with by Kant is to the effect that it is indeed possible in principle to think of a possible world of which a better world could not be thought. The reason for believing this is grounded in the claim that it is simply part of the definition of a 'Supreme Understanding' that it have cognition of all possible worlds. If the Supreme Understanding must have cognition of all possible worlds, then for such a being, there

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<sup>24</sup> This text will be referred to as *Reflections on Optimism*.

must be a cognizable world for which a still better world could not be imagined, for “if I can assert of any particular idea whatever, which can be made of a world, that the representation of a still better world is possible, then the same thing can also be said of all the ideas of worlds in the Divine Understanding” (2:30). However, if there are possible worlds better than all of those cognizable by the Divine Understanding, then that Understanding does not know all possible worlds, which is in conflict with the very notion of a Divine Understanding. We can therefore see by *reductio* that a Divine Understanding must be able to cognise a world of which a better world could not be thought.

Argument 2 – However, the first argument presented by Kant leaves open the possibility of possible worlds that are equally perfect, or, put differently, have the same degree of the most amount of goodness, in that a better world could not be thought of either of them. In such a situation, Kant takes it that a Leibnizian theodicy would be defeated, as there would not be a possible world that would be best. The second argument (which he takes to be new), then, as part of Kant’s effort to defend Leibniz, attempts to preclude the possibility of such a situation. This argument relies on the claim that the greatness of worlds depends on the respective degrees of reality that they contain. We could try, Kant suggests, distinguishing worlds on the basis of the quality of their reality and the magnitude of their reality. When it comes to the comparison of worlds, Kant states, any salient characteristic of a world will be something positive, as worlds are sets of possibly existing things – the magnitude of that world being set by the amount of positive marks it has. It follows from this that if one world is to differ from another, then that difference consists in it having something positive that the other world does not have, or vice versa. So, our comparison between worlds is made when “something negative would be thought in the one [world] which enabled us to distinguish it from the other” (2:31), that is, when we understand a world as lacking some positive mark that another possible world has.



As a result, the worlds are being compared in terms of the magnitude they contain, the magnitude of their reality, rather than in terms of the quality of the reality they contain, however that might be understood, for “reality and reality differ from each other only in virtue of the negations, the absence and limits attaching to one of them” (*Ibid.*)<sup>25</sup>. So, if two worlds are to be differentiated, they can only be done so through the degree of the reality they contain. The result which Kant wants, that no two worlds can be cognized to have the same degree of reality, is obtained by an application of the principle of identity of indiscernibles. If the only way to distinguish between worlds is through the magnitude of their reality, any two worlds with the same magnitude would in fact be indiscernible and thus identical – they would be the same world. Therefore, no two worlds could be cognized by God to be equally best – there is only one best possible world, as far as the Supreme Understanding is concerned. The Leibnizian position that maintains that there is one best of all possible worlds, and that this best of all possible worlds must in fact be ours, is saved, at least for now.

Argument 3 – Kant, though, then goes on to consider the anti-Leibnizian claim that the very notion of the greatest of all possible worlds is self-contradictory. The anti-Leibnizian argument, as Kant takes it, attempts to strike a parallel between problems with the notion of the greatest of all numbers and the notion of the best of all possible worlds. The notion of the greatest of all possible numbers is taken to be a self-contradictory concept as more can be added to any number you may ever come across, and as a parallel, it is argued that more reality could always be added to any possible world you could ever come across, and so the notion of the greatest of all possible worlds is also self-contradictory.

Kant faces this anti-Leibnizian argument by pointing out a disanalogy between numbers and possible worlds. Whilst there is indeed no such number as the greatest possible number,

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<sup>25</sup> Kant’s early view of the nature of negation is expounded in greater detail in his *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (1763). Engaging with this account would take us beyond the scope of this thesis.

there is a greatest degree of reality, namely God, and whilst multiplicity (which numbers essentially denote) is finite<sup>26</sup>, there is a *bona fide* infinite source of reality that provides a determinate magnitude between itself and any example of finite reality. The world that so happens to find itself “at that point on the scale of beings which marks the start of the chasm<sup>27</sup> containing the measureless degree of perfection which elevate the Eternal Being above every creature” (2:33) will be the best of all possible worlds. So, whilst you can always have a greater number, there is a point at which a created world could be the greatest, for

the predicate ‘greatest’ cannot belong to any such finite number, for no matter what determinate plurality one thinks, every such finite number can be increased by addition without its finitude being thereby diminished. The degree of reality of a world is, on the other hand, something which is completely determinate (2:32).

God, as the infinite source of reality, sets a standard by which a perfection of a world can be made determinate – given its created status, it is a much thicker notion than that of a number, and can be said to lack features such as “[i]ndependence, self-sufficiency, presence in all places, the power to create, and so on” (*Ibid.*). The notion of a created world itself allows for there to be a definitive chasm between the range of possible created worlds, with our world at its pinnacle, and the infinite source of reality, God. No such chasm exists between finite numbers and a mathematical infinity, for a number can always be increased in magnitude. In other words, there is a disanalogy between numbers and worlds here as there is no infinite number but there is an infinite reality, namely God.

Having the touchstone of infinite reality allows us to identify a ‘greatest world’, which is not possible in the case of numbers. Therefore, the cases of the greatest possible number and

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<sup>26</sup> As Kant states, “the predicate ‘greatest’ cannot belong to any such finite number, for no matter what determinate plurality one thinks, every such finite number can be increased by addition without its finitude being thereby diminished” (2:32).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Chasm’, here, refers to the ‘infinite distance’ held between God and humankind by classical theist traditions.

that of the greatest of all possible worlds are not sufficiently similar, Kant argues, to sustain the anti-Leibnizian argument that the latter concept is self-contradictory in the same way that the former is. With these three arguments, Kant believes that he has done enough to thoroughly secure a Leibnizian response to the problem of evil, stating that this is the best of all possible worlds, and so we cannot blame God for the evils that we do find in the world we live in.

Argument 4 – Before he concludes *Reflections on Optimism*, however, Kant offers us another Leibnizian argument which he states “is, admittedly, less scholarly in character, but it is, perhaps, equally valid” (2:33). Again, he wishes to attack the view that God chose to actualise the world we live in simply because it pleased him to do so. Kant asks us to consider what it means to choose to do something, and concedes to the anti-Leibnizian position that all choice is “according to one’s pleasure” (*Ibid.*). However, he argues here that the distinction between ‘being pleased with’ and ‘finding good’ is merely verbal in form, so to say that God chose to actualise our world because it pleased him to do so *is to say that* he found our world to be the most good out of all possible worlds within his cognition. Therefore, Kant concludes, the anti-Leibnizian position implicitly leads to the standard Leibnizian theodicy.

Kant finishes *Reflections on Optimism* by stating that we should all be satisfied with Leibniz’s defence of God in the face of the reality of moral and natural evil, remarking that he is

happy to find myself a citizen of a world which could not possible have been better than it is. Unworthy in myself but chosen for the sake of the whole by the best of all beings to be a humble member of the most perfect of all possible plans, I esteem my own existence the more highly, since I was elected to occupy a position in the best of schemes (2:35).

Despite the hardships we face during the course of our existence in the world, we should still rejoice in the fact of our existence at all, and in the fact that we form part of the best possible way in which things could have gone, chosen by God’s perfect understanding and goodness. We must

trust in God that if only we could view all that exists from his perspective, we would see the “wealth of the creation” (*Ibid.*). Thus, from the remarks from 1753/4 and from *Reflections on Optimism*, we discover that Kant is a fully committed proponent of Leibnizian approaches to theodicy, though not an entirely unreflective one, as he distances himself from aspects of Leibniz’s thought in his *Manuscript Reflections* in a way that suggests an underlying discomfort with the whole project of offering an ‘optimistic theodicy’. Reflection 2705 in particular reveals his worry that many will always be dissatisfied with a Leibnizian approach, and that it may perhaps not be sensitive to the extent (in both quality and quantity) of the reality of evil in the world. However, despite Kant’s discomfort with Leibniz, certain themes from the latter remains in Kant’s thought, for example, the theme of trusting in God to know what is best for us will remain deeply embedded in his reflections on evil and religion, and will form an essential part of his doctrine of radical evil.

The issue of perhaps a shift of focus between the *Reflections* of the early 1750s and *Reflections on Optimism* from 1759 regarding Kant’s attitude towards Leibniz can perhaps be resolved by a change of agenda in relation to the *Theodicy*, which especially picks up on the theory-praxis and faith-based aspects of the Leibnizian project. There are two particular passages in *Reflections on Optimism* that are interesting in this regard, and I will explore these now. The first is rather long and will take some unpicking, and follows Kant’s first mention of Leibniz in the text and his attempt to address the problem of evil. He speaks of,

[a]n idea which is so easy and so natural, and which is eventually repeated so often as to become a common platitude and a *source of disgust* to people of *the more refined taste*, cannot continue an object of respect for long. Where is the honour in thinking like the common herd, or in maintaining a proposition which is so easy to prove? Subtle errors are a *stimulus to one’s self-love*, which takes delight in the sense of its own strength... [I]t is often the case with some of the things we know that they are highly esteemed, not because they

are right, but because they have been *gained at a cost*. We do not care for truth at bargain price. In accordance with this sentiment, it was first found extraordinary, then beautiful and finally correct to assert that it had pleased God to choose this of all possible worlds, not because it was better than the other worlds which lay within his power to choose, but quite simply because it so pleased him (2:29-30 – my emphases).

This passage highlights an approach to the topic that is largely missing from the purely theoretical approach to be found in the *Reflections*. Kant here is specifically talking about one particular response to the problem of evil, namely ‘biting the bullet’ and simply stating that the evil we experience is something that we ought to accept on the basis of God’s overriding power over all things – what we may call a ‘strict omnipotence’ (SO) position (as a corollary of this, whether we live in the ‘best possible world’ or not is not even a salient question). His objections to such a view reflect both a theoretical and moral repugnance to facets of its claims, and what it reveals regarding the individual who holds such beliefs. For Kant, Leibniz’s position is ‘so easy and so natural’ that the fact of people not following the Leibnizian approach to the problem of evil requires an explanation. Those who see themselves as having ‘more refined taste’ begin to turn against the views of the ‘common herd’, for the very reason that it is a commonly held view and is easy to accept. Leibniz’s theodicy begins to be seen as essentially a form of intellectual laziness, and certainly not an approach to be held by those who know better. Those who believe themselves to know better style themselves as seeking after truth, which is not to be found in the views of the common herd.

As an alternative to following the easy view, contrarians begin to take an SO position, which is instead ‘gained at a cost’ but satisfies the elitist instincts of those who regard themselves as having better taste. It is noteworthy that Kant argues that the SO position is ultimately adopted for the reason of self-love (a theme that will achieve prominence in *Religion*), an undeniably immoral (or at least amoral) foundation for a doctrine. Those who adopt SO do so for reasons

related to praxis, rather than any theoretical merits it might have (merits which Kant feels are firmly on the side of Leibnizian theodicy). Kant's argument here is, then, more than theoretical – he understands the intertwining of theoretical positions with moral considerations in a reflection of Leibniz in his *Theodicy*. As such, Kant reacts on both a theoretical and a practical level to SO. When read in this Leibnizian context, it may seem that proponents of SO take a perverse pleasure in rejecting what should come naturally to us as created beings, that is, coming to know our creator through the adoption of the right kind of theodicy grounded in true faith. We can come to reject SO on a basis that offers both practical and theoretical reasons - for the kind of individuals and behaviour that would promote it, and for the inevitable intellectual errors that arise from self-love. The primary aim is of course the rejection of SO as a theoretical, philosophical response to the problem of evil. However, Kant clearly feels that more than theoretical considerations can come to play a legitimate part in the discussion.

We can find a second passage from *Reflections on Optimism* that I think particularly highlights the growing sensitivity of Kant towards the aims and methods of Leibniz's *Theodicy* project. He writes,

I am... *happy* to find myself a citizen of a world which could not possibly have been better than it is. *Unworthy in myself* but chosen for the sake of the whole by the best of all beings to be a humble member of the most perfect of all possible plans, *I esteem my own existence the more highly*, since I was elected to occupy a position in the best of schemes. To all creatures, who do not make themselves worthy of that name, I cry: 'Happy are we – we exist!'... Measureless spaces and eternities will probably only disclose the wealth of the creation in all its extent to the eye of the Omniscient Being alone. I, however, from *my viewpoint* and *armed with the insight which has been conferred upon my puny understanding*, shall gaze around me as far as my eye can reach, ever more learning to understand that *the whole is the best, and everything is good for the sake of the whole* (2:34-35 – my emphases, except the last).

This passage, again, betrays an assumption on the part of Kant of the kind of theory-praxis approach to the problem of evil that we found in Leibniz's *Theodicy*. Here we see an interaction between the theoretical and the practical - the theoretical problem of evil and the actualisation choice by God, and the dual response practically of a new evaluative stance towards oneself and the world and epistemically of assent to a Leibnizian theodicy. The practical benefits of the recommended response to the problem of evil extend to an increased happiness and acceptance of the world in which we live. We understand our own existence and the evil we experience in an entirely different light, as acceptable due to the place it plays in the benevolent God's plan, a plan that we embrace theoretically and practically. We see and understand the natural world in a different way through taking an appropriate stance towards God and the problem of evil. Whilst we cannot come close to grasping the 'wealth of creation' in the way that God is able to do, we come to see the natural world as ultimately harmonious and good, despite on the surface seeming to contain a great deal of evil, with the suggestion of an analogy between the way in which God grasps the 'wealth of creation' and the way to do so that is available to us<sup>28</sup>.

So, what does this relation between Kant and Leibniz mean for our understanding of the former's thought? First, that, at least when it comes to the problem of evil and related issues with religious faith, Kant and Leibniz hold a shared metaphilosophical approach. The purpose of philosophy in its response to the problem of evil is not to offer merely empty theoretical rationalising, a kind of argument that will not be internalised by the individual, does not tap into deep intuitions that we have about the world we live in and the creative power that may lie behind it, and will not significantly practically benefit the individual in leading a more assured, and contented, existence. The attempt to persuade, by both thinkers, involves a mixture of both theory and praxis, and not for the reason of apologetics – rather, I argue that such an approach shows the gravity of the problem of evil, and the deep misgivings it gives to any individual who

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<sup>28</sup> It was a commonplace in the philosophical context of the time, and would remain so throughout Kant's career, to view God's knowledge of the world as intellectual, so as to emphasise its non-sensory aspect (see Baumgarten 2013: 877 and *passim*).

reflects upon the world and the existence they have within it. The reality of evil is felt on both the theoretical and the practical level, and so the approach pioneered by Leibniz in *Theodicy* and used in Kant's work here attempts to reflect that.

It is clear, also, that both Kant and Leibniz (in dealing with what is perhaps its most potent philosophical challenge) desire to defend religious faith, and see it as something that is natural to us, and something that can decisively shape our existence and the way in which we experience the world around us. The problem of evil, for both thinkers, arises out of a *lack* of faith, which has the concomitant effect of causing us to view the world and ourselves incorrectly in some way, or at least view the world from a limited perspective, and behaving accordingly. As a result, an effective response to the problem of evil will be multifaceted, insofar as it will not only encourage the right sort of religious belief, trust and love in God, but also enhance, not only theoretically but also emotionally, the right sort of approach to the world around us. Kant's approach to the problem of evil, then, given the influence of Leibniz's *Theodicy*, is very much not straightforward. I will, throughout this thesis, explore the consequences of such a metaphilosophical approach for our understanding of Kant's treatment of evil, theodicy and the nature of religious faith in relation to philosophy, with a view to gaining a sense of the religious framework of Kant's thought, alongside shaping our interpretation of perhaps his most important statement on evil in *Religion*.

Second, we see that Kant already, very early on his career, feels uncomfortable with the Leibnizian approach to the problem of evil, despite being attracted to the attitude taken in the *Theodicy*. It is my contention that on the level of theoretical detail, Kant slowly drifts away from Leibniz, feeling uncomfortable with a kind of optimistic approach that he feels is potentially morally complacent. However, at the same time, the evidence of a shift of focus with regard to Leibniz between the *Manuscript Reflections* and *Reflections on Optimism*, I believe, shows an increased affinity with the metaphilosophical, one might say pedagogical, leanings of Leibniz's theodicy project. The notion that Kant is very interested in education and the power of philosophy



is well attested in the literature. As an example, in a recent paper, Zammito (2014) outlines how and why Kant would shape his teaching material for the praxis-related benefits of his students who would often face a difficult career ahead. Kant sees his pedagogical role and the discipline of philosophy as not only involving the dispersion of knowledge, but also of 'worldly wisdom' (*Weltweisheit*); he talks about such an endeavour in his *Lectures on Physical Geography*, where he states that

[a]n education is still seriously lacking if it does not teach a person how to apply his acquired knowledge and bring about a useful employment of these [acquisitions] in accordance with his understanding and the situation in which he stands, or [in other words] to make our knowledge *practical*. And this is what knowledge of the world is (9:157-8).

In these lectures and elsewhere, the material is shaped so as to prepare his students to become 'men of the world'. It is my contention that Kant's work on religion and evil, just as with Leibniz, is intended to aid us in becoming people of another world, namely, God's kingdom on Earth and beyond.

## 2.5 Kant and the Lisbon Earthquake

Further evidence of Kant's underlying sympathies for a Leibnizian approach to the problem of evil can be seen in his response to the notorious Lisbon earthquake in 1755. The horror of this event seems to have led Kant to reflect even further on the issues arising from moral and natural evil<sup>29</sup>. That the occurrence of the earthquake was noted by Kant is beyond dispute, in that he wrote no fewer than three separate texts on the event and earthquakes more generally in the following year. We can detect, I hold, upon examination of these texts, a positive stance towards a Leibnizian optimistic approach to the occurrence of evils in the world, alongside an assumption of the metaphilosophical approach set in the *Theodicy*.

In the first earthquake text, entitled *On the causes of earthquakes on the occasion of the calamity that befell the western countries of Europe towards the end of last year (Causes)*, Kant professes to give an objective account of the causes of earthquakes from the perspective of a natural scientist. However, it is clear that Kant does not have purely theoretical considerations in mind when investigating the causes of earthquakes, as, for example, he criticises those who take an unscientific approach, which he believes is ultimately grounded in base emotion. He writes that,

[s]ince fear robs them of [the capacity for rational] thought, they believe they can see in such widespread misfortunes *a kind of evil* quite different from those [calamities] against which one is justified in taking precautions. They imagine that they may [help to] mitigate the severity of their fate by the blind submission with which they yield unconditionally to it (1:421 – my emphasis).

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<sup>29</sup> Kant certainly would not be unique in that regard – many intellectual figures of the time, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, were greatly struck by the event, with a wide impact upon their own work (see Brightman 1919).

In being confronted by terrible events such as the Lisbon earthquake, one can allow oneself to be paralysed by fear, fall back on the claim that they are accepting fate, with possible dire consequences following for the future when one does not arm oneself to the extent one could in readiness for similar events. Kant seems to believe that his kind of scientific investigation into the causes of earthquakes will help quell such fatalism and thereby generate a positive impact upon humankind through the extra drive to preparedness. We see, then, in Kant's investigation, the practical and theoretical intertwine insofar as natural science is used as a way of dispelling fear and offering hope for the future. In particular, he wishes to promote hope in his homeland of Prussia, in which many feared similar events befalling them as had taken place in Lisbon (for example, he notes that earthquakes tend to be concentrated in mountainous regions, a rubric under which Prussia certainly would not fall (1:422)).

We also begin to see statements which have a trace of Leibnizian optimism about them. As an example, after noting that volcanoes can calm the activity of earthquakes in the same area, he writes that, "[i]n this manner, what frightens is often beneficial, so that if a volcano were to open up in the mountains of Portugal, it could herald the gradual departure of the misfortune" (1:423). Here, he has moved somewhat beyond an objective scientific investigation, so as to emphasise the harmony and unity of natural processes that give rise to both volcanoes and earthquakes, and to encourage a higher perspective upon disasters such as the Lisbon earthquake. One cannot fail to see faint echoes of a Leibnizian view that apparent great evils make much more sense from a higher perspective.

The event of the Lisbon earthquake, in essence, posed to Kant a particular conflict between fatalism and optimism, and he realised that he wishes to side with the latter. Fatalism is a tacit target, represented as a lazy and potentially paralysing position, when Kant writes that, "one should not form an over-hasty conclusion concerning so strange an occurrence... Nature reveals herself but gradually. One should not seek impatiently to discover by fabrication what she

conceals from us, but wait until she reveals her secrets in distinct activities” (1:426). Here, he emphasises a certain patience with regard to coming to understand the world – surely with the thought that nature will eventually reveal herself to be harmonious (and ultimately for the best?).

The second text on the Lisbon earthquake, I argue, reveals even more clearly a shift towards Leibnizian optimism in the face of great disaster and the temptation to fatalism. Entitled *History and natural description of the most noteworthy occurrences of the earthquake that struck a large part of the Earth at the end of the year 1755 (Natural description)*, Kant even no longer appears to wish to project an image of the objective natural scientist, and appends a section that quite explicitly suggests a Leibnizian approach to theodicy. At the very beginning of the text, he immediately connects the scientific approach to wondrous and terrifying natural occurrences with higher reflection upon God and the goodness of things, by noting that,

[m]an, to whom the husbandry of the Earth’s surface has been entrusted, has the capacity and the desire to familiarize himself with them, and *praises the Creator* through his insights. Even the terrible instruments by which disaster is visited on mankind... invite man’s contemplation (1:431 – my emphasis).

All natural occurrences, including great disasters such as the Lisbon earthquake, seem to inspire in us a desire to understand on a dual level; on the lower-level, we endeavour to gain a scientific understanding of such occurrences, and thereby, as a corollary, we reflect upon and even come to praise the wisdom lying behind all these things. A consequence of this is that Kant appears to argue that a *proper* investigation into great natural evils will ultimately involve praising God, and as such it appears almost inevitable that a position of Leibnizian optimism will be taken. It is when we refuse to reflect upon such events properly, and slide perhaps into a lazy fatalism, that we fall short. He notes that,

[t]he contemplation of such terrible occurrences is instructive. It gives man a sense of humility by making him see that he has no right... to expect only pleasant consequences from the laws of nature that God has ordained, and perhaps he will learn thereby to realize how fitting it is that this (present) arena of his desires should not contain the goal of all his aspirations (*Ibid.*).

As well as again stressing the balance and harmony of natural occurrences (for example, “[s]uch is the nature of the accidents that affect the human race. The joy of one group and the misery of another often have a common cause” (1:437)), Kant goes as far as to stress the *utility* of disasters such as the Lisbon earthquake, that is, the possible practical benefits of these events<sup>30</sup>. He realises how controversial such a position may be, for he admits that “[p]eople will be shocked to find such a terrible scourge of humanity praised from the point of view of utility”. However, such people would be merely falling into a kind of hubris, “we have laid an illegitimate claim to all the pleasant things in life, we are not prepared to pay the cost of any advantages..., we imagine that we would better regulate everything to our advantage” (1:455). Such arrogance on our part is fundamentally undermined by our limited cognitive powers, our propensity to anthropocentrism (as Kant notes, “Man must learn to adapt to nature, but he wants nature to adapt to him” (1:456)), and our unwillingness to take a higher view on such matters, one that takes into account the wider causal nexus and moral implications of events<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> To take a trivial example of such a benefit, Kant points to the town of Töplitz in Bohemia, whose famed mineral water

suddenly ceased to flow and then returned blood-red. The force with which the water was pushed through enlarged its former passages, and thus it gained a stronger inflow. The inhabitants of that town had good cause to sing *Te Deum laudamus*, while those in Lisbon began to sing in quite different tones. (1:437)

This quote gives a good example of Kant taking a Leibnizian approach of stressing the balance of the natural world, where a disaster for some can be a boon for others.

<sup>31</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will refer to ‘hubris’ and ‘arrogance’ in a number of different contexts. Mostly, this will be with regard to an individual’s relation to God, in terms of not responding in the right manner to God, and being overly anthropocentric in one’s behaviour and beliefs. In this instance, it is related to one’s attitude towards nature as God’s creation, and as such connects with the individual’s response to the divine. At other times, I will refer to arrogance in terms of being overly speculative, with too much trust being put into our intellectual and perceptual faculties. Again, this is directly related to issues of religious faith, as we shall see throughout this thesis.

In the context of discussing volcanoes, Kant challenges us directly to think again about our instinctive, pessimistic reactions to major disasters. Instead, we should take a more optimistic stance of trusting in providence. He asks, “[s]ince so much utility is apparent, can the disadvantage that accrues to the human race through one or other eruption, exempt us from the gratitude we owe to Providence for all the measures it employs?” (1:458). Such reflection is necessary if we are to achieve the aim of “[moving] mankind to a desire for gratitude towards that supreme being that is worthy of respect and love” (*Ibid.*). Kant most certainly, then, holds a multifaceted view of the possible impact of his scientific investigations into earthquakes; the explanation of the varied causes and interconnections between natural occurrences will in turn aid us in grasping higher truths regarding the order and goodness lying behind the world. In turn, this will have an impact upon our behaviour, in that we will find faith and feel inclined to praise God, as well as acting in greater appreciation of the world around us.

The possible moral and religious impact of scientific investigation into the world, for Kant, is reinforced in the concluding section to *Natural description*. Again, Kant reacts against a hubristic response to the Lisbon earthquake, this time, against an assertion that the earthquake is divine punishment for the vice of the inhabitants of the city, which he calls a “culpable impertinence that arrogates to itself the ability to understand the intentions behind divine decisions and to interpret them according to its own opinions” (1:459) that would cancel out any possible ethically worthy response we may make to the disaster. He also speaks out, again, against an anthropocentric view of the world, which in its turn reinforces blindness to the wider causal nexus underlying the Lisbon earthquake. The text ends with an explicit statement of a Leibnizian theodicy, speaking of “[t]hat same supreme wisdom from which the course of nature derives that accuracy that requires no correction, [which] has *subordinated lower purposes to higher ones*” (1:460 - my emphasis), and the concurrent need to modify our behaviour to reflect the truth that our life has a higher, moral purpose, and not only connected to transient things, such that an earthquake could destroy. Kant writes,

[s]ince his entire life has a far nobler aim, how well does this harmonize with all the destruction fit into which allows us to see the transience of the world in even those things that seem to us the greatest and most important and to remind us that the goods of this world cannot provide any satisfaction for our desire for happiness! (*Ibid.*).

Finally, foreshadowing the social aspect of *Religion* and his ethical theory of the Critical period, Kant connects the change in attitude towards the world brought about by an optimistic theodicy with wider social benefits; the “leaders of the human race” will be able to become “[beneficent] tools in the gracious hand of God” by supporting those who fall victim to natural disasters and through accepting their occurrence as part of a wider scheme overseen by an all-good divine wisdom, will act and pass laws so as to lessen their detrimental impact upon humankind (1:461). In this way, *Natural description* is even more explicitly Leibnizian than *Causes*, and highlights that even in such a short period of time following the Lisbon earthquake, Kant’s views regarding nature, evil and theodicy are undergoing evolution, and particularly coming to recognise the potential religious, moral, and practical benefits of an optimistic approach, even in the face of great disasters.

In these texts, written in response to the disaster in Lisbon, we therefore find more evidence of in-depth reflection upon different approaches to the problem of evil and the metaphilosophies underlying them. A more positive stance towards Leibniz in the subtext here is revealed more clearly in his *Reflections on Optimism* of 1759. These ‘Earthquake texts’, *Causes* and *Natural description*, on the surface appearing to be scientific in manner, in fact reveal a deeply religious interest on the part of Kant in natural occurrences such as earthquakes, and show that Kant is eager to draw lessons from them for our proper approach to interpreting the world as God’s creation. Though Leibniz’s approach has its drawbacks, we can see Kant beginning to appreciate its practical advantages in engendering the right approach towards natural disasters such as the Lisbon earthquake, for the benefit of human individuals and their proper relation to

God in faith. As such, we have good reason to see the Lisbon earthquake as prompting further reflection by Kant on the theodicy and its relation to faith and the well-being of humankind more generally. Just as for Rousseau and Voltaire (amongst others), the earthquake provided for Kant the occasion for deep reflection upon key religious topics and the way in which we approach the world.



## 2.6 *Universal Natural History as a Transitional Text*

Kant's early interest in the problem of evil and the nature of faith that I am attempting to describe here can also be seen in a text from early 1755, *Universal natural history and theory of the heavens* (*Universal natural history*). It is a remarkably ambitious work, encompassing natural science, anthropology, philosophy and theology (and Kant shifts frequently between these disciplines throughout his exposition). It touches not only on the development of the whole universe from a beginning point, but looks far into the future, imagining how the cosmos will continue to develop. It also contains a defence of a Newtonian, mechanistic approach to nature, whilst attempting to go beyond and improve upon Newton's work (indeed, with some help from Leibniz). Kant also uses the scientific aspect of the text to emphasise the systematic structure of all things as pointing towards a divine creator. In addition, Kant reflects upon the life that has arisen on our world, that may have arisen on other worlds, and may arise in the future. We will briefly reflect upon this work insofar as it reflects our interests in Kant's approach to the relation between religious faith and philosophical and scientific reflection upon the nature of the universe, alongside his attack on anthropocentrism and hubris on the part of human beings. We shall see that Kant sees scientific endeavour and reflection upon God as complementary, and that we should trust in divine providence despite evidence to the contrary in our experience of the world around us.

At the very beginning of the text, Kant gives us a tantalising glimpse into his thoughts regarding the nature of the work. He acknowledges the audacity of his project, particularly given that it does encompass broad (and potentially very emotive) issues in the natural sciences, in religion, and philosophy, and the potential criticisms that could be raised by both atheists and theists regarding the bounds of reason and what can be claimed as regards God's role in the material universe. Nevertheless, he writes, he is "not faint of heart", and "did not set out upon

this enterprise until [he] saw [himself] secure in relation to the duties of religion" (1:221). This quote reveals to us that even though *Universal natural history* is primarily a scientific work, the defence of religious faith is always in mind, presumably shaping Kant's approach and treatment of topics that would be considered as confined to the purview of the natural sciences. Kant is, therefore, certainly not embarrassed to admit that the work is as much a work of religious apologetics (he goes as far as to style himself a "champion of faith" (1:222)), as it is a work on the Newtonian view of the material universe.

We also get here a sense (to be repeated in Kant's works) that as far as he is concerned the investigation into natural sciences and cognition of God are not only compatible but complementary; he writes, "[m]y eagerness was redoubled when I saw that with every step the mists dispersed whose darkness seemed to hide monsters; and after they parted, the glory of the highest being shone forth with the most vivid brilliance" (1:221-222). Kant's strategy, we can infer, which combines both pro-science Enlightenment concerns and apologetics, is going to partly concern the idea that investigations into natural science can intensify one's faith in God, rather than, perhaps, a Pietist view<sup>32</sup> that sees the natural sciences as an inherently atheistic discipline, and one antithetical to true faith in God.

One of the most pertinent aspects of this text for our purposes is the rather unpalatable position it places humankind in with regard to the general narrative of the created universe, partly a reflection of Kant's interest in undermining an anthropocentric approach to the universe. As an example, let us explore the last part of *Universal natural history*, in which Kant reflects upon the possibility of life on other planets and at other times, both in the past and far into the future of the universe. Kant clearly thinks it highly likely that there are life-forms on other planets ("I am of the opinion that it is just not necessary to assert that all planets must be inhabited, even

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<sup>32</sup> We will particularly focus on the relation between Kant's thought and the Pietist tradition in Chapter 7.

though it would be nonsense to deny this in regard to all or even only most of them” (1:352)<sup>33</sup>), and that there is a possibility of even more highly developed life-forms than humankind in the future (“the perfection of the spiritual as well as of the material world increases and progresses in the planets from Mercury on to Saturn or perhaps even beyond it (insofar as there are yet other planets) in a correct sequence of degrees in proportion to their distances from the Sun” (1:360)). From a purely anthropological viewpoint, Kant is clearly attempting to attack anthropocentrism by making clear the small scale of our lives and the world we live in, as well as the possibility of higher life-forms than ourselves, when we would perhaps like to see ourselves as the pinnacle of creation<sup>34</sup>.

Kant also touches upon the problem of evil in a way that does not wish to gloss over the pain and suffering that humankind might face, even as part of the divine plan for creation. We, as a part of nature, are ultimately subject to transience like the “countless mass of flowers and insects [that]... a single cold day destroy[s]”, and even though “deleterious effects of infected air, earthquakes, floods eradicate whole peoples from the face of the earth... it does not appear that nature has suffered any disadvantage from this” (1:318). Such transience even plays out on a cosmic scale when “whole worlds and systems leave the scene after they have finished playing their roles” (*Ibid.*). Kant is not just implying here that evil is something that should be ultimately accepted as part of the divine plan, consistent with what he argues in the Earthquake texts; in

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<sup>33</sup> Kant returns to the topic of the existence of alien species on other planets in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, e.g. “That there could be inhabitants of the moon, even though no human being has ever perceived them, must of course be admitted” (A493/B521), as well as,

[i]f it were possible to settle by any sort of experience whether there are inhabitants of at least some of the planets that we see, I might well bet everything that I have on it. Hence I say it is not merely an opinion but a strong belief (on the correctness of which I would wager many advantages in life) that there are also inhabitants of other worlds (A825/B853).

This quote, interestingly, comes in the context of a discussion regarding the distinction between knowledge, belief or faith, and mere beliefs.

<sup>34</sup> Kant amusingly remarks that

[i]f the idea of the most sublime classes of rational creatures that inhabit Jupiter or Saturn arouses their jealousy and humiliates them by the knowledge of their own baseness, then they can be satisfied again and comforted by the low stages on the planets Venus and Mercury, which are lowered far below the perfection of human nature (1:359)

addition, he is emphasising the hopelessness of the position of humankind without trust in divine providence.

As part of this trust, in the face of terrible events, Kant also seems to advocate a kind of passivity in faith in response on the part of humankind. Without entirely disengaging from the world in which we find ourselves, we can look above material events, beyond time, to the only kind of salvation available to us. As an example, he writes,

O happy if, among the tumult of the elements and the ruins of nature, it is always positioned at a height from which it can see the devastations that frailty causes the things of the world to rush past under its feet, so to speak!... When the shackles that hold us to the vanity of creatures have fallen off at the moment that has been determined for the transfiguration of our being, then the immortal spirit, liberated from dependence on finite things, and in the company of the infinite being, will find the enjoyment of true happiness (1:322).

What can save us here from a Schopenhauer-style resignationism is a Leibnizian approach that, in its intertwining of practical and theoretical matters, allows us to keep one eye on the world around us, as well as through the explicit affirmation of this world as the *best possible world that could be expected for us*, aiding us to turn the picture into a much more optimistic one, one that equips us more thoroughly to engage with the problem of evil as it confronts us in our daily lives. Leibniz's metaphilosophy is designed to allow us to do all these things in the context of maintaining a flourishing faith in God.

Another pertinent aspect of *Universal natural history* that we should touch upon is that of Kant's relation to Newton in this text. Whilst Kant appropriates and extends Newton's approach to understanding the universe, he also seeks to amend and improve upon the position of the latter. Kant, in particular, directs an attack at Newton's 'hand of God' addition to his cosmology. Newton believes that the natural laws, if left to their own devices, would inevitably lead to

growing imperfections in the universe through inherent structural deficiencies (which of course could not be part of the divine plan). As an example, an apparent implication of Newton's cosmology is that the system of the universe appears to 'run out of motion', due to the fact that motion is increasingly lost as bodies collide with each other, and so Newton invokes God to periodically introduce new motion into the universe<sup>35</sup>. For a philosopher, like Kant, who wishes to emphasise the perfection of God's creative power, such a picture does not look particularly satisfactory. Surely, it would seem, a universe created by a perfect being would not require the constant tinkering that Newton requires, and would instead create a world which could run by itself? In addition, Newton's theistic approach to cosmology fails from an apologetic perspective as he calls on God to fill in gaps in our scientific explanations.

Kant realises that science still has a long way to go, and so as the gaps in our knowledge reduce, God's role in the universe would look increasingly untenable. Given this, it is best to already give God a reduced part to play in the everyday workings of the universe (such a theme of stressing the compatibility between science and religion as an apologetic strategy will continue to appear in his works). As an example, in the Preface, he writes that in the face of increasing knowledge regarding the operation of the laws of nature, the apologist needs to accept that "matter... has a certain rightness in its consequences and satisfies the rules of propriety without being forced to"; for,

[i]f a well-intentioned person were to try to dispute this capacity of the universal laws of nature in order to save the good cause of religion, then he will place himself into an embarrassing situation and give the unbeliever cause to triumph through a bad defence (1:224-225).

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<sup>35</sup> A detailed explanation of the ways in which Newton's picture falls short, and requires God's 'guiding hand' is to be found in Schönfeld (2000: 104-106).

In other words, the apologist needs to be very careful about the strategy they adopt in relation to the increase of knowledge through the natural sciences. If they attempt to impinge upon the realm of the natural sciences at this stage (perhaps by overemphasising the role that God plays in the everyday operation of the natural laws), then they are putting themselves in a potentially awkward situation in the future, when science can offer a complete explanation for the relevant phenomena in question without having to invoke supernatural cooperation<sup>36</sup>. By carefully circumscribing the proper areas of influence for the natural sciences and legitimate religious reflection at this early stage in the development of the sciences, Kant argues, one can help ensure the continuing legitimacy and acceptance of a proper role for religious thought in wider society. Going back to the Preface, Kant makes it clear that he appreciates the reservations of certain religious believers who may find themselves suspicious in the face of scientific works such as *Universal natural history* and the formulation of a mechanistic view of the physical universe, for it may easily seem that

[i]f the universe with all its order and beauty is merely an effect of matter left to its general laws of motion, if the blind mechanism of the powers of nature knows how to develop so magnificently and to such perfection all of its own accord: then the proof of the divine Author, which one derives from the sight of the beauty of the universe, is entirely stripped of its power, nature is sufficient in itself, divine government is superfluous, Epicure lives again in the middle of Christendom, and an unholy philosophy tramples faith under foot, which hands that philosophy a bright light to illuminate it (1:222).

Such a worry is needless, and may even ultimately be antithetical to the continuing flourishing of the Christian faith, if it means that apologists are going into intellectual battle with natural

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<sup>36</sup> We shall see such concerns resurfacing in the following decade (see 3.2).

scientists<sup>37</sup>. Again, speaking from a personal perspective in order to mollify potential suspicions, Kant writes, “If I had found this objection well-founded, the conviction I have regarding the infallibility of divine truths is so powerful in me that I would consider everything that contradicts them to be sufficiently disproved and would reject it” (*Ibid.*). We see, then, very early on in Kant’s career a desire to preserve philosophical and religious reflection upon God, whilst at the same time affirming the power of natural science to explain the natural world. I will argue that such a mixture of Enlightenment ideals and apologetic interests in preserving religious (and particularly Christian) thought is a recurring part of Kant’s approach to religious faith and connected topics throughout his works. As such, *Universal natural history* sets the tone for Kant’s religious reflections. As part of this, Kant criticises (though not in an overly explicit way) Newton’s ‘hand of God’ approach, stating that,

if one considers that nature and the eternal laws that are prescribed to substances for their interaction, are not a principle independent and necessary without God, that precisely because of the fact that it shows so much correspondence and order in what it produces through universal laws, we can see that the essences of all things must have their common origin in a certain primitive being... whose sage idea designed them in constant proportions and implanted in them that ability by which they produce much beauty, much order in the state of activity if left to themselves, if, I say, one considers this, then nature will appear to us more dignified than it is commonly regarded and one will expect from its unfolding nothing but correspondence, nothing but order. If, by contrast, one gives credit to an unfounded prejudice, that the universal laws of nature in and of themselves create nothing but disorder and any useful correspondences that shine forth in the constitution of nature points to the direct hand of God, then one is required to turn the whole of nature into miracles (1:332-3).

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<sup>37</sup> Kant also does, through his extensive list in the previous quotation, with worries becoming increasingly overblown, seem to imply that the worry is somewhat hysterical, and perhaps even indicative of a certain amount of religious enthusiasm, which he is certainly keen to combat.

In other words, the less God has to do in the everyday workings of the universe, the more respect we give to his creative power, and thereby the more dignity we give to the beauty and harmony of his creation.

We also see here a reference to miracles, which Kant also appears to see as ultimately not doing justice to God's providential plan and creative power. In this way, Kant may seem to be approaching the position of deism, where the occurrence of miracles are absolutely denied, but it is not clear that this is the case. Rather, we should not multiply miracle events beyond necessity. This issue links directly to the problem of evil, and the occurrence of natural disasters, for we can always wonder why God does not directly intervene in nature at particular points to stop events like the Lisbon earthquake from taking place. At this point, Kant does not shift his position significantly from that which he takes in the Earthquake texts, for it is an undermining of the harmony of all things and the creative power of God that causes us to wonder in such a way. If we could take a higher perspective on things, we would see that such a question is groundless.



## 2.7 Concluding Remarks on Kant in the 1750s

With *Universal natural history*, we come to the end of our survey of texts by Kant from the 1750s. We have considered a number of different texts that, in varying degrees of directness, consider issues surrounding religious faith, and in particular the problem of evil and the attempt at justifying God through theodicy. Such an examination forms part of our wider project of following the trajectory of Kant's thought regarding religious faith and the problem of evil, to use as context for our reading of *Religion*. In this vein, I have attempted to establish a number of related theses:

1. Leibniz did not take a straightforwardly theoretical approach to theodicy, as is often supposed. Rather, underlying his theodicy is a theory-praxis metaphilosophy, which posits a need for a philosophical approach that is sensitive to the practical aspects of religious faith and the need for a right approach to matters concerning God.
2. Kant, though critical of some details of Leibniz's theodicy, is overall sympathetic to a Leibnizian approach to the problem of evil throughout the decade, and appreciates the metaphilosophical project underlying *Theodicy*, especially its intertwining of issues concerning theory and praxis.
3. Kant, from the very beginnings of his philosophical works, is greatly interested in matters concerning religious faith, particularly philosophy's potential role in reinforcing faith (without overstepping its bounds), fostering a good relationship on the part of humankind towards the imperfect world in which we find ourselves, as well as the traditional problems of evil and theodicy. Indeed, Kant is concerned with these issues to the extent that they come to shape even his scientific endeavours, such as those concerning earthquakes and the history of the universe itself.

With these theses in mind, we can now move on to a consideration of some key texts from the 1760s, focusing on aspects of those texts that build upon our discussion so far and aids us in a gaining a greater sense of the religious framework of Kant's thought.

### 3. Faith, Philosophy, and the Problem of Evil in the 1760s

#### 3.1 Introduction – Kant in the 1760s

The 1760s were a very productive period for Kant (certainly when compared with the so-called ‘Silent Decade’ of the 1770s), with much work spanning a number of different fields, from philosophy to the natural sciences. From this period, there are a number of texts that touch upon themes relevant to our discussion, and we will examine them in chronological order. The three texts that we will focus on are as follows: *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1762), *Inquiry concerning the distinctness of the principles of natural theology and morality* (1762 – known also as the *Prize Essay*), and *Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by dreams of metaphysics* (1766 – referred to as *Dreams* in what follows). The main objective of this chapter is to continue tracing the themes and development of Kant’s thought regarding the problem of evil, in relation to theodicy and religious faith, as part of our wider project of offering as extensive a context as possible (in terms of Kant’s career) for our discussion of evil and religious faith in the Critical period, and building our understanding of the religious framework of Kant’s thought.

We will begin (3.2) with *The Only Possible Argument (OPG)*. In this text, we will find Kant presenting us with two interlinking arguments for the existence of God, one, *a priori*, the other one, *a posteriori*, which together constitute a ‘proof-ground’ for the existence of God, and show that both *a priori* and *a posteriori* reflection can link up to point towards the existence of God, though with the former having primacy over the latter. We also see that the reciprocal movement between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, as well as the abstract manner in which the *a posteriori* argument is stated, are intended to guard against superstition and enthusiasm regarding the establishment of the existence of God, and therefore form part of Kant’s wider project against

superstition that we shall see throughout our reflections on his philosophy of religion. He outlines a new method for attempting to come to a philosophical demonstration of the existence of God, a demonstration in which we remain as epistemically humble as possible, prioritising the firm ground of the scientific as much as possible, whilst balancing the theoretical and practical aspects of religious faith.

We will then move on to consider the *Prize Essay* (3.3), a work that is particularly significant for its metaphilosophical slant. In this text, we find Kant reflecting upon the discipline of metaphysics, in relation to the certainty offered by mathematics. Whilst pessimistic about the state of philosophy at the time, he nevertheless has hope for progress in the discipline, as long as philosophers are less liable to epistemic hubris in their claims. In continuation of a theme in *OPG*, Kant sets out the kind of methodological humility that philosophy could follow, a method which nevertheless offers greater certainty for the different branches of philosophy, such that it can legitimately bring about conviction<sup>38</sup>, including with regards to the murky areas of morality and God.

The chapter then ends with a discussion of *Dreams* (3.4), perhaps the most controversial work in the Kantian corpus. We, again, will find Kant seeking to explore the practical implications of philosophical theories and ways of doing philosophy. In addition to the well-rehearsed theoretical worries about the mystical philosophy of Swedenborg, we shall also see that Kant attacks the kind of religious faith and approach to morality that he sees underlying Swedenborgianism. In addition, I will argue that *Dreams* is not to be taken as the turning-point in Kant's corpus that it is often taken to be, for the same themes regarding the limits of

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<sup>38</sup> 'Conviction' appears as a technical term in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where we take something to be true on the basis of grounds that are "valid for everyone merely as long as he has reason... [therefore] objectively sufficient" (A820/B848). It is contrasted with persuasion, where taking something to be true "has its ground only in the particular constitution of the subject" (*Ibid.*). A belief held through conviction is taken to be valid in a sense that a belief brought about through persuasion is not. Trullinger (2013) argues that the validity of conviction is based on a demonstrable impact upon the behaviour of a moral agent, and thus a connection with practical reason. I use 'conviction' here in just this way, namely, as a taking-to-be-true that is internalised to the extent that it has a fundamental impact upon the moral life of the individual. I will return to the question of conviction and Trullinger's paper in 6.2.

understanding, the proper practice of philosophy, and the link between morality and religious faith are continued here. Some of Kant's correspondence regarding Swedenborg will also be considered in order to reinforce my view that his sympathies for Swedenborg are very weak indeed, and in addition, once we take Kant's satirical tone in the text into account, we can see that he sees Swedenborg as ultimately committing the errors (both practical and theoretical) that he is battling against throughout his work on religious issues.

### 3.2 Themes in *The Only Possible Argument*

From 1762, we find *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*. At nearly one hundred pages in the Academy Edition, this is the earliest extended discussion of religion and faith that we find in the Kantian corpus. Immediately, at the beginning of the text, we find Kant making interesting claims. First, for a text that concentrates on possible demonstrations of the existence of God, Kant downplays quite strongly the need for such a demonstration through philosophical means. He asserts that,

[p]rovidence has directly transmitted these insights to our natural common sense... Thus, that employment of sound reason, which still lies within the limits of ordinary insights, yields sufficiently convincing proofs of the existence and properties of this Being, though the subtle scholar will everywhere feel the lack of demonstration (2:65).

Thus, it appears that nevertheless there is something to be said for seeking a philosophical demonstration of the existence of God, perhaps to shed light upon the Divine that is not available to common sense alone, or just to satisfy the whims of metaphysicians who feel the need to exercise their intellects. However, as we can perhaps tell from the title of the text, Kant is not straightforwardly attempting to appease the metaphysician through putting forward a demonstration of the existence of God. Rather, he is going to both be constructive, by offering an argument in support of a possible demonstration, and destructive, by, through implication, rejecting all other possible arguments in support of that demonstration.

Kant's argument proceeds in clear steps, and at the beginning, we may be fooled into thinking that we are going to be confronted with yet another attempt at formulating a standard ontological argument, as the argument starts with an analysis of the notion of existence itself. However, this argument is clearly going to be something out of the ordinary, as Kant starts with

the well-known claim that existence is not a predicate or a determination of a thing. Of course, one may use the term 'existence' as a predicate, as long as "one does not insist on deriving existence from merely possible concepts" (2:72), which is what the standard ontological argument attempts to do<sup>39</sup>. Kant then goes on to state that existence is "the absolute positing of a thing" (2:73), and thus it is not something that attaches to an object in itself (*à la* a predicate). Not only that, little more can be said of existence in itself, in that it is almost entirely unanalysable. There is clearly a distinction, though, between a merely possible object and a real object. Such a distinction, Kant argues, lies not in what is posited but how it is posited. Whilst nothing more is posited *in* an existent object than in the merely possible counterpart of that object, more is posited *through* that existent object, in that we are absolutely positing the object itself in addition to the positing of the merely possible counterpart (see 2:75).

Having offered this brief analysis of the notion of existence, Kant then turns his attention to the modal notions of possibility and necessity. He immediately distinguishes two elements of possibility, formal and material. R.M. Adams discusses the distinction in his 'God, Possibility, and Kant' (2000: 429-431), and connects it to the form of propositions, in that a proposition can only be 'really possible' if it contains material content, whereas formal possibility encompasses a wider range of propositions that include those that only have formal content. The key role for God in the context of this discussion is that he is held to be the necessary ground of material possibility through exemplifying fundamental qualities, from which the possibility of all other qualities can be derived. God, as a necessary being, is not taken to provide a ground for logical possibility because Kant believes that his nonexistence is at least logically consistent. However, the material aspect of possibility would 'fall away' if it were the case that God did not exist. Why, though, might we think that material possibility stands or falls with the existence of God? Adams (*Ibid.*: 431) locates the crux of Kant's answer at 2:79, where he writes that "[e]ither the possible can only

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<sup>39</sup> What Kant means is that it can make sense for 'existence' to be used as a predicate in a grammatical sense, but it is illegitimate for us to draw any metaphysical implications from this. As such, his position here is indistinguishable from his position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

be thought in so far as it is itself real, and then the possibility is given as a determination existing within the real; or it is possible because something else is real". It would appear that Kant assumes that any ground of material possibility must ultimately be given as a real determination, or property, of a being – and that being is God. Thus, on the basis that something is possible, we can see that God must exist.

Therefore, Kant offers here an ontological argument of quite a new ilk, taking as a starting-point the very notion of possibility. Whilst more could be added on the detail of the argument here, what is salient for our purposes is the kind of argument we have here and the role it plays within the text as a whole. Just after the presentation of the argument proper, he is immediately humble as regards his aims, remarking that, as far as he is concerned, "[i]t is no part of my intention to furnish a formal demonstration" (2:89). In this way, he explicitly distinguishes himself from the traditional ontological argument, which is rather audacious in its claims. Nevertheless, Kant does seem to think he has achieved something rather impressive in deriving an argument for God's existence from a possibility that "presupposes neither my own existence, nor that of other minds, nor that of the physical world" (2:91). Added to this is a second argument concerning the existence of God, covered in the second section of the text, to which we now proceed.

One of the most interesting puzzles regarding *OPG* is the relation between its contents, the way the text is arranged, and the titles that Kant uses for the text itself and its sections. Put simply, the puzzle begins with the title, which seems to promise one argument alone for God's existence. Such an argument appears to be provided in Section 1, entitled "In which is furnished the argument in support of a demonstration of the existence of God" (2:70), where Kant, as we have seen, presents us with a version of the ontological argument. The problem starts with the second section, entitled "Concerning the extensive usefulness peculiar to this mode of proof in particular" (2:93), which is where we find the second argument. Given the title, one might expect



a further excursus upon the ontological-style argument just provided, perhaps noting its utility with regard to natural science or other intellectual disciplines. However, this is not obviously the case, in that Kant presents us with an entirely different argument for the existence of God with apparent approval, this one on the physico-theological or cosmological side of things. So, is Kant presenting us with two arguments or one? Why the potentially misleading titles, both for the text as a whole and for the sections?

Schönfeld (2000) has offered an interesting explanation in an attempt to defuse the puzzle. He argues, to begin with, that the title rendered with 'Only possible argument' is somewhat misleading; rather, the title of the text, including the term *Beweisgrund*, should be taken as "Only possible *proof-ground*" (*Ibid.*: 196). A proof-ground acts as the foundation for an argument, and so it is consistent with the newly-rendered title for Kant to offer us two separate arguments in the course of the text, with the ontological argument taking precedence, as per the section titles. As such, we can take the 'proof-ground' referred to in the title as encompassing a combination of *a priori* and *a posteriori* considerations. We are also offered an argument as to why the second argument, which appears to be a probabilistic design argument, is supposed to be useful with regard to the first, ontological argument, consisting in completing the argumentative circle begun by the reflections upon possibility at the start of the first argument. It allows us to see that all reflections, whether *a priori* and *a posteriori*, can help to reinforce true faith in God.

The second argument of *OPG* begins in a rather abstract manner by focusing on the example of geometrical truths. Kant writes of himself, "[l]ooking at it with a philosophical eye, I come to notice that order and harmony, along with such necessary determinations, prevail throughout space, and that concord and unity prevail throughout its immense manifold" (2:93), and he goes on to marvel over the properties of a circle, and the many complex geometrical laws that apply to it of necessity, "one is, indeed, amazed and rightly astonished to find, in such a seemingly straightforward and simple thing as a circle, such wondrous unity of the manifold

subject to such fruitful rules” (2:94). It would appear, then, that Kant is going to base a version of the design argument on the very basic necessary structure of reality – a foundation which appears to offer fruitfulness and harmony. The simple laws which govern space are described as “[inhering] in the very essence of things themselves”, being “universal relations to unity and cohesiveness”, from which it follows that a universal harmony would extend throughout the realm of possibility itself. Kant believes that he speaks for all of us when he concludes that “such a state of affairs would fill us with admiration for such extensive adaptedness and natural harmony” (2:96).

It is noteworthy that Kant is starting his version of the design argument from an abstract foundation in geometrical truths. In beginning at a reasonably general level (away from historical particularities), he is clearly distancing himself from the kind of superstitious and enthusiastic arguments from miracles and design that Hume would go on to deal with so effectively in the *Dialogues*. Rather, we see the hand of God at a more abstract level (parallel to the discussions found in the ‘Earthquake texts’) in how things work together and in the basic laws of reality – a factor which is ultimately less precise and perhaps requiring more faith, but less vulnerable to the ongoing march of natural science and the Enlightenment. The argument also is not so far from the first argument, as other arguments from the *a posteriori* foundations of apparent design and cosmology would be, in beginning with experience of the world that is intimately connected with *a priori* matters, namely, the truths of geometry. Kant has pushed the cosmological argument to a higher-order level, seeing a common principle “not merely [in] the existence of matter and the properties attributed to it, but [in] the very possibility and essence of matter in general” (2:100).

Also, in another echo of his reflections on the Lisbon earthquake, Kant chastises here those who would ask why some feature of nature was not created differently, in order to avert some sort of inconvenience or disaster. He remarks that the operations of the atmosphere, in line with natural laws, function providentially enough without the need for the Supreme Being to

continually interfere in its workings, and besides, “man cannot expect that all the laws of nature should be adapted to his convenience” (2:98) – we are not the only inhabitants of this planet after all! The theme of the intervention of God in the world is continued in another discussion of natural disasters in the ‘Third Reflection’ of the second section. Kant begins by separating all events in the world into those that are “subsumed under the order of nature” (2:103) and those that are not. Of the latter group, those events can be further divided into the “materially supernatural”, whose “immediate efficient cause is external to nature, that is to say, the divine power produces it immediately” and the “formally supernatural”, in which “the manner in which the forces of nature are directed to producing the effect is not itself subject to a rule of nature” (2:104).

What is especially interesting from our point of view are those events that fall under the rubric of formally supernatural, for they appear to be second-order events that supervene on what we may call every-day, physical events, i.e. those that are subsumed under the order of nature. On the first-order level of natural laws, Kant affirms that one must not, for example, see any connection between the actions of man and the occurrence of a natural disaster such as an earthquake (explicitly referring to the 1692 earthquake in Port Royal, Jamaica, a place which at the time was a notorious haven for pirates). However, one could see divine punishment on a second-order level in taking into account the entire causal structure leading up to the event (even going all the way back to Creation) and its results (the destruction of much of the town) – it might be useful to say that Kant is thinking of seeing God’s action *through* the operation of natural laws and the results obtained thereby, rather than as identifying those events as immediately connected with the divine will<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> There may be something of a nascent distinction between phenomena and thing-in-itself working here, though one that at the moment plays out on the level of appearance alone. Such parallels add to my argument of strong continuity between the pre-Critical and Critical periods.

As we saw with the ‘Earthquake texts’, then, Kant is caught in something of an awkward, yet ultimately consistent position, insofar as he wants to preserve some sense of seeing God in creation, whilst at the same time guarding against superstition and enthusiasm that are both intellectually lazy and audacious in quickly identifying divine events with particular physical events. We can see him as attempting this partly by keeping in touch with the operation of physical events, whilst abstracting to a higher level of reflection, under which we can speak of events as ‘formally supernatural’. Those, on the other hand, who see the ‘materially supernatural’ in history and the operations of the universe will hubristically overstep the bounds, morally and epistemically, in presuming they can directly cognise the guiding hand of God in the world.

It fits neatly into this that it seems that Kant thinks you will get closer to cognising God’s action in the world through focusing not on particular events, but on the unity of all things – he points to the “extraordinary extensive adaptedness and fruitfulness” (2:107) of the results of the necessary nexus of natural laws that in itself reveals a perfection that points to a Supreme Being. The fact that we do not need to postulate the direct intervention of God in physical events demonstrates the divine origin of natural laws. In pushing the cosmological/design argument away from the particular concrete towards the abstract, Kant thereby places the second argument close to the *a priori* argument of the first section. Given that the latter is clearly seen to be the best way to give some demonstration of God’s existence, we can thereby see this second argument as a much improved version of attempts at cosmological demonstrations (in Kant’s eyes anyway).

It should be emphasised at this point, though, that Kant’s argument is here is not content with securing some notion of the divine plan, unlike, say, a traditional construal of the design argument. He writes that,

the appeal to the divine power of choice does not adequately explain why a given means, necessary to the achievement of a single end, is advantageous in so many other respects as

well. There is an admirable community to be found among the essences of all created things. This community is such that the natures of things are not alien to each other but are united in a complex harmony... It is this which is the foundation of such a variety of benefits (2:131).

It appears that Kant feels that the traditional teleological argument does not do justice to the overwhelming unity and harmony at the basis of physical reality<sup>41</sup>. We shall also see later that the argument fails on the basis of not securing everything that we might want to claim about God in a traditional theism – thus we find a general critique of traditional teleological and cosmological arguments as lacking in explanatory power.

Kant then goes on to consider some of the implications of this argument for our understanding of nature and God. For one thing, we can see nature as *chosen* by God for certain ends, and thus as good in relation to the realisation of those ends. Such a viewpoint has implications for our understanding of miracles, for if the essences of things in the natural world depend upon God, and if we bear in mind the ends of God's creative act, both of which ensure harmony and unity, we discover that,

where nature operates in accordance with necessary laws, there will be no need for God to correct the course of events by direct intervention... in virtue of the necessity of the effects which occur in accordance with the order of nature, that which is displeasing to God cannot occur, not even in accordance with the most universal (2:110).

Kant clearly takes it as an implication of his argument to this point that one can strictly circumscribe the notion of God's direct intervention in the world – given the facts mentioned earlier (for example, the inbuilt harmony and teleology in the nexus of natural laws), God would simply have no need to do so. However, he is not entirely giving up orthodoxy and states that

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<sup>41</sup> As we shall see, Kant maintains the possibility of miraculous events throughout his works on religion, and thus never strays into the realm of deism, which rules out divine intervention in principle.

there is conceptual space still for the notion of miracle and God's revelation towards the world (Kant is no deist here). Some alterations in the natural course of things may have an

inadequately understood contingency... in so far as they appear to have about them an indeterminacy in respect of determining grounds and necessary laws, [and] harbour within themselves a possibility of deviating from the general tendency of natural things towards perfection (2:110-111).

Given this possibility, it may be necessary on rare occasions for God to bring the course of nature back to running according to the will of God. Kant notes that, "it can be expected that supplementary supernatural interventions may be necessary, for it is possible that the course of nature... may, on occasion, run contrary to the will of God" (2:111). With this argument Kant maintains orthodoxy, but at the same time combats enthusiasm and superstition through its implication that God need only intervene in nature on a very infrequent basis.

There is a further way, moving slightly away from Kant's second argument, of granting conceptual space for God's intervention in our world, with regard to our understanding specifically of organisms and their place in nature<sup>42</sup>. Organic bodies, Kant argues, have a constitution, it would appear, "which cannot be explained by appeal to the universal and necessary laws of nature" (2:114), despite the harmony and unity to be found within the causal nexus. Due to this, it seems that we may be forced to posit one of two forms of supernatural intervention in the natural course of things,

either the formation of the [organic product] is to be attributed immediately to a divine action, which is performed at every mating, or, alternatively, there must be granted to the initial divine organisation of plants and animals a capacity, not merely to develop their kind thereafter in accordance with a natural law, but truly to generate their kind (2:115).

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<sup>42</sup> There are thus very strong parallels between certain claims in *OPG* and key considerations from the *Critique of Judgement* with regard to our being unable to account for organic beings through laws of nature alone, but requiring teleological considerations.

Of these, Kant does not seek to prefer one above the other. As we will go on to see, in either case, such a positing of divine intervention is far too rash, in that although our understanding of the operation of natural laws with regard to organic products does let us down, it is still wholly arbitrary to posit God's intervention in order to furnish us with a complete explanation<sup>43</sup>. Even in the case of the mystery of organic production and systems, we must only posit God's influence if it becomes absolutely necessary.

With regard to this discussion, it is worth briefly considering just where Kant thinks his only possible 'proof-ground' can get us. He argues that the arguments provided can lead us not to the traditional notion of God as infinite, but as "all-sufficient", an idea he glosses as, "[w]hatever exists, whether it be possible or actual, is only something in so far as it is given through Him" (2:151). Whilst the notion of the infinite God is "beautiful and genuinely aesthetic" (2:154), using the concept of all-sufficiency has a number of advantages, despite the fact that, as Kant admits, it may not be a notion that comes naturally to us, nor has it been regularly used in philosophical and theological reflection<sup>44</sup>. Attributing all-sufficiency to God, for Kant, stresses the divine's role as the ultimate ground of being, encompassing possibility as well as actuality, and takes attention away from attempts to discern the fruits of God's wisdom (which can so easily fall into mistake and hubris that is ultimately destructive of faith). He also argues that it more successfully encompasses the wonder and amazement at the world that can lead us to reflect upon the divine, writing that,

[m]y amazement at the succession of an effect upon its cause ceases as soon as I directly and easily understand the capacity of the cause to produce its effect. On this basis, amazement must cease as soon as I regard the mechanical structure of the human body, or of any other

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<sup>43</sup> It is for this reason that the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Judgement* will be able to compatibly sit alongside each other in the Critical system.

<sup>44</sup> Kant also feels that the use of a mathematical term like 'infinite' puts God on a continuum with created beings, perhaps in terms of intellect, that may not be appropriate in insufficiently stressing the absolute difference between the divine and creation. He writes that "such a comparison as this brings the divine determinations into an improper relationship of homogeneity with those of created things" (2:154).

artificially devised arrangement whatever, as the world of the Almighty Being, and look merely at the actuality. For that a Being who can do anything should also be able to produce such a machine, provided that it is possible in the first place, is something which can be easily and distinctly understood. And yet, notwithstanding, some amazement is left over... For it is astonishing that something like an animal should even be possible (2:152).

The complexity of some natural process can strike us as incredible, but Kant seems to feel that it is somehow intellectually unsatisfying to explain it as the product of divine design – the amazement and wonder at something like the machine-like system of the human body somehow goes deeper than that, leading us to reflect upon the question of how it could even be possible that a system like that could be possible and function in the way it does. Such deep amazement (which could inspire an even deeper faith in God and a cognizance of his greatness) strikes Kant as possibly an unending source of inspiration for wonder and faith in God, for

nor, indeed, is the ground of my amazement removed once I have convinced myself that all the unity and harmony I observe around me is only possible because a Being exists which contains within it the grounds not only of reality but also of all possibility. For although it is true that, employing in the analogy of human behaviour, one can form some concept of how such a Being could be the cause of something real, one cannot form any concept of how that Being should contain the ground of the internal possibility of other things. It is as if this thought rises far higher than mortal creatures can reach (2:152-153).

From an apologetic perspective, a focus on the notion of all-sufficiency could ultimately be more successful than emphasising God's infinitude and divine wisdom in offering an unending source of wonder and amazement. Kant seems to believe that the very possibility of things, and the way in which harmony and unity seem to be built into it, is something that human beings simply cannot completely grasp, and thus can be a great source of inspiration and faith throughout human reflection on these matters.



Interestingly, Kant also thinks that we can, with an emphasis on the concept of God's 'all-sufficiency', answer a couple of difficulties concerning whether or not we should regard our world as the best possible world God could have actualised (we saw before that this issue is one that he considers in the 1750s also). He posits two questions that apologists may be confronted with, first, "among all possible worlds, is there not to be found an endless gradation of degrees of perfection, since no natural order is possible, beyond which there cannot be thought an order which is still more excellent" (such a question of course challenges the very notion of there being a 'best possible world', and thus undermining the notion of God being able to choose to actualise a world in this way), and second, "whether the different worlds themselves which were unsurpassed by any other would be exactly equal to each other in respect of their perfection" (2:153) (thus undermining the assumption that there is just *one* best possible world, and similarly therefore problematizing the notion of God's choice with regard to which possible world to create).

Kant argues that his approach through his new formulation of the ontological argument can undercut these difficult questions regarding God's actualisation choice and the very notion of a best possible world. By focusing on the very possibility of things in our world being embedded in God's being, we maintain the idea that the world is indeed actualised by God, but lose the notion of any kind of preference or judgement with regard to his creative action. The unity and harmony in God's very being is always going to reflect itself in the unity and harmony we find at the very essence of the created world in which we find ourselves. There was a conscious action in God creating our world, but there is no conceptual space for there being an unending hierarchy of better worlds, nor a group of best possible worlds, for our world is the only one that could ultimately have occurred given the fact of God's being. As such, Kant argues, possible problems from a Leibnizian 'best possible world' theodicy are undercut and should not worry us.

Kant is, however, still not leaving Leibniz behind entirely here, in that the latter holds a similar view regarding the impact God's nature has upon what can be and what is created. It has recently been argued by Griffin (2013) that in addition to the familiar doctrine of possible worlds, Leibniz also holds a form of necessitarianism, the view (also held by Spinoza) that what is actual is also metaphysically necessary. Whilst possible worlds are intrinsically possible in themselves, only the world in which we find ourselves is metaphysically possible due to the actualisation choice exercised by that which is metaphysically necessary, i.e. God, and the nature of that being. As Griffin notes,

what counts as a possible world has to be understood relative to the divine attributes. Relative to his power, any combination of intrinsically possible substances is a possible world. Relative to his wisdom, only a universal system is a possible world. And relative to his goodness, only the best possible system is a possible world (*Ibid.*: 106).

God does choose which world to actualise from amongst all possible worlds. However, given certain facts about the divine nature (which will, for one thing, guarantee that he chooses the best possible world), there is in fact relative to the fact of his metaphysical necessity only one possible world, namely ours. As such, there is a kind of necessity that attaches to our possible world, regardless of the fact that there are intrinsically many possible worlds. So, whilst in Leibniz the notion of actualisation choice is still present, like Kant here, he seeks to emphasise the way in which God's goodness (and other aspects of his nature) shape the world in which we find ourselves in a fundamental way, even to the level of what is metaphysically possible *at all*. Although Kant may be uncomfortable with the notion of a hierarchy of possible worlds, there is good reason to see it as a notion in Leibniz that is ultimately tempered by other ideas to be found in the latter's work that the former might be very sympathetic to. Leibniz's necessitarianism, and the way in which the divine attributes reflect upon the created world, is perhaps a part of his

philosophy that Kant still holds on to, despite his continuing reflection and careful distancing from the former on some points.

With the 'Fifth Reflection', Kant's attention shifts from his second argument to more explicitly methodological topics concerning reflections upon God's existence and the course of nature. His focus rests on traditional attempts to prove the existence of God through physico-theology, which we might understand now as the cosmological and teleological arguments. The critique here continues the themes we have already noted, and helps to make more clear what Kant thinks *is* the right approach. Kant's attack on these traditional forms of the argument starts from the basis that they all begin with (and stress) the contingency of all natural things, including "all the perfection, harmony and beauty of nature" (2:118). Such contingency (the fact that things could have been otherwise) is taken to demand an explanation, which is handily furnished in the form of God.

Kant sees a number of problems with such an argumentative strategy. To begin with, once one focuses on the contingency of nature as the only basis for proving God's existence, "all the necessary harmonies which exist between the things in the world come to be regarded as dangerous objections" (2:119) (such harmonies are, in Kant's argument, dealt with much more positively). The worry is that seeking to stress the immediacy of divine choice in our approach to inorganic nature leads to an overemphasis on divine intervention in nature at the expense of recognising the necessary unity of natural laws (which, as we have seen, can point towards the divine in their own way). The traditional argument forces one to disregard the necessary unity underlying the operation of the natural laws, and see it incorrectly as artificial, thus requiring continual intervention by God. Such a viewpoint, Kant feels, is more likely to lead to superstition and enthusiasm, with concomitant worries about moral laziness.

The second objection focuses on the impact of traditional physico-theology upon the individual, as well as upon wider scientific and moral enquiry. Kant argues that it hinders scientific

enquiry and progress, for “as soon as a provision of nature is recognised as useful, there is a general tendency to explain it directly in terms of the intention of the Divine Will” (2:119), and as such natural enquiry is shut off too soon (one is assuming that the natural laws alone could produce such harmony or that if they did, it would be mere accident in an atheistic sense). As Kant puts it, such a view “[furnishes] the lazy with an advantage over the tireless enquirer” (*Ibid.*). Newton is praised as a scientist who did not allow his religious commitments to lead him astray in his enquiry. Despite the advantages that come from the Earth’s spherical form, a situation that God could most certainly be pleased with, he “did not hesitate to regard them as the effects of the most necessary laws of mechanics. Nor did he fear that in doing so he would lose sight of the great ruler of all things” (2:121). The implication is certainly that traditional physico-theology can hinder the scientific enterprise by both stopping enquiry too early and by pitting science and religion against each other, when in fact they can, in Kant’s opinion, be entirely complementary and congruent.

Outlining a complementary relation between science and religion is certainly one of Kant’s concerns in *OPG*. Later on in the text, he addresses himself to those defenders of religion who may be concerned regarding Kant’s method of prioritising a scientific, rather than a miraculous, explanation of certain events and features of nature. He states that he wishes to “remove the baseless suspicion, namely, that explaining any of the major arrangements in the world by appealing to the universal laws of nature opens a breach which enables the wicked enemies of religion to penetrate its bulwarks” (2:148). There is certainly the sense that Kant foresaw a continuing growth in scientific knowledge, and thus the need for a change in apologetic strategy, away from the particular, where science would inevitably come to explain more successfully, to the abstract, a point where science seemingly could never reach, namely, the necessary unity of natural laws.

In a discussion of the formation and operation of our solar system, Kant gives an example of physico-theology potentially leading us astray from scientific fact and potentially bringing us to formulate incorrect scientific theories. With regard to the observation that the density of the planets stands in inverse proportion to distance from the Sun, it had been suggested that such a situation had been ordained in order to ensure that our star can heat the planets as well as it can, even for those planets that are further away. If one allows providential considerations to lead one's thinking astray in such ways, one's scientific understanding and ability to formulate legitimate scientific theories and good predictions will inevitably be negatively affected, which is a reflection of the fact that the orders of explanation offered by science and religion are different despite the potential complementarity of the two areas of thought that we saw explored in the *Universal Natural History* (see 2.6).

In addition to such worries from the point of view of scientific practice, Kant argues that physico-theology simply commits philosophical error too. The fact that a natural state of affairs accords with the will of God cannot lead one to the conclusion that is "from the point of view of the universal laws of causality, contingent, or that it has been especially instituted by an artificial provision" (2:122), an assumption which physico-theology makes. In a move parallel to Hume, Kant also argues that, by focusing alone on divine intervention in the relations between natural things and thereby leaving aside the very possibility and existence of things, physico-theology fails to establish what would recognisably be called a theism, and instead points one towards a Platonic system which distinguishes a creator divine being from a 'demiurge' which sees over the maintenance and fashioning of nature.

After attacking traditional physico-theology on both theoretical and practical grounds, Kant outlines his own method, which he has already put into use in formulating the second argument. Understanding this supposedly revised method will aid us in gaining a further understanding of Kant's intentions and argument in this second section of *OPG*. He begins by

reiterating the thought that those seeking to demonstrate the existence of God should not focus on attempting to find artificial divine intervention in nature, but rather see “the necessity perceived in the relation of things to regular combinations, and the connection of useful laws with a necessary unity” (2:123) as offering a proof of God’s existence. With such a focus, the revised argument is able to presume less than the original, for, Kant argues, we can point to the unity and harmony of all natural things as a sign of God’s existence before even considering the necessity or contingency of things, whereas the original argument relies on an identification of some event as contingent as a condition for standing for a moment when God intervenes in nature. When Kant comes to formulate his rules for the new revised method of physico-theology, his second, revised argument is thereby given much greater importance than the original (2:126-127):

1. “Even in the case of those constitutions in nature which are the most advantageous, one will always seek the cause of such advantageous dispositions among those universal laws which, in addition to producing other appropriate consequences, are also related, and related with a necessary unity, to the production of these particular effects as well” (so, if one thinks that one sees the hand of providence in an event, one must seek to trace it back to natural laws first, before positing supernatural intervention).
2. “One will note the element of necessity in this combination of different forms of adaptedness in a single ground” (Kant clearly feels that the element of necessity, as we have seen, is important for securing the conclusion that God is the ground of the natural laws and the essence of all natural things).
3. “One will presume that the necessary unity to be found in nature is greater than strikes the eye” (this provision is to strengthen the revised argument and guard against superstition and hubris by warning against seeing contingency where there is none).
4. “An order which is obviously artificial will be employed to infer the wisdom of an Author, construed as the ground of that order. On the other hand, the essential and necessary unity, which is to be found in the laws of nature, will be employed to infer the existence

of a Wise Being, construed as the ground of this unity. The latter inference, however, will be mediated, not by the wisdom of this Being, but by that in him which must harmonise with that wisdom” (again, we see that God’s direct intervention in natural events is only to be postulated when it is absolutely needed, and Kant reiterates an important point, namely, that the necessity and unity of natural laws is traced back to the very being of God, rather than to a supposed divine plan for the world, so we find another guard against hubris built into the revised method).

5. “From the *contingent* connections of the world one will infer the existence of a Being who has originated the manner in which the universe is assembled. From the *necessary* unity of the world, however, one will infer the existence of that self-same Being, construed as the Author even of the matter and fundamental stuff of which all natural things are constituted” (Kant has allowed conceptual space for the traditional argument, but its conclusion is much less impressive than that of the revised argument, the latter of which is able to establish God as *creator* and ground of all things, rather than just designer).
6. “This method will be extended by means of the universal rules which will be able to explain the grounds of the harmoniousness which exists between that which is necessary, either mechanically or geometrically, and the supreme good of the whole. And, in this connection, one will not omit to consider the properties of space itself, or to elucidate our fundamental thesis by appealing to the unity of the vast manifold of space” (thus, the argument will be completed with a posited harmonious connection between the necessity and unity of nature and the moral divine plan underlying the course of events in the universe).

So much, then, for the rules of Kant’s new ‘revised method of physico-theology’, a procedure for formulating a new kind of cosmological/teleological argument that dovetails with the argument from the first section is far more successful from a philosophical point of view, has greater explanatory power than traditional arguments for God’s existence from cosmology and design

(according to Kant, anyway), and supports concerns from the point of view of praxis regarding the relation between religious faith and reflection upon events in the world (such as regarding overriding superstition and epistemic laziness).

To further elucidate his new method and argument from physico-theology, Kant offers an interesting discussion that explicitly relates his ideas regarding the linking of nature to God's being and purposes to what he sees as the proper philosophical method concerning such things. We are presented with a hierarchy of discerning what we may see as increasingly more abstract links between nature and God's intervention, to a point where "philosophical effort is the greatest" (2:134):

1. To begin with, we may wish to judge an event as arising from direct divine intervention. In such a situation, Kant allows that the philosopher can put forward an argument for such a judgement, though such an argument will have to be very carefully made and is fraught with danger, for many reasons we have already discussed. One gets the feeling that Kant sees such an enterprise as thoroughly un-philosophical.
2. At a slightly more abstract level, we may wish to judge an individual event as having been prescribed by God at the very beginning of creation, its occurrence being built into natural laws in some sense in order to ensure its occurrence. Again, the philosopher must tread lightly here, and can easily fall into making illegitimate claims. Kant criticises the notion of such intervention as "superfluous art", and thoroughly beneath the dignity of the divine, analogous to "someone who, perfectly able to fire off a cannon directly, attached a clockwork mechanism to the firing-device so that the cannon would be discharged at a given time by means of this ingenious mechanical arrangement" (2:135). Attributing 'superfluous art' to God can also safely be thought of as un-philosophical from Kant's point of view.



3. We then move beyond individual events to the notion of features of nature that are individual arrangements ordained by God from the moment of creation, and are conceptually separate from the laws of nature (Kant gives the example of God directly ordering the provision of mountains, rivers, and planets). There is some legitimate ground for philosophy here, but very little, as it is overly audacious to “ascribe an arrangement immediately to the act of creation just because it is advantageous and orderly” (*Ibid.*).
4. At the next level, we find judgements of features of nature as “attributed to an artificially devised order of nature before it has been properly established that nature is incapable of producing that phenomenon in accordance with her universal laws” (*Ibid.*). As an example of this, Kant speaks of judging the order of nature as purposively constructed in order to generate the *aurora borealis* for the benefit of those who live in Greenland and elsewhere in the Arctic, a supposition “made in spite of the fact that these phenomena are probably ancillary consequences arising with necessary unity from other laws” (2:136). There is another kind of judgement, then, that should be avoided for the philosopher, despite the fact that we are moving away from the concrete to the abstract. A feature of nature which has providential consequences for humankind should not be singled out as artificial and as pointing to a deliberate decision on the part of God without considering its necessary unity with all others.
5. Finally, we come to a type of judgement which most reflects “the spirit of true philosophy” (*Ibid.*). Whilst the discipline is happy to admit supernatural occurrences and providential artificial orders of nature to bring about specific ends, it will only do so when rationally compelled to, and will otherwise always aim at tracing “nature’s interests” and “harmoniousness” to the necessary natural laws, whilst “[always paying] careful attention to the preservation of unity, displaying a rational aversion to multiplying the number of natural causes in order to explain the benefits and harmony of nature” (*Ibid.*). On this

path, the philosopher can find some legitimate ground in order to find reason's way to God's being.

Kant's hierarchy of judgements from the least to the most philosophical makes clear, then, that from the point of view of the philosopher who wishes to gain some cognition of God through physico-theology, they must ensure that they posit the intervention of the divine as late as possible in their reasoning, and at all times, when possible, seek to explain apparently providential (or otherwise) events through appeal to the necessary unity of natural laws. They must also seek, as much as possible, to move away from concrete particulars to more abstract considerations – it is thought that in this way, human reason can try to avoid error in such matters as positing divine intervention in the natural course of things and presuming to know the will of God.

In the final section of *OPG*, Kant reiterates that other than through the pathway he has trodden, there is no legitimate way to philosophically demonstrate the existence of God. However, as we have already mentioned, his only possible 'proof-ground' can be taken as a combined approach of cosmological and ontological arguments, though with the latter being afforded ultimate primacy. Kant takes such a combined approach because he believes that each part, both the cosmological and the ontological, interlinks with the other in a congruent way, but also because they offer something the other part does not. The ontological proof, certainly, "seems to be capable of the rigour required for a demonstration", (2:161) and so can give a kind of certainty to the demonstration that will be forever beyond the cosmological argument, which produces a conviction that "will never attain the completeness necessary to challenge the most insolent scepticism" (2:160). The cosmological argument, as we have already touched upon, by itself will also fall short in terms of what it could potentially demonstrate regarding the divine - for example, we may have to admit that we do not have intimate knowledge of all parts of the physical universe, and so we cannot perhaps rule out (in terms of the evidence available to us) the

possibility of one divine author ruling over our part of the universe, and another divine being ruling over another (Kant here remarks that it is not strict inference, given the evidence available to us, to suppose that all parts of the universe are similar so as to demonstrate one divine creator for all things).

However, at the same time, Kant admits that the ontological argument (even in the improved form that he has put forward) may be sufficient in some ways by itself, and thus requiring a cosmological addition to create the strongest possible 'proof-ground' for the existence of God, for if "one is looking for accessibility to sound common sense, vividness of impression, beauty and persuasiveness in relation to man's moral motives, then the advantage must be conceded to the cosmological proof" (*Ibid.*). From a practical point of view in terms of impressing and inspiring the average person (who is not going to be interested in the technicality of Kant's ontological argument), the cosmological part must take primacy:

It is doubtless more important, while also convincing sound understanding [i.e. what the ontological argument can achieve], to inspire man with noble feelings, which are richly productive of noble actions, than to instruct him with carefully weighed syllogisms, so that the demands of subtler speculation are satisfied (2:161).

Kant makes it clear, then, that he is keen (as ultimately an apologist for the Christian tradition) that with regards to constructing a proof-ground for the existence of God, one must balance philosophical rigour with practical accessibility, with the implication being that the interlinking of the cosmological and ontological arguments that we find in *OPG* is intended to offer just such a balance. It may surprise some that he is not such a hard-headed rationalist that he forgets the importance of actually convincing people of the existence of God, and it makes *OPG* and the reflections we find within much more nuanced than may appear at first-glance. At the same time, Kant is attempting to achieve a great deal, insofar as he wishes to criticise and reject prior philosophical attempts to prove the existence of God, to offer revised

versions of the cosmological and ontological arguments and to explore how they can interlink to offer the single best 'proof-ground' for the existence of God, whilst bearing in mind many practical issues, for example regarding the need to combat superstition and enthusiasm, to challenge those who take an overly arrogant view regarding their understanding of God's being and his motives, as well as ultimately defending the existence of God and our ability to gain some cognizance of his being and attributes. It is this continuing balancing of theory and praxis, and certain themes regarding our knowledge of God and the existence of evil and providential events in the world, that Kant will continue to reflect upon in his religious works, coming to a culmination, as we shall see, in *Religion*.

### 3.3 Morality and Faith in the *Prize Essay*

Written in the final months of 1762, following the completion of *OPG*, we come across *Inquiry concerning the distinctness of the principles of natural theology and morality*, written for a prize-essay competition set by the Prussian Royal Academy (which was eventually won by Moses Mendelssohn, with Kant, it would appear, coming a close second). The question set by the Prussian Academy concerns the comparison of the certainty of the truths of geometry with certainty with regard to “metaphysical truths in general, and the first principles of *Theologiae naturalis* and morality in particular”<sup>45</sup>. It is a short piece, but contains some relevant discussions with regard to our purposes, particularly in relation to our interest in Kant’s religious epistemology and developing views regarding morality and faith.

Kant begins by noting that a desirable outcome of the discussion would be learning how to maximise and maintain the degree of certainty available to metaphysical truths, which would in turn result in greater stability and permanence for philosophical claims. We find throughout this text a great dissatisfaction on Kant’s part regarding the state of metaphysics at the time, and a reforming zeal for his own discipline - he desires that “the endless instability of opinions and scholarly sects will be replaced by an immutable rule which will govern didactic method and unite reflective minds in a single effort” (2:275). One cannot but be reminded of the A Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant, in an almost despairing tone, calls metaphysics a “battlefield of... endless controversies” (Aviii) and suggests a critique of pure reason as a new “court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims... not by mere decrees but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws” (Axi).

However, given that such a discussion is conducted within the bounds of metaphysics itself, the prospects for securing a greater degree of certainty for metaphysical truths do not look

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in the Cambridge Edition of *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, lxii.

promising, and certainly will find difficulty in convincing those who stand outside metaphysics and may be suspicious of the discipline. In order to combat this problem as much as possible, Kant writes that “my treatise contains nothing but empirical propositions which are certain, and the inferences which are drawn immediately from them” (2:275) - this will be achieved by not appealing to authority, and by avoiding the establishment of *a priori* proofs beginning with stipulated definitions. Such an introduction to the text is somewhat reminiscent of the ‘Earthquake texts’ we looked at earlier – Kant professes a philosophical humility grounded strongly in the empirical, but again we shall see that there is more going on with regard to religious faith, and what can be learned from natural theology and morality.

Kant begins the discussion proper by distinguishing between mathematical and philosophical cognition<sup>46</sup>, which he admits begin with different starting points, and yet can both achieve strong degrees of determination, and thus a level of certainty. When undertaken correctly, mathematics arrives at its definitions through a synthetic method, what he calls “the *arbitrary combination* of concepts”, whilst philosophy proceeds analytically, beginning with “the concept of a thing... [given] albeit confusedly or in an insufficient determinate fashion” (2:276), which the philosopher can then analyse and render “complete and determinate” (2:278). So, whilst philosophy certainly begins from a difficult and often obscure starting-point, it can, through analysis, move beyond it to greater determination and certainty. However, Kant does not wish to underestimate the various challenges that face the philosopher in undertaking the analytic method, such that philosophy will appear less certain and substantial in the face of the truths obtained through geometry.

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<sup>46</sup> The distinction between philosophical and mathematical cognition is reiterated and discussed at length in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in ‘The Transcendental Doctrine of Method’ (A712/B740 – A738/B766). The continuing importance of this distinction for Kant, particularly with regards to the fact that it is linked in both earlier and later texts to questions germane to religious faith, adds to my argument stressing the continuity between pre-Critical and Critical Kant.

As a first example of the peculiar difficulties facing philosophy, he notes that the discipline's starting-point (in contrast to mathematics) is located in language, in that it attempts to analyse words. However, "words can neither show in their composition the constituent concepts of which the whole idea, indicated by the word, consists; nor are they capable of indicating in their combinations the relations of the philosophical thoughts to each other" (2:278-9), that is, words, when brought under the analytical microscope of the philosopher, do not immediately reveal the connections and relations between concepts that we may wish to investigate in our quest for universal truths. As a result, the philosopher has to indulge in abstraction in order to attempt to draw universal conclusions, which is a method that will almost inevitably lead to error and confusion.

In addition, Kant notes that philosophy, in comparison with mathematics, faces a large number of concepts that are unanalysable and propositions that cannot be demonstrated with apodictic certainty. Kant speaks of concepts being unanalysable with respect to a particular discipline "if, irrespective of whether or not it be definable elsewhere, it need not be defined, not, at any rate, in this discipline" (2:280). Philosophical analysis is peculiar in coming to just so many unanalysable concepts, for one could not achieve the kind of complex, universal cognition the discipline aims at with a small number of foundational concepts. However, the result of this will be an unsatisfactory conclusion to our philosophical investigations, for "[w]ithout exact knowledge and analysis of [philosophical] concepts, the springs of our nature will not be sufficiently understood; and yet, in the case of these concepts, a careful observer will notice that the analyses are far from satisfactory" (*Ibid.*).

Similarly, mathematics operates with relatively few indemonstrable propositions, such as 'there can be only one straight line between two points', whilst philosophy abounds in them, due to the fact that its analytic method must begin with a concept to be defined, namely, "that which is initially and immediately perceived in it... [which thus serves] as an indemonstrable

fundamental judgement” (2:282). The comparison between mathematics and philosophy ends in the ‘First reflection’ with a discussion of the respective object of those disciplines - again, with the philosophical discipline coming off worse. Mathematics, Kant argues is ultimately concerned with magnitude, which can be explicated with “a few, very clear fundamental principles... originating from a few simply fundamental concepts” (*Ibid.*), and thus can be understood in a relatively distinct manner. Philosophy, on the other hand, is in quite a different situation, for “there are infinitely many qualities which constitute the real object of philosophy, and distinguishing them from each other is an extremely strenuous business” (*Ibid.*).

It is clear from such a comparison between mathematics and philosophy that Kant despairs of much that constitutes his own discipline. In summing up his rather negative views, he writes that,

[c]laims to philosophical cognition generally enjoy the fate of opinions and are like the meteors, the brilliance of which is no guarantee of their endurance. Claims to philosophical cognition vanish... Metaphysics is without doubt the most difficult of all the things into which man has insight. But so far no metaphysics has ever been written (2:283)<sup>47</sup>.

Such a remarkable turn of phrase from Kant reveals him as thoroughly dissatisfied with the state of philosophy (and more particularly, metaphysics) at that time. He paints a picture of a discipline that faces huge obstacles in gaining a certain legitimacy for its claims and achieving any real progress on philosophical matters (such as gaining a greater understanding of freedom) whatsoever. We also see a certain kind of reforming zeal here, reflecting a great interest in the great metaphilosophical issues, such as the aims and methods of philosophy, and what sort of progress the discipline makes.

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<sup>47</sup> Kant’s last claim here, that to this point “no metaphysics has ever been written” (2:283), strikes one as rather puzzling at first sight. I lean towards reading this as a hyperbolic claim, intended to emphasise the relative uselessness of philosophy that had been written to that date, in comparison with a potentially bright future for metaphysics to come. Metaphysics is to be reborn, in a sense.



The 'Second reflection' sees Kant going into greater detail regarding the kind of certainty that specifically metaphysics, defined as "the philosophy of the fundamental principles of our cognition" (*Ibid.*), can hope for and thus as a corollary, the kind of measure against which we could determine philosophical progress. His stance here becomes more constructive, insofar as despite the fact that metaphysics often has to begin with difficult concepts, for which a determinate definition cannot be found (or at least not without great difficulty), it can nevertheless attempt to operate with a nominal definition garnered from the particular concept's use in everyday experience. Kant uses, as an example, the concept of 'appetite', which he states we do not have a 'determinate concept' of, and yet

I should still be able to say with certainty that every appetite presupposed the representation of the object of the appetite; that this representation was an anticipation of what was to come in the future; that the feeling of pleasure was connected with it... Everyone is constantly aware of all this in the immediate consciousness of appetite (2:284).

In other words, even without a determinate definition for a concept, we can still come to learn a great deal about it by reflection upon our everyday experience, which can give us some marks by which we can come to learn something of the concept. In the same way, we can also reflect upon the use of that concept in language, though he admits that such a procedure could be fraught with difficulty, for example due to ambiguity, which comes as an almost inevitable part of language and dealing with indeterminate concepts (see 2:284-285).

Thus, though we have reason for despair regarding the difficulty of the philosophical method (as explained in the 'First reflection'), there is some basis upon which we can base our metaphysical explorations which may give us a particular kind of certainty (peculiar to metaphysics), namely nominal definitions of indeterminate concepts based upon everyday experience. Through such a process, Kant argues, we can come to learn something that is

immediately certain of a concept prior to its definition, from which we can carefully begin to draw conclusions.

With this in mind, Kant articulates two major rules for metaphysics to follow, in order for those in the discipline to achieve the greatest kind of certainty that can be achieved given its indeterminate basis. The first rule is that “one ought not to start with definitions, unless that is, one is merely seeking a nominal definition” (2:285). If we do not follow this rule, and assume a determinate definition at the beginning of our investigation, then we will not be recognising the necessary indeterminacy of our starting-point and will be inevitably leading astray. Kant later on gives an example of a metaphysical argument against the notion that material objects can have an immediate relation of attraction between each other, even though they are at a distance. He argues that such arguments have illegitimately begun with a “surreptitious” determinate definition to the effect that “the immediate and reciprocal presence of two bodies is touch” (2:288). When metaphysicians have presumed such a definition, then they have been led into believing (incorrectly, Kant thinks) that they can refute the possibility of attraction at a distance, when in fact they have not achieved such a result.

Such an argument ties into the continuing theme of the need for philosophical humility. For philosophy to retain its legitimacy and achieve the kind of results that are available to it, we need to remain aware of the discipline’s limitations. In this regard, a philosopher should “not make an elaborate parade of one’s hope of arriving at a definition. Indeed, one will never venture to offer such a definition, until one has to concede the definition, once it has presented itself on the basis of the most certain of judgements” (*Ibid.*). Not only, then, should the philosopher be clear that they do not begin with determinate definitions, they should be reluctant to arrive at them, and should accept them only when forced to do so by the weight of evidence and arguments. Later on in the text, Kant argues that great mistakes have been made in metaphysics because “we venture to make judgements, even though we do not know everything which is

necessary for doing so” (2:292). He lambasts metaphysicians for their “over-hastiness” (*Ibid.*) in this regard, and makes it clear that he believes that metaphysical investigations could be conducted much more successfully if this kind of intellectual arrogance can be left behind. He writes that,

[i]t is therefore possible to avoid errors, provided that one seeks out cognitions which are certain and distinct, and provided that one does not so lightly lay claim to be able to furnish definitions. Furthermore, you could also establish a substantial part of an indubitable conclusion, and do so with certainty; but do not, on any account, permit yourself to draw the whole conclusion, no matter how slight the difference may appear to be (2:293).

Kant is, in the *Prize Essay*, amongst other things, advocating for wide-scale reform of the methods and ambitions of metaphysics (and philosophy more generally) – it is a discipline that can be reformed and find great success in the future, but only if it is practiced in much more humility than had been previously done.

Following on from this, the second rule states that “one ought particularly to distinguish those judgements which have been immediately made about the object and relate to what one initially encountered in that object with certainty” (2:288). Such a rule ensures ongoing methodological humility on the part of the philosopher throughout the metaphysical investigation. We should be constantly referring back to the foundation of our enquiry in what can be immediately garnered from reflection upon the object, and separate sharply in our thought-processes those things that were immediately certain at the beginnings of the investigations and later conclusions drawn from that basis. In this way, Kant believes that a methodological parallel can be drawn between the right conduct of metaphysics and Newtonian natural science. In natural science, one begins with immediate and certain observations, from which we can discover repeated patterns in occurrences that give rise to principles, what we label as natural laws. Such fundamental principles are not discovered in the objects themselves, but we

can still use these laws, formulated on the basis of inference, to increase our understanding of naturally occurring events.

Analogously, metaphysics (when undertaken correctly, as according to Kant) begins with immediately certain observations regarding some of the aspects of indeterminately defined concepts, including the way in which they are used in language, from which we can infer ‘characteristic marks’ of that concept<sup>48</sup>, and thereby sharpen our understanding of the concept in question (though we still may not be “acquainted with the complete essence of the thing” (2:286) in the same way that we never come to immediate acquaintance of scientific laws as they are in themselves). Through exploring such a parallel, Kant is attempting to undo some of the damage done to philosophy through the earlier comparison with mathematics. If natural science can greatly increase our understanding of the object of its investigation, even with its relatively uncertain basis, a discipline that follows similar methodological lines can also, presumably, achieve some sort of the same kind of success. Metaphysics, despite its long-standing failures, if pursued correctly, can have at least a similar level of legitimacy as is enjoyed by natural science.

The problem comes when philosophers try to act like mathematicians and stipulate determinate definitions as axioms at the very beginning of their investigations, ignoring the fact that they begin with indeterminate concepts and can only acquire concepts that they might deal with through analysis. If it is accepted that the proper methodology of metaphysics is in fact closer to that of the natural sciences, the discipline can then start to make some progress (though, interestingly, Kant admits that at some point in the future, it is at least possible in principle that metaphysics can begin to proceed synthetically, though only when “analysis has helped us towards concepts which are understood distinctly and in detail” (2:290)). Referring back

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<sup>48</sup> In the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant states that “[a] mark is that in a thing which constitutes a part of the cognition of it, or – what is the same – a *partial representation*, insofar as it is considered as ground of cognition of the *whole representation*” (9:58). He goes on to add that “all *thought* is nothing other than a representing through marks” (*Ibid.*). Kitcher (2010) has remarked that they have a dual purpose for Kant. Firstly, they “enable cognizers to differentiate the object of cognition from other things”, and secondly, they “are the ground for applying the whole concept to the object” (*Ibid.*: 38). In other words, it is the characteristic marks of a concept that give us grounds and guidelines for us to apply it in our thought.

to our continuing themes, we can here see another part of Kant's project to stress the compatibility and potential alliance between the natural sciences and metaphysical exploration (such as that which could bring us understanding of the divine). In this instance, it is methodological parallels between the two disciplines that could, if accepted by philosophers, bring great philosophical progress, including in our philosophical understanding of religious notions.

In the 'Third reflection', Kant reflects more specifically on the question of whether certainty (defined as "if one knows that it is impossible that a cognition should be false" (*Ibid.*)) is available to us through the metaphysical discipline, and thereby what kind of conviction it could secure. The discussion here can aid us in furthering our understanding of Kant's conception of the relation between the possible results of philosophical cognition and the nature of religious faith. Kant pursues the familiar strategy of exploring metaphilosophical issues through a comparison with mathematics. He reiterates that a kind of certainty is available to philosophy, but it is of an absolutely different kind than that available to us in mathematics<sup>49</sup>. Certainty is affected by both an objective and a subjective factor, depending upon the "sufficiency in the characteristic marks of the necessity of a truth" and the "degree of intuition to be found in the cognition of this necessity" (2:291), and should be balanced, Kant argues, against a major mistake that the human understanding can make, namely, concluding that a characteristic mark of a thing does not exist on the basis that we are not conscious of it. Such a mistake is much more easily committed in the philosophical discipline for reasons already touched upon in the text, including the fact that determinate definitions are not posited at the beginning of any investigation (thus a certain characteristic mark of a thing may not be at all obvious at the start), and that whilst mathematics uses signs *in concreto* in relation to its 'universal knowledge', allowing us to see more immediately

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<sup>49</sup> Beiser notes that one of the major themes of the *Prize Essay* is the argument that "[m]etaphysics... must resign itself to not attaining the same degree of certainty and clarity as mathematics" (1992: 40). I will argue that the projected future for metaphysics found in this text is not as negative as Beiser suggests in his use of the word 'resign'.

that a characteristic mark has been missed, philosophy uses signs *in abstracto*, with which “there is nothing sensible which can reveal to us the fact that the characteristic mark has been overlooked” (2:292).

Both objectively and subjectively, then, the certainty available to us in philosophy is not as strong as that available to us in mathematics, insofar as the process of dealing with abstract notions is simply more likely to end in mistake, and the abstract signs used in philosophical language have less clarity, and thus contain less intuitive confidence in the concomitant intuition, in comparison with the sensible signs of mathematics. Nevertheless, Kant argues, despite these difficulties, philosophy (and its sub-discipline, metaphysics) can offer certainty strong enough to produce conviction<sup>50</sup> (this is not something argued for, but simply taken to be evident from our experience), and indeed can do so just as successfully as mathematics (despite the continuing and fundamental problems the philosophical discipline as a whole faces), “whereas in mathematics the definitions are the first indemonstrable concepts of the things defined, in metaphysics, the place of these definitions is taken by a number of indemonstrable propositions which provide the primary data” (2:296). Both disciplines, then, begin (if they are being conducted properly) with basic, indemonstrable foundations, both of which are capable of producing certainty sufficient for conviction. Despite philosophy’s difficulties, it can at least achieve that.

Then, Kant arrives at the stated topic of the *Prize Essay*, namely the distinctness of the principles of natural theology and morality. The significance of the foregoing discussion regarding certainty and conviction now becomes clear, for he now argues that whilst the former can achieve what he calls “the greatest philosophical certainty”, the latter “in their present state are not capable of all the certainty necessary to produce conviction” (2:298), and therein lies their distinctness. What is striking about the discussion of natural theology here is the extent to which Kant claims natural theology can be successful in legitimately generating cognition of God such

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<sup>50</sup> The specific epistemic status of conviction in Kant’s philosophy will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

that we can claim to have a cognitive grasp on the divine with a great deal of certainty. He states that the nature of God as a unique being, the only first cause and necessarily existing thing, allows us to cognise something of him with remarkable ease.

He writes that, “distinguishing one thing from another is easiest and most distinct if the thing in question is the only possible thing of its kind” (2:296), and that seems right, for if one is attempting to cognitively grasp a certain object, and that object is the only one of its kind, then it will be easier to pick out and much less likely to be confused with something else. Further, because of the nature of God, once we have a tentative cognitive grasp on him, we are less likely to be led astray, partly due to the reciprocal implications of God’s attributes (so, for example, once one comes to cognise his omnipresence, you will thereby understand his necessary omniscience also) and their necessary status as the greatest of their kind (see 2:297). Indeed, Kant argues, within the scope of philosophical cognition altogether, the process of grasping God’s being is relatively simple, “[promising] even more certainty than most other philosophical cognition” (2:296). So, when it comes to a cognitive grasp of God’s being and his necessary attributes through natural theology, metaphysical investigations can be met with remarkable success, and can attribute a great deal of certainty to their conclusions, given the nature of God and the low probability Kant believes this gives to us going astray. We thus see a further defence of the methodology taken in *OPG* and some of the metaphilosophical and methodological points he makes there – the necessity that surrounds God’s being can be a legitimate philosophical pathway towards genuine cognition of God.

However, this must be tempered with a humility regarding further questions that move away from his necessary nature, in that,

[m]etaphysical cognition of God is thus capable of a high degree of certainty in all those areas where no analogon of contingency is to be encountered. But when it comes to forming a judgement about His free actions, about providence, or about the way in which He exercises

justice and goodness, there can only be, in this science, an approximation to certainty, or a certainty which is moral (2:297).

Again, Kant reiterates that we must remain conscious of a deep uncertainty regarding God's providence and plans for the created universe, what we can regard as contingent notions related to the divine's necessary being. Natural theology, as he understands it, must be very careful when attempting to infer and make pronouncements about God's being from events in the course of nature, particularly when taking into account the rather strong conviction that is available to us (just as readily available as conviction in mathematics) through the pathway he takes in his recasting of the ontological argument in *OPG*. What the *Prize Essay* makes clear, in a way that *OPG* does not, is that Kant sees a successful natural theology as part of a potentially bright future for philosophy as a whole (once it admits its limitations and becomes more self-aware regarding its methodology), and as a discipline that can safely secure a great deal of certainty and thus foster conviction on a parallel with what is often taken as the discipline *par excellence* that offers certainty and security in its conclusions, namely, mathematics.

Finally, in the *Prize Essay*, Kant touches upon the state of the fundamental principles of morality from a metaphilosophical perspective. He states that at the time of writing, moral philosophy particularly suffers from the difficulties outlined earlier that the discipline of philosophy as a whole faces. He notes the continuing confusion surrounding the central concept of obligation (which must be absolutely indemonstrable due to its absolute prescription of actions), and that philosophical investigations into morality itself have an indemonstrable foundation in a "feeling of the good" (2:299), which cannot be analysed to furnish us with some criterion for good action. However, Kant argues, careful philosophical investigation of this 'feeling of the good' can furnish us with material principles of morality:

[I]f an action is immediately represented as good, and if it does not contain concealed within itself a certain other good, which could be discovered by analysis and on account of which it is



called perfect, then the necessity of this action is an indemonstrable material principle of obligation (2:299-300).

One such material principle of obligation relates to our cognizance of God:

An immediate ugliness is to be found in the action, which conflicts with the will of Him, from Whom all goodness comes and to Whom we owe our existence. This ugliness is clearly apparent, provided that we do not straightaway focus our attention on the disadvantages, which may, as consequences, accompany such behaviour. Hence, the proposition: do what is in accordance with the will of God, is a material principle of morality (2:300).

So, there is to be found, at the end of the *Prize Essay*, a suggestion of an intuitively based moral philosophy that gives rise to an understanding of God (and his will) as the ground of obligation. Kant admits, though, that matters in practical philosophy are still too confused to state such a conclusion with conviction, though such a statement is at least possible in principle upon further reform and development of the discipline.

So much, then, for Kant's *Prize Essay*. The text has been helpful to our investigation in a number of ways: Kant sees philosophy as a discipline prone to error and confusion, due to its analytical method and its objects of investigation, and it particularly comes off the worse in a comparison with the certainty offered by mathematics. As such, we ought to be vigilant against epistemic and intellectual arrogance in philosophy. However, Kant believes that if this is done, then philosophical progress is possible. Philosophy can grant sufficient certainty to offer conviction, along the lines of his treatment of religious faith. As part of this, natural theology can go some way to generating a legitimate notion of the divine, alongside a renewed vision of moral philosophy, run along the lines of a new, more humble philosophical method, linked to religious faith. We will find these themes continued in *Dreams*.

### 3.4 The Impact of Swedenborg

Finally, we shall briefly consider the last text from the 1760s that is noteworthy for our purposes, namely, the rather strange *Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by dreams of metaphysics*, published in 1766. The exact stance that Kant is taking towards Swedenborg is still a topic of philosophical debate<sup>51</sup>, and I will discuss these issues, alongside a focus on a couple of passages that are particularly relevant for our purposes on the topics of philosophy and religious belief.

We shall start our discussion at the very end of the text, where Kant seeks to draw a practical conclusion from what has come before<sup>52</sup>. *Dreams* has, if its theoretical argument and satirical aspects are successful, highlighted the extravagant speculations that philosophy can open itself up to if it is not careful<sup>53</sup>. Kant shows how, at least as far as the practice of philosophy is concerned, theory and praxis intertwine. Foreshadowing a constant theme of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he argues that reason often attempts to reflect upon questions (such as those concerning spirits) that lie beyond the bounds of legitimate reflection. In addition to this, Kant seems to think that enquiring beyond such bounds appeals to our vanity, which only serves to add to its intellectual paucity, insofar as

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<sup>51</sup> Laywine (1993: ch. 4) lays out clearly the motivation for the examination of Swedenborg's mystical and prophetic philosophy that we find in this text, namely, a worry on Kant's part that his pre-Critical metaphysics, particularly regarding the postulated physical-influx relation between body and soul, lies worryingly close to the mystic's system, and indeed leaves a window of opportunity open for such metaphysical speculation. Laywine puts quite a negative spin on the relation between Kant and Swedenborg, whilst Johnson (2001) emphasises the similarities between the two and argues for a more constructive stance on Kant's part.

<sup>52</sup> One can certainly discern a repeated pattern on Kant's part to move from more theoretical considerations to questions of praxis towards the end of certain texts.

<sup>53</sup> My argument here is echoed in a paper by McQuillan published just before completion of this thesis. *Dreams* is characterised in this paper as "a cautionary tale about how not to do metaphysics" (2015: 178). McQuillan particularly focuses on the fact that in the 1760s, Kant at one point had announced the intention to publish a text entitled *The Proper Method of Metaphysics* (*Ibid.*: 189), to which *Dreams* would act as a companion piece. I was not aware of this biographical information when this chapter was originally written, but it certainly fits into my view of Kant as keenly interested in metaphilosophical issues and epistemic humility at the time.

those questions, in virtue of their elevated character, draw a person into a speculation which is eager to triumph; that eagerness is indiscriminate in its construction of sophistries and drawing of conclusions, in its teachings and refutations – as always happens with specious understanding (2:369).

What then follows is a Humean-style discussion regarding the necessary basis of experience for genuine concepts, which does not bode well for fundamental philosophical notions of force, cause, power, or action. Indeed, Kant notes that they “are wholly arbitrary, and they admit of neither proof nor refutation” (2:370). As such, we cannot even begin to answer more complex philosophical questions, such as those surrounding how the soul interacts with the body, and making cognitive ground in such areas will be seen to be impossible. At the same time, we can also come to understand the search for such answers as unnecessary from the viewpoint of praxis. Kant particularly attacks those who claim that “a rational understanding of the spirit-nature of the soul is very necessary to the conviction that there is life after death, and that this conviction, in its turn, is necessary if one is to have a motive for leading a virtuous life” (2:372). He claims, on the contrary, that once we understand the lack of foundations for our theorising in these matters, we can come to see even more clearly that our moral purity is undermined by such reasoning. We must “base the expectation of a future world on the sentiments of a noble constituted soul than, conversely, to base its noble conduct on the hope of another world. Such is also the character of the *moral faith*”<sup>54</sup> (2:373).

It is interesting and rather revealing that Kant finishes the text with these reflections from the viewpoint of praxis, which have not been particularly emphasised in the literature I have come across<sup>55</sup>. It certainly makes it clear that, again, Kant has his eye on the practical effects of a

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<sup>54</sup> We will return to the notion of moral faith in the following chapter.

<sup>55</sup> For example, Laywine (1993) focuses upon the problems that Kant faces in developing his philosophy of the relation between the spiritual and physical worlds, Johnson (2001) focuses largely upon metaphysical issues in Swedenborg and Kant, whilst Palmquist (2000) wishes to emphasise the spiritual character of Kant’s philosophy in relation to Swedenborg.

philosophical and religious practice, which come as ultimately intertwined with theoretical considerations. We can add a further aspect to just why Kant ultimately came to disassociate himself with Swedenborg after some intense interest in the early 1760s, namely, not just for the overwhelming metaphysical speculation that the latter indulged in, and the rather unenlightened claims to special revelation and prophecy, but for the moral impurity that ultimately lay behind his philosophical system and the religious claims he made. We find Kant worried about followers of Swedenborg engaging in an immoral sort of faith that undermines the moral law within, and the true cognition of God that is thereby available to us. Not only that, engaging in such idle speculation can have wider consequences for the world, as it will distract us from what is truly important, that is, engaging with the lives we are leading now and trying to be the best people we can (after all, as Kant remarks, we will all know the truth about the afterlife soon enough!).

The text as such finishes with an exhortation to good behaviour, directed to those who allow themselves to fall into idle (and ultimately immoral) metaphysical speculation. He writes that,

since our fate in that future world will probably very much depend on how we have comported ourselves at our posts in this world, I will conclude with the advice which *Voltaire* gave to his honest *Candide* after so many futile scholastic disputes: *Let us attend to our happiness, and go into the garden and work! (Ibid.)*.

Kant also explicitly worries about the practical effects of Swedenborg's (and his ilk's) philosophical works on their readers when earlier drawing conclusions about the practice of metaphysics in light of his treatise. He defines metaphysics as "a science of the *limits of human reason*", but we can only come to realise this "at a fair late stage and after long experience" (2:368), presumably after coming to know extravagant and nonsensical metaphysical systems such as that of

Swedenborg<sup>56</sup>. Kant makes it clear that *Dreams*, particularly the first part in which he indulges in speculative metaphysics and takes the voice of a follower of Swedenborg, is intended to give the reader such an experience, and by way of an apology for such subterfuge, he writes “I have wasted my time in order to save it. I have deceived my reader in order to benefit him” (*Ibid.*). It is not only right from an epistemic perspective to understand the limits of human reason, but also practically useful, insofar as

we find ourselves back on the humble ground of experience and common sense, happy if we regard it as the place to which we have been assigned: the place from which we may never depart with impunity, the place which also contains everything which can satisfy us, as long as we devote ourselves to what is useful (*Ibid.*).

*Dreams*, then, repeats metaphilosophical themes that we have become to see as important issues for Kant in his pre-Critical works. Swedenborg, whose system borrows much from such a respectable figure as Leibniz, weaves an extravagant metaphysical system that clearly would have proved unpalatable for a philosopher who has the sort of concerns about the conduct of the philosophical discipline that we have seen throughout the pre-Critical texts we have examined so far. Laywine (see 1993: ch. 4) ultimately provides a compelling argument that Swedenborg showed Kant that, despite his concerns for intellectual humility and careful philosophical practice, certain elements of his pre-Critical system (for example, the system of physical influx) may betray his professed *modus operandi* for the philosophical discipline. As such, Swedenborg undoubtedly has a great impact upon Kant in terms of his rationalist metaphysics,

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<sup>56</sup> Kant is perhaps betraying some biographical information here regarding his interest in Swedenborg, which, I argue, shifts from a naive interest in rumours regarding supposedly magical feats towards embarrassment after academic engagement with Swedenborg’s works. Johnson has assessed which of Swedenborg’s works Kant might have read in the years leading to the publication of *Dreams* (2001: 37-41), which almost certainly included the *Arcana Coelestia*, a work so strange and speculative that we have “reason to think that reading [it] somewhat dimmed Kant’s enthusiasm; indeed it led him to question Swedenborg’s sanity” (*Ibid.*: 56); for example, Swedenborg claims to have had “psychic conversations with the spirits of extraterrestrial beings” (*Ibid.*: 119), as well as extensive knowledge of a complex society of angels (summarised in Laywine (1993: 64-66)). The epistemically humble Kant that we see throughout his works would naturally recoil from such claims.

paving the way for a Critical metaphysics that radically focuses on the limits of human understanding in a way never attempted before.

Should we also see *Dreams* as a turning-point in other ways? For one thing, we can see from the ‘practical conclusion’ drawn at the end of the book that Kant’s metaphilosophical concerns continue, and it is these concerns that will ultimately drive the creation of the Critical system. What about Kant’s approach to religious faith, cognition of God, and the problem of evil though – topics that we have been exploring so far in this thesis? As I wish to stress the continuity of Kant’s thinking on these topics throughout his career, it may not be surprising to the reader that I do not see *Dreams* as a turning-point in this respect. Kant’s critique of Swedenborg here can be seen as just the sort of defence of a philosophically nuanced approach to cognition of God, away from mere idle speculation that ultimately lies in intellectual hubris, which we can expect given from the earlier texts we have examined. Swedenborg’s emphasis on discerning details regarding the spirit-world distracts us from more important issues in relation to true faith, including the proper upholding of God’s law planted within all of us, and the kind of legitimate cognition of the divine that Kant allows to us as detailed in *OPG*. Ultimately, for Kant, there is too strong a whiff of pre-Enlightenment superstition in Swedenborg, a kind of irrationality that can ultimately prove antithetical to true religious faith. Laywine, then, is quite right in emphasising *Dreams* as a turning-point in terms of certain details of Kant’s pre-Critical metaphysics and cementing even further the need for Kant to focus on the limits of human understanding, but the themes we have touched upon regarding cognition of God, faith, and the response to the problem of evil, are preserved and untouched in the face of the challenge Swedenborg poses to Kant.

Kant (or at least Kant’s ‘voice’ in the chapter in question) reflects upon what has been perhaps an overly hypothetical discussion to that point, considering the concept of an immaterial being, and the need to try a new approach. He writes that,

[i]t would be a fine thing if the systematic constitution of the spirit-world which we have presented here could be inferred, or even supposed as simply probable, not merely from the concept of the spirit-nature as such, which is far too hypothetical in character, but from some real generally accepted observation (2:333).

In this way, Kant announces a renewed philosophical reflection upon the notion of a ‘spirit-community’, beginning with a new foundation and methodology – what Johnson (2001: 128) helpfully labels “The Spirit World as Moral Hypothesis”. His new approach will consist in the notion of a ‘spirit-community’, which can aid us in explaining some of our moral experiences, including the phenomena of moral motivations which have a more communitarian focus and take us away from our natural egocentricity. Such a natural drive for the focus of our incentives to fall onto the wellbeing of other rational beings is the foundation of altruism<sup>57</sup>. We further feel a drive to harmonise our judgements, regarding both what is good and what is true, with others – Kant suggests that this may be a reflection of a ‘universal human understanding’, an underlying unity of reason amongst rational beings in the intelligible realm, which our individual rationality feels a dependence upon<sup>58</sup>. Ultimately, Kant wishes to concentrate on what he feels is potentially “more illuminating and more important for our purpose”, namely, moral motives that direct us away from egoism, “which relates everything to itself”, and towards altruism, “by means of which the heart is driven or drawn out of itself towards others” (*Ibid.*)<sup>59</sup>.

The only possible explanation, Kant argues, for a drive towards the well-being of others, which might seem quite strange in the face of a natural egocentricity, is that there are “other

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<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, if we are pursuing parallels between *Religion* and the discussion here in *Dreams*, this natural drive, part of the moral incentive natural to us, can have bad consequences as well as good ones if it is misused – here, Kant speaks of a situation where we are led to become overly dependent on the judgement of others, resulting in “a wrong-headed and misguided conception of honour” (2:334). The ways in which natural drives can lead us astray as well as aid us in achieving moral perfection will be one of the main themes, which we shall explore later, of *Religion*.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson (2001: 130-133) suggests that this very notion recurs in the *Critique of Judgement* as the ‘sensus communis’, which is an intriguing suggestion, but one that I shall not explore here

<sup>59</sup> This is not to say that Kant is here disavowing one’s duties to oneself – rather, that we need to counteract the natural balance of incentives for selfish motives at the expense of those arising out of duty.

forces which move us and which are to be found in the will of others outside ourselves" (2:335). So, the drive to moral actions on an individual level has to be understood (if it is to be understood at all) as grounded in a force outside of the embodied individual. Due to the fact that all (or at least the vast majority) of thinking beings feel this drive, we can think of such a force as a "rule of the general will"<sup>60</sup>, which "confers upon the world of all thinking beings its *moral unity* and invests it with a systematic constitution, drawn up in accordance with purely spiritual laws" (*Ibid.*).

Hence, we, as thinking beings, universally feel a conflict between altruism and egoism, understood as the individual will both straining to assert itself and to harmonise with the moral unity exemplified in the general will<sup>61</sup>. From a foundation in our very basic moral experience, then, we can come to the notion of a general will, as part of an immaterial world that invests in all thinking beings a universalised drive towards acting in a moral unity. What of the role of the general will in the immaterial realm? Kant argues that we can think of the general will as a "genuinely active force, in virtue of which spirit-natures exercise an influence on each other", and ultimately fostering a "moral unity, and that as a result of having formed itself into a system of spiritual perfection, in accordance with the laws governing the cohesive unity peculiar to it" (*Ibid.*). The general will, as grounding for our drive towards actions which benefit the well-being of others, is understood as binding the immaterial, rational parts of all thinking beings together in a moral unity beyond the physical realm.

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<sup>60</sup> Johnson explores the possible affinities between Kant, Swedenborg, and Rousseau's notion of the 'general will' (2001: 138-146). Though an interesting topic, I will not explore this here.

<sup>61</sup> We see a precursor here to reflections surrounding 'unsocial sociability' in *Idea for a Universal History*. Unsocial sociability is one of the engines behind moral development - a force of conflict that inevitably comes about in a society that holds a finite amount of power and resources. It is here that Rousseau's influence upon Kant becomes particularly clear, and this has been the focus of much recent scholarship. We, as human individuals, feel drawn into society (a tendency to 'socialise'), and yet we feel a resistance towards others (a tendency to 'individualise'). It is in this delicate tension that the powers of the human being are discovered and enhanced. Kant characterises this tension at the same time as a struggle between humanity and nature:

The human being wills concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species: it wills discord. He wills to live comfortably and contentedly; but nature wills that out of sloth and inactive contentment he should throw himself into labour and toils, so as, on the contrary, prudently to find out the means to pull himself again out of the latter (8:21).



Though we are still far away from the details of *Religion*, we have here an intimation of all rational beings being bound up together as a single moral unit in a realm beyond our purely mechanical physical universe. We can also note here that such a view is grounded in an explication of our most fundamental moral experience – a drive towards moral actions, and the individual egocentric part of the embodied human being that reacts against this. Kant’s critical distinction between phenomena and noumena will inevitably change much surrounding these ideas, but we can certainly see strong echoes between *Dreams* and his later works, despite the former’s status as being largely a work of satire.

This has been quite a brief discussion of *Dreams*, mostly because of the large amount of interpretive issues surrounding the text that remain unresolved in the literature and would necessitate detouring far away from our concerns<sup>62</sup>. The problem of what ‘voice’ Kant is using here, and his very ambiguous feelings about Swedenborg’s work (a fascination tinged with a certain amount of scepticism and distaste) particularly makes it difficult to discern the author’s intentions in this text. As such, I have confined myself to making two general points: 1) that *Dreams* carries on general metaphysical themes that we have discussed in earlier texts, and thus as a ‘transition text’ suggests that these themes will continue to play a large part in Kant’s thinking, and 2) that the text carries echoes of ideas that will come to great prominence in *Religion*, despite the general acceptance that Kant adopts a satirical tone for much of the text (again, reinforcing the argument for continuity between pre-Critical and Critical Kant on the very topics that we shall be concerned with in *Religion*). Though I disagree with some of the details, Palmquist has done extensive work on the foreshadowing of the Critical system in *Dreams* (2000: ch. 2, Appendix 2; see Firestone & Jacobs 2008: 21-22), adding to my argument for the text as one of *continuation*, as well as being something of a turning-point in Kant’s philosophical career.

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<sup>62</sup> For example, I do not seek to enter into the debate surrounding the metaphysical commitments of both Swedenborg and Kant at this time, beyond the question of religious faith and metaphysical issues related to faith and the problem of evil. I have also avoided issues surrounding the relation of *Dreams* to other theoretical works of the pre-Critical period.

As an aside, a recent paper by McGlynn (2014) has also argued for greater continuity between *Dreams* and the Critical Kant, though, in contrast to my position, by arguing that the former contains a genuinely sympathetic attitude to Swedenborg, and that such an attitude continues into the Critical period. There are, as I have argued, potential parallels between ideas in Swedenborg and later Kantian thought, but they are just parallels, and should not be confused with Kant taking a ‘Swedenborgian’ line. McGlynn, in attempting to establish the claim that Kant is something of a closet Swedenborgian in the Critical period, makes a great deal out of a couple of passages from the *Lectures on Metaphysics* in which Swedenborg is discussed. The first passage cited (28:298-9), McGlynn claims, shows Kant “[describing] Swedenborg’s thought as ‘quite sublime’ and recounts his views of the transcendent in terms very close to his own cogitations in Chapter Two of Part One of *Dreams*” (2014: 333, n. 6). The fact of Kant labelling Swedenborg’s ideas as ‘quite sublime’ could be taken in a number of ways, including pejoratively (a philosophy can be quite overwhelming in a sense, whilst at the same time striking one as ultimately nonsense, for example, as some see the majesty and controversy of Hegel’s system), sarcastically, or as indeed affirming the parallels that I have argued for, without affirming Swedenborg’s philosophy *tout court* (there are some deep truths in there, even though it may be dressed up in wild metaphysical speculation, without the help of the transcendental turn in the Critical system).

The rest of the short discussion is marked by a purely descriptive presentation of some of Swedenborg’s theories, without any explicit evaluative stance, for example, “[Swedenborg] says the spiritual world constitutes a special real universe... He says all spiritual natures stand in connection with one another”, and so forth. The first passage referenced by McGlynn, then, simply does not support his argument. McGlynn then goes on to say, “Kant cites Swedenborg as virtually an authority and does not speak of his views as nonsense” (*Ibid.*: 333, n. 8), and directs us to another passage from the *Lectures on Metaphysics* (28:768-770). Again, we simply find a descriptive passage with no real evaluative implications. I will grant that he is perhaps presented as an authority of some sort here, but perhaps it is not so surprising that Swedenborg is being

presented as an authority on his own philosophy (I can also grant this whilst at the same time thinking his theories to be nonsense!). We should perhaps also note the context of the discussion here, namely, in a section on “Rational Psychology” (28:753), alongside a discussion of many other theoretical suppositions about the soul that are ruled as inadmissible in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. As such, we can safely conclude that the discussions on Swedenborg in the *Critical Lectures on Metaphysics*, do not reveal a ‘Swedenborgian’ Kant.

A much more interesting text to consider, which McGlynn also briefly refers to, is the letter to Moses Mendelssohn from April 1766, in which Kant discusses *Dreams*, having sent a copy of the book to Mendelssohn a couple of months earlier. From the letter, McGlynn sees some significance (2014: 336) in Kant’s statement that, “I am absolutely convinced of many things that I shall never have the courage to say” (10:69). There is little reason to read some sort of implicit admission of Swedenborgianism here on the part of Kant – in the part of the letter in question, he is not in fact speaking of *Dreams* and Swedenborg, but in fact is affirming his own moral character (in particular, his honesty) and his concomitant desire to not be ambiguous and to be straightforward in the presentation of his ideas. The full sentence of which the previously referenced phrase forms part states, “although I am absolutely convinced of many things that I shall never have the courage to say, I shall never say anything I do not believe” (*Ibid.*).

Kant is, in fact, *welcoming* the opportunity given to him to clarify his thoughts regarding Swedenborg when he states,

[t]he unfavourable impression you express concerning the tone of my little book proves to me that you have formed a good opinion of the sincerity of my character, and your very reluctance to see that character ambiguously expressed is both precious and pleasing to me (*Ibid.*).

We have, therefore, very little reason to read Kant as expressing an underlying Swedenborgianism here, and in fact more reason to view this letter as an opportunity, from Kant's perspective, to be absolutely explicit regarding his views on Swedenborg. As it turns out, Kant *is* explicit about his thoughts regarding Swedenborg in the letter, and these thoughts are distinctly negative in tone. He admits that,

my mind is really in a state of conflict on this matter. As regards the spirit reports, I cannot help but be charmed by stories of this kind, and I cannot rid myself of the suspicion that there is some truth to their validity, regardless of the absurdities in these stories and the fancies and unintelligible notions that infect their rational foundations and undermine their value (10:70).

A careful reading of this passage, I would argue, puts Kant's evaluation of Swedenborg and his theories in a very negative light. Swedenborg's claims regarding his philosophy and experiences of the spirit-world are characterised as an 'infection', something you cannot help getting, but also something you very much want to rid yourself of. Characterising himself as having fallen under a 'charm' also certainly has negative connotations as something undesirable from which you would wish to extricate yourself (we can also perhaps detect a hint of sarcasm, referencing Swedenborg's claims to certain magical powers). So, there is a conflict there, but there is little hint from Kant that he is in any substantive way a convinced Swedenborgian, though engagement with Swedenborg may have been philosophically productive in a limited way. Indeed, later references in the letter to Swedenborg's "delusions" and "daydreams" in attempting to discover the relationship between material body and soul conclude the matter (10:72). As such, this letter certainly does not establish a deep underlying commitment on the part of Kant to Swedenborg, and neither does it show *Dreams* as a covert defence of the latter's 'experience' of spiritual

beings<sup>63</sup>. In line with my interpretation, then, the Kant of *Dreams* and of the Critical period is certainly not a Swedenborgian, though the balance of positive and negative treatments of the mystic on the part of Kant point towards some parallels in thought that will occur in Critical texts.

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<sup>63</sup> Palmquist argues for such a pro-Swedenborg interpretation of the letter, writing that in it, “Kant explains that he clothed his thoughts with ridicule... in order to avoid being ridiculed by other philosophers for paying attention to mystical visions” (2000: 23). It should be clear by now that I can certainly find no such explanation in the letter.

### 3.5 Concluding Remarks on Kant in the 1760s

In this chapter, we have considered three key texts by Kant that show continuing concerns and ideas regarding the nature and method of the philosophical discipline, the nature of religious faith, and responses to apparent evil and providence in nature. I shall now recap the most important points from these discussions.

First, from *OPG*:

1. Kant has a very specific aim for the text, namely to offer a ‘proof-ground’ encompassing a reciprocal action between the ontological *a priori* argument and the cosmological/teleological *a posteriori* arguments. The former is taken to be the strongest argument philosophically, in terms of certainty and argumentative rigour, but its effect is enhanced alongside a carefully formulated argument from nature.
2. Alongside this main aim, Kant wishes to pursue a metaphilosophical agenda regarding what can be achieved with regard to cognition of the divine and how best to proceed in religious faith. He continues his desire to foster humility in both faith and the philosophical discipline, centred on the postulation of specific divine wishes and plans regarding the material world.
3. Both arguments considered exemplify Kant’s metaphilosophical aim by focusing on the abstract, and by confining its conclusions to the being of God, rather than on his divine wisdom and plan. In this way, the arguments can also be kept out of the way of the continuing march of natural science – placing science and faith against each other could only be destructive on both sides.

We then considered the *Prize Essay*:

1. Kant has a great reforming zeal for the philosophical discipline, and one of the major reasons for this is a desire to circumscribe a legitimate pathway to cognition of God such that we can feel confident in our investigations.
2. Philosophy should not try to imitate mathematics, but rather should follow the methodology of the natural sciences – beginning not with a stipulated definition, but the raw data of our everyday experience. Pursuing such a parallel with the natural sciences would combat the over-hastiness and intellectual arrogance of earlier metaphysicians by fostering a methodology that is much more careful, and as such can be much more successful in securing conviction, the best that we can hope for with regard to both the principles of natural theology and of morality.
3. Kant makes some interesting points regarding the ways in which natural theology (in relation to other areas of philosophical enquiry such as the principles of morality) can be relatively simple due to the nature of its object, God, who is both a necessary being and exhibits the greatest kind of internal unity in his attributes. We therefore see a very positive evaluation of careful philosophical efforts to foster legitimate cognition of God. Natural theology has a legitimate place in a reformed philosophical discipline that could achieve great things (as long as we maintain the humility that is proper to its divine object), alongside a philosophy that points towards God as the ground of moral obligation.

Finally, we considered *Dreams*:

1. Through the text's satirical character, Kant attempts to highlight how speculative metaphysics can go horribly wrong when his methodological recommendations are not followed. Importantly for our purposes, though, Swedenborg is also attacked on the basis that his system engenders moral impurity and irreligion – this underscores the point that methodological issues involve both the theoretical and the practical, and that Kant is

continuing to defend religious faith and legitimate cognition of God, even at the brink of the Critical system (which would begin to take shape four years later in the *Inaugural Dissertation*).

2. Swedenborg at first fascinated Kant, but then made it increasingly clear to him how some parts of his pre-Critical system were going against his own methodological and metaphilosophical ambitions for his own work and the wider discipline. The similarities he found between himself and Swedenborg showed him as being just as culpable of intellectual hubris as the other metaphysicians he criticised in the *Prize Essay*.
3. Despite all this, *Dreams* can be seen as more than just a piece of satire and a reinforcement of Kant's ideas concerning proper philosophical methodology and the nature of religious faith. Ideas from Swedenborg's work can be seen echoed in the Critical system, though very much modified through their incorporation into this system, including the notion of a 'spirit-community' and a 'general will' that encompasses all thinking beings as a moral unity beyond the phenomenal realm. We can thus see *Dreams* as a work of continuation between pre-Critical and Critical-period Kant, and not so much as the 'turning-point' that it is so often designated as in the literature.

Next, we move on from pre-Critical Kant to the formulation of the Critical system in the 1780s, beginning with his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*. Before I do so, though, it might be best to sum up what we have learned about the pre-Critical Kant with regards to our interest in his thoughts regarding the problem of evil (including the proper approach to events that may be miraculous), the nature of religious faith, and the proper conduct of philosophy such that we can achieve legitimate cognition of God.

The pre-Critical Kant is a philosopher who is greatly interested in religion, to the extent that he can be called a defender of faith (though one not marked by superstition and enthusiasm). The kind of religious faith that Kant is interested in defending is of a humble piety, reinforced by



Careful philosophical reflection on the facts of experience, both of ourselves and the world around us. Further, his project of making clear the proper relation (as he sees it) between philosophy, faith, and science, such that 'true' religious faith can be defended, shapes much of his work during this period. Such a project (apologetic in its intent) has an inevitable impact upon his approach to the problem of evil and theodicy. His attitude towards Leibniz, one of the most important thinkers on this topic, shifts through the period, though it always reveals Kant as a philosopher who is focused on the possible practical impact of philosophy, and the way in which interests from the point of view of praxis can be tied productively with theoretical interests. Like his approach to religious faith, our approach to the problem of evil within philosophy should ultimately be marked by humility<sup>64</sup>, which ultimately limits to a large extent what we can investigate and what we can say about theodicy and the existential threat that evil poses us. Nevertheless, Kant is optimistic regarding what philosophy can achieve with regards both to the defence of religious faith and the proper approach to the problem of evil, with a link to morality (embedded within all of us) playing a key role. We will continue to see these themes through our investigation of texts from the Critical period, and in particular, in the next chapter (discussing his lecture notes on the philosophy of religion) we shall see Kant give more details regarding how religious faith and philosophy are to be linked to morality, and how we can potentially ground a legitimate cognition of the divine.

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<sup>64</sup> Humility becomes something of a technical term in *Metaphysics of Morals*, denoting "[t]he consciousness and feeling of the insignificance of one's moral worth *in comparison with the [moral] law*" (6:435). Whilst this sense of the word is salient, to our purposes, I use it in a wider sense, encompassing both a proper theoretical and practical response to the existence of God and the moral law, in contrast to hubris, both epistemic and in connection with one's relation to God.

## 4. Religious Epistemology and the Problem of Evil in Kant's *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*

### 4.1 Introduction – Kant's Lecture Notes

In this chapter, we leave the pre-Critical Kant behind, and move on to the Critical period. It would be usual for us at this point to move straight to the first monumental work of the Critical period, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, as I earlier noted, our approach here is to take the road less travelled, and to see if an examination of less well-known texts can shed light upon Kant's philosophy of religion, with a particular focus on gaining a sense of the religious framework of his thought and providing context for our reading of *Religion* in the final chapter. So, I propose that we instead consider Kant's *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, which are often only considered in passing by scholars interested in the religious aspects of his thought. Such a situation is unfortunate, as for those who are interested in Kant's philosophy of religion, his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* are incredibly illuminating. It is here, for the first time in the Critical period, that we have a long-form piece of work that deals solely with religious themes, and foreshadows a number of arguments and ideas that would recur later on in Kant's corpus. Parts of the transcript that has been passed down to us appear to stem from different years, but all can be dated to between 1783 and 1786 (therefore, between the publications of the first two Critiques). In the text, Kant is reacting to the work of others, particularly Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*, but this is only a springboard for him to explore in great detail his understanding of various theological issues.

In the following section (4.2), before we deal with the *Lectures* themselves, I first take care of a methodological matter, one which will occur quickly to many people, namely, the

question of whether Kant's lecture notes should be used to inform our interpretation of his philosophy in such a way. There are a number of objections that are often put to the use of the lecture notes, and I will consider and reject a number of these. I will also make some brief comparisons between the *Lectures* and Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* in order to demonstrate the former as offering a uniquely Kantian slant on the topics considered, with only passing consideration as such given to the latter text. On this basis, I will conclude that there is little reason to dismiss the use of the *Lectures* as offering insight into Kant's philosophy of religion.

Then, I will move onto the text of the *Lectures* proper (4.3), and pick out some of the most important themes from this work, as well as offering some reflections upon its relation to the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. We will see Kant constructing a recognisably realist religious epistemology in the *Lectures*, grounded in the possibility of an inner revelation granted to us as created beings made 'in the image of God', as part of a wider strategy for arguing that he is a theist, and not a deist or an anti-realist regarding the divine. In addition, I will expand upon the notion of faith in Kant, how it links to knowledge, and how it is able to expand our cognition beyond the everyday and towards the divine.

## 4.2 Using Kant's Lecture Notes – A Defence

As I have just stated, there is an important methodological issue that must be addressed at this point. My argument in this chapter will make use of lectures notes from various classes that Kant gave during the course of his lengthy teaching career. The use of these lecture notes is quite controversial, not in the least because they are not written by Kant himself (rather, they were written by various students and passed down to us). Further, in the context of such lectures, Kant would have used a standard textbook as a basis for his discussion. The *Cambridge Edition* has now made a large number of these lecture notes in a number of subjects widely available in the English language for the first time. As such, scholars working in the English language have a wealth of new material to pick through and study as an aid to our understanding of Kant's published works.

It is certainly the case that some philosophers are more suspicious of the use of the lecture notes than others. As an example, Jacqueline Mariña uses the *Pölitz* lectures notes that I will make use of, to argue that Kant holds to a purely punitive notion of divine justice, as well as the view that happiness given by God is not earned, in order to establish that he cannot be accused of Pelagianism (which rejects original sin, and questions whether God's grace is freely given) (1997: 382-383). In contrast, in a recent paper, Vanden Auweele (2013b: 177, n.29) has questioned such a use of the notes, stating that it simply cannot be clear, due to Kant's repeated references to the 'author', when Kant is positively putting forward his own ideas, and when he is simply elaborating upon the textbook that he is lecturing from. Further to this, he notes that such lectures would, of course, be given in public, and as such Kant may at any point be engaging in self-censorship for the benefit of his safety and employment. Also, he refers to the dating of the lectures, stating that given the lecture notes are almost certainly from the early 1780s, we cannot assume that Kant's views regarding religion and other matters did not change between then and

the publishing of the *Groundwork* (1785) and all later works. Finally, Vanden Auweele<sup>65</sup> has also noted that the students' handwriting of the original manuscripts at times was very poor, and that the relevant publishers may have made serious mistakes in the editing process.

I would like to take the opportunity now to attempt to briefly answer these methodological difficulties. First, there is the issue of authenticity and accuracy of the notes. Such an issue simply cannot be decided. Of course, mistakes may have been made in the creation and transmission of the manuscripts. Nevertheless, the facts of the matter simply merit us treating the notes with care, and not rejecting them out of hand, as Vanden Auweele seems to suggest we should. For one thing, in connection with a number of lecture courses that Kant gave, we have notes from separate sources that have a large amount of agreement (for example, for the lectures on religion, we have five sets of notes apparently taken from three independent sources). Also, one cannot help but think that the trouble these students went to in taking such copious notes must count in favour of their accuracy and authenticity. I would also, of course, wish to resist the suggestion that Kant's views may have evolved to a large degree between the production of the lecture notes and his later published works. I simply do not think it plausible that Kant's position would shift a great deal in these few years, and I would certainly argue that the onus would be on the part of Vanden Auweele and others to demonstrate that his position did shift in this way, rather than on those who stress a fundamental continuity between the pre-Critical and Critical periods.

There also may lie the spectre of self-censorship, but again I do not find this plausible. The environment of the time, prior to the enthronement of Frederick William II in 1786, was remarkably liberal, Kant had a senior, relatively safe position in the University of Königsberg, and given what we know of the publication history of *Religion*, he did not let censorship bother him much even when matters became more constrained and serious in the 1790s. All this is not to say

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<sup>65</sup> In conversation.

that Vanden Auweele and others suspicious of the use of the lecture notes are not making valid points, but I reiterate that their points make a good case for being as careful as we should always be as scholars when we approach historical texts, and not for rejecting the use of the notes in Kant scholarship out of hand.

A final issue we can examine is the extent to which Kant puts forward his own views in the lecture notes, and how much he simply repeats the views of others, most notably Baumgarten. I concede that it is not always entirely clear when Kant is speaking as himself, and speaking from the perspective of the textbook that he bases his lectures upon. However, with the case of Baumgarten, we may perhaps be able to settle the issue to some extent, as we have available to us Kant's edition of Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* (which is the main basis for Kant's lectures on the philosophical doctrine of religion, as well as others) with which to compare the lecture notes. I argue that through a comparison of both Baumgarten and Kant's lecture notes on religion, we can come to see that the notes to a large extent reflect Kant's genuine views on key issues. Though I cannot carry out this examination in great detail here, a focus on two particular topics will help me prove my point.

One particular passage that is important for my interpretation, and shared across Baumgarten and Kant's lecture notes, are the closing sections on revelation. I will begin by briefly noting some of the main arguments put across by Baumgarten and Kant in the relevant sections. To begin with, Baumgarten defines revelation broadly as "when God signifies the divine mind to his creatures" (982<sup>66</sup>). Kant criticises Baumgarten's definition of revelation as being too narrow and not being sufficient to encompass the full range of everything we may wish to evaluate as potential revelation (28:1117). Revelation, Kant argues, is not limited to revealing God's will, but may also provide "convincing cognition of God's existence and attributes" (*Ibid.*). In other words, revelation can simply reveal God's existence, or some aspect of his nature, without granting us

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<sup>66</sup> Section references and translations are from Baumgarten (2013).

epistemic access to the divine mind. In addition, unlike Baumgarten, Kant explicitly links his discussion of revelation and an appropriate concept of God to morality (“from this little or nothing can be deduced toward the confirmation and awakening of a true morality” (28:1118), as well as (foreshadowing a theme from *Religion*) the potential problem of the heteronomous and insidious influence of the historical Church, when he states, “[a]nd of what use, then, is the entire natural concept of God? Certainly for nothing else than that actually made of it by most peoples: as a *terrifying picture of fantasy*, or a superstitious object of ceremonial adoration and hypocritical high praise!” (*Ibid.*). Kant, then, is certainly stamping his own worries and agenda upon the content in this section, as well as challenging Baumgarten on certain assumptions in his treatment of revelation.

Further, both Kant and Baumgarten differ greatly in their treatment of divine mysteries. Baumgarten writes that the “Holy Mysteries are those things posited as beyond the reason of creatures in holy faith taken objectively. There are mysteries in every revelation in the strictest sense. Therefore, they are not repugnant to revelation in the strict sense, nor do they go against reason” (996). Kant agrees with Baumgarten that mysteries are to be understood as beyond reason in some sense, but parts company with him when he ties the discussion into his Critical philosophy of the postulates, his moral theory, and his particular vision of rational theology. As an example, he discusses the difficulty of establishing the highest good as an ideal, stating, “[it is a mystery that] a just God in his benevolence can distribute happiness only according to the object’s worthiness to be happy; yet he can make a human being happy even when this human being finds himself unworthy of happiness” (28:1120). Given this, it seems implausible to then claim that Kant is in some way simply repeating Baumgarten here, for why would he then bother to incorporate key elements from his Critical system into the discussion?

The two philosophers also differ in the important matter of the account of God's external revelation through speech<sup>67</sup>, which Baumgarten speaks of as revelation in the 'strict sense'<sup>68</sup>. Baumgarten treats such revelation as acting in addition to and making up for the shortcomings of revelation through natural means, such as "whatever a creature understands through its own nature about the mind of God" (983)<sup>69</sup>. He writes that revelation in the strict sense "is actual in this world whenever religion cannot be actualized equally well through natural revelation alone" (986). Kant's view, on the other hand, is entirely different, as he wishes to ensure the primacy of inner revelation through introspection. He maintains that "the religion of reason always has to remain the *substratum* and foundation of every investigation; [thus] it is *according to this religion* that the value of that verbal revelation must be determined" (28:1119). As such, Kant, contra Baumgarten, does not see revelation through speech as a self-standing category that can grant religious cognition that is not available through the inner revelation of reason alone. He does concede that "an external divine revelation can be an occasion for the human being to come for the first time to pure concepts of God which are pure concepts of the understanding; and it can also give him the opportunity to search for these concepts" (*Ibid.*), but this is only granting a contingent utility to revelation through speech, rather than seeing it as having intrinsic, necessary value for religious faith.

We can see, then, through this admittedly brief comparison, that Kant is only too happy to distance himself from Baumgarten, even while following the general structure of the latter's *Metaphysics* through much of these lecture notes. The use of the lecture notes will certainly continue to be debated amongst scholars, but there is enough evidence of Kant's independence in these notes to show that he is not simply elaborating upon Baumgarten, but is instead using the *Metaphysics* as a spring-board and structure within which he can present his own ideas to his

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<sup>67</sup> Such as with Moses and God speaking through the 'Burning Bush' in Exodus 3.

<sup>68</sup> This is to be understood as a subset of 'revelation in the broad sense' discussed earlier.

<sup>69</sup> We can think of this as coming to gain a sense of God through introspection.



students. As such, I argue that we have at least *prima facie* justification for using these lecture notes to inform our interpretation of relevant published works.

### 4.3 Themes from the Lecture Notes

With an important methodological issue shelved, we can begin our examination of the text proper. One of the most illuminating sections of these lecture notes is entitled “Of revelation” (28:1117). Kant begins there by separating revelation into two kinds: inner and outer. Outer revelation comes to us “either through works, or through words” (*ibid.*), by which Kant presumably means both scripture and unusual events traditionally denoted as miracles. Inner revelation, on the other hand, “is God’s revelation to us through our own reason”, and it is this revelation that is the key foundation of Kantian theology. Outer revelation must be judged in the light of inner revelation in order to avoid the dangers of misjudging whether a revelation is in fact from God and of operating with an incorrect concept of God. The inner revelation of God comes in the form of “a pure idea of the understanding, an idea of a most perfect being” (28:1118). Kant speaks of this idea as a “universal rule *in abstracto*” (28:994) that naturally arises out of our need to have a pure moral standard with which to compare our own behaviour. Such an idea of a highest being has three aspects, namely, “1. A being which *excludes every deficiency*... 2. A being which contains all realities in itself... 3. Can be considered as the highest good, to which wisdom and morality belong” (28:994-5).<sup>70</sup>

Theology, when practised correctly, deals with the cognition of God available to reason given the presence of this idea of reason placed within human nature. It is instructive that, for Kant, this idea is indeed *revelation*, a *bona fide* instance of God revealing himself to us, i.e. through a presence, an image of himself, embedded within human reason itself. It is this presence

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<sup>70</sup> The potential significance of the distinction between inner and outer revelation for our understanding of Kant’s philosophy of religion is brought out by Wood (1970: 205): “When we regard our moral duties as divine commands, when we believe in God through rational faith, we may see these commands and this faith as a kind of ‘revelation’ to us by God himself, a revelation through universally communicable human reason, rather than through experience or feeling”. Whilst Wood notes the distinction in relation to Kant’s recommendations regarding the use of Scripture (a topic I will cover in 7.4), I seek to increase the significance of the distinction more generally as a key to our reading of the religious framework of Kant’s philosophy.

that ultimately allows us to cognise God, and to construct a true, moral religion. We can thereby see that Kant stands strongly in the Christian tradition of *Imago dei*, which, when taken as a substantive thesis, generally sees the Book of Genesis' proclamation of humankind as made in the image of God as offering a framework within which, despite our fallen state, we can still hold some hope of salvation, as well as a possibility of some form of knowledge of God. Perhaps the most prominent line of thought regarding what the 'image of God' might consist in is the so-called 'spiritual interpretation', which Barr expounds as the view that, "[t]he image of God is related to the spiritual or rational character of humanity, which forms a distinction from the animal world" (1993: 157), and in turn, it is our spiritual or rational character that allows our special relation to God and some sense of the divine. The tradition of according the 'image of God' to humankind is traditionally linked to our intellectual and rational capacities due to their being the feature which distinguishes us from other creatures on earth (see *Ibid.*: 172).

Though in our postlapsarian state we are highly corrupted, there is nevertheless some weak *sensus divinitatis* that remains, with various moral and epistemic advantages arising from it still available (we can at this point appeal to a distinction between man being made in the *image* and the *likeness* of God, the latter of which is lost due to the Fall (see *Ibid.*: 158)). Even a theologian as uncomfortable with the notion of natural knowledge of God as Calvin still allows for a continuing awareness (and thereby an epistemic link) with the divine after the Fall because of our special status at the head of Creation on Earth (see Sudduth 2009: 113-117). Kant, for his part, defines theology as the "system of our cognition of the highest being" and the "sum total... of what human reason encounters pertaining to God", based on "that part of God which lies in human nature... [which] can be very deficient" (28:995). Such a construal of the possibility of theological cognition here reveals Kant standing within a traditional Christian approach, and allowing for the possibility of genuine religious reflection through examination of God within ourselves (justified through the *Imago dei* framework mentioned earlier).

Kant speaks of the kind of cognition of God available as ‘negative’, as opposed to ‘positive’. He seems to have something in mind along the lines of the *via negativa* of apophatic theology<sup>71</sup>. It should be noted, though, that, insofar as Kant stands in this tradition, he has a very much weaker stance than others have had regarding what we can know of God and his nature. He stands much closer to Aquinas, who argues from certain effects of God’s creative act to the divine possessing certain perfections, though we cannot understand the way in which God possesses those perfections (see McInerny & O’Callaghan 2014: 11.1). In this branch of theology, which has been supported by influential Christian theologians such as Tertullian and Aquinas, we gain a clearer concept of God by coming to understand what we *cannot* say about God. Through such an eliminative process, we can trim down our concept to become a better (though inevitably always highly inferior) image of the highest possible being, God. Kant offers us an example of how this works, stating that,

[o]ur understanding cannot cognize things otherwise than through certain general marks; but this is a limitation of the human understanding, and this cannot occur in God. Thus we think of a maximum understanding, that is, an intuitive understanding. This gives us no concept of all, but such a maximum serves to make the lesser degrees determinate, for the maximum is determinate... Thus in our cognition the concept of God is not so much extended as determined, for the maximum always has to be determinate (28:996).

The goal, then, of negative cognition is to come to a concept of a highest being that is as determined as possible. Determination is gained through a greater sense of the maximal nature of God’s being. Such maximisation cannot be cognised directly or positively, but offers a determination of sorts for our concept of the highest being.

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<sup>71</sup> A similar approach seems to be in operation with regards to things in themselves in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B148-9).

It is made clear, however, that Kant is not interested in idle theological speculation. He denigrates “speculative interest” in the concept of God in favour of “the practical interest which has to do with our making ourselves into better human beings” (28:997). It is only through the attempt to satisfy this practical<sup>72</sup> interest that our cognition of God has any dignity, and not because our cognition is directed at a concept of the highest being. It is our cognition itself that has dignity, given its foundation in the moral law and inner revelation of the concept of God<sup>73</sup>. Kant accepts that such cognition, from a speculative perspective, will be unsatisfactory. However, from the point of view of praxis, we should be satisfied, and our cognition is even higher and more pure due to its removal from speculative interest (see 28:999). If we were to allow ourselves to slip into the trap of speculative theology, we will inevitably end up in the errors of ‘ontotheology’ (the corollary of the ontological proof), ‘cosmotheology’ (the cosmological proof), and ‘physicotheology’ (the teleological/physicotheological proof) (see 28:1003).

It could at this point be argued, in opposition to my interpretation, that the emphasis here, as throughout the Critical philosophy, is on how the concept of God can be best used in order to aid our moral development, without any realist implications regarding the existence of the divine. To argue in such a way is to forget the implications of the Christian framework within which Kant is operating here, which mixes theory and praxis in the way in which we saw he is inclined towards in the pre-Critical period in the previous two chapters. The *Imago dei* doctrine is particularly significant here. As beings created in the image of God, we have a capacity for moral development unavailable to any other created beings in the physical world, a capacity which is inextricably bound up with another implication of the *Imago dei* tradition, namely that our being made in the image of God allows us some sense (again, not available to other created

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<sup>72</sup> Of course, at this point, we are now in the Critical period, where the term ‘practical’ gains greater significance. However, I hold that for our interests, the importance of the ‘practical’ for Kant remains a reflection of his desire to highlight what is important from the divine perspective, our moral progress, at the expense of speculation and epistemic hubris.

<sup>73</sup> I will discuss this more in 7.3, with a particular emphasis on the moral archetype as revelation.

beings) of the divine, perhaps through the operation of our reason. In fact, given that our moral development is our highest destiny, our development of a possible cognition of the divine is secondary and merely geared towards our capacity for moral perfection. However, this does not imply that the cognition in question is false in some respect, because the *Imago dei* framework guarantees legitimate access to the divine for those beings (like us) made in the image of God, and thus allows Kant to be a realist with regards to the divine, whilst at the same time putting the moral destiny of humankind first (as we should do in any genuinely Christian framework). So, I agree with the competing interpretation that the concept of God is being considered with regard to our moral development here. However, what I deny is that this places Kant outside of the Christian tradition in any way, and that it establishes him as some sort of anti-realist with regard to the divine. Interpreting Kant as standing within the *Imago dei* tradition allows us to place the moral emphasis of his approach to religion within genuine realist religious commitments.

Along the same lines, there has been a recent discussion between scholars regarding whether or not Kant should be regarded as a deist<sup>74</sup>. Here in the *Lectures*, at any rate, Kant makes the position clear as far as he sees it. The deist is an individual who, unlike him, does not accept a natural theology, and lacks a belief in a “*living* God who has produced the world through knowledge and by means of free will” (28:1001). Natural theology contains a mix of both transcendental considerations and gleanings from our experience. Transcendental theology, as we have seen, is certainly useful in its status as negative cognition, allowing us to gain a more determinate concept of God through elimination and, due to its pure status, helping

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<sup>74</sup> One of the most prominent scholars arguing for reading Kant as a deist is Allen Wood. In his paper ‘Kant’s Deism’, Wood argues that Kant should ultimately be seen as a deist on the basis that Kant desires to ultimately abandon Christianity and replace it with a rational religion that is recognisably deist. His argument in this paper centres on the claim that “Kant is plainly a rationalist because he is simply an agnostic about supernatural revelation” (1991: 13). I challenge this view on the basis that what may appear as agnosticism is a reflection of the ideal epistemic humility of the religious believer. The status of supernatural revelation in the Critical period in particular will be covered in more detail in our discussion of *Religion* (particularly 7.3 and 7.4).

us to avoid introducing anthropomorphisms into our concept. The deist, however, according to Kant, does not realise that this is insufficient. Their concept of God, he writes, "is wholly idle and useless and makes no impression on me if I assume it alone" (28:1002). The deist God will not have any moral impact or relevance for the believer, as such a God does not sustain interest in his creation beyond the original creative act. Due to this, it is not just a natural theology that the deist lacks, as they require a moral theology also. The thin notion of the deist God is insufficient to generate moral interest and does not set up the kind of moral scheme for the universe that can help make sense of our morality.

Kant characterises the three strands of rational theology (transcendental, natural, and moral) as thinking of an "original being" (28:1000) in differing ways. The original being of transcendental theology is the bare first cause of all things, whilst with the addition of natural theology we are able to conceive of God as a highest intelligence, an author that has freely given shape to the world in various ways through his creative act. Finally, with moral theology, we come to understand the original being as also the ruler of the world, a lawgiver and the ground of a final system of ends.

A moral theist, Kant writes, accepts that "it is impossible for speculative reason to demonstrate the existence of such a being with apodictic certainty; but he is nevertheless firmly convinced of the existence of this being, and he has faith beyond all doubt on practical grounds" (28:1011). Indeed, the faith of the moral theist (echoing Cartesian language) is so strong that "the foundation on which he builds his faith is unshakeable and it can never be overthrown, not even if all human beings united to undermine [it...; it is] as certain as a mathematical demonstration" (*Ibid*). This theism, one which Kant presumably takes himself to share, is not a watered-down version of classical theism, never mind deism - rather, it is an attempt to identify an ideal, pure faith in the existence of God, shorn of anthropomorphisms and self-interest, and grounded in a moral sense that is a necessary part of the reason of all human beings. Such a

basis for theism, he argues, is much stronger than any that could be possibly given through the traditional arguments for God's existence, as "nothing firmer or more certain can be thought in any science than our obligation to moral actions" (*Ibid.*). Kant introduces the notion of practical conviction, as a "convincing certainty of God's existence.... [that in addition] leads to *religion*, since it joins the thought of God firmly to our morality, and in this way it even makes *better* human beings of us" (28:1083) – a very special type of conviction indeed. Immediately after this, Kant makes it clear that practical conviction is not supposed to be a weaker counterpart to any other type of conviction, as

[t]his moral belief is not equivalent to saying that my opinions occur only as hypotheses... such presuppositions, which flow from some absolutely necessary datum, as in morals and mathematics, are not mere opinions but demand of us a firm belief. Hence faith is not knowledge, and thank heaven it is not! (28:1083-4)

Therefore, it is entirely incorrect to suppose that Kant is putting forward here some sort of implicit critique of religious belief and its truth claims by labelling it as a practical conviction. It is not a derogatory term, intended to signal that religion should be reduced to morality, a necessary supposition for morality but no more. The fact that religious belief is 'practical conviction' is, as far as Kant is concerned, in its favour – it involves truth claims with the certainty of mathematics, and in addition has the ability to make a positive impact upon our behaviour.

The seriousness with which Kant affirms the existence of God is put even more strongly later on, when he states that,

[t]he three articles of moral faith, *God*, *freedom of the human will*, and *a moral world*, are the only articles in which it is permissible for us to transport ourselves in thought beyond all possible experience and out of the sensible world; only here may we assume and believe



something from a practical point of view for which we otherwise have no adequate speculative grounds (28:1091)

With moral theism, we are able legitimately to break through the famous limits placed on theoretical reason by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Moral theism is a special exception, a unique path to have cognition of something outside of the phenomenal realm, all thanks to inner revelation and the moral law.

Kant's conception of moral faith, further to its mention in *Dreams*, is expanded upon in an important letter from 1775 (thus falling in the so-called 'Quiet Decade' between the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 and the *Critique of Pure Reason*). In this letter, we find a definition of moral faith as "the unconditional trust in divine aid, in achieving all the good that, even with our most sincere efforts, lies beyond our power" (10:178). Kant paints a picture of his idealised conception of moral faith, when he writes,

[s]uppose we were totally ignorant of what God does and suppose we were only concerned of this: that, because of the holiness of His law and the insuperable evil of our hearts, God must have hidden some supplement to our deficiencies somewhere in the depth of His decrees, something we could humbly rely on, if only we should do what is in our power, so as not to be unworthy of His law. If that were so, we should have all the guidance we need, whatever the manner of communication between the divine goodness and ourselves might be. Our trust in God is unconditional, that is, it is not accompanied by any inquisitive desire to know how His purpose will be achieved, or still less, by any presumptuous confidence that the soul's salvation will follow from our acceptance of certain Gospel disclosures. That is the meaning of the moral faith that I find in the Gospels (10:176-77).

Leaving the question of the status of Scripture to one side for now<sup>75</sup>, it is clear that Kant is offering his view of what true religious faith looks like, indeed the standard that he attempts to live up to in his religious life (it is a remarkably personal and candid letter). Again, the stress is on a balance between humility, including not engaging in fruitless theoretical speculation, and what the moral law reveals to us. Simply following the moral law, instead of engaging in speculation, may be disappointing to many. However, it is a sign of trust in God, and thus an indicator of true faith, to follow one's conscience without inquiring further into God's operations in the moral and natural realms. Kant states that "the doctrine of the purity of conscience in faith and of the good transformation of our lives... [is] the only true religion for man's salvation" (10:177). Salvation comes from morality, which is a revelation from God, and any speculation beyond that is not only unnecessary but potentially pernicious.

All of this expands upon ideas regarding how the practical realm can offer a wider realm of justified beliefs than that found within the narrow limits of reason in its theoretical employment. Stevenson is prominent amongst those scholars who have noted the important role given by Kant to faith (*Glaube*), which he glosses as "holding something to be true, and being practically but not theoretically justified in doing so" (2003: 88). Believing or having faith (*glauben*) is to be distinguished from knowing something (*wissen*), in which we do have the relevant theoretical justification for holding it to be so. However, the kind of subjective certainty underlying faith is not to be unfavourably compared with the certainty of knowledge. Kant speaks of faith engendering a kind of moral certainty, in which the belief in question is inextricably bound up with our moral nature:

[T]he conviction is not *logical* but *moral* certainty, and, since it depends on subjective grounds (of moral disposition) I must not even say '*It is morally certain that there is a God,*' etc., but rather '*I am morally certain*' etc. That is, the belief in a God and another world is so

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<sup>75</sup> The topic of Scripture will be dealt with at length in 7.4.

interwoven with my moral disposition that I am in as little danger of ever surrendering the former as I am worried that the latter can ever be torn away from me (A829/B857).

It is entirely possible to take such a distinction between knowledge and faith as impugning the former in some sense; for example, holding that faith is unlike knowledge is not seeking after ‘the facts of the matter’, in whatever way we wish to understand that, and is in fact only concerned with how we ought to act and what beliefs are going to aid us in our moral development<sup>76</sup>.

However, in the context of the *Imago dei* framework, moral certainty, grounded in our creation in the image of God, does have realist connotations *alongside* any aid we might gain for our moral development. To say that we are ‘subjectively certain’ or ‘morally certain’ of the actuality of some state of affairs is not necessarily some form of epistemically weak stance for Kant. If some belief is genuinely grounded in our moral nature, i.e. in the part of us that is the image of God and thereby has some sort of guarantee of epistemic credibility, then that belief is justified. Even better, the range of justified beliefs generated in this way is much larger than those that can be held to be objectively certain through reason in its theoretical employment. The *Imago dei* tradition can give us a framework within which this can be the case, holding our theoretical faculties to be fallen and impaired in some way, whilst some notion of the divine, grounded in our corrupted but still present moral nature, can still be used as an inspiration to faith and moral development. It is not correct, then, to focus on Kant’s distinction between faith and knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and take the former to be a mere failed attempt at the latter. Faith has its own role to play in the life of the individual alongside knowledge, crucially, giving us an opportunity to grasp that which is beyond our everyday experience.

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<sup>76</sup> As an example of such an interpretation, Vanden Auweele speaks of Kant’s interest in faith as “[providing] a morally beneficent concept of religious grace (in a broad sense) as a useful notion that would augment the human agent’s moral resolve” (2014: 151).

We can also consider briefly here the famous ‘fact of reason’, which forms a major part of the argument of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. When considering the way in which the moral law forces itself upon our experience as an authentic source of laws, Kant remarks that:

Consciousness of this fundamental law may be called a fact of reason because one cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason, for example, from consciousness of freedom... and because it instead forces itself upon us of itself as a synthetic *a priori* proposition that is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical... However, in order to avoid misinterpretation in regarding this law as *given*, it must be noted carefully that it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of pure reason which, by it, announces itself as originally lawgiving (5:31).

So, it seems that we all have some inherent sense of the authoritative nature of the moral law, one which is presented to us as a sheer fundamental fact without any other ground in reason or intuition. Allison argues that with regard to Kant’s mysterious references to this ‘fact of reason’,

the bulk of the evidence suggests that the fact is best construed as the consciousness of standing under the moral law... the consciousness attributed to ‘every natural human reason’ [being] of particular moral constraints as they arise in the process of practical deliberation, with the law serving as the guiding rule (decision procedure) actually governing such deliberation (1990: 233).

Whilst it seems difficult to avoid accepting Kant’s claim that we all have this sense of the moral law, guiding our decision-making procedures to a varying extent, we may feel a little dissatisfaction in relying upon such a brute fact as a foundation for his ethical theory. Indeed, in *Groundwork III*, Kant offers an attempt at deducing the moral law without relying upon such a foundation. Without wishing to get into the extensive literature on the ‘fact of reason’, it may be worth considering whether this ‘fact’ is just the kind of ‘inner revelation’ that Kant considers in

the *Lectures*, a kind of brute fact grounded in our reason that is nevertheless self-justifying given our status as created beings in the ‘image of God’. Such a suggestion will not be helpful to those who wish to pursue a purely secular Kantian ethics, and insofar as we try to interpret Kant in a secular manner, the ‘fact of reason’ may continue to dissatisfy us. It can appear a rather mysterious and perhaps even *ad hoc* addition to the Kantian scheme. Within an affirmative interpretation, however, we may be able to account for the fundamental aspect of the fact of reason within our own reason, whilst allowing it some significance beyond ourselves, pointing towards a created universe that can progress, from the moral standpoint, towards the divine. Exploring the Christian framework underlying the fact of reason not only dispels its mystery, but can also help fill out for us what the fact precisely is.

In holding such a view of the fact of reason, I follow the traditional foundationalist interpretation, in which the fact of reason is cited as the foundation of a vindication of practical reason (and reason more generally)<sup>77</sup>. Such a reading is offered by Ameriks, who sees the fact of reason as putting Kant close to a kind of moral intuitionism:

Kant emphasised, of course, that his dogmatism was at least not mystical, that it rested on a given generally recognised cognition and not a sheer feeling or ordinary intuition. Yet although in intention his practical philosophy surely can be distinguished from the mystical excesses of the idealists who followed him, Kant must bear considerable responsibility for the latter. Only some technical peculiarities of his system prevent labelling his position fundamentally intuitionistic, for although the ‘a priori fact’ of the validity of the moral law is not a given particular, as a standard Kantian intuition should be, but is rather a kind of principle, it shares the nonnaturalistic ultimacy that is found explicitly and typically in

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<sup>77</sup> An alternative to a foundationalist reading of the fact of reason lies upon constructivist lines. Such a position is argued for by Lukow, who sees a foundational fact of reason as implying that Kant “ultimately gave up the project of vindication, and so of critique of reason, lapsing into a dogmatic rationalism of a quasi-Cartesian kind” (1990: 208). Whilst I cannot engage with Lukow’s position in great detail here, I believe that Kant’s use of the fact of reason within the Critical system becomes much more plausible when we take into account the religious framework of his philosophy.

intuitionistic systems. Moreover, this ultimacy is clearly taken by Kant to be a prime sign and proof of a special transcendent realm of being (1981: 72).

Whilst Kant's flirtation with dogmatism may seem puzzling, the picture becomes clearer when we take into account the religious framework of his philosophy. Within the religious framework, the Critical system investigates *created beings*, beings that have been created with a particular moral purpose in mind. Given such a background, we are able to interpret various aspects of our experience, such as the 'fact of reason', as forming part of a divine purpose. The fact of reason no longer appears as a mysterious brute fact, but rather forms part of a wider scheme, telling us of our place in the moral order and pointing beyond itself to the divine.

Returning to the *Lectures*, parallel to the benefits of natural theology, moral theism is able to aid us in fashioning a more determinate concept of God. We retain the eliminative aspect of the approach, 'shaving off' the concept so that it accords more precisely with our sense of the moral law. However, the influence is reciprocal, in that the more determinate concept of God resulting from moral theism is able to aid us in our conflict with sensuous incentives, "in order that he may not act against his own powers, he is set by his own reason to think of a being whose will is those very commands which he recognizes to be given by themselves *a priori* with apodictic certainty" (28:1012). How natural theology and moral theism influence each other is not entirely clear, but as far as Kant is concerned, there seems to be something about moral theism that gives the individual strength to embark upon a morally renewed life, insofar as for the moral theist,

[t]he foundation on which he builds his faith is unshakeable... It is a fortress in which the moral human being can find refuge with no fear of ever being drive from it... [H]e is certain that he is also a member of the chain of the realm of ends, and this thought gives him consolation and comfort, makes him most inwardly noble and worthy of happiness, raising him to the hope of constituting a whole with all rational beings in the realm of morality, just

as all and each are connected to one another in the realm of nature. Now the human being has a secure foundation on which he can build his faith in God (28:1011).

The relationship between belief in God and morality for Kant is certainly not reductionist, nor does it give a watered-down version of theism. Genuine faith and the moral life go together in the life of the individual created in the image of God.

Later on in the *Lectures*, Kant talks in more detail about the foundations of his moral theism. Physicotheology, the attempt to demonstrate God's existence through "[seeing] whether a determinate experience, that of the things in the present world, their constitution and order, yields a ground of proof that could help us to acquire a certain conviction of the existence of a highest being" (A620/B648), falls short in attempting to cognise a supreme principle of nature. However, given our status as moral beings, as well as beings that are part of nature, we will be ultimately unsatisfied due to the possibility for conflict between morality and what happens in our everyday experience. Indeed, Kant states, such a conflict is all too clear, for,

experience and reason show us that in the present course of things the precise observation of all morally necessary duties *is not always connected with well-being*, but rather the noblest honesty and righteousness is often misunderstood, despised, persecuted, and trodden underfoot by vice (28:1072).

The world does not seem to be constructed with a view of building towards a morally perfect telos, in fact it seems to be morally cold insofar as the gifts of fortune do not naturally accrue to the morally virtuous. Given such a fact of our experience (a fact that Kant will draw upon again in *Religion*), we cannot settle with the notion of a highest being as merely a supreme principle of nature.

We feel, drawing upon the inner revelation of our indeterminate concept of God and our feeling of the moral law, both a need for a highest being that can reconcile nature and

morality, happiness and virtue, and a trust that “he is already present in the nature of things and that the order of things leads us to him” (*Ibid.*). We can also come to know him as “*holy lawgiver, a benevolent sustainer of the world, and a just judge*” (28:1073), attributes that God must have in order to give objective reality to our moral duties through the right connection between morality and nature.

Given a notion of such a God, the question of the existence of evil is soon begged, and Kant addresses this problem directly in a strong foreshadowing of *Religion*. It is clear that Kant is primarily interested in the problem of moral evil, that is, as he sees it, the question of whether “a holy God himself placed a predisposition to evil in human nature” (28:1077). Given our existence as created beings of a wholly good and just God, how could our capacity to commit evil acts come about? Indeed, in using the term ‘predisposition’, Kant is making it clear that humankind are evil *as a matter of course*. Such an assumption regarding the history of human moral behaviour makes the problem of moral evil even greater.

In response to this challenge, Kant presents a not altogether novel defence here, in affirming the original perfection of human nature and an inherent good in the process of moral perfection, as opposed to a possible instantaneous achievement of perfect virtue, stating that the “predisposition to good, which God placed in the human being, must be developed by the human being himself before the good can make its appearance” (28:1078). The fall of humankind into a predisposition to evil becomes an unfortunate but ultimately good event, an affirmation of the freedom that will allow us to cultivate ourselves and come to truly deserved happiness and virtue. Hence, Kant writes that,

[i]n this earthly world there is only progress. Hence in this world goodness and happiness are not things to be possessed, they are only paths toward perfection and contentment. Thus evil in the world can be regarded as *incompleteness in the development of the germ toward the*



*good... A special germ toward evil cannot be thought, but rather the first development of our reason toward the good is the origin of evil (Ibid.)*

Such an approach to defending classical theism against the problem of evil is prevalent in the tradition, with a particular foundation in the theology of Augustine. In one of his earlier works *On the Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine claims that our own individual free will, something which has value in itself as a gift from God, is the ground for our evil actions, thus something that we are entirely responsible for:

If a person is something good and could act rightly only because he willed to, then he ought to have free will, without which he could not act rightly. We should not believe that, because a person also sins through it, God gave it to him for this purpose. The fact that a person cannot live rightly without it is therefore a sufficient reason why it should have been given to him... If anyone uses it in order to sin, the divinity redresses him [for it]. This would happen unjustly if free will had been given not only for living rightly but also for sinning. How would God justly redress someone who made use of his will for the purpose for which it was given? (Augustine 2010, 2.1.3.5-6)

Our free will, a good thing for us to have, has the purpose of being used for the good, and we, the individual human moral agent, are solely to blame if we misuse this capacity we have for free choice. This theme is continued in the *Lectures* through a discussion on the related topics of the ultimate purpose of creation and of God's providence. Kant argues that the perfection of the entire world (and thus its ultimate purpose) lies in the perfection "in the use *rational creatures* make of their reason and freedom" (28:1099). He takes a firmly optimistic view of the future of creation and the place of humankind in it, stating that we, as rational creatures, "constitute the *centre of creation*" and that we should believe that "the human race is grounded on a *universal plan* according to which it will in the end *attain to its highest possible perfection*" (28:1103).

The position, then, is clear – all of the suffering and other bad things we experience in the world is wholly justified given the possible perfection of the world, grounded in the moral perfection of rational, free agents.

Kant also considers the question of why God does not give all created beings complete happiness instantaneously. He argues that it is simply antithetical to the very notion of happiness that one could attain it completely in such a way. Happiness, he writes, has to be understood as “*progress toward contentment*” (28:1080). God does not will for happiness for his created beings at any moment in particular. As a being outside of time, he measures happiness throughout the entire duration of the existence of a created being. Therefore, we must be epistemologically humble when it comes to deciding the happiness of a being’s existence. As Kant writes, “[w]e are acquainted with too little of the outcome of suffering, of God’s purposes in it, of the constitution of our nature and happiness itself, to be able to determine the measure of happiness of which the human being is capable in this world” (28:1080-1). Rather, we should be satisfied and lay our trust in God, for, “it is enough that it is within our power to render most ill harmless to ourselves, indeed to make our world into a paradise, and to make ourselves *worthy* of an uninterrupted happiness” (28:1081). In other words, we are capable of helping ourselves through attempting to ensure that we are open to grace, and letting God do the rest, trusting that he has given us the best kind of existence possible for free, rational, finite moral beings. We are simply wrong, therefore, to expect instantaneous complete happiness – it not only betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of what complete happiness would be and what it would look like from God’s perspective, but also demonstrates a lack of trust and faith in God’s plan for us.

Reflection upon the problem of evil is carried on in the *Lectures* under a discussion of “God as the author of the world” (28:1093). Here, Kant begins by rejecting a dualistic, Gnostic-inclined approach to the problem of evil by absolving God of guilt for evil by seeing evil as

founded in the necessary constitution of matter. Under such a view, God fashioned the world out of pre-existing matter which, due to inherent flaws, could only be used to construct an imperfect world. God is seen more as the 'architect' of the world, rather than 'creator', doing his best to create a good world out of imperfect material. As such, his responsibility for the evil we experience in the world is largely undermined, and maybe even extinguished. Kant seems to reject such a position on the basis of the questions it leaves unanswered:

[I]t might accordingly be difficult to determine the extent to which God as the world's architect is responsible for what is good and bad in the world and the extent to which matter, as its fundamental material, is responsible. Such indeterminate ideas are useless in theology (28: 1094).

As far as Kant is concerned, the relative certainty that holds within the realm of true moral theism compares favourably with the uncertainty left by dualism with regard to precisely the role matter plays in both meeting the (moral) ends of the creator and in hindering the divine plan for the world. On this basis, he affirms the traditional Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, leaving behind the possible theodicy that dualism suggests by attempting to undermine divine responsibility for evil in the world.

To retrieve the situation, Kant here goes back to the old topic of a Leibniz-style theodicy, and in fact defends a version of the argument – namely, that our world must in fact be the best possible world that God could have created, and so he cannot be held responsible for the evil that is contained in the world (given the fact that his creative act has many other positive virtues, such as bringing about the creation of free moral agents who can achieve the perfection that is available to us). Kant presents his reasoning in this way:

If a better world than the one willed by God were possible, then *a better will* than the divine will would also have to be possible. For indisputably that will is better which chooses what is

better. But if a better will is possible, then so is a being who could express this better will. And this being would therefore be more perfect and better than God. But that is a contradiction; for in God is *omnitudo realitatis* [the all of reality] (28:1097).

Kant believes that it is clear that God, the highest being, has the best will, so by necessity, the world that he has created must be the best possible world. However, it also seems that he feels that the Leibnizian argument lacks some persuasive power on its own, as he goes on to develop his own novel argument for the ‘best world hypothesis’ through “maxims of reason alone, independently of all theology” (28:1098). Though it is difficult to follow precisely<sup>78</sup>, here is an attempted reconstruction of the argument:

1. It is an established principle (due to its utility and predictive success) in the study of nature that in every animal and plant, there is no part of the creature that is superfluous to its final end(s)<sup>79</sup>;
2. It is good for the cultivation of our reason to assume such a maxim in the natural world – namely, that everything is combined under the supremely necessary principle of unity<sup>80</sup>;
3. Through analogy, we can expect the rational world to be arranged in a similar way;
4. Therefore, everything in the world (phenomenal and noumenal) can be expected to be arranged for the best<sup>81</sup>;
5. So, the whole of everything existing is the best possible one.

I do not wish to pronounce upon the strength of this argument. Rather, it is noteworthy that Kant links this argument (with a starting-point in natural science) so closely to morality. In the

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<sup>78</sup> Due to the fact that these are lecture notes, they can sometimes be lacking in detail and argumentation at points where you rather wish they were not.

<sup>79</sup> Such a principle can be found stated at B425 also.

<sup>80</sup> Kant discusses the use of a principle of unity in nature at A618/B646 – A620/B648 and at A680/B708 – A702/B730. An in-depth review of these passages would take us beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>81</sup> Here, we are assuming that the rational order underlying the world is a benevolent one, arranging the world in best manner possible from a moral perspective.

same way that natural science is best pursued on the assumption that the laws governing nature are the best ones, morality also must also be based on the assumption of the creation of the best world:

[I]f this world is the best, then my morality will stand firm and its incentives will retain their strength... Hence even *our practical reason* takes great interest in this doctrine [of the best possible world] and recognises it as a necessary presupposition for its own sake (28:1098-1099).

Again, just as we saw in the pre-Critical period, Kant ties together his reflections upon nature, God, and morality. The approach, modelled in Leibniz, of intertwining practical and theoretical considerations in philosophical reflection, is being used to offer an explanation of evil in the world. Though the argument, here in the lecture notes, is clothed in the more recognisable garb of Critical vocabulary, the themes and approach are the same as we saw in the pre-Critical texts we considered. At the fundamental level of Kant's general approach to issues in the philosophy of religion, very little has changed.

#### 4.4 Concluding Remarks on the Lecture Notes

What have we learned, then, from these lecture notes regarding our project of coming to a wider understanding of Kant's philosophy of religion? We have been able to draw together a number of substantive elements regarding Kant's critical thought on religious faith, philosophy, and the problem of evil. They can be summarised as follows:

1. Kantian theology is to be grounded in inner revelation, seated in our God-given reason. We see this as a kind of *sensus divinitatis*, along the lines of Luther. As rational beings, we can generate cognition of God simply from ourselves, given that we are made 'in the image of God'. Nevertheless, our approach to religious matters will remain humble, and will resemble the *via negativa* approach favoured by Aquinas.
2. In the spirit of humility, we must be careful to avoid idle theological and philosophical speculation. Instead, our investigations into the divine must be conducted with the primary concern of the moral well-being of humankind. A true moral faith, grounded in practical conviction, will underlie these investigations, given that our moral destiny is the most important aspect of our being and relation to God. As such, we must distance ourselves from the traditional arguments for the existence of God, which are ultimately less convincing than a faith grounded in the certainty of the moral law and the divine underlying it.
3. Kant's approach, here in the lecture notes, accords with his treatment of religious faith in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and that of the 'fact of reason' in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The power of practical reason can legitimately expand our understanding, even to touch upon the divine.

4. The lecture notes also deal with the problem of evil. Here, Kant offers an orthodox approach to evil and theodicy (one which places him close to Augustine), with inherent value attributed to the process of moral development inaugurated by the Fall.

We can see, in terms of general themes and approaches, a fundamental continuity between the pre-Critical Kant and the views put forward in these lecture notes. There are important developments, certainly, but these add to the overall project regarding religious faith and the problem of evil inaugurated in the pre-Critical texts we considered. We will see this continuity as we proceed through the Critical period, approaching *Religion* in the early 1790s.

## 5. Interlude: The Three Critiques and the Anthropological Works

At this point, we skip over some very important works by Kant that could have been examined in detail in this thesis. In particular, the famous *Critiques*, various ethical works (including the *Groundwork*) and anthropological works, such as *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, are notable by their absence. Unfortunately, given the aims of this thesis, a detailed examination of these works is not possible here, as I believe that the religious framework of Kant's philosophy is more transparent elsewhere, that is, it is more easily seen in the works we shall be considering in detail in this thesis. In addition, one of the advantages of my approach is that I am able to discuss less-examined works, which means that this thesis can be complementary to the wealth of literature on the major works that defends similar views to mine<sup>82</sup>. Despite this, I have indicated, in the last chapter, the way in which the treatment of religious faith in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the fact of reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason* may fit into my interpretation. With regard to the *Critique of Judgement* and the anthropological works, there is a key notion that Kant focuses upon, namely, teleology. Throughout this thesis, I will touch upon issues surrounding teleology, though due to our interests in other works, this will be without extensive reference to the *Critique of Judgement* and the anthropological works.

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<sup>82</sup> Just to pick a few examples, see Green (1978); Palmquist (1993), (2000); Davidovich (1993); Galbraith (1996); Firestone (2009), whereas Insole (2013) is a much more wide-ranging work (encompassing pre-Critical and Critical works) but focuses on the topic of freedom in relation to Kant's theological realism.



## 6. Kant's Reflections on Theodicy, the Example of Job and Eschatology

### 6.1 Introduction – Two essays on Theodicy and Eschatology

In this chapter, I will consider two minor essays from the early 1790s that will aid us in our exploration of the religious framework of Kant's thought, prior to the final chapter on interpreting *Religion*. They are *On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy (Theodicy)* and *The End of All Things*. These two minor essays, the former from 1791 (before the publication of *Religion*) and the latter from 1794 (after the publication of *Religion*), treat two major areas of theological and philosophical enquiry – theodicy as a response to the problem of evil, and eschatological reflection on the end of the world as we know it and the fulfilment of the moral destiny of all human beings.

In *Theodicy* (6.2), we will discover Kant outlining a new approach to defending God in the face of the existence of evil in the world. Using the example of Job, we see an opportunity to take a much more humble approach to theodicy (taking into account our own imperfections and the limitedness of our faculties), yet nevertheless an approach more in harmony with true religious faith. As such, Kant rejects earlier attempts at theodicy, crystallising his dissatisfaction (felt from the very beginnings of his philosophical career) with traditional attempts to preserve theism in the face of evil. I will also begin to draw some preliminary conclusions regarding how we should approach key theories that we will find in *Religion*. In the following section (6.3), we will continue our evaluation of *Theodicy*, alongside a text focused on eschatology from a Kantian perspective, namely *The End of All Things*. Building upon our investigation of the lectures notes (in chapter 4), we will continue to probe the foundations of a possible Kantian theology within the Critical

system. Reason, in its practical employment, is a powerful tool, being able (amongst other things) to give us some sense of what must happen at the end of the world, given that we are in a world created by the God of classical theism. Whilst remaining epistemically humble and sincere with regards to our religious faith, we can nevertheless with some confidence rule out some pictures of the last days that conflict with the moral standing of God. In this vein, we will also pursue the theme of the primacy of practical reason found in *Theodicy* and elsewhere, which is an important counterpoint to an over-emphasis on the careful limits placed by Kant on reason in its theoretical employment.

## 6.2 Theodicy and the Example of Job

*Theodicy* was written only two years before Kant began work on *Religion*, and so can act as a useful clue for Kant's thought regarding religious matters during this period. Further to this, it will be argued that what we can learn from *Theodicy* regarding Kant's religious framework can help inform how we interpret key claims in *Religion*, such as the doctrine of radical evil, where we may come understand the apparent lack of argument for it<sup>83</sup>.

*Theodicy* begins with a fairly conventional tread through various attempts at offering a theodicy, that is, a justification of God's creative action in the face of the experience of evil in our lives. So, for example, we find a rehearsal of the Irenaean theodicy, which argues that the suffering we experience in our lives is necessary for our moral development towards perfection, God's true and justified goal for all of us (see 8:260). One after another, Kant offers points against various attempts at theodicy, and concludes that "[e]very previous theodicy has not performed what it promised, namely the vindication of the moral wisdom of the world-government against the doubts raised against it on the basis of what the experience of this world teaches" (8:263). Theodicies try to do far too much in their attempt to offer a positive justification of God's creative act in the face of the evil we experience in the created universe.

However, Kant claims, there is still the possibility of a successful theodicy whilst "it must yet be proven that at least a negative wisdom is within our reach - namely, insight into the necessary limitation of what we may presume with respect to that which is too high for us" (*Ibid.*). Kant, it would appear, wishes to put the final nail in the coffin for theodicies, by demonstrating a certain limitation in our thought that would prevent us from gaining the knowledge necessary for the sort of positive justification that a successful theodicy would rest upon, and he does this

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<sup>83</sup> A topic we will discuss in detail in 7.2.4, where I argue that attempts to offer a formal proof for the doctrine of radical evil, do not take sufficient account of Kant's intentions with regard to his pronouncements on ethical and religious matters.

through the familiar distinction between phenomena and the supersensible, arguing that concepts such as artistic and moral wisdom that would aid us in grounding any theodicy could “be intuited only by one who penetrates to the cognition of the supersensible (intelligible) world and sees the manner in which this grounds the sensible world” (8:264), i.e. could not be intuited by us whose cognition is grounded in sensibility.

One might easily think that with that, a seemingly final rejection of the very possibility of those, such as ourselves, who are limited to sensible cognition, to find an explanation for the evil we experience, we would find the end of the matter for Kant. However, he then goes on in *Theodicy* to offer us a radically new, but greatly reduced, program for those who aspire to formulate such an explanation. Kant begins by distinguishing between two different types of theodicy, doctrinal and authentic. In explicating this distinction, Kant writes that a theodicy is “an *interpretation* of nature insofar as God announces his will through it” (*Ibid.*). A theodicy through a doctrinal interpretation of nature is a project of offering a positive justification of God’s action, seeing the world as a “divine publication of [God’s] purposes” (*Ibid.*) through which we discern his final moral end for the universe and thus some justification for the evil we find in the world around us. It has an inferential method, namely, making “a rational inference of [God’s] will from the utterances of which the law-giver has made use [realised in created world], in conjunction with his otherwise recognized purposes” (*Ibid.*), which can, it is hoped, garner for us cognition of God’s divine scheme. The problem with such an inference, as already suggested, is that it is simply not open to the kind of creatures with the finite rational capacities that we have - our theoretical reason is trying to gain a kind of knowledge of God’s moral plan for the world of our experience that seems impossible for us to obtain. As Kant writes, “[t]he world is *often* a closed book for us, and it is so *every time* we look at it to extract from it God’s *final aim* (which is always moral)” (*Ibid.*). There is another type of theodicy available to us, though. We can formulate a so-called authentic interpretation of the will as revealed through nature. Such a theodicy would

consist of “the mere dismissal of all objections against divine wisdom” (*Ibid.*), as opposed to the kind of positive project envisioned by doctrinal theodicy.

To illustrate his new conception of theodicy through an authentic interpretation of God’s will, Kant uses a story from Biblical scripture, namely that of Job, as an analogy. The Biblical story of Job should be reasonably familiar; he is a righteous man who has everything taken away from him as a test of his faith. Much of the book is taken up with a series of speeches by Job and various friends. Job’s friends maintain that Job must have sinned in some way in order to deserve the unfortunate events that have been occurring, despite the evidence of his righteousness:

Job’s friends declare themselves for that system which explains all ills in the world from God’s *justice*... although they could name [no crime] *for* which the unhappy man is guilty, yet they believed they could judge *a priori* that he must have some weighing upon him, for his misfortune would otherwise be impossible according to divine justice (8:265).

Job, however, whilst admitting that he is not perfect, does not agree with his friends’ attempt to offer such an explanation for his woes. Job’s misfortunes, he argues, should be simply put down to a decision by God, “[b]ut he stands alone and who can dissuade him? What he desires, that he does” (Job 23:13), and we should not attempt to impute any particular intention to God for that decision. Whilst Kant makes it clear that he is not siding with the *letter* of either side in the dispute, he does affirm the *spirit* of Job’s position, against his friends, who “speak as if they were secretly listened to by the mighty one, over whose cause they are passing judgment, and as if gaining his favour through their judgement were closer to their heart than the truth” (8:265). It is Job’s frankness and honesty that Kant ends up praising:

[O]nly sincerity of heart and not distinction of insight; honesty in openly admitting one’s doubts; repugnance to pretending conviction where one feels none, especially before God...

these are the attributes which, in the person of Job, have decided the pre-eminence of the honest man over the religious flatterer in the divine verdict (8:266-267).

It is his meek acceptance of God's decision, and his rejection of the attempt to seek to come to know God's intentions with regard to bestowing misfortunes upon him, that, for Kant, reveals his true faith, "[proving] that he did not found his morality on faith, but his faith on morality: in such a case, however weak this faith might be, yet it alone is of a pure and true kind" (8:267).

So, what is the significance of Kant's discussion of Job in *Theodicy* for our understanding of the religious framework of his philosophy, as we look forward to our interpretation of *Religion*? We can see, from the analogy with Job, that the primacy of morality means for Kant a particular approach to religious matters, and we should read *Religion* itself as being an example of such an approach (in the Preface to the First Edition of *Religion*, Kant makes clear his desire to ground religion in morality (see 6:3-11)). We can see what such an approach would not be, as unlike Job's friends, we would not seek to break the limits of our theoretical reason in attempting to explain the evil we experience in the world, and imputing a certain intention to God. Rather, what should be adopted is a much more humble approach, which would involve basing our faith on morality *because* we are not taking a theoretical position regarding the origins of evil, instead leaving ourselves open to an authentic interpretation of the world of our experience that reveals God's active role in nature, whilst not revealing any more precise details that are beyond the ken of our sensible cognition.

As much as it might have puzzled some of his contemporaries, and indeed modern readers, Kant is in effect affirming his trust in God's love and will for what is best for us, in the same way that Job ultimately accepts the misfortunes that God brings upon him. Indeed, as Stump (2010: ch. 9)<sup>84</sup> has shown, the structure of the narrative of the Book of Job reveals that

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<sup>84</sup> I find that Stump's discussion of the structure of the narrative in the Book of Job in this work is incredibly helpful for bringing out the significance of the narrative for Kant here, and I draw upon her work in the following discussion.

Job's trust in God's benevolence is ultimately justified. Whilst the story of Job's sufferings in itself might lead us, like Job's friends, to conclude that Job must have brought his sufferings upon himself in some way, the whole structure of framing narratives, concluding with God's dialogue with Satan, fundamentally alters the whole import of Job's travails. As Stump notes, the Book of Job has an incredibly intricate structure:

The description of God's personal relations with the non-human parts of his creation is contained within an account of God's conversation with Job, which is part of the dialogues commenting on God's relations with Job, which relations are themselves the subject of the story of God's relations with Job, which is in turn part of the framing story about God's exchanges with Satan (*Ibid.*: 183).

We cannot understand the meaning of Job's suffering unless we take into account this wider structure into which it fits. The difference between Job and his friends lies in the claims they make about this wider structure. Whilst the friends are hubristic enough to claim what such a structure *must be like*, Job is willing to trust in God's overall benevolent scheme and thereby not make any definite claims regarding the wider context of his own suffering.

The divine speeches towards the end of the narrative reveal God as more than just powerful, but also as standing as a benevolent parent to creation. Through these speeches, it is implied that "a good parent will sometimes allow the children she loves to suffer – but only in case the suffering confers an outweighing benefit on the child who experiences the suffering" (*Ibid.*: 191), and this is the case with regards to the relation between God and Job. In addition, the speeches do not as such offer a straightforward philosophical explanation of Job's suffering, but instead, in various ways, manifest and demonstrate God's love for Job, and thereby offer some form of direct, non-inferential explanation of why Job has suffered so greatly (see *Ibid.*: 190-195). Job's trust is further affirmed through the framing narrative of God's dealings with Satan, though Job has no knowledge of the interaction between these two higher beings. Stump shows (see

*Ibid.*: 197-221) that the most fundamental framing narrative of the Book of Job is that of the love of God for Satan, and the desire to bring Satan back into fellowship with God. In both this wider narrative of the relation between God and Satan, and the narrative it encompasses of the relation between God and Job, God's benevolence is key, with both Satan and Job the intended beneficiary of the events that take place. As such, the narrative affirms the wider benevolent scheme of God's creation, whilst at the same time considering Job's considerable suffering in an unflinching manner and rejecting the approach of Job's friends of offering a fully worked-out explanation of the suffering that Job has faced.

What precisely Kant is praising in Job's position here in *Theodicy* is paralleled by Luther, in section 64 of *The Bondage of the Will* (2008: 124-125), where he similarly praises the theologically humble approach of Ezekiel, who

[speaks] of *the preached and offered mercy of God*, not of that *secret and to be feared will of God*... [God's will] is not to be curiously inquired into, but to be adored with reverence as the most profound *secret* of the divine majesty, which He reserves unto Himself and keeps hidden from us.

On the same theme, Luther writes, "God hides Himself and will be unknown by us, that is nothing unto us, and here, that sentiment stands good, 'What is above us, does not concern us'" (*Ibid.*). Luther strikes a key distinction between 'God preached', the Word of God, and 'God hidden', God as He is in Himself. True knowledge of God (in faith) is the gift of the Holy Spirit alone, through the Word. Luther reminds us that,

God does many things which He does not make known unto us in His Word; He also wills many things which He does not in His Word make known unto us that He will... It is enough to know only, that there is in God a certain will inscrutable, but *what*, *why*, and *how far* that will



wills, it is not lawful to inquire, to wish to know, to be concerned about, or to reach unto – it is only to be feared and adored! (*Ibid.*)

It is very important to stress that, for Luther, human beings have no knowledge of the way God works in the world. Human beings have a tendency to produce images of false gods, a tendency that needs to be combatted as much as possible (see Bayer 2008: 177). Faith can only have some grasp of God's Word, that is, God as he reveals himself to us, but can never reach back into understanding how God is in himself.

Further, for Luther, belief (*Glauben*) in God did not just concern propositional knowledge, but included trust as part of an on-going relationship between the deity and his subject (see Whitford 2011: 63), and a willingness to let God be God. Such trust includes not attempting to discern God's intentions. It is just this sort of trust and faith in God that Kant is praising in Job.

The parallel should not be altogether surprising given Kant's Pietist background<sup>85</sup>. Spener, the father of Pietist theology, and a figure that Kant will have been thoroughly acquainted with, is open to mystical theology, and stresses that it can help strengthen faith when approached with the appropriate humility (see Brown 1996: 16). Even if one at least professes to believe in God, they are still no better than an atheist if they act in a way that shows that they do not trust God (see Bayer 2008: 180). In attempting to reach out to God, Job's friends have merely found a human-constructed idol that is unfeeling and uncaring, and this impacts upon their activity, insofar as they are simply unwilling to let God take care of them, to let God be God (see *Ibid.*: 181). To quote Bayer, for Luther,

[f]aith and unbelief are more than merely explanations about reality. In both cases, concerning both faith and unbelief, something actually *happens*: the judgement of God makes a determination about the existence of the human being; the judgement of the human being concerning God makes a determination as well – though admittedly not about the nature of

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<sup>85</sup> We will particularly focus on Kant's Pietist background in the following chapter.

God; it determines something about the human being instead... *Reality is constituted by one's assessment (Ibid.: 180).*

In this Lutheran tradition, then, we find true faith in God having an impact not just upon belief but also upon praxis. Again, we find the theoretical and practical inextricably bound together. True faith shapes the whole life of the believer in both action and belief.

The wide-ranging importance of the example of Job for our understanding of Kant's approach to faith is brought out well by Trullinger (2013), who connects Kant's references to Job to the distinction between conviction and persuasion that we noted earlier. Faith is a taking-to-be-true that rests on subjectively sufficient grounds, though it cannot attain to the kind of certainty available to us in knowledge. How, though, can we tell whether our grounds are subjectively sufficient or not? Trullinger (*Ibid.*: 382-289) argues that Kant offers us a touchstone by which we can measure such grounds, based around betting. When someone takes something to be true in the sense marked out by Kant as conviction, this belief is internalised to the extent that one is willing to risk a certain amount on the basis that what is taken-to-be-true is indeed true:

The usual touchstone of whether what someone asserts is mere persuasion or at least subjective conviction, that is, firm belief, is *betting*. Often someone pronounces his propositions with such confident and inflexible defiance that he seems to have entirely laid aside all concern for error. A bet disconcerts him... [He] would happily bet one but at ten he suddenly becomes aware of what he had not previously noticed, namely that it is quite possible that he has erred. If we entertain the thought that we should wager the happiness of our whole life on something, our triumphant judgement would quickly disappear, we would become timid and we would suddenly discover that our belief does not extend so far (A824/B852-A825/B853).

We, seemingly, have an underlying sense of whether our taking-to-be-true has sufficient grounds such that it is borne of conviction rather than persuasion, and thus betting can act as a touchstone for testing such a sense. In the case of religion, the touchstone of betting gains even greater significance due to the considerable stakes involved, not in the least our moral destiny as an individual.

Trullinger argues that in the example of Job, Kant finds a concrete way of illustrating what an individual who is convinced of God's existence to the extent that they would bet on him, regardless of the stakes. If our touchstone for conviction is betting in the sense just described,

it follows that the true believer is the one whose faith does not waver when everything is taken away from him. He has so deeply invested himself in the hope that the world is structured for morality, and he has so deeply committed himself to be moral, that doing whatever it would take to regain happiness would be a rejection of the commitment that constitute his identity. The biblical figure of Job best exemplifies this conviction because the stakes could not be higher – he could very well lose his life to God's wrath, whereas he could regain happiness by repenting for something he did not do, thereby tacitly admitting that God judges on a nonmoral basis – yet Job firmly keeps wagering that divine Providence is not arbitrary, without any theoretical proofs for the same (2013: 395).

Job's piety is, in his dispute with his friends, displayed by his insistence upon the justice of God, whilst his friends reveal that they are merely persuaded of God's existence (and thus have not deeply internalised this taking-to-be-true) by swiftly reverting to a non-moral view of divine action in the world despite the traditional assertion of God's goodness. The friends are "so [unnerved by Job's misfortune] that they anxiously go through whatever hollow motions they take God to arbitrarily favour" (*Ibid.*: 396), thereby revealing that they are no willing to bet on the justice of God, whilst Job shows his trust in God's overwhelming goodness and his autonomous character by seeking to appease him through servile means. So, the example of Job is very important for

Kant in revealing what true (moral) faith looks like, measured against the touchstone of betting. The stakes could not be higher for Job, and yet his faith remains unshaken.

So, in *Theodicy*, we find both a rejection of traditional attempts at providing a theodicy, as well as the suggestion of a new approach, exemplified in some ways by the example of Job and his response to the sufferings that he undergoes. In the following section, linked with a discussion of eschatology, we will add more detail to the new approach to theodicy that Kant is advocating. In particular, we will be able to see just how practical reason can aid us in formulating a new, authentic interpretation of nature as revealing God's benevolent plan for creation.

### 6.3 Eschatology

In the same vein as *Theodicy*, Kant turns his attention to the proper approach to eschatology in another minor essay, *The End of All Things*. In eschatology, as with theodicy, we need to tread carefully and with humility. Kant also reflects upon the course of human history in *Religion*. There, he criticises theories of human history that confidently claim either that history is proceeding in a downward spiral to destruction or that it is obviously moving towards a glorious telos of some sort. Kant claims that he wishes to establish his views regarding the nature of humankind on some sort of “middle ground... [according to which] as a species, the human being can neither be good nor evil, or, at any rate, that he can be the one just as much as the other” (6:20).

It is clear that Kant is rejecting something shared by the two approaches at either end of the spectrum, namely the teleological views that confidently proclaim a historical narrative of either progress or inevitable decline. DiCenso suggests that Kant is rejecting the “deterministic theological notions” underlying both views, in that “they stray from a moral focus into ungrounded ontological claims” (2012: 39). However, Kant is not necessarily reacting against these theories of the course of human history on the basis of the *letter* of such views (as we shall see, he ultimately holds an optimistic view regarding the development of humankind); rather, it is the *spirit* of enquiry with which Kant is concerned. We are to, therefore, locate Kant’s critique of the inevitable progress and decline views in terms of the spirit in which they are expressed. In particular, I suggest that he is reacting to a certain kind of *moral complacency* inherent in these views.

If the history of mankind is to be consciously understood as inevitably moving in one particular direction, then it might be easy to conclude that there is little need for the kind of moral self-improvement that is being promoted in *Religion*. Kant is upholding morality by

rejecting views that are contrary to the moral spirit of true religious faith, and thereby contrary to the religious framework of his thought. As we shall see, Kant expands this approach in *Theodicy* and *The End of All things* in formulating a new Critical method in approaching difficult religious topics, one that balances the humility of faith and the imperfection of our intellectual faculties with the power of practical reason.

In *The End of All Things*, Kant writes that we can consider the end of the world from three different aspects, namely,

(1) the *natural* end of all things according to the order of divine wisdom's moral ends, which we therefore (with a practical intent) can *very well understand*; (2) their *mystical* (supernatural) end in the order of efficient causes, of which we *understand nothing*, and (3) the *contranatural* (perverse) end of all things, which comes from us when we *misunderstand* the final end (8:333).

When we attempt to think about the end of things, we can only legitimately consider it from a practical standpoint, in terms of divine providence and our own moral development, for if we were to attempt to consider it theoretically (perhaps by attempting to express the process by which God brings about the last days), we blunder into speculation and empty ideas. The difference lies in the power of reason in its practical employment, with which we can come to some small understanding or cognition (though not *knowledge*) of the moral aspect of the end days:

Here we have to do... merely with ideas created by reason itself, whose objects (if they have any) lie wholly beyond our field of vision; although they are transcendent for speculative cognition, they are not to be taken as empty, but with a practical intent they are made available to us by lawgiving reason itself, yet not in order to brood over their objects as to what they are in themselves and in their nature, but rather how we have to think of them in

behalf of moral principles directed toward the end of all things (through which, though otherwise they would be entirely empty, acquire objective practical reality (8:332-333).

Reason in its practical employment is an incredibly powerful tool; God's morality is in us, and therefore can lead us to some understanding of the deepest questions, such as what will happen at the end of all things.

So, what can we learn regarding the end of all things, according to Kant? Our inquiry into eschatology from a moral standpoint, like such an investigation from a theoretical standpoint, centres around a last day, which marks the end of history or time, and sees a new eternal age come into being. What is peculiar to the moral standpoint is a focus on the final day as a day of judgement, where all are judged, and either blessed or damned, on the basis of their past deeds, for which they are held morally responsible. The act of irrevocable judgement on the last day helps us to come to some (admittedly imperfect) understanding of what a timeless, eternal world (a notion which he believes is "woven in a wondrous way into universal human reason... [thereby] encountered among all reasoning peoples at all times, clothed in one way or another" (8:327)), would be after the last day. Time has come to an end because, from a moral perspective, nothing *can* change – all have been judged irrevocably, and no other moral development will take place.

Whilst we can have some grasp upon the end of all things from this perspective, Kant makes it clear that we can have no notion of how it may appear physically – representations such as "the falling of the stars from heaven... and the collapse of this heaven itself" (8:328), in being physical changes, could not form part of a new, timeless world, and therefore can only be justified as symbols occasioned by our reflection upon the end of all things from the moral perspective. Following his principles of the interpretation of Scripture<sup>86</sup>, he considers a verse from the Book of Revelation (10:5-6), "An angel lifts his hand up to heaven and swears by the one who lives from eternity to eternity who has created heaven, etc.: that henceforth time shall be no more",

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<sup>86</sup> We shall consider Kant's stance on the interpretation of Scripture in greater detail in 7.4.

remarking that theoretical reason cannot comprehend such an event. Kant's reasoning for this begins with noting that the world coming to an end requires alteration. There is a difficulty, though, in that as long as there is alteration, there is time. In order to avoid this difficulty in the notion of there being an alteration at the end of the time, we could instead construe the alteration as one world being replaced with another. However, Kant writes, such an approach faces a further difficulty due to the fact that "the moment which constitutes the end of the first world is also supposed to be the beginning of the other one, hence the former is brought into the same temporal series with the latter, which contradicts itself" (8:334) – as such, we have not conceived of the world in which we find ourselves coming to an end in any meaningful sense. Indeed, Kant points out that *thinking itself* "contains a reflecting, which can occur only in time" (*Ibid.*), and so we find it very difficult to conceive of anything approaching human life (which we must presume as involving thought) in an eternal world.

Kant goes on to criticise both theoretical positions of the unitists (those who believes eternal blessedness will be granted to all – such a position is now usually called 'universalism') and the dualists (who believe that blessedness will be granted to some, and damnation to all the rest) on the basis that their systems "transcend completely the speculative faculty of human reason", leaving us only to "[limit] those ideas of reason absolutely to the conditions of their practical use only" (8:330). Using the sure foundation of our own moral conscience, we can come to see that in fact dualism is to be preferred, due to the problem of potential moral laxity arising from a universalist position, as well as basic reflection upon our moral conscience telling us that the principle we live under in our lives (be it evil or good) will continue to hold true for eternity.

In addition to basic moral reflection giving us a legitimate conception of the last day, as a day of judgement, and enabling us to side with the dualists against the universalists, it can also give us a sense of just *why* the world *has* to end. We have a rational sense that "the duration of the world has worth only insofar as the rational beings in it conform to the final end of their



existence”, and if there were no final end, “then creation would [appear] purposeless to [us], like a play having no resolution and affording no cognition of any rational aim” (8:331).

Our reflection upon our moral conscience, then, tells us that the ending of the world is an integral part of the world having any moral significance. Kant also, at this point, sees moral significance in the symbolism of the Christian tradition as positing terrible events just prior to the end of history, insofar as the expectation of “terrors” that accompany the last days are bound to have a greater impact upon the individual than a “heroic faith in virtue” (8:332), focusing the mind upon moral improvement in a way that simple hope for the perfection of the moral disposition cannot match. So, through reason taking a moral standpoint, we can come to cognize a great deal regarding the end of all things – a justification and conception of the last days and the eternal world that follows, resting upon reflection arising from our moral conscience.

Kant also touches upon eschatological matters in *Theodicy*. In the first part of the discussion, in which he criticises various theoretical attempts at theodicy, he offers a response to those who would argue that evil is a necessary counterbalance to virtue, along the lines of arguing that “it is a property of virtue that it should wrestle with adversities..., and sufferings only serve to enhance the value of virtue” (8:261). Such a theodicy is criticised on the basis that it cannot satisfy those who are looking for a theoretically secure response to evil. Kant grants that, indeed, the existence of evils now could be in harmony with a just end of humanity in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished, and thus be justified as a necessary counterbalance in a wider moral scheme. However, such an argument will be unsatisfactory, and ultimately failing to offer a convincing defence of God in the face of evil, as long as the promise of justice goes unsatisfied, for “if even such an end (as experience thereof gives many examples) fails against sense to materialize, then the suffering seems to have occurred to the virtuous, not *so that* his virtue should be pure, but *because* it was pure” (8:261-2).

As long as the world continues to be unjust, we cannot persuade anyone from a theoretical standpoint that evil is a necessary counterpart to pure virtue. Kant makes it clear that eschatological, religious hopes regarding a final day of judgement, taken from a theoretical standpoint, cannot successfully defend the justice of God in the face of evil – looking forward to a possible final day of judgement, “such a possibility cannot count as a *vindication* of providence; rather, it is merely a decree of morally believing reason which directs the doubter to patience but does not satisfy him” (8:262). Theodicy, then, can only satisfy a rational being when taken in the spirit of patience, humility, and faith. At the point where we try to rationalise the evil with which we are confronted within the wider soteriological sphere, explanation breaks down and ultimately simply cannot account for the reality of evil.

As Kant reiterates at the end of *Theodicy*, the quest for a defence of God’s justice is “a matter of faith... less [depending] on subtle reasoning than on sincerity in taking notice of the impotence of our reason, and on honesty in not distorting our thoughts in what we say, however pious our intention” (8:267). To be left in such a position may feel unsatisfactory, but that is simply the fault of those who illegitimately rely on speculative reason to garner knowledge of topics beyond our ken, such as the theological topics of evil, God’s justice, and eschatology. Kant further points out that from the standpoint of theoretical reason, we must regard it as probable that any new world would simply follow the same laws of the world in which we find ourselves now, for it is only through “reason, as a faculty of moral legislation” (8:262.) that we can come to hope for a different world in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished.

So, what is the method that we can discern in this Critical investigation into the end of all things? As we have seen, in the case of eschatological reflection, reason naturally brings us to think about the end of the world, seemingly something that occurs to most people, and thus is generally considered by all human societies. We can attempt to reflect on eschatological matters theoretically, but in its theoretical employment, reason is simply too limited – it cannot

comprehend, using empirical materials, strange notions such as time coming to an end, and one world being replaced with another. All is not lost, however, for those beings that can use reason in its practical employment. We can reflect upon which course of eschatological events would accord most thoroughly with our conscience, of which we can all be certain, and on this rational, universal basis, come to some form of comprehension (though falling short of knowledge) of what may happen at the end of all things.

We should not despair, for although knowledge of such things is denied to us, reason in its practical employment can offer a legitimate basis for some cognizance of such matters. Why, though, should we take reason in its practical employment as being so trustworthy? At this point, we have to bring in faith – the presence of the moral law within us points towards God, who in turn offers a guarantee of the trustworthiness of our practical reason. Reason in its practical employment tells us how things *ought to be*, and thus acts as a legitimate guide to how things *will be* when God's will is fully imposed on our world at the end of all things. Why does not God grant us a theoretical reason powerful enough to garner theoretical, eschatological knowledge? Ultimately, what is only important is our moral development – all other things should be geared towards the moral perfection of the individual.

A more powerful theoretical reason, which could perhaps gain knowledge of God's grace, could ultimately lead to moral complacency, and thus would undermine the moral development of the individual. God has given us enough to work with - a sense of moral incompleteness, the feeling of a need to foster moral improvement, and enough uncertainty such that we have to act as if it all depends on us, even if God will ultimately grace all rational beings. Kant explicitly links his reflections upon eschatology (and approaching religious matters from a practical standpoint more generally) to God's wisdom in *The End of All Things*. Human attempts to bring about the eschatological end-point of universal moral perfection will always be folly, even though our intentions may be honourable. We must, in the end, trust in the true wisdom of God, "practical

reason using means commensurate to the final end of all things... in full accord with the corresponding rules of measure” (8:336). All we can do, which marks the extent to which we can speak of human wisdom at all, is ensure that we “[act] in a way which is not visibly contrary to the idea of that [divine] wisdom” (*Ibid.*), that is, use the spark of divine wisdom within us, in the shape of the moral law and reason in its practical employment, to ensure that we do not act against God’s will for creation.

In the face of this, we must ensure that we act with humility, noting that “the human being may hope to [avoid folly] only through attempts and frequent alteration of his plans” (*Ibid.*). Kant speaks of our practical reason and its “assurance against folly” as a “gem which the best person can only follow after, even though he *may* never *apprehend* it... [and] he may never let the self-indulgent persuasion befall him – still less may he proceed according to it – that he *has grasped* it” (*Ibid.*). In *Theodicy*, he links his preferred approach to theological matters with a brief passage on sincerity (intended to undermine policies of public confession of faith as a prerequisite of university entrance, as well as more generally to criticise those who use religious belief for their own immoral gain), and argues that it is a widespread phenomenon amongst humankind that we offend against our conscience by declaring beliefs that we do not in fact hold (8:267). Sincere confessions, due to the fact that there is no such thing as an ‘erring conscience’, can only be based on our feeling of the moral law, insofar as “I can indeed err in the judgement *in which I believe* to be right... but in the judgement *whether I in fact believe* to be right (or merely pretend it) I absolutely cannot be mistaken” (8:268). Sincere faith, then, can only be based on the undeniable judgement of the moral law, and as long as we base our theological investigations on this basis, we are bound to be less liable to be led astray by our propensity to insincerity and the hubris of speculative reason.

In this context, the primacy of practical reason within the Critical system comes to the fore. Gardner puts quite straightforwardly what is meant by the primacy of practical reason when he states:

To assert the primacy of practical reason with respect to speculative reason is... to assert that propositions on which the interest of practical reason depends necessarily, so long as they are not contradicted by theoretical reason, must be accepted by theoretical reason. Their acceptance involves, Kant adds, their being integrated by theoretical reason with the rest of its cognition (2006: 260).

The primacy of practical reason, then, involves the relation between reason in its practical employment and reason in its theoretical employment. Our moral interest as rational beings brings practical reason to postulate the key tenets of moral theology, namely, God and immortality. Given the primacy of practical reason, the fact that practical reason postulates God and immortality, and that theoretical reason has no reason to withhold its assent, believing the existence of God and immortality can be legitimate from *both standpoints* of theoretical and practical reason.

Added to the epistemic status of the postulates is the broader claim, as part of the Critical system, that “the use of our reason in general, inclusive of its philosophical use, is fundamentally practical rather than theoretical” (*Ibid.*: 261). In other words, theoretical reason must submit to the superiority of practical reason, and can legitimately do so, even if practical reason points towards the supersensible. All this has broader implications for the entire discipline of philosophy in that it “finds its ultimate ground, purpose, and guiding norm in moral consciousness, as befits it as the activity of a being whose true vocation is morality” (*Ibid.*). The entirety of Kant’s Critical system, then, is fundamentally shaped by the primacy of practical reason, with its core in the moral consciousness of a being whose fundamental guiding purpose is to fulfil a (divinely

ordained) moral vocation. Given this core, the Critical philosophy can legitimately embrace religious topics in a manner that does not necessarily imply a form of religious anti-realism.

Continuing with the *Theodicy*, Kant further expands upon the primacy of practical reason (and its importance regarding religious matters) in relation to theoretical reason by distinguishing between moral and artistic divine wisdom. As the moral concept of God is that which is “most suited to religion”, the task of theodicy should be to defend the moral wisdom of God (summed up as his holiness, goodness, and justice (8:257)), rather than focus on teleology which “gives us abundant proof in experience of this artistic wisdom” (8:256n), but does not garner us any sort of cognizance of God (and certainly nothing connected to the key moral concept of God), for even purported experience of design does not necessarily imply the existence of the personal God of classical theism. Any “demonstration of [moral wisdom] must be carried out totally *a priori*, hence in no way be founded on the experience of what goes on in the world”, and it is because of this that “the proof of the existence of such being can be none other than a moral proof” (8:256n).

Faith in moral wisdom, then, and thereby faith in God, comes first in legitimate religious reflection upon the world. Such reflection is built upon the *a priori* foundation of the moral law, the workings of practical reason within all of us, in which is found “the moral idea of our own practical reason[,] a concept of a *moral wisdom* which could have been implanted in a world in general by a most perfect creator” (8:263). In addition, Kant, in the *Theodicy*, makes a clear response to those who would question this basis upon which we can build moral faith and gain some cognizance of God. He imagines a possible theodicy which claims that there is

no such thing as an absolute counterpurposiveness... but there are violations only against human wisdom; divine wisdom judges these according to totally different rules, incomprehensible to us, where, what we with right find reprehensible with reference to our practical reason and its determination might yet perhaps be in relation to the divine ends and

the highest wisdom precisely the most fitting means to our particular welfare and the greatest good of the world as well (2:258).

This is a theodicy that claims that we have absolutely no comprehension of the basis upon which God would morally evaluate the world and thus reflect not only upon his actualisation choice, but also the actions of all created, rational beings. Due to this lack of comprehension, our judgement regarding evil in the world, and the corresponding need for theodicy, could be entirely incorrect. Kant does not allow for this possible theodicy, stating that, “[t]his apology, in which the vindication is worse than the complaint, needs no refutation; surely it can be freely given over to the detestation of every human being who has the least feeling for morality” (*ibid.*). We know that there is evil in the world and that moral development is necessary, for the moral law within us all cannot be mistaken in such a fundamental way. Not only that, due to the fact that our moral wisdom participates in God’s divine moral wisdom, we have a legitimate justification for thinking that God judges the world with the same moral standard. As a result, no person who feels the moral law could believe that our moral judgements are not at least on the same continuum as divine moral judgements. As such, the moral law within us can clearly show the way on a theological matter such as theodicy in that it can at least rule out certain illegitimate theodicies and give us some cognizance regarding the moral state of the world from the divine perspective. Kant writes:

[I]f we do not succeed in establishing with certainty that our reason is absolutely incapable of insight into *the relationship in which any world as we may ever become acquainted with through experience stands with respect to the highest wisdom*, then all further attempts by a putative human wisdom are fully dismissed. Hence, in order to bring this trial to an end *once and for all*, it must yet be proven that at least a negative wisdom is within our reach – namely, insight into the necessary limitation of what we may presume with respect to that which is too high for us – and this may very well be done (8:263).

The Critical investigation into evil, eschatology, and theodicy comes to this sort of 'negative wisdom' through the moral law and faith in it and in God, with our God-given practical reason giving us some sense of the relation between the world of our experience and the 'highest wisdom', and it is this method that Kant explores in *Theodicy*, *The End of All Things*, and *Religion*. It is also here, then, that we come to understand what Kant means by an authentic interpretation of nature that gives rise to a new kind of theodicy, grounded in the kind of piety exhibited by Job.



## 6.4 Concluding remarks on Eschatology and Theodicy

In this chapter, we have considered two minor essays from around the time of *Religion* in which Kant considers two key theological concerns, namely eschatology (in *The End of All things*) and theodicy (in *On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*). It has been useful preparatory work with regard to our ultimate aim of understanding the religious framework of Kant's thought, alongside interpreting key claims found in *Religion*. We have seen that Kant rejects much traditional philosophical and theological work on the problem of evil and eschatological issues on the basis of the limitations of theoretical reason, the primacy of practical reason, and the importance of moral virtue and humility with regard to one's relationship with God. Instead, Kant has sketched a new approach to theological matters that takes into account what really matters for God and for us – namely, doing what we can to accept God's grace, and thereby achieving the moral perfection that is willed for all rational beings. In this regard, Kant sees the example of Job as exemplifying the spirit within which the new 'authentic theodicy' will be formulated. We also considered briefly the structure of the Book of Job, which ultimately reveals God's love for all creation, despite the evil visited upon Job.

From these two essays, we can discern a Critical method that is applied by Kant to these areas of theological and philosophical debate, one that relies on faith in God as the moral ruler and creator of the world and thereby the moral law as acting as a guide not only for our actions but also as a foundation upon which we can gain some cognition of areas of enquiry (such as eschatology and theodicy) that are beyond the ken of reason in its theoretical employment. We have seen something of this method all the way through Kant's career, but finally, at the time of *Religion*, it appears much more clearly – it is something that he has been working towards over a number of decades, and has in the Critical period formulated in a much more definite manner.

In the following chapter, we will use what we have discerned of Kant's thoughts regarding the right approach to theological issues and philosophical issues related to faith and God, as well as earlier arguments from both his pre-Critical and Critical works, to approach *Religion* from an 'affirmative' perspective - reading *Religion* as a text defending faith in God generally, and Christianity particularly. It is certainly not an entirely new approach to *Religion*. However, we will seek to use the new perspectives we have gained from our examination of earlier texts to either throw new light on aspects of the argument, or at least confirm aspects of the readings of others.

## 7. Interpreting *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*

### 7.1 Introduction – *Religion as apologetics and the influence of Pietism*

We have arrived at our final destination, namely, an examination of Kant's pivotal work, *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*. Our discussion of this text will be fundamentally informed by our examination, in previous chapters, of other significant works that treat religious topics, ranging through both the pre-Critical and the Critical period, and our increased understanding of the religious framework of Kant's thought. Even if the reader does not subscribe to all the arguments I have made so far in the course of this thesis, nevertheless it is hoped that at least the option of interpreting Kant as defending religious faith and standing within the Christian tradition is seen as an interesting one, and worth investigating in relation to *Religion*, which is what we shall attempt now.

The chapter proceeds through some of the major themes of *Religion* in a way that is dictated by the flow of argument in the work itself, beginning with the doctrine of radical evil, largely found in Book 1 (7.2), moving to Kant's discussion of the moral archetype in Book 2 (7.3), and then concluding with a discussion of the topics of Scripture (7.4) and the notion of the 'ethical community' (7.5) in Books 3 and 4. In addition, I will, at points, continue to fill in some of the context within which we should read *Religion*, namely, the Lutheran-Pietist tradition in which Kant was raised. Many details of *Religion* betray the influence of the Lutheran-Pietist tradition upon Kant, and I will explore this both here, in the Introduction, and throughout the chapter. The way in which *Religion* coheres with elements of Pietism is to be added to my cumulative case for reading Kant as a defender of religious faith, and for demonstrating that the Critical system does not commit us to theological anti-realism.

Arguing for Lutheran influence upon *Religion* is not entirely novel, for example it has recently been argued by Vanden Auweele (2013a) that Kant's treatment of radical evil and the will in *Religion* and elsewhere betrays a significant Lutheran influence. Though I would quibble with some of the details in that paper, I nevertheless agree with the general notion that Lutheranism is a tacit stimulus behind the initially quite surprising claims Kant makes regarding the depravity of humankind. As an aside, it might be queried how biographically plausible it is that Kant's philosophy of religion be influenced in a substantive way by Lutheranism. In response to this worry, I would make two replies. To begin with, I would note that the Pietist education that Kant enjoyed was inspired by thinkers who consciously and clearly followed Lutheran theology, and second, it is not plausible that Kant would not have picked up Lutheran ideas in the cultural milieu of the time.

Before we begin our consideration of the text of *Religion*, I want to investigate this Lutheran influence more deeply. To start with, it should be clear that Kant's very approach to ethical theory is decidedly Lutheran in character. In his *Concerning Christian Liberty*, Luther focuses his attention upon freedom of the Christian from heteronomous influence in the world. Christian ethics cannot be based on obedience to external authority due to the possible morally corrupting influence of self-love, so must begin with an analysis of the will itself (see Wogaman 2011: 116), the precise starting-point of Kant's ethical theory in the *Groundwork*. The Pietists would later base their Luther-inspired ethical theory upon the 'inner Word', the moral law as felt by the human individual, as opposed to the 'external Word' coming from without (see Brown 1996: 24).

The feeling we are given of a human being forced to confront the evil of the world and himself in the first book of *Religion* is very much Lutheran. The pull of the moral law as something that we could not possibly satisfy reminds one of the role of the Law for Luther, in being so stringent that one is forced into a moral despair and a grasping for the grace offered in Christ, the

hope offered by the Gospel (see Whitford 2011: 73). Even more crucially, the movement towards salvation is understood by Luther to inevitably involve both Law (what we ought to do) and Gospel in the sense of ‘good news’ (what is the case). A Lutheran account of the radical evil in humankind and its possible moral development will therefore involve a concatenation of both descriptive and imperative statements, and this is what we find with Kant’s doctrine of radical evil – a doctrine that is both descriptive and prescriptive, or maybe lying somewhere in the middle.

In addition to considering the possible Lutheran influence upon *Religion* and the doctrine of radical evil, I would also now like to consider the Pietist influence, the importance of which has been noted by McCarthy, who remarks that,

it would distort our grasp of Kant, of the formative influences upon him and of certain emphases in his thinking, to ignore his origins and education. For German Pietism is a decisive influence and stands in a dialectical relationship with Enlightenment religious currents in his thought (1986: 56).

We will focus here upon two key figures in that tradition, figures that Kant most certainly would have been schooled in from an early age – namely, Phillip Jakob Spener and his follower, August Hermann Francke. We will begin with Spener.

There are a number of theological differences and emphases that mark Spener out as moving beyond Luther, the most important being an emphasis on subjectivity and a detailed account of the effects of grace upon the moral development of the individual. Part of Spener’s subjectivist emphasis comes in his account of how Scripture is to be read properly. Orthodox Lutherans at the time understood God as Spirit to be speaking to us directly through Scripture, i.e. the very words in which Scripture is couched are chosen by God directly. Spener, however, is clear that interpretation of Scripture is necessary to gain any understanding at all (see Stein 2004: 88). Not only that, the support of the Holy Spirit is required to ensure that one’s interpretation is the

correct one<sup>87</sup>. Stronger parallels still can be found in Spener's account of moral development and regeneration, which comes in two stages. The first key stage that forms part of Spener's account is that of a 'New Birth', a radical revolution that entirely changes the nature of the individual, away from the postlapsarian human condition, back towards a restoration of the *imago Dei* and a way of life filled with love (see Brown 1996: 23).

Stein, a noted scholar on Spener, has delineated three aspects to this 'New Birth' (2004: 90-91), the first being the gift of faith from God, followed by the gift of forgiveness, and finally the restoration of the nature of the human being to the *Imago Dei*. All of these three aspects have a purely external origin, in that they arise out of grace alone. The role of the human individual is limited to being open to receive that grace. However, the radical revolution of the 'New Birth' is very much not the end of the story for Spener. It still takes time for the love of God and true belief in Christ to grow in the individual. Such a 'renewal' is an on-going, active process, in contrast to 'New Birth', which is a passive receiving of God's grace.

It is also worth noting some elements of Spener's eschatology, which upheld the New Testament notion of the Kingdom of God being established on earth (see *Ibid.*: 95). The belief in such a coming kingdom of grace in this world formed a part of the trust in God that comes as part of faith in him – that is, a trust that God will banish evil and the suffering of those who believe in him. This sort of positive eschatology (positive with regards to the future of things here on earth) is found in Kant's *Religion*. The kind of interest Pietists had in looking forward to a state of universal, on-going peace (given the recent experience of the devastating Thirty Years' War) is reflected in Kant's political notions of perpetual peace and a Kingdom of Ends. Spener is not entirely unaware of the social impact upon moral development – despite the primary importance of faith and the Word of God for moral regeneration, the community is also crucial, as love for

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<sup>87</sup> I shall expand upon the topic of Scripture further later on in this chapter (7.4).

God will also manifest itself as love for neighbour (see Brown 1996: 30)<sup>88</sup>. Further to this, the Pietists in general are unwilling to allow external sacraments particular to certain traditions as necessary for salvation, unlike Luther, who set great store on the practice of baptism (see *Ibid.*: 23). This is echoed and carried further by Kant's universalist leanings regarding communities that could become expressions of the moral law in society.

The parallels between *Religion*, alongside the wider treatment of faith and religion in the Critical system, and Spener become even clearer through a close reading of one of the founding texts of Pietism, *Pia Desideria*<sup>89</sup>, which was published in 1675 and went through a number of editions in the decades afterwards<sup>90</sup>. Spener sees the whole of Christendom as in need of great reform, with 'sickness' at both the individual and the social level intertwined and resulting in loss of faith and interdenominational conflict:

The precious spiritual body of Christ is now afflicted with distress and sickness. Since in certain respects it is committed to the care of every individual and at the same time to all and sundry together, and since we must all be members of the body and hence should not regard affliction anywhere in the body as alien to us, it is therefore incumbent on us to see to it that medicine which is suited to its cure be found and applied (31-32)<sup>91</sup>.

Indeed, the situation is so dire as to merit reference to St. Polycarp's lament, "Good God, for what times hast thou preserved me!" (39). As already mentioned, though unashamedly a Lutheran, Spener has an eye on an ecumenical project of bringing differing Christian denominations

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<sup>88</sup> As an aside, Spener also marks a far more liberal figure than Luther, in that whilst he held the Lutheran Church to be the 'true church', salvation could also be achieved through other Christian denominations, even the Roman Catholic Church. Part of this is due to Spener's epistemologically humble approach, from which he concluded that, due to the weakness of the human intellect and the possibility of its being in error, no single religious tradition should necessarily be posited as the single and only way in which one could learn about God. Spener, as a result, espoused a remarkably liberal approach to other religious traditions for the time (Brown 1996: 33) However, as we shall see, Spener does look forward to a universal church built on the moral core of Lutheranism.

<sup>89</sup> This text will be referred to as *PD* in what follows.

<sup>90</sup> A good general summary of the content of *PD* can be found in Shantz (2013: 86-91).

<sup>91</sup> Page references in this section are to Spener (1964), unless otherwise indicated.

together, openly regretting the loss of the kind of grand councils of the early Church that helped to crystallise much of what is taken to be orthodox Christian doctrine (such as the First Council of Nicaea which settled the famous Arian controversy regarding the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son), thereby going some way in keeping the fledging Church together, and recommending a greater exchange of ideas between ministers throughout the wider Christian world (see 32). Spener believes that the Bible promises ‘better times’ for the Church, part of which involves the end of interdenominational conflicts (see Bernet 2014: 149-151).

Spener’s soteriology in *PD* is also marked by both individual and social concerns. The practice of theology in the universities and in the clergy at the time was dominated by the art of disputation, and the sermon. It is one of Spener’s aims in this work to take away some of the emphasis from these practices and place it instead on others, with the aim of improving the moral health of Christendom. As part of this, Spener repeatedly undermines the pursuit of knowledge alone in being the true path of the Christian: “Let us remember that in the last judgement we shall not be asked how learned we were and whether we displayed our learning before the world... Instead, we shall be asked how faithfully and with how childlike a heart we sought to further the kingdom of God” (36). Spener argues that the art of disputation and of the sermon are symptoms of a general spiritual malaise in the Church, reflecting the self-serving and self-loving nature of those who make up the Church, those who rule over it, and those to whom it ministers.

Indeed, an overemphasis on theological knowledge on the part of an individual indicates a lack of true faith – Spener quotes Johannes Dinckel, who speaks of “that true *theologia practica* (that is, the teaching of faith, love, and hope) [being] relegated to a secondary place”, being replaced by “a *theologia spinosa* (that is, a prickly, thorny teaching) which scratches and irritates hearts and souls” (53). This connects with Spener’s views regarding what he takes to be the



proper practical context of theological study, namely that, “the study of theology should be carried on not by the strife of disputations but rather by the practice of piety” (50).

Of course, Spener is not negating a need for the theoretical study that is undeniably necessary for an understanding of Christianity, but stating that this should be grounded in the context of a good, pious life. Religion is not being reduced to morality, but is being studied in a context grounded in moral virtue. For scriptural authority in this matter, Spener quotes (55) from 1 Timothy 1:4-7, where Paul speaks against those who “occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith. But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith”. Spener, just like Kant, is trying to go back to the roots of Christian theology and teaching, putting the emphasis back on good behaviour, intentions, and piety, rather than on theoretical and speculative matters. In this vein, he explicitly calls for an attempt to mirror the early Christian church (81), when, according to a quote from Ignatius, “[t]hose that profess themselves to be Christ’s are known not only by what they say but also by what they practice” (82).

Indeed, a large part of *PD* is spent outlining the dangers for true faith in God of an overemphasis on theoretical, speculative reason, at the expense of moral concerns. Spener argues that forgetting the moral core of Christ’s teaching, and focusing instead on the precise details of complex doctrines and other theological disputes, is detrimental for faith and virtue:

When men’s minds are stuffed with such a theology which, while it preserves the foundation of faith from the Scriptures, builds on it with so much wood, hay, and stubble of human inquisitiveness that the gold can no longer be seen, it becomes exceedingly difficult to grasp and find pleasure in the real simplicity of Christ and his teaching. This is so because men’s taste becomes accustomed to the more charming things of reason, and after a while the

simplicity of Christ and his teaching appears to be tasteless. Such knowledge, which remains without love, ‘puffs up’... It leaves man in his love of self (56).

Spener recommends that “[u]nnecessary argumentation should rather be reduced than extended, and the whole of theology ought to be brought back to apostolic simplicity” (110) - we can perhaps recall this quotation when we consider those who charge Kant of a lack of argumentation (most notably, the purported ‘missing formal proof’) in *Religion*. Purported knowledge in religious matters not only serves to obscure the true moral core of the Christian faith, but thereby also impacts upon our moral standing, fostering self-love (a term used frequently by Kant in *Religion*) at the expense of virtue. Indeed, Spener goes so far as to state that “*it is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice*” (95), “theology is a practical discipline” (105), and that “the reality of our religion consists not of words but of deeds” (104).

Note that saying such a thing does not make Spener a deist, an atheist, an anti-realist, *et alia*! Rather, how faith will show itself in the world is through right practice, rather than necessarily through right doctrine or confession:

[L]ove is the whole life of the man who has faith and who through his faith is saved, and his fulfilment of the laws of God consists of love. If we can therefore awaken a fervent love among our Christians, first toward one another and then toward all men... and put this love into practice practically all that we desire will be accomplished (96).

Spener ties this argument to a proper approach to Scripture (which, as we shall see, Kant also does in *Religion*). An overly theoretical, speculative approach to Scripture will result in an interpretation devoted to ‘subtleties’, instead of the moral teaching contained within, and reflect in tandem a growth of self-love and other personal and social ills:

Subtleties unknown to the Scriptures usually have their origin, in the case of those who introduce them, in a desire to exhibit their sagacity and their superiority over others, to have a great reputation, and to derive benefit therefrom in the world. Moreover, these subtleties are themselves of such a nature that they stimulate, in those who deal with them, not a true fear of God but a thirst for honour and other impulses which are unbecoming a true Christian... [Thereby both] preachers and hearers confine themselves to the notion that the one thing needful is the assertion and retention of pure doctrine, which must not be overthrown by errors, even if it is very much obscured by human perversions (*Ibid.*).

The overly theoretical approach to Scripture, then, not only has a moral impact upon those who study Scripture, reflecting a desire to achieve honour and intellectual superiority, but also has a morally deleterious effect throughout the Church, as lay members begin to focus on subtle doctrine, rather than on the moral teaching that is truly important for their faith and eventual salvation. Spener remarks that “the church is a body which, no matter in what places it may be, has one nature... [thus] it is incumbent on all Christians... to examine the condition of the church and consider how it may be improved” (85). Immorality arising out of self-love spreads throughout the church unless believers are vigilant against social vices, such as the desire to achieve honour, and this is a project that includes all members, not just those higher in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Kant’s view of the moral development of the church, as we shall see, also stresses the importance of the conduct of all members, with each person doing what they can to aid the progress of the church and the spread of moral faith throughout humankind.

The social concerns in *PD* continue with a focus on the often un-Christian activity of the clergy at the time. We need only look to prevalent behaviour in order to see the disease filling the Church, insofar as “their lives reflect... a worldly spirit, marked by carnal pleasure, lust of the eye, and arrogant behaviour”, which in turn leads to a view of priesthood as a career rather than a vocation: “Behold how they seek promotions, shift from parish to parish, and engage in all sorts of

machinations!” (45). Spener, in discussing the clergy (specifically in this example those that engage in theological education), echoes Kant’s emphasis in *Religion* on the importance of moral examples, though the latter (as we shall see) focuses on Christ as moral example. Spener writes:

The professors could themselves accomplish a great deal here by their example... if they would conduct themselves as men who have died unto the world, in everything would seek not their own glory, gain or pleasure but rather the glory of their God... Then the students would have a living example according to which they might regulate their life, for we are so fashioned that examples are as effective for us as teachings, and sometimes more effective (104).

Interestingly, he adds the point that many of these individuals may believe (through self-deception) that they have truly given themselves to God, but we, from the outside, can see that this is not the case, for “although they themselves do not realise it they are still stuck fast in the old birth and do not actually possess the true marks of a new birth” (46). It is therefore from reflection upon the conduct of individuals in their lives that we can infer a lack of true faith, replaced with a faith that is “a human fancy” (*Ibid.*), despite often being accompanied by a learned theological education.

Faith and ‘new birth’ is to be found through good life conduct, and we should therefore chastise those who “judge who are good and who are evil, not according to their life but according to their doctrinal agreement or disagreement with us” (49). We can see from this that the close linking between true faith and good moral conduct is intertwined with Spener’s wider social projects - much could be done for ecumenism if we focus (as we should be doing) on the right (or otherwise) conduct of others, and not on specific differences in doctrine. Indeed, in *PD* we find the kind of ecumenical, universalist agenda that underscores much of the discussion in Kant’s *Religion*.

Spener argues that Lutherans cannot expect the conversion of Jews and Catholics into their true church until they offer a more moral picture to the rest of the world. If the current outward form of the Lutheran church, showcasing widespread impiety and immorality, obscures its true moral core, then it is not a surprise that those of other persuasions are not becoming Lutherans. If the church were to become more like a reflection of its moral core, and put its moral teaching in action in the world, then it would find itself garnering a greater number of followers.

Spener writes:

If [those of other faiths and denominations] find that our teaching agrees with the Word of God, and theirs is in conflict with it, they would be bound in conscience to unite with the church which is pure at least in doctrine and where they can be assured... that they would encounter true and godly children of God, where they would acquiesce in no error when they confess their faith (71).

Those of other persuasions, if they can see true faith realised in the world in the form of the Lutheran church, will feel the call of their moral conscience, universal throughout humankind, to join with that true church, and from that basis the kind of universalist project common to both Spener and Kant will start to be realised:

In order for the Jews to be converted, the true church must be in a holier state than now if its holy life is to be a means for that conversion, or at least the impediments to such conversion... are to be removed... It is to be hoped in any event that the whole church of God, made up of Jews and heathen, would with mutual emulation serve God in one faith and its rich fruits and with holy zeal edify all its members (77).

In addition, “we must give them a good example and take the greatest pains not to offend them in any way, for this would give them a bad impression of our true teaching” (98). It is, of course, not unusual for those who reflect on religious matters to hope for a universal church, but what

specifically links Kant and Spener in this regard is the notion that the project will only be realised by a church beginning to reflect in its practices a true, universal moral teaching. We will consider Kant's hopes for the future universal church later, but for now we can expect to see parallels between his social project and the Pietist ideal of the universal church (and the priesthood of all, through moral virtue).

Spener's hopes for a church of the 'priesthood of all' (see 92-95) and the loss of emphasis on rigid hierarchy are outlined towards the end of *PD*. Such a project includes Scripture being made available to all, with all believers encouraged to engage in their own extensive reading programme, by themselves and in small groups, apart from the usual exposition of Scripture by clergy in church services. He recommends, for instance, that "the books of the Bible be read one after another, at specified times in the public service, without further comment" (89).

It is interesting here that Spener wishes for the lay member of the church to be confronted with passages from Scripture for the first time without any further comment or interpretation immediately following, which seems to imply that there might be something valuable in a *prima facie* response to a given passage, perhaps suggesting that there is something inherent in the individual that can discern truth in that passage before it could potentially be distorted through the interpretation of others.<sup>92</sup> Given Spener's focus upon the moral response of the individual, we can perhaps see this *prima facie* response as one ideally grounded in the feeling of the moral law, before speculative theorising begins to work its own interpretation. We can see, then, Spener's recommendation of Scripture being read by all as part of his drive towards the priesthood of all, grounded in the feeling of the moral law that inheres in all human beings and can thereby bring a true moral religion together. Spener's practical recommendation that "others who have been blessed with gifts and knowledge" (89), in addition to the clergy, should be allowed to speak at church meetings is a reflection of his wider social aims in this regard.

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<sup>92</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that he accuses the Catholic church of having control over its members' moral conscience through its restriction of access to Scripture (see 92).

What conception of faith do we find in *PD*? As you might expect, Spener posits a close connection between religion and morality in a similar way to Kant<sup>93</sup>. If, as I argue, there is a strong Pietist influence in Kant's thinking on religion, it may be interesting to note that Spener does offer something of a reductionist relation between faith and good conduct, and it is very much faith that is the key foundation of moral virtue:

We gladly acknowledge that we must be saved only and alone through faith and that our works or godly life contribute neither much nor little to our salvation, for as a fruit of our faith our works are connected with the gratitude which we owe to God, who has already given us who believe the gift of righteousness and salvation (63).

Here, Spener is taking a familiar Lutheran line. Moral virtue is grounded in faith, which is what truly matters for salvation and the perfection of humankind. However, this is not to denigrate in any way the importance of good works – these will still play an important role in the life of the true Christian, though it is the case that alone, they will not secure salvation for the individual. They will simply *naturally follow* from true faith in God. Mori notes that,

Pietists claimed that while faith is undoubtedly essential, it must for this very reason 'bear fruit' if it is true faith at all... A holy Pietist lifestyle reveals that Christ lives within a person (2014: 214).

The reductionist relation, then, between religion and morality is not complete - it is more that the two go hand-in-hand, with faith being the primary partner that begins the process of moral development. Indeed, the relation is such that we can *infer* a lack of true faith from actions that are not in line with God's will and the moral law:

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<sup>93</sup> Of course, Spener does not have the kind of detailed moral theory that Kant does, reflecting the former's approach as a theologian and the latter's approach as a philosopher. Brown writes that he finds in the early Pietist literature "a *love theology*" in which "[f]aith grasps God's love through Christ which alone brings about holy actions" (Brown 1996: 21-22). There is little more detail to be found that might help us construct a systematic ethical theory from Spener. However, we are interested in comparing Kant and Spener on a more general level at this point, and we have sufficient information to carry this work out.

How many there are who live such a manifestly unchristian life that they themselves cannot deny that the law is broken at every point, who have no intention of mending their ways in the future, and yet who pretend to be firmly convinced that they will be saved in spite of all this!... [T]hey believe in Christ and put all their trust in him, that this cannot fail, and that they will surely be saved by such faith. Accordingly they have a fleshly illusion of faith (for godly faith does not exist without the Holy Spirit, nor can such faith continue when deliberate sins prevail) in place of the faith that saves. This is a delusion of the devil (64).

Spener is clearly airing a grievance regarding a widespread misunderstanding of the import of the primacy of faith in Lutheranism, even amongst Lutherans themselves! Though good works do not influence God's bestowal of grace upon us, that does not mean that we are given *carte blanche* to act as we please – anyone who has true faith will act well as a matter of course, and so moral behaviour should not be an issue. "All those who live under the rule of sin", Spener writes, "can have no other kind of faith than such human delusion" (65), they have not let the Word of God "penetrate inwardly into [their] heart" (66).

As Spener and Kant consider the contemporary Lutheran church, they are struck by the widespread immoral behaviour, and thus can gain a sense of the lack of true faith throughout the church, despite having moral faith at its core. In imagery reminiscent of Kant's picture of the inner, moral core and the outer shell of religion, Spener writes, "[a]lthough our Evangelical Lutheran church is a true church and is pure in its teaching, it is in such a condition, unfortunately, that we behold its outward form with sorrowful eyes" (67). It is perhaps one of the problems of Luther's pronouncements regarding the (non-)relation between good works and salvation that it may perhaps give those who are still mired in self-love and lack true faith an excuse to act as they please as long as they proclaim faith in God. We might perhaps be reminded here of Kant's pronouncements against public confessions of faith in *Theodicy*, a practice which, due to the



hiddenness of true faith and its connection to long-term patterns of behaviour, may not reveal true faith in any way.

Spener also gives hints in *PD* regarding his view of the bestowing of God's grace, and how we should act in response to the redemptive scheme in which we find ourselves. As you would imagine from a good Lutheran, grace is very much not in human hands, and is certainly not earned in any substantive sense. Though we cannot achieve our own salvation, "[w]hat is impossible for men remains possible for God. Eventually God's hour must come, if only we wait for it" (37). However, if this state of affairs tempts us into moral laxity, both in judging ourselves and others, we should remember that it is up to us to respond in the right way to God's helping hand: "Our fruit, like other fruit, must be borne in patience, and the fruit in others must be cultivated by us with perseverance... Seeds are there, and you may think they are unproductive, but do your part in watering them, and ears will surely sprout and in time become ripe" (37-38). The great mystery behind the bestowal of grace is required for it to remain a genuinely moral system, devoid of motivations of self-love. Due to this reason, "his work is done in complete secrecy, yet all the more surely, provided we do not relax our efforts" (38). Relating back to the importance of the practical at the expense of the theoretical, the message of salvation for all mankind must be taken on faith "in the power of God" and the "illumination of the Spirit", rather than the "wisdom of men" (57). The Holy Spirit is usually taken as connected with our moral conscience (indeed, Spener, when reflecting on the good works done by the early Christian church, writes "It is the same Holy Spirit who is bestowed on us by God who once effected all things in the early Christians" (85)), and thus by stating that we should rely on divine illumination through the Spirit, rather than on supposed theological knowledge, he firmly grounds his soteriology in our moral conscience and faith, rather than in theoretical knowledge. We can at this point recall our discussion of theodicy and eschatology, where we saw Kant take the same stance on our reflecting upon the moral destiny of humankind.

In addition, we find another parallel with Kant in the injunction to act as if salvation does depend on you, even though in fact it is God's work alone that brings it about:

Since this has been promised to us by God, the fulfilment of the promise must necessarily follow in its time, inasmuch as not a single word of the Lord will fall to the ground and remain without fruit. While hoping for such fruit, however, it is not enough idly to wait for it and be killed by the desire... Even if it may be evident that we cannot achieve the whole and complete purpose, we can at least do as much as possible (78).

From Spener, we now go on to consider the influence of Francke, a prominent Pietist follower of Spener, which is less in evidence in *Religion*, but nevertheless worth a brief mention. As Kant seemingly does, Francke posits a sudden and lasting effect upon the determination of the will that mysteriously occurs as the first stage of the moral regeneration of the individual (see Matthias 2004: 103), which shows itself in gradual improvements in moral action throughout life (see Shantz 2013: 138). More importantly, Francke speaks of a kind of 'living knowledge', a knowledge of God beyond theoretical understanding that shapes the life of the individual. Indeed, the impact of knowledge for Francke goes beyond this; for in his brand of 'Halle Pietism', influenced by utopian texts, true faith manifests itself in grand social projects, such as the famous orphanage at Halle (see Bernet 2014: 151-152).

The Word of God as intended to form those who receive it into true Christians will inevitably affect the will as well as involving descriptive elements (see Matthias 2004: 105). This is related to the general Pietist complaint that for all of the general emphasis throughout Christendom on getting doctrine right, it did not seem to have much practical impact upon the ethical lives of believers. The reason for such ethical laxity in the wider Christian church is the lack of the kind of 'living knowledge' of God that could transform our will such that it comes into harmony with God's will. Luther had successfully reformed the church, but the reformation of Christian lives had still to occur (see Brown 1996: 22). Such knowledge, according to Francke,

could be discerned in Scripture through the *sensus mysticus* and the work of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to access an authentic level of meaning beyond even the allegorical and figurative (see Matthias 2004: 106).

Kant offers us an updating of such a position, moving away from an emphasis upon Scriptural authority (as part of the Enlightenment project), towards allowing that a greater level of understanding could be engendered through the experience of nature alone (in the interests of justice, for those who are not able to access Scripture, the divine can be discerned apart from Scripture, though it will be decidedly more difficult). However, as we shall see, Scripture still has a very important role to play for Kant in the process of revolution in moral behaviour and the engendering of true faith.

So, there are a number of important elements of Pietism that we can take into account as possible influences, both on *Religion* and also on Kant's religious works more widely. We have seen that:

1. An ethical focus on autonomy, and the moral law felt within, is grounded in both Luther and later Pietist developments upon his theology. Luther sets up the task of satisfying the moral law as impossible, leading us to look to Christ in hope for divine grace.
2. A key part of Pietism is the notion of a 'New Birth', brought about by God alone and his grace. Such a 'New Birth' will bring about a transformed life, from an ethical perspective, and the community of people whose lives have been transformed in such a way constitute the beginnings of a possible Kingdom of God on earth. Pietism, therefore, binds together ethical concerns on an individual level with desires for fundamental social change.
3. The moral health of Christendom is key to the development of humankind. As such, the Church should move its focus from theoretical, speculative matters, and instead should

consider anew the moral core of Christ's teaching, made available to us through the right understanding of Scripture, in the context of true piety.

4. Developments in the Church will also see a move both towards universalism, and away from rigid hierarchical structures. Rather, the perfected Church will involve a priesthood of all. The Church, constituted by all who have internalised true faith and will allow it to regulate their behaviour, will eventually see the end times that mark the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

I will continue to expand upon these elements of Lutheran-Pietism in the coming sections, in order to make clear the way in which this tradition impacts upon the argument of *Religion*. Further to this, if we can show that Pietism is a key influence upon *Religion*, the possible influence of Leibniz (which we saw in the pre-Critical period) also gains significance, for there is growing evidence of (conscious) affinities between Leibniz's thought and the Pietist tradition. As Shantz (2008: 54) notes, Leibniz was friends with a number of prominent Pietists, such as Francke, and maintained an extensive correspondence with them. Not only this, aspects of Pietist thought can be found in Leibniz's desire for religious reconciliation (in particular the reunification of the different denominations within Christianity in the short-term, as well as the 'conversion of the heathens' in the long-term), religious toleration of other faiths (on the basis that matters concerning salvation are all that is ultimately important for religion, and can be found in varying degrees in the different faiths), and a hope for a new age, a 'moral world', in which society is based on a community of the pious, and harmony is finally brought to this world (see *Ibid.*: 53-62).

Exploring these connections between Pietism and Leibniz in greater detail is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, given such affinities between Leibniz and the Lutheran-Pietist tradition, we can see the influence of the former on Kant's philosophy as just another aspect of the way in which Kant sits within the Pietist tradition, and Christian orthodoxy more generally. Indeed, it was perhaps Kant's underlying sympathy for elements of the Pietist tradition that

brought him to seek out the kind of theory-praxis method that is exemplified in Leibniz's *Theodicy*. We can now move on to Kant's famous doctrine of radical evil, and how we might interpret the doctrine in the light of the foregoing discussion.

## 7.2 Radical Evil

### 7.2.1 Introducing Radical Evil

The role of radical evil within Kant's moral philosophy remains a controversial one, with disagreements continuing as to its intended purpose given the perhaps surprising religious and pessimistic elements it brings into his work. In part to counteract such surprising elements, recent scholarship has tended to emphasise a prescriptive approach to radical evil, in which the self-interpretation of our own actions as grounded within an evil intertwined in human nature is seen as a necessary presupposition for our taking moral responsibility and attempting to morally better ourselves, or an anthropological approach, in which radical evil is deflated to the purely social notion of 'unsocial sociability'. Given the commitment of this thesis to take an 'affirmative' approach, in which theological realism is affirmed within Kant's critical system, I will defend a more traditional descriptive view of the doctrine of radical evil, whilst upholding the potential role it has to play in the moral improvement of the human moral agent. I will begin by setting out the doctrine (7.2.1), before moving on to deal with three live issues in the literature surrounding radical evil, namely, a deflationary interpretation that focuses on Kant's account of moral education (7.2.2), another deflationary interpretation that gives radical evil a purely sociological analysis (7.2.3), and the question of the 'missing formal proof' for the doctrine (7.2.4).

With regards to radical evil, Card (2010: 75-77; see also 2002: 75-79) offers a good summary of six fundamental claims we find in the exposition of the doctrine of radical evil. We can refer to these claims as the 'excluded middle thesis', the 'diabolical thesis', the 'self-love thesis', the 'inscrutability thesis', the 'imputability thesis', and finally, the 'inextirpability' thesis. The 'excluded middle thesis' applies both to the will and to the human being as a whole. The will, Kant claims, is either wholly good or wholly evil, following on from the simple claim that either

the incentive of the moral law has determined the individual's power of choice or not - if it has, then the will is good, and if it has not, then the will is bad. The will can never be morally indifferent, for it should ideally always incorporate the moral law into its maxim (6:24). Following on from this, Kant states that "nor can a human being be morally good in some parts, and at the same time evil in others" (*Ibid.*). The argument for this claim is not entirely clear:

If he is good in one part, he has incorporated the moral law into his maxim. And were he, therefore, to be evil in some other part, since the moral law of compliance with duty in general is a single one and universal, the maxim relating to it would be universal yet particular at the same time: which is contradictory (6:24-25).

There are two aspects to what Kant is claiming here. The claim that, at any given moment, an individual cannot be morally good in some parts and morally evil in others, is combined with the general claim that the moral law prescribes acting in accordance with duty. If at any given moment I follow the moral law by adopting a maxim which is in accordance with duty, then I am a good person as a whole.

We can also consider the 'diabolical thesis' as part of the doctrine of radical evil. Kant makes it clear that human moral agents never will immorality or evil for its own sake (6:35). The reason for claiming this is provided by the 'self-love thesis', which states that it is the pursuit of certain prudential goods in self-interest that brings about an evil will in human moral agents. So, even when a human moral agent is willing evil actions, there is always some sort of good in mind, and never evil for its own sake (6:36). The 'inscrutability thesis' also states that we cannot know the ultimate grounds for the ways in which we act, including the grounds for moral improvement, with Kant stating that, "[h]ow it is possible that a naturally evil human being should make himself into a good human being surpasses every concept of ours" (6:44-45). There is also the 'imputability thesis', which states that our will, be it good or evil, is imputable to us, thus we are morally responsible for it and its moral development (6:42). One may wonder how such

imputability is possible given the epistemic limits laid down by the inscrutability thesis. The final major claim that Kant makes with regard to his doctrine of radical evil is the ‘inextirpability thesis’. Kant writes that, “as natural propensity, [the propensity to evil] is also not to be *extirpated* through human forces, for this could only happen through good maxims – something that cannot take place if the subjective supreme ground of all maxims is presupposed to be corrupted” (6:37). Our radical evil, then, however we understand it, is not something that can be wiped out. It would appear that once we have committed an evil action, our slate can never be clean again. However, perhaps unexpectedly, Kant then goes on to state, “[y]et it must equally be possible to *overcome* this evil, for it is found in the human being as acting freely” (*Ibid.*). Radical evil, though inextirpable, can be overcome.

So, what is it for the will to be evil? An evil will acts on immoral maxims which can be inferred *a priori* to be grounded in “the presence in the subject of a common ground, itself a maxim, of all particular morally evil maxims” (6:20). The imputation of an evil nature to a human being consists precisely in the inference of such a ‘subjective ground’ for all evil actions, itself a maxim chosen freely. Kant makes it clear at this early point that an ‘evil nature’ must be in some sense chosen by the moral agent in order for it to be imputable (see 6:21). The underlying argument here seems to be that it *simply wouldn’t make sense* for an individual’s ‘evil nature’ to not be morally imputable to that individual. As already mentioned, Kant suggests that the underlying evil maxim, what we can call the ‘evil meta-maxim’, is to be inferred *a priori* from our observations of evil actions. What this precisely means is unclear, and such obscurity persists when Kant states of the evil meta-maxim that it “cannot be a fact possibly given in experience” (6:22). It might seem that Kant is contradicting himself here, insofar as he previously stated that the evil meta-maxim is to be inferred from our experience, and yet he also seems to be arguing that the fact of the meta-maxim is not accessible through our experience. However, this would be to misunderstand the previous quotation - what ‘cannot be given in experience’ is a *Factum*, a sense of something ‘being done’. What Kant is asserting is that the evil meta-maxim is not



something that we can experience as *operating upon us*. Evil actions simply are something that we choose to do. Given the lack of immediate phenomenological access to the evil meta-maxim, it is something we can only posit as lying behind the evil actions we experience, both by others and ourselves, given the moral imputations that we also feel are right to hold against ourselves and others.

In the following *Remark*, Kant affirms that human beings are evil by nature, and is loath to also hold that human beings are also morally good by nature, due to the need to “preclude, so far as possible, anything morally intermediate, either in actions or in human characters” (6:22). The desire to impute only an evil nature to human moral agents is a reflection of Kant’s rigorism<sup>94</sup> regarding our nature as moral agents. In doing so, he relies upon the so-called ‘Incorporation Thesis’ (see Allison 1990: 39-40). The “freedom of the power of choice” (6:23) that human moral agents have, designated by Kant as *Willkür*, is moved to action only to the extent that it incorporates an incentive or incentives into the maxim that it acts on. The moral law is such an incentive that could be incorporated by our *Willkür* into maxims. The undeniable fact that we do not always act morally, then, demonstrates that there are incentives other than the moral law acting upon our power of choice. Kant’s rigorism follows from the fact that at some point in the decision-making process, one kind of incentive has to eventually prevail and be the determining incentive incorporated in the maxim. Therefore, any action we undertake will thereby be either good if the prevailing incentive is the moral law, or evil if the prevailing incentive is not the moral law - there is no middle ground here. Indeed, not only is there no middle ground with regard to the morality of individual actions, neither is there a middle ground with regard to the characteristics of a moral agent in that they can either be said to be innately good or innately evil.

However, Kant’s position begins to make more sense when he states that a human moral agent’s evil innate characteristic “has not been earned in time” (6:25). If it has been chosen

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<sup>94</sup> ‘Rigorism’ is the term used to denote those who deny any moral middle ground in our evaluation of the character of moral agents.

timelessly that one is to prioritise an incentive that is not the moral law, then it is simply a fact that from the perspective of the 'eternal now' you always have and always will choose to prioritise an incentive that is not the moral law. Further, beyond the individuation of moments in time, the prioritisation will also be a singular event and universal, or to put it another way, there is only one eternal moment out of time, and so the choice to prioritise an inclination other than the moral law can never be undone and will continue for all eternity. The notion of such a timeless choice may seem very strange. However, Insole (2013: ch. 6) has argued convincingly that Kant's Critical system allows for 'atemporal first causation', with the possibility of a timeless choice left open by theoretical reason, and actively called for by practical reason. Due to the specific scope of this thesis, I will not explore this issue further (as it can easily lead into extensive debates regarding Kant's wider ethical philosophy, as well as the metaphysics of time); rather, it is enough to say that the reliance upon timeless choices in *Religion* is not necessarily the stumbling-block to the coherence of the Critical system and the success of Kant's project that some may take it to be. Indeed, the notion of a timeless action, a decision made by some sort of entity beyond time that holds true for all eternity, would not have seemed strange to Kant, ensconced in an intellectual context widely influenced by Christian theology.

The notion of God existing and acting timelessly, in a Christian context, goes back to Augustine, who, in a bid to maintain a strong sense of God's immutability (that God does not change to the extent that none of his properties change), affirms that God exists outside of time<sup>95</sup>. Augustine grounds his view of the possibility of timeless actions in an account of time very similar to Kant's in some respects, for example, he claims in the *Confessions* that time is, for us, a subjective impression, and that our notion of time intervals derives from 'mental extension' into the past by memory and into the future by expectation on the part of the individual mind, whilst affirming the empirical reality of time in *The City of God*. For Kant, it is entirely possible that the

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<sup>95</sup> My discussion here is indebted to DeWeese (2004: Ch. 5). Augustine believes that the act of creation itself is timeless and everlasting, in that time is a feature of the universe itself, a universe that is sustained in its existence at all moments by God.

Augustinian tradition suggested to him the alliance of a subjective approach to time with the possibility of timeless acts. Of course, this is not to say that Augustinian influence upon Kant in his doctrine of radical evil has been established. What can be clear, though, is that the approach I am imputing to Kant here would not seem as strange to a late 18<sup>th</sup> century thinker, with greater links to the tradition of Christian theology, as it might seem to us.

Moving back to the question of a moral middle ground, we can perhaps see the beginnings of more plausible picture, as despite the fact that human beings suffer from radical evil, a 'propensity to evil', the nature of a human moral agent also has an 'original predisposition to good'. However, whilst predispositions and propensities are clearly supposed to be different things, the former are not given a clear definition. We will, therefore, have to do some digging to try to discover precisely what Kant means by 'predisposition'. The predisposition to good has three elements, namely, a predisposition to animality (which relates to our existence as a 'living being'), humanity (which relates to our existence as a 'rational being'), and personality (which relates to our existence as a 'responsible' being) (6:26). All three elements are understood as a certain kind of susceptibility that the human being feels in their different levels of existence, as a living being amongst other animals, as a being with faculties of reason, and as a being that feels the incentive of the moral law.

As living beings, we feel an urge towards self-preservation, to propagate the species, and to socialise with other members of the species; as a rational being, we feel the urge to compare ourselves with others, and gain the good opinion of others, which can act as a drive towards bettering ourselves; and finally, as a responsible being, we feel the moral law as a "sufficient incentive to the power of choice" (6:27). The major point that Kant wishes to make about these susceptibilities, and this is where we get to the crux of what he means by 'predisposition', is that they are potentialities for all of us as human moral agents, insofar as "they belong to the possibility of human nature" (6:28). Further to this, they are potentialities to the good that at the

moment go unfulfilled, and at this moment in time lead us astray, or at least the first two elements of the predisposition to good. So, the predisposition to animality, Kant states, can lead to “all sorts of vices... [including] the *bestial vices of gluttony, lust and wildlawness*” (6:26-27), whilst the predisposition to humanity can lead to ‘diabolical vices’, such as “envy, ingratitude, [and] joy in other’s misfortunes” (6:27). Kant’s notion of a predisposition to the good, then, is intended to show that there is an original goodness in humanity that is, at this moment, being unfulfilled, but a possible fulfilment of this predisposition lies in the future, and part of the function of *Religion*, we shall see, will be to say something about this possible, morally better, future for humankind.

Kant emphasises that whilst humankind’s predisposition to the good is not thought of as acquired, our propensity to evil is to be thought of as consciously chosen by the moral agent. It is only contingent that humankind chooses to prioritise non-moral inclinations over respect for the moral law, otherwise our original predisposition to the good would rule supreme over our decision-making and actions. Again, the propensity to evil comes in three elements or grades, namely, frailty, impurity and depravity. A human moral agent exhibits frailty in cases where even though respect for the moral law has been incorporated into the maxim, and is objectively the strongest incentive for human rationality, the agent finds the moral incentive to be “subjectively the weaker (in comparison with [non-moral inclinations])” (6:29), and thus does not act primarily out of respect for the moral law; whilst a human moral agent exhibits impurity in cases where even though respect for the moral law is foremost in the maxim-forming process, and thus will lead to an action in accordance with the *letter* of the moral law, the maxim in question is not formed in the *spirit* of the moral law, in that respect for the moral law as incentive is not taken as a “*sufficient* incentive but, on the contrary, often... needs still other incentives besides it in order to determine the power of choice” (6:30).

Depravity is to be understood as “the *corruption (corruptio)* of the human heart... [reversing] the ethical order as regards the incentives of a *free* power of choice” (*Ibid.*). Going beyond frailty and impurity, depravity involves the human moral agent freely reversing the proper order of incentives, specifically prioritising non-moral incentives above the feeling of respect for the moral law. In all degrees, then, the propensity to evil is characterised by something going wrong in the way in which incentives are organised in choosing a maxim prior to acting. Whilst an incorrect ordering of incentives, from the rational, objective standpoint, may still give rise to actions in accordance with the moral law, Kant makes it clear that this would not be satisfactory as it would be “purely accidental that these actions agree with the law, for the incentives might equally well incite its violation” (6:31). Even the human moral agent who has the appearance of a saint may still be evil.

To further explicate what he means by a propensity to evil, Kant makes a distinction between a physical and a moral propensity. A physical propensity “pertains to a human’s power of choice as natural being”, whilst a moral propensity “pertains to a human’s power of choice as moral being” (*Ibid.*). A propensity to moral evil as pertaining to a human’s power of choice as natural being is not possible, for being moral, it must have its ground in freedom, apart from the causality of the phenomenal realm. Not only, to be imputable to us, should we understand our propensity to evil as pertaining to our power of choice as a moral being, we should also see it as something that in some sense we have chosen.

What is it, then, to state that a human being is evil by nature? Kant states that it simply means that being evil applies to him considered in his species; not that this quality may be inferred from the concept of his species... but rather that, according to the cognition we have of the human being through experience, he cannot be judged otherwise, in other words, we may presuppose evil as subjectively necessary in every human being, even the best (6:32).

Kant is actually saying very little here, merely that if we reflect honestly upon our experience of ourselves and others, in terms of the actions we undertake and the intentions we can discern lying behind them, we will come to the conclusion that we have not come across a human moral agent who is not tainted by evil. Such an interpretation is confirmed when Kant writes that, “[w]e can spare ourselves the formal proof that there must be such a corrupt propensity rooted in the human being, in view of the multitude of woeful examples that the experience of human *deeds* parades before us (6:32-33). The sort of rigorous argumentation that Kant is known for is simply not needed here, for our own individual experience is more than sufficient to substantiate his claims. We will come back to this quote later, in relation to recent attempts to offer the kind of formal proof alluded to here - all I will say for the moment is that the sentence in no way implies that such rigorous argumentation in the form of a formal proof is available anyway, so it is a good thing that our experience offers us all the evidence we need to agree with Kant regarding the necessity of evil in all human beings.

However, all is not lost for humankind. We are not able to save ourselves from radical evil (as Kant asks, “how can an evil tree bear good fruit?” (6:45)). The evil meta-maxim, which prioritises sensuous incentives, cannot overturn itself, for by its very nature it disregards the moral law at the expense of other incentives. However, the moral law *does* call us to moral improvement, and as such we *must* be capable of it. The only way we can make sense of such an impasse is by presupposing supernatural assistance bringing about the revolution in disposition required such that the evil meta-maxim is overturned, and a new maxim of prioritising the moral law is put in its place. The workings of practical reason, therefore, commit us to some form of grace, apart from any action we might undertake (in line, then, with the Lutheran approach to grace, which does not rely in any way upon human efforts). Whilst we should still act as if everything depended upon us, making ourselves “worthy of this assistance” (6:54), nevertheless it is supernatural assistance that secure the beginning of our turn away from evil with the revolution in disposition.

It is only the beginning, however, for as we shall see, there is still a long way to go in the development of humankind in addition to the revolution in disposition. A revolution in the “mode of thought” must be accompanied by “a gradual reformation in the mode of sense” (6:47), a shift by which we move from a “subject receptive to the good” to a “good human being” (6:48). The struggle of the moral development of humankind, though begun with supernatural assistance, will be completed in the physical world in which we find ourselves; indeed, it will be found in a society of all rational beings who stand in moral relations with each other and all hold the right sort of faith in God and morality. We will continue considering this grand project of moral development in sections 7.3-7.5.

In this section, then, I have offered a brief summary of Kant’s doctrine of radical evil. Whilst we are beings who feel the call of the moral law, nevertheless, for reasons that are beyond our ken, we prioritise sensuous, non-moral incentives in our decision-making, from which we can postulate a meta-maxim concerning the systematic prioritising of such incentives. We cannot gather a theoretically grounded formal proof for such notions; however, given the sense we have of the world around us, as well as the potential power of practical reason to give insight into such murky matters, we can have some form of conviction in the doctrine of radical evil, along the same lines in which we can generate faith in God. There is much more that could be said about radical evil – however, the basic details are sufficient for our purposes. We will now consider three of the most prevalent issues in the current literature surrounding radical evil in the light of our discussion of Kant’s methodology and approach to religious topics in the previous chapters.

### 7.2.2 Descriptive or Prescriptive?

Radical evil, given the experience that we have of our own moral conduct and that of others throughout human history, is offered as an explanation for the generally bleak view that Kant presumably believes we will have if we are honest moral judges of ourselves and others. Such an explanation of course comes with a large number of provisos, especially surrounding the justificatory ground for the doctrine. We certainly cannot come to know the truth of the doctrine of radical evil in a straightforward manner, and we cannot establish the doctrine on any sort of firm theoretical footing. Despite such provisos, we are indeed making descriptive claims in that we are supposing (in however a weak sense) something to be the case as opposed to not. Our position, then, could perhaps be labelled as descriptive, insofar as we are interested in objective true/false claims regarding the moral character of ourselves and our species<sup>96</sup>. Such an approach to the doctrine of radical evil, viewing it as primarily involving descriptive claims, has been recently challenged by Irene McMullin (2013), whose position is taken as representative of a current deflationary approach to radical evil that ties radical evil to Kant's (secular) account of moral education and avoids making descriptive claims beyond supposed strict Critical epistemic limits.

McMullin suggests a so-called 'prescriptive' interpretation, which sees the doctrine of radical evil as something to be believed in at pain of not being able to achieve full autonomy and thereby moral responsibility. McMullin begins her paper by claiming that "the notion of radical evil accounts for the beginning of moral responsibility... since the act of *attributing* radical evil to one's freedom is an inauguration into the autonomous stance" (*Ibid.*: 49). McMullin goes on to

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<sup>96</sup> Such a descriptive reading can take a number of different forms. McMullin (2013: 68) points to a number of different examples, including Bernstein who identifies radical evil as "the tendency (propensity) of human beings to disobey the moral law" (2002: 43) and readings that emphasise the (realist) religious implications of radical evil such as Quinn, who argues that even though Kant rejects the model of inherited sin from Augustine, we can find in *Religion* positive descriptive claims regarding a propensity towards evil actions (1990: 229-31). We will also, in the next section, go on to discuss a further descriptive rendering of radical evil along social lines, exemplified in the later work of Allen Wood (1999).



characterise radical evil as a “backward-looking self-designation that allows the agent to make sense of her moral experience... a self-interpretation of [the] structure [of practical reason] that is necessary for the proper functioning of practical reason” (*Ibid.*: 51). Further, McMullin writes, “characterizing oneself as having chosen one’s radically evil status is not a simple description of observed events; rather, it is to lay down as a rule *that* one will view oneself henceforth according to that interpretation” (*Ibid.*: 54). We have, that is,

[taken up] the stance of self-responsibility by shifting from (i) a self-interpretation of her condition as a *natural* distance between incentive and law to (ii) a self-interpretation of her condition as a *failure* arising from her choice to permit [a] natural distance between incentive and law to produce immoral acts (*Ibid.*: 56).

It would appear that in some sense full moral agency is inaugurated *through* our self-imputation of radical evil. McMullin affirms this reading when she writes that “interpreting ourselves according to such an original ‘choice’ of evil is a type of transcendental condition for the possibility of moral agency” (*Ibid.*: 57-58). We are not, it would appear, able to even fully attain moral agency until we internalise the self-interpretation of radical evil, as

[t]he agent who does *not* interpret himself as radically evil... is still responsible for his moral failings in the sense that he can and must be held accountable for them by others. But because he has not yet adopted a stance whereby he holds *himself* accountable for such violations, he has not yet achieved the genuine responsibility of moral autonomy (*Ibid.*: 57).

Further to this, McMullin argues that “by interpreting itself as globally evil the self makes itself answerable for a condition for which it is *not* responsible in so far as it simply finds itself torn between self-love and the moral law” (*Ibid.*: 67).

The supposed benefits of this interpretation includes being able to move away from the view that radical evil is “religious baggage” (*Ibid.*). Though viewing radical evil in religious terms

may be something that some scholars would wish to move away from, this is not possible once we take into account the religious framework of much of Kant's philosophical thought, a framework that I attempt to explore in this thesis. In addition, McMullin states that her interpretation "is in line with his earlier works" (*ibid.*), whereas I would argue that the religious framework in which we should interpret aspects of *Religion* is established and developed from the very beginnings of Kant's philosophical career. Finally, McMullin states that her interpretation "can solve one of the traditional problems of Kantian ethics – namely, that it has no developmental account, but merely *presupposes* autonomous agents" (*ibid.*). Within the religious framework suggested by this thesis, there is a sense of ethical development on both a personal and social scale - there is not only the ongoing path to ethical perfection for the individual to pursue (the only factor that counts according to order of divine justice), but also the ability of human society to work towards the Kingdom of God on earth<sup>97</sup>. McMullin, then, cannot claim to be novel in incorporating a sense of ethical development into the Critical system.

In further response to McMullin's argument, I would challenge the stark disjunction assumed between descriptive and prescriptive approaches. The characteristics of a descriptive interpretation of radical evil would be that it includes truth-claims, the cognition of which may indeed influence our behaviour, but does not result in a substantive change at the deep level of, say, the constitution of the self. The prescriptive interpretation, on the other hand, starts with the action of taking something to be so, which is able to bring about substantive changes internal to the moral situation in which an agent finds themselves<sup>98</sup>. Learning or even supposing something to be the case is a necessary rational ground for any attempt to be prescriptive, and McMullin appears to realise this through describing radical evil as a 'self-interpretation', for it is not clear

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<sup>97</sup> The social aspect of the moral development of human beings in relation to the notion of the ethical community will be explored in 7.5.

<sup>98</sup> Of course, one may wish to quibble with the way in which I have distinguished these two positions, and argue that I have done some injustice to the prescriptive approach in perhaps making it appear more controversial than it is. However, in defence of the characterisation of the positions I have laid out here, I would query whether the distinction would be of any import at all if it were to be drawn in a much different manner.

how we are to understand such an interpretation except as involving some form of substantive claim(s). For any reflective, rational, moral agent, description and prescription will come together when they reflect upon the radical evil of their species. One simply cannot help but be affected in some way by the terrible realisation that is encapsulated in the doctrine. Without the assumption of certain substantive claims, and the concomitant investment in a certain view of human behaviour, it is not clear how effective moral motivation can be brought about.

McMullin describes the prescriptive response to the doctrine of radical evil as “[laying] down as a rule *that* one will view oneself according to that interpretation – that one will view specific acts of self-love as arising from a global choice to prioritize them over morality” (*Ibid.*: 54). It seems strangely voluntaristic to think that an individual could genuinely lay down such a rule for themselves, “[to choose] to view what presents itself as a propensity as being an *act*” (*Ibid.*). McMullin points, as evidence for such an interpretation, to Kant’s statement that although the propensity to evil can be innate, it “yet *may* be represented as not being such: it can rather be thought of (if it is good) as *acquired*, or (if evil) as *brought* by the human being *upon* himself” (6:29). However, though Kant is talking about how we may *represent* the subjective ground of the possibility of evil actions to ourselves, there is no sense in which this is linked to how we *ought* to represent things, nor to the inauguration of our moral responsibility or autonomy.

So, I would argue, in addition to it seeming strange to think that one could even choose to see things in the way he presents them, Kant himself simply does not talk about that choice in prescriptive terms. Chignell has noted that Kant ultimately holds a non-voluntarist position with regards to beliefs<sup>99</sup>, an exception being pragmatic beliefs that can be accepted “in cases where we *don’t* have sufficient objective grounds one way or the other” (2007: 342). In order for us to self-interpret as radically evil, and thus in some sense actively take up beliefs in our radical evil, then it

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<sup>99</sup> In other words, we cannot choose to hold particular beliefs. In the *Jäsche Logic*, Kant rejects the view that “there is something arbitrary in our judging, in that we hold something to be true because we want to hold it to be true, and argues that “[t]he will does not have any influence immediately on holding-to-be-true; this would be quite absurd” (9:73-74).

would appear that the beliefs involved would have to be of a pragmatic kind, which can legitimately be voluntarily held. With regard to beliefs connected to radical evil, it is not beliefs of the pragmatic kind that are involved. As Chignell notes, even though the term ‘belief’ has been used in relation to pragmatic beliefs in the context of the Critical system, it is rather problematic to try to state whether or not

Pragmatic Belief involves ‘belief’ in the contemporary sense... [as] Kant doesn’t have our cotemporary concept of belief... [and] it is not at all clear that the subjects [in the examples of pragmatic beliefs that Kant supplies] really would have to believe those propositions in order to be rational in acting in the way that they do (*Ibid.*: 341).

In relation to *Religion*, it is not clear at all that Kant is viewing the doctrine of radical evil as encompassing pragmatic beliefs in the very specific sense that he lays down. Rather, it seems that there are simple factual claims being made here about the depravity of humankind, and reading the text in any other way would rather require more textual evidence than is provided in McMullin’s paper. As such, the beliefs involved have to be taken as non-voluntarist, which contrasts with the notion of ‘self-interpretation’ involved in the prescriptive rendering of the doctrine of radical evil.

In addition, as we have seen in previous chapters, Kant consistently formulates an approach to religious topics that mixes theory and praxis. In the pre-Critical period, he follows a Leibniz-style ‘theory-praxis’ approach (explored in Chapters 2 and 3), which eventually evolves into the complex Critical method that relies upon the primacy of practical reason to act as guide to what must be the case given that we live in a universe created by the God of classical theism (explored in Chapters 4 and 6). When it comes to religious issues, such as here in *Religion* where he is dealing with the imperfection of humankind and the possibility of salvation, theory and praxis go hand-in-hand. McMullin, in distinguishing between the descriptive and the prescriptive

in such a sharp way, is simply not giving sufficient attention to the methodological context in which Kant is approaching these issues.

Further, there is an open question in the prescriptive interpretation regarding what happens in a case where we fail to interpret ourselves as radically evil. Does this mean that we are entirely devoid of moral responsibility? McMullin writes that,

[t]he agent who does *not* interpret himself as radically evil... is still responsible for his moral failings in the sense that he can and must be held accountable for them by others. But because he has not yet adopted a stance whereby he holds *himself* accountable for such violations, he has not yet achieved the genuine responsibility of moral autonomy (2013: 57)

Such a view seems to assume degrees of responsibility in Kant's moral theory (at least with regard to fully-formed (adult) rational beings), namely, a lesser degree of moral responsibility before one has interpreted one's own practical reason in terms of radical evil, and a greater degree when this has occurred. On the other hand, we could read McMullin here as arguing for two forms of responsibility, one connected to self-ascription, and the other connected to ascription by others, with genuine responsibility occurring in situations where these two forms of responsibility come together. If there are textual grounds for either reading in *Religion*, I cannot find them, and it is telling that McMullin ceases referencing Kant at this point. Radical evil, as a facet of Kant's ethical thinking, is largely unconnected to the notion of moral responsibility. As a rational, free agent, one is morally responsible, and that is an end of it. Radical evil is intended to offer grounds of explanation for why evil actions are so prevalent in the history of humankind and also to fit into an account of how development towards greater autonomy, and greater compliance with the moral law, can be possible. Radical evil is characterised as a state we are in effect born into, conceptually prior to any free action that we take as a moral agent. The great moral shift that we should aim for, an intelligible choice to systematically prioritise the moral incentive, is understood

as irreversible in a way that a mere interpretation of the structure of one's own practical reason could never be.

As I have already stated, from a purely exegetical perspective, we simply cannot find the kind of prescriptive story that McMullin is telling within the text of *Religion* itself or in any of the other of Kant's ethical works. I find no passages where cultivation of adherence to the moral law is linked with convincing oneself of the doctrine of radical evil. In addition, McMullin's prescriptive approach fails to account, in my opinion, for some of the aspects of the doctrine of radical evil put forward by Kant in *Religion*. As an example, Kant states that we cannot understand the kind of 'timeless' choice for an evil meta-maxim as being taken by an individual, or at least the kind of individual that we come across in the course of our empirical experience. Instead, we have to understand the choice being taken by a different sort of entity, which Kant refers to as "the whole species" (6:25). Thus, when we impute a particular moral character to an individual, we are not imputing a good or evil innate characteristic to that individual *per se*, rather, we are imputing it to 'a species', or to an individual *qua* a spatio-temporal manifestation of a species. It is not clear to me that, if we are simply telling ourselves a story that will inaugurate our drive towards moral autonomy, and indeed allow us to take full autonomy for the first time, we would impute the choice of the evil meta-maxim to the 'species', as opposed to the individual. It would certainly be much easier to 'take ownership' of our propensity to evil actions, as a prolegomena to tackling such a propensity, if we take direct individual responsibility for it ourselves.

A further aspect of Kant's doctrine of radical evil that appears surplus to requirements on the prescriptive approach is the characterisation of radical evil as a propensity, as opposed to offering a sheer explanation of the possibility of evil actions. From the text of *Religion*, it certainly appears that Kant is positively claiming that human moral agents commit overall more evil acts than not. Why would this sort of claim be necessary for truly taking responsibility for the first time for our evil actions? Indeed, the notion of a propensity might seem to *undermine* our taking

responsibility, in that if we take ourselves to have a deep propensity towards evil actions, it seems natural thereby to take ourselves to be *absolved* of some of our responsibility, if anything.

I would, therefore, challenge McMullin's prescriptive interpretation in the following ways:

1. The supposition of a stark disjunction between descriptive and prescriptive approaches does not pay sufficient attention to Kant's methodology regarding religious topics.
2. Problem of voluntarism – could we really choose to believe radical evil in the way McMullin seems to assume we can?
3. McMullin appears to assume degrees of moral responsibility, with regard to fully-formed rational beings, for which there is no textual warrant.
4. The cultivation of virtue is not linked in *Religion* to convincing oneself of the doctrine of radical evil.
5. Some aspects of Kant's doctrine of radical evil seem surplus to requirements on McMullin's reading – such as the imputation of radical evil to the 'species', as well as the characterisation of radical evil as a propensity.

To conclude, I have attempted to defend a primarily descriptive approach to the doctrine of radical evil, in the face of McMullin's approach, which follows the general line of attempting to reduce radical evil to playing a role in Kant's theory of moral education. Insufficient attention to the wider context of Kant's religious thought (which I have tried to provide in this thesis) undermines the sharp distinction between the descriptive and the prescriptive, and suggests that the descriptive plays a larger role in the presentation of radical evil than secular readings (such as McMullin's) will admit. There are other such readings out there along similar lines (such as Vanden Auweele (2014)), but I take my objections here in this section to apply *mutatis mutandis* to all such deflationary readings.

### 7.2.3 The Social Interpretation

Radical evil, as we have noted, is an attempt to explain why evil is so widespread amongst humankind, indeed why we all qua human moral agents have a tendency towards evil actions. Many recent attempts to answer the question of precisely what explanation Kant is trying to provide focus upon the anthropological and social concerns that occupied him throughout his career. Allen Wood is perhaps the most notable scholar to posit a connection between Kant's explanation of evil and Rousseau's ideas regarding the deleterious effects of society and culture upon the human individual. The posited connection certainly has biographical plausibility, as Rousseau was clearly a very important thinker as far as Kant was concerned. Wood pushes the link between Kant and Rousseau to the extent that radical evil is simply equated to unsocial sociability (a notion introduced in *Idea for a Universal History* at 8:20-21), which is for the former an anthropological notion of the mutual corruptibility of human beings once they congregate into a society. However, for reasons that should already be clear, there is something much deeper going on in the doctrine of radical evil than anthropological analysis, and as such I would like to consider and reject this kind of interpretive line.

First, I will offer a brief outline of Wood's anthropological reading of radical evil as outlined in a recent paper (though it is also presented in his *Kant's Ethical Thought* (see 1999: 283-320)). Wood sees one of the aims of philosophers, in reflecting upon evil, as "[helping] us to understand the persistence and prevalence of evil as a fact of human life, and also [enabling] us to attach a meaning to evil, which might orient both our understanding of it and our struggle against it" (2010: 150). Wood sees Kant's postulation of the evil propensity as an attempt to answer these philosophical difficulties, but the answer to the question of just *why* we have this propensity begins with social factors. Wood argues that "*the human propensity to evil arises in the social condition, and develops along with the processes of cultivation and civilization that belong to it*"



(*Ibid.*: 159). As evidence for this claim, we can focus on the predisposition to humanity, which as we have already seen, can alter a desire to “gain worth in the opinion of others”, into the desire for ascendancy over others, out of which can result the vices of jealousy, rivalry, envy, and so forth (see 6:27), as soon as human beings start to organise themselves into societies. As Formosa points out:

Wood does not hold Kant’s radical evil thesis to be a simple empirical generalization. Rather... he conceives of it as an anthropological claim based on Kant’s ‘theory of the purposive development of the human race’s collective predispositions’... Radical evil becomes for Wood the misuse of our predisposition to humanity. Wood thus *equates* Kant’s radical evil and unsocial sociability theses (2007: 244).

Wood’s reading of radical evil, then, emphasises the social aspects of the corruption of humanity based upon the underlying predisposition to humanity and the possibility of its misuse. Wood writes:

Once we see that our natural inclinations, when shaped by our social condition as rational beings, involve this competitive spirit, then we can see that the fundamental maxim of evil, which gives their satisfaction priority over obedience to the moral law, is really nothing except a desire for superiority over others and a policy of esteeming ourselves on the basis of our state or condition, which can be compared with that of others with the aim of validating that superiority (2010: 160).

So, it is the condition of standing in societal relations with other rational beings which is the avenue through which radical evil is realised; at first, we simply wish to make sure that we can compete with others, and at least maintain some sort of parity, but eventually this evolves into a desire for superiority over others, from which the vices follow. Wood also points to the need for the kind of social project which Kant envisions in the ‘ethical community’ (which we shall discuss

in more detail later) as pointing towards the social origin of evil, and as such “it is human society which constitutes the condition both for evil and for the moral struggle against it” (*Ibid.*: 161).

In response to this position, it is undeniable that Kant believes that certain vices only come about in the context of human society - after all, he states quite clearly that “[e]nvy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these, assail his nature, which on its own is undemanding, *as soon as he is among human beings*” (6:93-94), and that, in the anthropological works, he examines the ways in which vices are occasioned by human beings organising themselves into societies. It is also true that Kant sees a social project as ultimately helping to bring about the moral telos of humankind (see section 7.5). However, none of these facts add up to Kant arguing for a social origin of evil. Whilst certain vices may only occur once humans have organised themselves into a society, that does not entail that society is the *origin* of those vices; rather, we can say that society is merely the occasion for our inbuilt evil nature to express itself in the form of those vices. Inherently social vices do not *add* to our evil nature in any way, for we are already tainted logically prior to our engagement with society, and society merely gives us the opportunity to engage in a greater range of wrongdoing (as Grimm rightly states (2002: 166-167), unsocial sociability can only be an effect of the sort of ground of evil actions that Kant is attempting to argue for).

If radical evil has been earned at birth, it cannot be said to arise out of social interactions once a human moral agent has reached adulthood. Kant examines the process in which we express radical evil in society in the anthropological works, but this does not affect his deeper analysis of evil in *Religion*, where his focus has shifted to ethical and religious topics. In addition, the fact that Kant sees a social project as part of the solution for bringing about the moral end of humankind also does not entail a social origin of evil, and a reduction of evil to unsocial sociability. Kant makes a clear conceptual distinction between a revolution in disposition on the individual level and the slow progress of moral development on the social level, the former of

which is the unintelligible, yet necessary, start of the process of moral development, which thereafter must be supplemented by social action. These two processes will run in tandem throughout human history, but this is not enough to establish a conceptual reduction of one to the other. As such, much more needs to be done to establish the reduction of radical evil to unsocial sociability, and therefore the reading of *Religion* as a text ultimately concerned with social issues<sup>100</sup>. Given the religious framework for *Religion* that I have argued for in the previous chapters, and the possibilities for a kind of religious faith within the Critical system that is not confined to the phenomenal realm, I believe that the burden of evidence weighs more heavily on the shoulders of those who wish to take this social/anthropological approach to radical evil, and that the evidence presented so far is insufficient to establish what is in reality quite an extreme position.

Before we conclude this section, I would also like to briefly consider Grimm's own version of the anthropological interpretation of radical evil. Grimm's account focuses on the development of the individual from early childhood, in which our natural impulses are developed before our reason has the capacity to assert itself:

[Kant's] claim is that by the time reason emerges in the human agent – and with reason the moral law – our natural needs and inclinations have already acquired a kind of foothold within the soul which reason finds it nearly impossible to dislodge. Hence, by noting that we are composite beings, part animal and part rational, and moreover by noting that the rational element emerges later in our development and is forced to confront a suddenly rebellious set of animal needs and inclinations, Kant thinks he can explain why all of us *freely* adopt evil maxims (*Ibid.*: 171).

The main problem I have with this account is that I do not see how any sort of developmental analysis of radical evil can give us anything approaching the depth of explanation for evil that Kant

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<sup>100</sup> Further issues with Wood's approach are suggested by Grimm (*Ibid.*: 165-169).

is attempting to offer. Even if we allow that natural inclinations are developed first, there is still the question of why reason cannot overcome their immoral leanings - just because inclinations come first, it does not mean that they will inevitably have a greater hold over an individual than reason. As such, this rendering of Kant's approach does not answer any of the deeper questions regarding evil that we are interested in. Furthermore, Grimm's developmental account is lacking the crucial universal element that Kant is claiming, that radical evil is a part of all of us. It seems entirely possible on the developmental account that a human moral agent comes about who, unlikely as it might be, does not suffer from a propensity to evil, and this does not seem to be a possibility that Kant could countenance given other claims he makes regarding the universality of radical evil. As such, I believe Grimm's account to suffer from the same sort of problems as Wood's account.

Further to this, the points I have made against Wood's and Grimm's accounts specifically can be made *mutatis mutandis* against any social/anthropological deflationary rendering of the doctrine of radical evil, which should perhaps lead us to conclude that all reductionist accounts of radical evil along social/anthropological lines will suffer from these defects. We can now move on to consider the issue of the so-called 'missing proof' for the doctrine of radical evil.

### 7.2.4 The 'Missing Proof' for Radical Evil

Another puzzle surrounding Kant's account of radical evil, and what we shall focus upon now, is the apparent lack of argument to be found in *Religion* for it. Such a lack of argument has struck some readers as something of a surprise given Kant's dislike of all forms of dogmatism. Hence, Seiriol Morgan has recently attempted to provide for Kant a proof for the doctrine of radical evil<sup>101</sup>. What we are interested in is not the reconstructed argument itself<sup>102</sup>, but the question of whether Kant's methodology calls for a formal proof of the doctrine of radical evil<sup>103</sup>. Morgan complains of a "yawning gap at the heart of the argument, at the point where solid argument is most needed... Kant will need to present an *a priori* argument in order to earn the right to assert that all human beings have such a propensity" (2005: 64). It does indeed seem that Kant recognises the need for such an argument right at the very beginning of the first part of *Religion*:

In order, then, to call a human being evil, it must be possible to infer *a priori* from a number of consciously evil actions, or even from a single one, an underlying evil maxim, and, from

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<sup>101</sup> Pablo Muchnik has also made a similar attempt (2009: 43-89), but I will not consider this in detail as I wish to make a general attack upon the project of offering the missing formal proof.

<sup>102</sup> Morgan attempts to give a transcendental argument, "from some accepted phenomenon to the reality of its conditions of possibility" (2005: 86), for radical evil. He starts with noting the difficulty regarding the claim that we necessarily, yet freely, choose the good, writing that "it is difficult to see how something that is imputable to our power of free choice could be universal and necessary, even if merely 'subjectively necessary' and hence not an essential property of the free being" (*Ibid.*: 69). To try to avoid this paradox, Morgan puts forward an *a priori* argument that relies upon the agent being transcendently free revolving around the notion of the evil will as representing outer freedom (freedom in the phenomenal realm) to itself "as the unlimited indulgence of all its whims" (*Ibid.*: 86-87), which gives rise to the incentive of self-love.

Palmquist (2008: 268) has noted two major problems with the argument surrounding whether or not Kant would accept the combination of freedom and necessity in the doctrine of radical evil as a paradox, and whether Morgan indeed offers a proof or merely a clarification of the concept of outer freedom. It does not fall within the scope of this thesis to analyse and evaluate Morgan's argument in any more detail, as I wish to make a more general point about the attempt to provide the missing formal proof for radical evil.

<sup>103</sup> Morgan admits that his reconstructed argument is ultimately a move away from Kant, intending to show that "a synthetic *a priori* argument for a universal human propensity to evil is in fact available, at least within the bounds of the Kantian critical philosophy", though by doing so, abandoning "Kant's [original] self-contradictory position" (2005: 65). At the very least, by following the principle of interpretive charity, we should be wary of accepting Morgan's argument.

this, the presence in the subject of a common ground, itself a maxim, of all particular morally evil maxims (6:20).

As we have already seen, Kant goes on to write that “[w]e can spare ourselves the formal proof that there must be such a corrupt propensity rooted in the human being, in view of the multitude of woeful examples that the experience of human *deeds* parades for us” (6:32-33).

Morgan uses these quotes as his case for Kant’s purported argumentative gap, insofar it would appear that Kant is implying that such a proof is possible, but that he has opted out of offering us one. However, I argue that the situation is not so clear. To begin with, it seems that by the time Kant came to write *Religion*, even if some attempt had been made earlier in the Critical period, he had come to give up the project of offering proofs for such matters concerning the operation of our freedom. Ameriks (1981) has charted the progress of Kant’s thought regarding the offering of a proof of the reality of freedom through the Critical period. Kant is always rather cautious in speaking of such a proof, an attitude which can be seen in the *Lectures on Ethics* and the *Review of Schulz*, as well as in the *Groundwork* (see *Ibid.*: 56-61). Ameriks argues that after the *Groundwork*, Kant realises that the guarantee of freedom necessary for the Critical system will never be provided by a theoretical argument. Instead, though “Kant continues to hold that freedom (in a positive sense in us) is certain,... now he says that this can be asserted only as a consequence of the ‘a priori fact’ that we see the moral law as binding” (*Ibid.*: 66). In other words, the fact of reason replaces any possible Critical project of offering a deductive proof of the reality of freedom:

In effect no strict deduction, let alone a noncircular one, of the moral law... is offered, and no nonmoral proof of freedom is given. (Thus Kant uses the term ‘fact’ here precisely as a contrast to what is a mere consequence of a proof)... [T]he original project of a deduction is in effect given up. Only freedom... is argued for, and this on the basis of the ultimately unargued-for premise of the validity of morality (*Ibid.*).

By the time of *Religion*, then, the fact of reason had come to negate the possibility of a proof of freedom within the confines of the Critical system. It would seem strange, in such circumstances, for Kant to still believe that he could offer some sort of proof of radical evil in *Religion*. Indeed, we can even go further than Ameriks and claim that at no point in the Critical works does Kant seriously attempt a proof of freedom, as does Paton (1947: 225), though to settle the matter would take us into detailed exegesis of the *Groundwork* and other texts, which is beyond the scope of our enquiry.

In addition to noting that Kant had at least abandoned the project of offering such proofs, if not even never intending to offer such proofs in the Critical works, I argue that it simply is not consistent with his *modus operandi* to leave such a gap in the text, if he felt that an argument could be provided. After all, the whole point of the architectonic that he kept so clearly, and at times so tortuously, to in his three *Critiques* is to make sure that there are not any gaps in his Critical system. It seems highly unlikely that Kant would withhold a full formal proof from us where he thinks one possible. Therefore, the balance of the evidence from his *modus operandi* points towards Kant not thinking that such a proof is possible. So, how to explain the previously quoted passages? We hold that the passages do not obviously support Morgan's case. To "infer *a priori* from a number of consciously evil actions, or even from a single one" (6:20) an evil *Gesinnung* does not require the kind of formal proof that Morgan claims is missing, for it could simply be that this is something that we can grasp without the need for such argument.

Such a grasp of the evil *Gesinnung*, whilst not deductively gained through a formal proof, nor from reflection upon the world of our experience (Morgan rightly points out that such an attempted deduction could not establish Kant's thesis regarding radical evil "at most, [it could show] that evil is common and widespread" (2005: 65)), is not obviously an illegitimate claim for Kant to make bearing in mind the framework of religious epistemology that we have built up throughout this thesis. As we have seen in previous chapters, the Critical system allows our insight

to be much wider than is often supposed, and the workings of practical reason could yield some sense of the evil *Gesinnung* apart from any sort of formal proof. Our sense of morality, implanted in us by God, and our experience of ourselves as continually falling short of that ideal is enough to generate some genuine cognition of the radical evil of humankind. We could, of course, add our experience of evil deeds in the world to a cumulative case for the doctrine of radical evil, but Kant is committed to saying that ultimately we can generate the conviction we require without such experience. There is, of course, the question of whether radical evil can form part of what we are claiming falls under the banner of inner revelation from God which can form part of a realist Kantian religious epistemology. However, the very establishment of such a framework as a live interpretive option is enough for now to seriously challenge the need for a formal proof of radical evil in *Religion*.

If we do not take account of the spirit of Kant's comments here, it might indeed seem, as it seems to Morgan, that Kant is making an "entirely reckless generalization to conclude from the undeniable extensive litany of the crimes that human beings have carried out that every single human being has a propensity to evil" (*Ibid.*), or not bothering to offer us an argument that he feels is possible. Kant's approach though, as we have seen, is a philosophically humble one, insofar as he is not seeking to offer us explanations where one cannot be given, nor is he attempting to make a straightforward deduction from the facts of our experience to his doctrine of radical evil. To attempt to offer some sort of formal proof for the doctrine of radical evil, would be to go against what Kant perceived as the correct philosophical approach to religious matters.

Let us further consider some of the textual evidence. Kant quotes, with approval, from Romans, which says of humankind: "There is no distinction here, they are all under sin – there is none righteous (in the spirit of the law), no, not one" (6:39). He follows this, in a footnote, with the explanation of the ground for such a judgement: "The appropriate proof of this sentence of condemnation by reason sitting in moral judgement is contained not in this section, but in the



previous one" (*Ibid.*). The section in question, the one that is supposed to provide the 'proof', is Section 2, where Kant describes the three grades of the propensity to evil and the distinction between a physical and moral propensity. So what is in fact established in that section? Let's start with an apparent conclusion to the section, which states that "[w]e are just as incapable of assigning a further cause for why evil has corrupted the very highest maxim in us, though this is our own deed, as we are for a fundamental property that belongs to our nature" (6:32). In this quote, Kant seems to be linking a proof of radical evil with the possibility (or not) of offering an explanation of the fact of radical evil. Given that whatever kind of proof of radical evil that is available to us is supposed to come in this section of *Religion*, and that the section concludes with a statement that the propensity to evil cannot be explained, it seems that Kant believes that the inability to provide an explanation goes together with the inability to provide a formal proof of radical evil. At this point, given what we have learned of Kant's religious framework, it seems clear that we are invited to the workings of practical reason to provide grounds for the doctrine of radical evil to generate conviction regarding these matters, rather than the kind of formal proof that reason in its theoretical employment might search for.

Of course, this hardly seems to be much of a 'proof', but in defence of Kant and the interpretation here, it has to be asked what more one could ask for in such a murky and obscure realm of human investigation – this may be all the proof we are ever going to get. In addition, such a reading also explains Kant's discussion of the propensity in hypothetical terms, for example "in order... to explain this propensity, *if there is one*" (6:41, my emphasis). Kant is making it clear through such hypothetical formulations that much of his discussion in *Religion* on evil is predicated upon a certain willingness to follow him in a particular direction *without* formal proof. We are being warned not to expect too much in the way of theoretical grounding or speculation regarding matters concerning freedom, the imperfection of human nature, and the possibility of salvation.

In conclusion, then, I think the expectation of some sort of ‘formal proof’ for the doctrine of radical evil in *Religion* simply misconstrues Kant’s approach in the text. He is trying to maintain a difficult balance between guarding against intellectual arrogance regarding the insight that our faculties can achieve (and particularly wishing to warn us about the dangers of relying too much on theoretical reason), and the desire to affirm the power of practical reason in giving us some insight into how things must be. There is a sense in which *Religion* is aimed at those who are already some of the way with Kant on the imperfection of human nature and the possible insights that faith can give us into matters concerning our immorality and the possibility of our salvation. If you are not already signed up to such a methodological approach (which may have to dispense with rigorous theoretical argumentation at points), then you may leave *Religion* feeling somewhat dissatisfied. However, *Religion* is not meant to convince those who do not already accept the religious framework within which Kant is operating, and the call for a formal proof shows a misunderstanding of what he is trying to achieve<sup>104</sup>.

We have now considered Kant’s doctrine of radical evil in light of the enhanced context we have given in previous chapters to *Religion*, and have considered some of the main points of discussion in the current literature. Before we conclude, I would like to consider some of the other main parts of the discussion in *Religion*, and attempt to render them in a way that is conducive to my overall approach to the text.

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<sup>104</sup> All this may seem to lead to a charge of dogmatism aimed at Kant. I think the charge is not entirely unmerited, but also is not damaging. In laying down any framework for approaching philosophical and religious matters, it is inevitable that there will be some dogmatism involved, and it will not be the sort of dogmatism that Kant criticises as prevailing in organised religion and as antithetical to true faith in God. In addition, we can note that Kant, in the Critical philosophy, ultimately subjects all things to the judgement of reason, which must go some way to tempering the potential charge of dogmatism against him.

### 7.3 The Moral Archetype

Another important (and controversial) aspect of *Religion* is Kant's discussion of the moral archetype<sup>105</sup>, linked to the example of Christ, as found in Christian Scripture. This notion forms the core of the discussion of Book 2 of *Religion*. In Book 1, Kant introduces his doctrine of evil and the possibility of a revolution in disposition, and in Book 2, he gives more detail to the possibility of humankind achieving moral improvement. Kant posits an ideal of humanity that is available to all of us, namely, "*Humanity... in its full moral perfection*" (6:60). Such an ideal is immediately connected to Christ through quotation of Scripture, such as when Kant remarks that "the idea of him proceeds from God's being; he is not, therefore, a created thing but God's only-begotten Son, 'the *Word*' (the *Fiat!*) through which all other things are, and without whom nothing that is made would exist" (*Ibid.*). From the presence of such an ideal, we are thereby given a duty to try to "*elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i.e. to the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity, and for this the very idea, which is presented to us by reason for emulation, can give us force*" (6:61).

So, the ideal of humanity has two aspects, namely, a duty-forming aspect, which puts us under an obligation to emulate it, and an intentional aspect, in that it gives us something to aim for. In addition, the ideal of humanity is also to be taken as revelation:

[P]recisely because we are not its authors but the idea has rather established itself in the human being without our comprehending how human nature could have even been receptive of it, it is better to say that that *prototype* has *come down* to us from heaven, that it has taken up humanity (*Ibid.*).

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<sup>105</sup> The Cambridge edition often adopts prototype as translation for *Urbild*, and I take this as interchangeable with archetype.

We can therefore understand this ideal of humanity as the kind of ‘inner revelation’ that we saw enunciated in the lecture notes, namely the revelation of God through our own reason, given our status as creatures created ‘in the image of God’. Kant enunciates precisely what he means by an ideal in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he speaks of an ideal as “an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through [a general] idea alone” (A568/B596). Ideals are generated from ideas of things that we are familiar with, and from them we generate perfected representations of these things that can help regulate our behaviour such that we can aim to progress toward these ideas.

Pasternack points to the moral *Urbild*, here in Book 2 of *Religion*, as being a “representation that helps us grasp moral perfection and so helps guide us in our own efforts” (2014: 136). However, he is clear that there is nothing more to the *Urbild* than an aid to practical guidance: “[Ideals] are just images we utilize in our pursuit of various goals” (*Ibid.*: 135), and do not correspond to anything in reality. Such a position is not necessarily the case if, as I argue we should, we take into account Kant’s presuppositions regarding theological realism, and the possibility of a legitimate religious epistemology within the Kantian system. In chapters 4 and 6, we looked at the establishment of a realist theological approach within the epistemic confines of the Critical philosophy. Given the establishment of such a framework, the ideal of humankind can act *both* as practical guidance *and* as a source of at least some sense of how things are with regard to our moral destiny - we no longer need to choose between the two.

Given the implantation of this ideal in human nature (the kind of revelation we categorised as inner revelation in 4.2), and specifically its connection to our moral development, we can discern further aspects of what must be the case regarding the ideal. Kant sees the ideal as necessarily pointing towards

a human being willing not only to execute in person all human duties, and at the same time to spread goodness about him as far wide as possible through teaching and example, but also,

though tempted by the greatest temptation, to take upon himself all sufferings, up to the most ignominious death, for the good of the world and even for his enemies (6:61).

Again, we see the method being used as we discerned in the previous chapter for justifying a purported religious doctrine, that is, measuring supposed revelation against the moral law implanted within us, a measurement legitimated by the fact that we live in a world overseen by the God of classical theism, who has created us in ‘the image of God’ and for moral improvement, and eventually perfection. It is in this vein, where the divine moral order is the measure of all things, that Kant speaks of the “*practical faith in this Son of God*” (6:62). Such faith is achieved when we recognise and internalise this ideal as given by God, and as generating the concomitant duties and motivation to moral improvement, with the usual Critical provisos against hubris, either on the theoretical side (unjustified speculation) or the practical side (moral laxity). However, Kant’s positing of this ideal as revelation by God is not enough to secure his place within Christian tradition, for the latter holds a historical particularism regarding the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth, which posits a unique event of the Incarnation and Resurrection centred around this figure, in terms of Kantian theology, an ‘outer revelation’ which can be measured for its veracity against the inner revelation of the ideal of humanity.

Kant considers the possibility of such an outer revelation in the following section, entitled “The Objective Reality of this Idea”, where he at first seems to reject the historical particularism of Christianity by stating that there is “no need [from a practical perspective]... of any example from experience to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us; the idea is present as model already in our reason”<sup>106</sup> (*Ibid.*). As the moral law commands unconditionally, it simply does not matter whether or not there is a real, historical example that matches up to the ideal, or at least it *should* not matter to us. If an individual does require such an example, then they “thereby [confess] to [their] own moral *unbelief*, to a lack of faith in virtue

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<sup>106</sup> Though there are other reasons for giving a historical example to follow, as we shall see.

which no [historically-based] faith... can remedy, for only faith in the practical validity of the idea that lies in our reason has moral worth" (6:63). The inner revelation of the moral law, and the ideal of perfected humanity which can arise from the workings of our reason, should be enough to achieve the moral progress that is possible for all humankind. In fact, due to the 'inscrutability thesis' we considered earlier, we could not even have an outer experience of the ideal, due to the fact that the ideal itself concerns an inscrutable disposition.

The historical particularism of Christianity centred on Jesus of Nazareth, then, is not morally necessary. However, it may be necessary in another sense. We are imperfect creatures, for whom the moral law is not enough, even though it should be, and as such, we require for motivation moral examples as something that our senses can latch on to. In a significant footnote, Kant writes:

It is plainly a limitation of human reason, one which is ever inseparable from it, that we cannot think of any significant moral worth in the actions of a person without at the same time portraying this person or his expression in human guise... for we always need a certain analogy with natural being in order to make supersensible characteristics comprehensible to us (6:64-65n.).

Given an assumption of an agenda in *Religion* that is perhaps not anti-Christian but at least wishes to move beyond Christianity, it is natural to suppose that he is denigrating the historical particularism of Christianity, taking it as simply a reflection of our morally tainted nature that we need myths such as those surrounding Jesus of Nazareth in order to aid our moral development, and thus as an aspect of Christianity that must be dropped at some point on the road to a pure, moral religion<sup>107</sup>.

However, as we have seen, such an assumption is unwarranted, and there is in fact good reason to interpret Kant as standing quite comfortably within a Christian framework. As such, we

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<sup>107</sup> Such an interpretation can be found, for example, in DiCenso (2012: 99-107).

can posit God as allowing for the fact that the moral law and the ideal of humanity implanted within us are not enough for human beings in their fallen state, and acting accordingly in bringing about the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ. There is no need, in other words, for us to read Kant here as arguing against the historical particularism of Christianity given the fact that the moral law should be enough. It is only on the assumption that Kant has a particular anti-Christian agenda, and nothing inherent to the text, that we are led to the conclusion that he is arguing against the historical particularism of Christianity.

Indeed, as Palmquist has shown, the crucial section we are considering (on the historical example of the ideal of humanity) can reasonably be construed as a defence of the traditional Christian understanding of the Incarnation (2000: 207-216) - for example, even though Kant remarks that the historical example of "a supernaturally begotten human being" is "from a practical point of view... of no benefit to us" (6:63), he is not rejecting the Incarnation, but rather "emphasizing that we must not lose sight of Jesus' *humanity*" (Palmquist 2000: 212), in case the example begins to seem too remote for us to possibly emulate. Indeed, further on in the same section, Kant allows that the example of Christ (as both human and divine) be acceptable for moral faith: "a divinely disposed teacher" could "speak truly of himself as if the ideal of goodness were displayed incarnate in him" (6:65-66), as long as we carefully balance his divinity and his humanity.

Further, whilst we may not be able to decisively have experience of the moral disposition of Christ such that we can *know* that he is the incarnated Son of God, nevertheless we have room for faith in him as divine. Indeed, given that his example is not only compatible with moral faith, but indeed can encourage it, the historical particularism of Christianity can sit happily within moral religion, and we can also use the test of practical reason to offer justification for believing that God, given his moral status and desire to bring about the moral development of humankind, *would* offer us the example of Christ. Therefore, a recognisably orthodox Christology can be

maintained within the Critical system, and Kant's worries, expressed in *Religion*, regarding the misconstrual of the moral archetype and the example of Christ is just another facet of his project to combat moral laxity and religious superstition, rather than a desire to combat the historical particularism of Christianity.

Before we move on from the notion of the moral archetype in *Religion*, it should also be noted that the power of a moral example, through biographies and other stories, was taken into account by the Pietism that Kant was raised in, to the extent that Pietist literature was dominated by conversion accounts and other examples of living a godly life. Such literature not only sought to proclaim the engendering of true faith, but also the positive impact that faith has upon their lives (see Matthias 2014: 22). Whilst the story of conversion and new faith was generally the main focus of the text, the way in which this new faith manifested itself in the individual's life is important to give an objective grounding to the belief that grace has indeed been visited upon the individual in question.

Such a strategy was important in the face of the scepticism and doubts raised by the Enlightenment. Whilst conversion from other faiths and other denominations within Christianity was still important, the focus was very much upon the shift from a 'nominal Christian' to a true believer that has received God's grace and has begun to live a better life (such a shift tended to be labelled *Bekehrung* rather than the standard *Konversion* (see Strom 2014: 294)). A 'conversion moment' like a *Bekehrung* was a notion that many orthodox Lutherans felt uncomfortable with, as it could potentially be linked to some sort of effort on the part of the individual that would somehow bring about grace. However, as Lutheranism developed, some began to posit a conversion moment as a beginning of 'true faith', such as Theophil Grossgebauer who (in his 1661 work, *Wächterstimme aus dem verwüsteten Zion*) introduced metaphors such as rebirth and regeneration connected with a definite moment of conversion (see *Ibid.*: 296-298).



The widespread acceptance of *Bekehrung* in the Pietist tradition, and the concomitant importance of conversion narratives and moral examples for those connected with the tradition, are particularly associated with the biography of Francke, who famously had his doubts swept away in a sudden moment of realisation of the divine. In addition to accounts of experience of conversion, religious biographies would often add to the moral lesson of the story by recounting the individual's acceptance of death, taken as *post facto* confirmation of conversion and the occurrence of true faith (see *Ibid.*: 305, 308, 314). Such narratives of true believers facing death are reminiscent of Passion narratives related to the life of Jesus Christ, whose acceptance of God's will regarding his coming death is taken as confirmation of his status as the 'Son of God'.

The potential significance of moral examples in bringing together a community of 'true believers' is something that Kant, brought up in the Pietist tradition, will have had great experience of. However, the emphasis on conversion narratives within Pietism was something that a significant number of Pietists felt uncomfortable with, for example, it went so far as to convince some Halle theologians that it was necessary for candidates for ministry to be able to identify a single 'conversion moment' in their lives, a template which would simply not apply to all worthy candidates, and Franke himself also expressed worries regarding self-deception and attempts at 'forcing' the process (see *Ibid.*: 303-304, 310). It is entirely plausible that Kant also saw a tendency amongst Pietist accounts of conversion and the stoic acceptance of death towards the kind of superstition and delusion he naturally rebelled against, and thus shifted his focus purely onto the moral example of Christ, grounded in Scripture, rather than on the many disparate religious accounts of pious lives circulating Europe at the time. Nevertheless, the possible impact of a moral example upon individuals and wider communities will have stayed with him, and will have influenced his account of the moral archetype here in *Religion*.

## 7.4 Scripture

*Religion* contains an interesting account of the role Scripture can play in the moral development of humankind as a whole, as they progress to an eschatological end-point. Pure religious faith should be enough for all humanity to achieve an improved moral standing (it can be communicated to all other people, and is in principle equally available to all of us as a resource to draw from), but unfortunately it is not enough. We seem to find it difficult to believe (or we do not want to believe) that virtue is sufficient to become well-pleasing to God, and Kant notes that we have an inclination to believe instead in the need for some other form of divine service, which leads to a formulation of statutory laws in the religious community. Such a tendency lies not only in our own moral laxity, but also in our desire to anthropomorphise God - we are used to worldly powers that desire various kinds of non-moral service, and so we expect God to be the same (see 6:103). We should not take from this, though, that God is not able to be influenced by humans *at all*<sup>108</sup>, it is simply that we cannot influence the divine other than through our moral behaviour. God, as moral ruler of the world, is only interested in whether we manifest virtue in our behaviour or not; everything else is beside the point, or at least pales into insignificance in relation to morality. As such, we do not need to understand Kant's God as impassible, or as completely unaffected by the world in a way such that he starts to approach a deistic system.

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<sup>108</sup> The view that Kant suggests that human beings have no influence upon God is, for example, put forward by Miller (2015: 92-93). This is a potentially misleading way of putting things, as clearly for there to be any sort of sense in which God interacts personally with creation, he has to come under some sort of influence, including that of actions and thoughts of human beings. Kant's key concern is delimiting *how* we can influence God (through morality alone), rather than questioning our ability to influence God *at all*. This topic is linked to a current debate in the literature surrounding grace, and whether or not Kant believes that one can earn salvation. The two competing models in this regard are the Pelagian model, in which we earn grace through our own efforts (a view attributed to Kant by Michalson (1990: 97 and *passim*)), or through an Augustinian model in which human efforts will never be enough to earn God's grace, and thus it is ultimately unmerited (a view attributed to Kant by Mariña (1997)). I support the latter interpretation of Kant on grace, which marks his position out as more authentically Christian, but the topic of grace is not something that I shall expand further upon here.

However, Kant's approach to such statutory laws, linked to divine service and historical faith, is not entirely negative, for they may have an important role to play in the social project of moral development. In the developing church, there will be members who are of "many dispositions", and thus some "*public form of obligation*" (6:105), not provided by reason but only by statutory legislation, will be required to help maintain the unity of the church, thereby acting as a useful supplement to the main project of the fostering of pure, rational religion. Historically, also, statutory legislation will come first, due to our propensity as human beings to focus on non-moral ways in which we may please the divine, rather than simply leading a good life. As such, "in the moulding of human beings into an ethical community, ecclesiastical faith naturally precedes pure religious faith", though "morally speaking it ought to happen the other way around" (6:106).

It is at this point that Kant argues for the value of Scripture as offering the kind of stable basis required for a religious community growing in its moral standing. For example, he remarks that religions that generally base themselves on Scripture have the constancy that is missing from those that rely primarily on public observances (see 6:107). So, whilst Scripture can overemphasise statutory laws, and thereby help contribute to an amoral "religion of divine service" (6:106), it is nevertheless part of the necessary basis for a stable religious community to morally develop and attract new members, on the way to an idealised universal church.

Kant expands upon his view of the New Testament in particular in a letter from 1775 (which we have had occasion to discuss previously). In the context of discussing what matters from the perspective of our salvation, namely, "hidden inner [moral] convictions" (10:175), he spells out the role that the Gospels have to play in cultivating moral faith. To begin with, he argues that we must "distinguish the *teachings* of Christ from the *report* we have of those teachings. In order that the former may be seen in their purity, [we must] seek above all to separate out the moral teachings from all the dogmas of the New Testament" (10:176). It is the *moral message* of the Gospels, encapsulated in the teachings of Christ, that is vital for our

salvation – all other content to be found in Scripture is, at least in principle, dispensable. In “the moral spirit of the Gospels”, Kant finds “a clear distinction between what I am obligated to do and the manner in which this message is to be introduced into the world and disseminated” (10:179). The historically contingent aspects of the text pale in significance in comparison to the universal message of morality.

For Kant, the notion of dogmas includes “everything of which one could become convinced only through historical reports... [as well as] those confessions or ceremonies that are enjoined as a supposed condition of salvation” (10:177-78). True (moral) faith is not to be found in that which must be historically transmitted, including testimony and ceremonial forms passed down through generations – rather, it is universally available to all rational beings, regardless of historical circumstance. In separating out the core message of the Gospels, we are simply reflecting what matters for us, our moral destiny, and the universal aspect of saving faith. Certainly, the New Testament does include a large amount of what would count as dogma for Kant, including miracle reports and theoretical speculation, but this is explained as a mere contingent addition due to historical circumstance, particularly the need to face the political force of Judaism (10:177). Such content from the Gospels is called “Kat’ anthropon” (or ad hominem), signalling that it is not universally valid, but only has an impact within specific historical circumstances<sup>109</sup>. It is right for humankind to build a religion that does not rely on dogma, and instead keeps at its core the universal moral message found in the Gospels.

All of this, of course, has a great impact upon how we should read and interpret the New Testament. For one thing, the text should be approached with a certain amount of hermeneutical suspicion insofar as “our New Testament writings can never be so esteemed as to make us dare to

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<sup>109</sup> Anything ‘taken-to-be-true’ in these cases would certainly come under the rubric of persuasion, rather than conviction, for Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he distinguishes between “kat’ anthropon” (according to the person) and “kat’ aletheian” (according to the truth) (A739/B767), in the context of a discussion of the polemical use of reason in defending beliefs from a theoretical perspective. Such a defence may be possible kat’anthropon, with subjective validity for a particular individual, at the same time as that individual not being in an epistemic position to have a positive proof for the belief kat’ aletheian.

have unlimited trust in every word of them” (10:178). Whilst we must “respect the reports of the evangelists and apostles, and [put our] humble trust in that means of reconciliation with God of which they have given us historical tidings”, we should remember that “what those men give us are only their reports” (10:177), and thus must not presumptuously be followed into realms of speculation regarding God’s actions beyond what the moral law can tell us. Later on, Kant generalises the point, stating that “no book, whatever its authority might be – yes, even one based on the testimony of my own senses – can substitute for the religion of conscience” (10:179). The moral law can, and should be, sufficient for the believer to ground their faith, and thus any text will have an auxiliary role to play in an individual’s moral destiny, regardless of the traditional authority that text may have.

Scripture has something of an ambiguous standing, then, in both the letter from 1775 and *Religion*. In the latter, Kant turns to the important topic of interpretation with regard to Scripture in the church, and how this links to the growth of moral faith in that community. He sees interpretation as the tool with which we can help bring historical faith and pure moral religion together. *Religion* as a whole, in fact, is concerned with the relation between historical faith and moral religion, as noted by the ongoing discussion in the literature relating to the ‘two experiments’ indicated in the Second Preface to *Religion* and how these experiments are connected to the discussion of religion in the main text. The discussion falls in the context of Kant’s attempt to explain what the title of the work is supposed to mean. The beginning of this explanation sees Kant speaking of two concentric circles. The wider circle contains all that pertains to faith, including both revealed and natural religion, what is taught by tradition and scripture, and so forth, whilst the inner circle contains what he calls “the pure *religion of reason*”

(6:12), that is, all the aspects of faith that can be derived from reason alone (though that does not rule out the possibility of such aspects being reinforced by historical revelation).<sup>110</sup>

The significance of this delineation between the wider and narrower circles for Kant's enterprise is that he takes the legitimate bounds of the philosopher's project to be confined to the latter, that is, the pure religion of reason, which involves abstracting from all experience. Following this, he writes: "From this standpoint I can also make this second experiment" (*Ibid.*), which implies that what has gone beforehand comprises the first experiment. The first experiment, then, should be understood as the aforementioned delineation of pure practical religion within the wider domain of religion; the narrower circle can then be taken as the standpoint from which the second experiment can take place. What is this second experiment? Kant writes that it is

to start from some alleged revelation or other and, abstracting from the pure religion of reason (so far as it constituted a system on its own), to hold fragments of this revelation, as a *historical system*, up to moral concepts, and see whether it does not lead back to the same pure *rational system* of religion [from which I have abstracted] (*Ibid.*).

The second experiment is putting the mantra of religion being based on morality into action, insofar as we take some historical revelation that falls outside of the inner circle and evaluate it with regard to pure morality, with a view to seeing whether it can be accommodated within the pure religion of reason. If the revelation in question does not measure up to the standard of

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<sup>110</sup> The delineation between the rational core of one universal religion and various historical manifestations of it is echoed in a footnote from *Perpetual Peace*:

*Different religions*: an odd expression! Just as if one could also speak of different *morals*. There can indeed be historically different *creeds*, [to be found] not in religion but in the history of means used to promote it, which is the province of scholarship, and just as many different *religious books* (the *Zendavesta*, the *Vedas*, the *Koran*, and so forth), but there can be only one single *religion* holding for all human beings and in all times. Those can therefore contain nothing more than the vehicle of religion, what is contingent and can differ according to differences of time and place (8:367n.).

Note, also, the connection made in this passage between there being one universal religion and one universal morality for all humanity.

morality, then it can only at best be seen as contingent for our historical religion and for our salvation.

Once these experiments are finished, what will the result be? Kant characterises the outcome of the two experiments as ultimately ending in unification (in essence, we have come full circle, as the first experiment involved delineation), because once a specific revelation (perhaps from scripture) has passed the test of being compared to the moral religion of reason, then

we shall be able to say that between reason and Scripture there is, not only compatibility but also unity, so that whoever follows the one (under the guidance of moral concepts) will not fail to come across the other as well (6:13).

Underlying the two experiments within the context of Kant's philosophy, then, is a wide-scale reforming project of historical religion more generally, and Christianity specifically. We evaluate philosophically various claims to historical religion to check compatibility with reason and morality, and those that pass the test can be accepted as part of a unified new religion which has as its ultimate foundation reason and morality.

Such a reading of the 'two experiments' passage also accords with a passage towards the end of the First Preface, where Kant is discussing the purview of the biblical and philosophical theologians respectively. The biblical theologian, Kant argues, has a dual role, not only to "care simply for the welfare of souls", but also "to care for the welfare of the sciences", which involves "cultivation and protection against encroachments" (6:8). Thus, with regard to philosophical theology, the biblical theologian has a very sensitive role to both defend the prerogative of biblical theology in certain areas, but also to protect philosophical theology from encroachment from their own discipline as part of their higher role of maintaining the boundaries of various disciplines. Acting as a philosophical theologian, and as part of an explicit plea to the biblical

theologian, he writes that “the sciences profit simply from being set apart, insofar as each science first constitutes a whole by itself; only after that shall the experiment be made of considering them by association” (6:10). Here, in condensed form, we see a characterisation of the two experiments that would later be filled out in the Second Preface - first, a dissociation of what lies within reason and the purview of philosophical theology, followed by a partially unifying process in which they are measured up against each other.

In this, I agree to an extent with the view of Pasternack, who characterises the first experiment as “the construction of the Pure Rational System of Religion from an *a priori* procedure rooted in moral concepts” (in essence separating out what can fall under the umbrella of philosophical theology and what cannot), whilst the second experiment aims “to compare the scope of the ‘historical system’ to the ‘pure rational system of religion’” (2014:79) (and thereby to discover what can be seen as ultimately rooted in morality). However, I depart from Pasternack where he characterises the two experiments as ultimately resulting in a large-scale *replacement* of Christianity with a new ‘pure religion of reason’. Here, he underestimates the importance of the second, unifying step of the process; after all, if all he wishes to do is to undertake such a replacement, then only the first experiment, which separates the possible elements of a new pure religion of reason out from the rest of what pertains to religion generally, is necessary.

That Kant does not wish to do so is indicated straight after the last passage quoted from the First Preface. He states, “[n]ow whether the theologian agrees with the philosopher or believes himself obliged to oppose him; *let him just hear him out*” (my emphasis – 6:10). Kant is arguing that he, through the undertaking of the ‘two experiments’ process, which on the surface may appear potentially destructive to Christianity and the organised Church, is actually on the same side as the biblical theologians, and is acting in defence of religion. The unification act of the second experiment is ultimately undertaken to purify the Christian religion, and not replace it with a new type of pure rational religion, and the biblical theologian in time will be able to realise



this. Of course, in reply to this interpretation, it may be argued that Kant is simply writing with political aims in mind, particularly in helping to mollify the Prussian censors and theology faculties who may view his work with suspicion. The evidence presented in this thesis as to the underlying Christian foundation for *Religion* can undermine this reply.

So, *Religion* as a whole is intended to explore the relation between moral religion and historical faith (particularly that of Christianity). Scripture, then, in helping to bridge moral religion and historical faith, is central to Kant's project here. Kant argues that, as part of this project, interpretation of Scripture should focus on promoting morality, even if it may appear forced. We should not be worried about such an endeavour, for many faiths already attempt to do so (see 6:110). Such an interpretation will not ultimately be too forced anyway, due to the moral religion that will have been "hidden in human reason" (6:111) when such Scripture was produced.

Kant then distinguishes between the certification and the exposition of Scripture. Certification of Scripture can occur through investigating the origins of the text, whilst exposition is attained through understanding the historical context and the original language of the text (see 6:113), and thus discerning its meaning for the original community in which it was produced. Such scholarship has secondary value, for Kant, in relation to the moral interpretation of Scripture. What does not have value, though, for Kant, is interpretation based on inner feeling, which can have no connection either with the moral law or with direct divine influence "for the same effect can have more than one cause" (6:114), and does have the requisite universality for scholarship in the ethical community. Kant expresses his conclusion of the discussion of Scripture thus:

There is, therefore, no norm of ecclesiastical faith except Scripture, and no other expositor of it except the *religion of reason* and *scholarship* (which deals with the historical element of Scripture). And, of these two, the first alone is *authentic* and valid for the whole world (*Ibid.*).

We can see an analogy between Kant's treatment of Scripture here, and his account (which we considered in the previous section) of the 'moral archetype' and the historical example of Christ. Whilst Scripture should not be necessary for the moral development of humankind, it nevertheless is important for bringing religious communities together, such that they can operate harmoniously, in accordance with the moral law, and achieve genuine moral development. We are imperfect beings, who are easily led astray from the obligations that the moral law imposes upon us, and so an external source of revelation (in the form of Scripture) is required as a core component of religion that individual believers can coalesce around. However, in the same way that an overemphasis on the divinity of the moral example could lead to moral laxity and superstition, Scripture also needs to be handled sensitively, with a focus on the moral core of religion being revealed to true believers, rather than the attempt to set up morally lax approaches to divine service. Ultimately, though, there is a validation of Scripture as revelation, just as with the moral archetype. Given Kant's apologetic approach, grounded in orthodox Christianity, focusing on the 'moral core' of Scripture does not necessarily imply a distancing from theological realism – indeed, the universalism of Scripture, if it accords with the moral law within all of us, can act as a sign of divine intervention, and thus can be taken to point towards the God of classical theism.

The treatment of Scripture in the Pietist tradition is of potential interest here. For Pietists, the treatment of Scripture was bound up with the important notion of conversion (a topic we have already touched upon). One of the most influential Pietist texts with regards to conversion was Johannes Musäus' *Thesis Theologicae*, published in 1670. Musäus particularly influenced Francke, who also placed conversion at the centre of the Pietist tradition (see Matthias 2014: 28-32), with a focus upon immanent conversion, that is the individual immanent experience of an individual who has undergone the kind of irreversible conversion that, as we have seen, Kant builds into his soteriology in *Religion*. In describing the psychological impact of conversion upon the individual, Musäus posited the acquisition of knowledge of Christ and God's grace, which the

individual immediately trusts in and impacts upon their will. As this new knowledge of the divine is not self-evident, the relevant material must be revealed in Scripture.

However, it is also not self-evident, prior to conversion, that the content to be found in Scripture is in itself divinely inspired. It is only when conversion has had the requisite impact upon the will that I have already alluded to that the intellect is moved to accept the validity of the divinely inspired contents of Scripture. Such an impact, allowing us to read and trust in the divinely-inspired content of Scripture in the right way, is the same kind of impact that also shaped our will into living a more pious life. Indeed, the growth of good behaviour in turn demonstrates that the right reading of Scripture has been attained by the individual, and that they are able to access the divine truths under the surface of the text. The belief that right interpretation of Scripture is available to anyone with true faith was reflected in the general conventicle practice of allowing all members of the meetings (not just those theologically trained) to reflect publicly upon passages from Scripture, with the possible practical implications for the pious life, and other interpretations offered, either by the clergy as part of public preaching or by other members of the conventicle (see Mori 2014: 209-211, 215). As part of this, Pietists generally encouraged widespread publication and study of the Bible, even going so far as to offer differing translations and in-depth commentary on historical and theological matters for the lay reader to ponder over (see Gierl 2014: 371).

Outside the Pietist tradition, offering such access to Scripture to the lay reader was unheard of, and marked a fundamental trust in the lay reader of true faith to interpret the Bible correctly. As such, the standard Pietist view of the reading of Scripture is echoed in *Religion*, insofar as it takes true faith to reveal what is important in Scripture, and it goes together with the impact of conversion upon the will such that one can begin to progress morally and start helping to build God's Kingdom on earth. Kant is perhaps slightly different in stressing that what is important in Scripture is the moral aspect of the subtext, and how the divine inspiration inherent

in the text can aid us in the pursuit that truly matters to God, i.e. our project of progress towards moral perfection, rather than basing the interpretation of texts as moral feeling. Nevertheless, again we can see a strong Pietist influence upon *Religion* here.

Before we move on to consider the notion of the ethical community, a further aspect of Kant's discussion of the distinction between moral religion and historical faith in *Religion* we can consider concerns reports of miracles, which is the focus of the 'Critical remark' at the end of Part Two. Kant has a very precise position that he wants to take towards accounts of miracles here, and even a cursory glance at the text reveals that he does not wish to discount accounts of miracles entirely (as some secular interpreters of *Religion* would have it). Kant certainly does look forward to a time when reports of miracles become dispensable as regards the engendering of a true moral religion and the establishment of the ethical community in humanity, for "we betray a culpable degree of moral unbelief if we do not grant sufficient authority to duty's precepts, as originally inscribed in the heart by reason, unless they are in addition authenticated by miracles" (6:84).

Even given that this is the case, though, Kant does not wish to philosophically challenge the occurrence of miracles, or indeed the veracity of reports of miracles (in the line of Hume). What concerns Kant is the purity of moral faith, and the possible impurity that can be introduced through an overemphasis on contingent events. They may be used as part of a developing historical religion, but only as long as "we do not make it a tenet of religion that knowing, believing, and professing them are themselves something by which we can make ourselves well-pleasing to God" (6:85). If we were to elevate miracle reports in such a way, we may easily fall into attempting to avoid the difficult moral task that faces us by believing our religious interest proper should focus on believing in certain contingent historical events.

In addition, we should remain officially agnostic towards miracle events, due to the epistemic limits laid down through Kant's explication of reason in its theoretical employment.

However, it is noteworthy that Kant does here leave open some space for evaluation of miracle reports. He first divides putative miracle events into two types, theistic and demonic, the former of which are purportedly undertaken by God himself, the latter by good or evil spirits. Demonic miracles, Kant argues, are “the ones most irreconcilable with the employment of our reason” (6:87) for epistemological reasons that I have already alluded to.

However, the situation is not entirely the same with regards to theistic miracles, for Kant allows us a criterion though which we have the ability to ultimately disconfirm such reports (therefore, it is clear that Kant is not strictly agnostic about miracles from God). The criterion, Kant argues, is to do with whether the divine command inferred as lying behind the occurrence of a purported miracle event is in line with or contrary to the moral law that we find with ourselves. If we come to evaluate a particular supposed theistic miracle, and the confirmation of which would seem to suppose God as violating the moral law, then the account associated with that miracle can be definitively ruled out.

The passage on miracles here suggests a difficult question for a secular reading of *Religion*, namely, why is Kant not strictly agnostic about miracle reports, and why does he give some basis on which to evaluate miracle events purportedly from God? If Kant has, in *Religion*, no time for miracle events, it would be easy for him to invoke the epistemic limits of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and dismiss them out of hand. Of course, it could be said in response that the criterion for theistic miracles is inextricably linked to whether or not they support moral development, but Kant does not present the distinction in these terms. Instead of saying something along the lines of ‘we should not believe in a miracle that appears to be in conflict with God’s operation within the moral law’, he writes that, “if something is represented as commanded by God in a direct manifestation of him yet is directly in conflict with morality, it *cannot be a divine miracle* despite every appearance of being one” (6:87). Kant is quite clearly talking about the possibility of a miracle event occurring, and not about whether an event is in

line with the moral law or not, and thus whether or not we should believe in it. This point, then, poses a difficulty to those who wish to entirely secularise Kant's approach in *Religion*. We have here a clear instance of the moral law within us, and the connected idea of God lying within reason, offering a guide to what things can actually happen around us, as opposed to merely being concerned with our moral development.

## 7.5 The Ethical Community

In Books Three and Four of *Religion*, Kant moves from the individual struggle against evil, to the social. At the heart of Kant's account of the possible moral development of humankind on the social level is the ethical community, his idealised end-point (from a moral point of view) of what human society should aim at and could potentially realise. In the discussion on radical evil, I argued against the anthropological interpretation of that doctrine, which in many ways implies that Books 3 and 4 of *Religion*, and specifically the discussion of mutual corruptibility and the establishment of the ethical community, are what the text is 'really about'. Books 3 and 4 certainly focus on social issues, but are still very much embedded in the religious framework that, I have argued, underlies Kant's Critical system. It is here where Kant reveals his hopes for the future with regards to the ongoing development of the Christian church, and the fostering of true piety and virtue throughout humankind. As such, Kant is still very much in his usual role of defending religious faith against the threats of dogmatism, enthusiasm, and superstition (with the usual corollary of furthering the moral development of humanity, both on the individual and the social level).

The need for the ethical community is grounded in the propensity human beings have to corrupt each other as they begin to associate and construct societies together. The human being naturally wants to associate with others of their own species, yet at the same time such a situation brings about social vices, such as "[e]nvy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these" (6:93-4). Kant is clear that these social ills will always assail each individual as long as they form part of a community that falls short of the ideal ethical community, no matter how "much the individual human being might do to escape from the dominion of this evil, he would still be held in incessant danger of relapsing into it" (6:94).

Such a negative view of the effects of society is confirmed when compared to the kind of community that morally legislative reason obligates us to construct, namely, an ethical community, “[a]n association of human beings merely under the laws of virtue” (*Ibid.*). Opposed to the notion of an ethical community is an ‘ethical state of nature’ in which “each individual prescribes the law to himself, and there is no external law to which he, along with the others, acknowledges himself to be subject” (6:95). Such is the state in which we find ourselves at this moment in time, even though we have joined together in a political community:

In an already existing political community all the political citizens are, as such, still in the *ethical state of nature*, and have the right to remain in it; for it would be a contradiction for the political community to compel its citizens to enter into an ethical community, since the latter entails freedom from coercion in its very concept (*Ibid.*).

A political community is compatible with an ethical state of nature, as it cannot compel us to act from the right motives, even if it could possibly compel us to act in conformity with morality. Kant also marks a distinction here between the concept of the ethical community as referring “to the ideal of a totality of human beings” (6:96) and that of the political community, which is a state of people “[standing] jointly under *public juridical laws*” (6:95). It is the move from an ethical state of nature to an ethical community with which Kant is concerned in regard to the salvation of humankind, announcing in a section title that “[t]he human being ought to leave the ethical state of nature in order to become a member of an ethical community” (6:96). The political community, on the other hand, can act as a potential springboard for helping to organise an ethical community, but due to the fact that “[t]he citizen of the political community... may wish to enter with his fellow citizens into an ethical union over and above the political one, or rather remain in a natural [ethical state of nature]” (*Ibid.*), the concept of political community itself does not hold as much importance as the ethical state of nature in this context.



With the notion of the ethical community, a necessary role for God quickly becomes apparent. From the standpoint of reason, the duty to establish an ethical community is not simply one incumbent upon each individual to do what they can to bring about such an end - rather, the duty is one of the “human race toward itself” (6:97). The ethical community will not be established through the action of one individual alone, but only through a unity of action, eventually encompassing all rational moral agents. The organisation of such a number of individual people cannot, Kant argues, be achieved through human effort alone, and thus “[w]e can already anticipate that this duty will need the presupposition of another idea, namely, of a higher moral being through whose universal organisation the forces of single individuals, insufficient on their own, are united for a common effect” (6:98). Such a construal of the duty of humankind to bring itself together into an ethical community, then, gives a religious tinge very quickly to the idea of the ethical community, which is further reinforced by rational reflection upon the laws of such a community.

In an ideal political community, the members of that community as a unity are understood as being the lawgiver – this seems to rest for Kant on the fact that the people themselves can judge people in accordance with these laws by observing their external actions (which is the only legitimate jurisdiction of such laws). In an ethical community, on the other hand, the laws are taken to promote morality (at the levels of maxims and dispositions), and therefore are concerned with that which is beyond the ken of the people. As such, something or someone other than the people must be understood as giving the laws that pertain to an ethical community, a being that can “penetrate to the most intimate parts of the dispositions of each and everyone, and as must be in every community, give to each according to the worth of his actions. But this is the concept of God as a moral ruler of the world” (6:99). The laws of the ethical community can only be understood, then, as commanded and administered by God himself – as such, not only organisational necessities, but also the notion of laws within the ethical community point towards God, and the ethical community thereby appear as a people of God.

The deep link between religious faith and the ideal of the ethical community is cemented through Kant's further argument that the ethical community is to take the form of a church. An ethical community is ultimately a work executed by God, but at the same time we "are not permitted on this account to remain idle in the undertaking and let Providence have free rein... Each must, on the contrary, so conduct himself as if everything depended on him" (6:100-101)<sup>111</sup>. He distinguishes at this point between a "church invisible", which Kant glosses as "the mere idea of the union of all upright human beings under direct yet moral divine world-governance, as serves for the archetype of any such governance to be founded by human beings", and a "church visible", "the actual union of human beings into a whole that accords with this ideal" (6:101). The former should perhaps be understood as the normative standard by which we can judge our progress in establishing the ethical community, whilst the latter is the ethical community itself, the eschatological end-point in which the Kingdom of God is attained in this world.

The church itself will manifest four qualities, namely, universality (in encompassing all human beings, and maintaining a unity between them), quality or purity (in terms of the (moral) incentives underlying the principles of the community, and the behaviour of its members), a relation of freedom between all members, as well as its potential relation to a political power, and a certain necessity (with regard to an unchangeable constitution). As part of the moral purity of the ethical community, we will see the end of a religion of divine service, in which believers seek to please God through non-moral means – rather all believers will live in the realisation that the only way in which they can serve God is through moral actions (see 6:103-107).

Again, we can see the Pietist influence here on Kant's thought in *Religion*. Pietism, as we have already seen, though primarily concerned with the propagation of 'true faith', was nevertheless an actively social movement, culminating in the grand institutions of Halle Pietism

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<sup>111</sup> This conception of providence is also clear in *Perpetual Peace*, where Kant argues that despite some sort of guarantee of perpetual peace, we nevertheless must not become complacent and instead do what we can to bring it about (see 8:360-368).

under the supervision of Francke. Throughout its history, it looked both backward to the idealised Christianity of the early Church, and yet at the same time forward to an idealised future society in this world, a 'New Jerusalem' (see Bernet 2014: 140-141). Such utopianism was already present in more orthodox Lutheranism, but the social implications of 'true faith' were brought under greater focus in the Pietist tradition.

As Gierl also points out, such utopianism was the key link between Pietism and the Enlightenment (whereas the two might seem irreconcilable on the surface):

Pietism has come to be seen as part of the Enlightenment, both socially and culturally and in its communication and interaction networks... For the Enlightenment, as for its constituent movement Pietism, modernity entered a self-reflective phase. Institutionalisation, socialization, and the development of the self were methodically pursued. They had become policy. The permanent, continual perfection of the best of all possible worlds through the combination of theory and practice was Leibniz's motto... With the new Adam, we are creating the kingdom of God on earth, said the Pietists. Enlightenment is "the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority", said Kant (2014: 353-354).

The social ideals of the Enlightenment, coupled with a sense of the importance of religious faith, with the mixture of theory and practice that we found in Leibniz, were already familiar to Kant through his Pietist upbringing. The impact of Pietist ideas upon wider society were taken as a sign of truth, that God's will really was being done on earth. Thus, the attempted shift from the beginnings of the church invisible to the grand project of the church visible marks a key social strand of Pietist thought, and we can see it operating in *Religion* also.

In addition, it should be noted that Pietism also operated with a version of the notion of the 'church invisible'. The establishment of conventicles, eventually morphing into largely social institutions, were developments that followed after the constitution of a 'virtual community', an

abstract notion encompassing all those who manifest a life of true piety. The ‘true invisible church’ was used to emphasise the distinctness of Pietists as a group from the impious official churches of the time, even if those individuals were not gathered into any concrete community (see *Ibid.*: 364). One of the more concrete ways in which this ‘church invisible’ kept itself connected was through a vast network of letter-writing and publishing of pamphlets and other works (another link between Pietism and the spread of the Enlightenment); Gierl notes that “[t]his Republic of Letters represented an imagined community, a society to which one felt a sense of belonging, even though one could scarcely grasp it, let alone know its individual members (*Ibid.*: 368; see also 373). The abstract sense of a community, the ‘church invisible’ amongst Pietists, even though they may be separated geographically or by political pressures against their religious practices, helped to keep the tradition together and sustain the growth of the movement, despite all the difficulties faced. Nevertheless, they looked forward to the transition from the ‘church invisible’ to the ‘church visible’ with the establishment of conventicles, culminating in the social projects of Halle Pietism, and even later, Radical Pietism. It has been suggested by Palmquist<sup>112</sup> that, in his adult years, Kant spent his Sundays (when he should have been in church) sustaining his own ‘church invisible’ by engaging in correspondence with a large number of like-minded people, thus carrying on in the proud tradition of both Pietism and the Enlightenment.

In the new ethical community, then, we find an entirely renewed Church, focused on our moral duty through true religious faith, with the ultimate goal of encompassing all humankind in an eschatological ‘Kingdom of God’. In ‘Division Two’ of Book Three of *Religion*, Kant reveals that he sees this as the future of the Christian church in particular, or at least the ethical community is to have a genealogical overlap with that of the Christian church that we know today. As such, he shares in the Pietist tradition of a unified and purified Christianity, encompassing all humankind. He states that the history of moral religion amongst humankind only begins once there is a given

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<sup>112</sup> In conversation.

historical religion in which “the distinction between a rational and a historical faith is already being openly stated, and its resolution made a matter of the greatest moral concern” (6:124-125).

The religion in question is Christianity, “which from the beginning bore within it the germ and the principles of the objective unity of the true and *universal* religious faith to which it is gradually being brought nearer” (6:125). In the origin of Christianity, we have a religion which was “grounded on an entirely new principle” and “effected a total revolution in doctrines of faith” (6:127). As might be expected from our previous discussion, Kant sees the revolutionary aspect of Christianity in the teaching and example of Christ (see 6:128-129), which forms the moral core from which true religious faith, and a rational religion grounded in morality, can grow. Whilst things quickly went wrong in the Christian church, such as when “the terrible voice of *orthodoxy* rose from the mouth of self-appointed canonical expositors of scripture... [and] split the Christian world into bitter parties over opinions in matters of faith” (6:130), nevertheless Kant still believes that the moral core of Christianity can be retrieved and can flourish again, to the benefit of all humankind. *Religion* can, therefore, be seen as a defence or even vindication of Christianity, a religion that can take us from the depths of radical evil and social strife, to the glorious telos of the ethical community, in which all people are united peacefully under the moral law. Kant sums up his hopes for the future, and the potential power of Christianity in uniting all of humankind:

Should one now ask, Which period of the entire church history in our ken up to now is the best? I reply without hesitation, *The present*. I say this because one need only allow the seed of the true religious faith now being sown in Christianity... to grow unhindered, to expect from it a continuous approximation to that church, ever uniting all human beings, which constitutes the visible representation... of the invisible Kingdom of God on earth (6:131-132).

With this idealised future world for humankind, structured by morality and true faith in God, we come to the culmination of Kant’s religious project.

## 8. Conclusion

The central focus of the thesis is the question of the religious commitments and framework of Kant's philosophy. I have argued that Kant's thought, spanning both the pre-Critical and Critical periods, is not only fully compatible with a recognisably orthodox Christianity, but is positively intended to be complementary to it. Indeed, his philosophy (both in the pre-Critical and Critical periods) is partly intended to give a philosophical defence of Christianity, or at least to undermine attacks upon Christianity within the philosophical discipline, linked to a fundamental religious framework of thought. Such a task has involved a wide-ranging look at various topics revolving around religious faith, such as Kant's treatment of the problem of evil and theodicy, the relationship between religious faith and philosophy, and that between the study of history and religious faith, the nature of religious faith itself, as well as his approach to various aspects of Christian theology, such as Scripture, eschatology, and Christology.

As part of my project to investigate Kant's religious framework, I have attempted to bring together texts by Kant that are either not considered very much in general or at least have not been considered with regard to their potential for giving us a glimpse of Kant's underlying religious commitments and defending the kind of 'affirmative' approach that I have been taking. Much of the thesis has been structured around the final goal of approaching what is perhaps Kant's key text on religion, *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, with a greater understanding of the context of the discussion that is found in the text, along with an attempt to point towards ways of dissolving some of the interpretive difficulties that are often considered in the literature.

In Chapter 2, I began the argument of the thesis with a brief consideration of the approach taken to religion by Leibniz, in particular his view of the connection between philosophical reflection and religious faith. I considered the metaphilosophy underlying his

*Theodicy*, and then examined Kant's discussions of Leibnizian theodicy in the 1750s. Although not altogether uncritical of Leibniz on the question of theodicy, Kant nevertheless has great sympathy with the Leibnizian approach, evidenced in *An attempt at some reflections on optimism*, particularly with regard to the notion of *theoria cum praxi*, where theory is synthesised with practical reflection in order to, ultimately, vindicate religious faith. I also argued that hints of sympathy for a Leibnizian approach can be found in works on natural science from that period, in particular those concerned with the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, as well as *Universal Natural History*. If I am correct, it is shown that Kant, from the very early stages of his philosophical reflection, is greatly concerned with religious faith and the ways in which philosophy can support it without overstepping its bounds. A sub-theme that began here and continued throughout is that the kind of piety engendered must be of the 'right sort', of which humility and right behaviour are the effects.

In the following chapter, the survey of salient pre-Critical texts continued, with a particular emphasis on metaphilosophical issues in relation to religious faith. I examined three significant texts from the 1760s, arguing for the continuity of Kant's general approach to religion by noting the repetition of themes identified in the previous chapter and beginning to look ahead to facets of the Critical system. In *The Only Possible Argument*, we can see the formulation of a new approach to the project of reinforcing belief in the existence of God through philosophical reflection. We find two interlinking arguments which, when taken together, are formulated to be a single 'proof-ground' for the existence of God which is as epistemically humble as possible, and not tainted with dogmatism or superstition. Following this, I examined the *Prize Essay*, which adds to our understanding of Kant's religious framework due to its metaphilosophical slant. In this text, we see Kant reflecting upon the progress and methods of philosophy. Though initially proposing quite a negative judgement of the progress of philosophy to that date, Kant nevertheless paints an optimistic picture of the future of the discipline, on the assumption that philosophers can shift to more epistemically humble working-methods. Such a project fits into and reinforces the

religious framework that Kant is building, in which philosophy has a key role to play in reinforcing the 'right' kind of faith. Finally, in this chapter, I reflected upon *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. One particular salient issue for my purposes with regard to this text is the question of Kant's allegiance to Swedenborg during these years. Swedenborg's religious views are certainly unorthodox from a Christian perspective, and thus my interpretation of Kant as a thoroughly orthodox Christian would be challenged if it could be established that he ever seriously considered himself as a Swedenborgian. I argued that when we read the text of *Dreams* sensitively, taking into account the different voices that Kant employs at different points of the text, we see not only that Kant is rejecting Swedenborgianism, but also that the reasons for his rejection are grounded in the religious framework that we have identified as key to his thought. In particular, we see that Kant criticises the kind of faith and morality implied by Swedenborg's religious and philosophical thought. Swedenborg is ultimately identified as committing the errors in religious matters that Kant battles against throughout his philosophical career.

Moving to the Critical period, I continued to argue for the fundamental continuity of Kant's religious framework throughout all the texts I consider. The *Lectures* are particularly useful in respect of their direct focus on more traditionally theological matters in comparison with the *Critiques*. I began with a brief consideration of the similarities and differences between the *Lectures* and Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*. I argued that an examination of both texts reveals that, whilst Kant does generally follow the structure of Baumgarten's work, he nevertheless uses it as a springboard to develop his own original material. Thus, the *Lectures* is worthy of the importance and originality I attribute to it. Following this, we looked at the text itself with a particular eye to issues concerning the nature of religious faith and its connection to philosophy. My main claim here is that the *Lectures* reveal a framework that is genuinely theist, such as affirming a sense of revelation from God and maintaining the traditional Christian view of the image of God grounded in human reason, whilst being in accord with the bounds of reason laid down in the *Critiques*. I also considered the notion of moral faith, which I argue is the Critical version of the idealised faith



seen through Kant's philosophical works. In particular, the notion of moral faith maintains the traditional Christian focus upon the importance of an individual's moral destiny above all other things. Such a view of faith feeds into his approach to the problem of evil, which is considered in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

In addition, I examined key texts on relevant topics from around the same time as *Religion*, as part of my examination of the establishment of a religious framework within the confines of the Critical system. These two texts, *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy* and *The End of All Things*, are useful in enhancing our understanding of the context in which *Religion* was written, as well as the religious framework of Kant's thought. I argued that in *Theodicy* we find Kant outlining a new approach to defending God in the face of the existence of evil in the world, grounded in the notion of moral faith that has already been formulated. Through moral reflection, with a foundation in the 'inner revelation' of our reason, we can come to see the problem of evil as ultimately groundless. The example of Job, here, is held up by Kant as a paragon of true piety, and is thus revealing as to what Kant's views regarding faith are. We can see the form of moral reflection that Kant envisages in action in *The End of All Things*, where he turns his attention to eschatological matters. Through Kant's approach here, we can discern something of a legitimate working-method for theology within the legitimate bounds of the Critical system. I then returned to *Theodicy*, where we can see such a working-method in practice.

Finally, in Chapter 7, we used what we have learned of Kant's religious framework to approach some of the main interpretive problems regarding *Religion*, such as difficulties surrounding radical evil, Christ as moral archetype, the status of Scripture within Kant's rational religion, and the significance of Kant's social project, the 'ethical community'. A subsidiary topic is the influence of key Pietist thinkers, which I argue is particularly clear in *Religion*, certainly with regard to the kind of social project envisaged and the idealised image of faith it assumes. A key part of Pietism is the notion of a 'New Birth', brought about by God alone and his grace. Such a

'New Birth' will bring about a transformed life, from an ethical perspective, and the community of people whose lives have been transformed in such a way constitute the beginnings of a possible Kingdom of God on earth. Pietism, therefore, binds together ethical concerns on an individual level with desires for fundamental social change in a manner echoed in *Religion*. The bulk of the chapter was spent summarising some of the key themes of *Religion* and responding to key interpretive issues as they arise. For example, in the context of Kant's religious framework, we can reject the so-called problem of the missing proof of radical evil, as well as binding together the individual and social aspects of the text that does not require us to prioritise one at the expense of the other (which has been happening with purely anthropological/social readings of *Religion* that are currently in vogue). I also argued that Kant's initially puzzling notion of the moral archetype appears much more straightforward when it is understood as a development of his thought concerning revelation found in the *Lectures*, and that his approach to Scripture and the ethical community can be seen as thoroughly orthodox in a Christian sense once we view it through the lens of his religious framework (Kant is not, as it were, trying to replace Christianity with a new 'rational religion').

If nothing else, I hope to have shown that the possibilities for reading Kant's philosophy as authentically Christian are wider than has been previously supposed. Also, I hope to have shown that Kant's desire to defend Christianity can be seen as a strong connecting link throughout his philosophical works, which has in the past often been read as falling into two largely distinct periods (a view which should seem even *prima facie* implausible). A further point I have tried to develop is to make clear that in fact the Christian tradition is much more accommodating of what may seem unorthodox views than is often supposed by Kant scholars, and that Kant's debts to various Christian thinkers can be seen to place his firmly within that tradition.

I hope it should also be clear (if you were not convinced even before reading this thesis) that it *matters* whether Kant's various philosophical projects, in both the pre-Critical and the

Critical periods, are at least partly aimed at defending Christianity. It affects how Kant would have been influenced by other thinkers and what he may have taken from them, what the purpose of various texts in his corpus are, which in turn affects the specific claims he makes in those texts. More broadly, it affects our understanding of Kant's own conception of just what he was a philosopher for, and the role he had to play in the academic world and beyond. Our reading of Kant's philosophy as essentially Christian also affects his place in the history of philosophy, perhaps making us see a stronger Christian influence (even if entirely unconscious) in the works of those who he influenced. If we stress, say, his influence upon Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, it is surely significant for our understanding of *their* thought that Kant stands within the Christian tradition. What impact this might have, I would not like to speculate, but nevertheless it could be an interesting avenue of research in the future. What should not be surprising is that we still have a long way to go towards understanding the contours of Kant's philosophy itself and his attitude towards religious faith generally, and Christianity in particular. We are only just beginning to grasp the extent of his philosophical achievements, and thus it is an exciting time for those who are interested in Kant's thought.

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