University of Alberta

On the Relationship between Historical Faith and Rational Religion in Kant

by

Peter T. Buijs

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Philosophy

Fall 2010
Edmonton, Alberta

Examining Committee

Robert Burch, Philosophy

Jeffery Dudiak, Philosophy, The King's University College

Leo Mos, Psychology

Alex Rueger, Philosophy

This Master's Thesis is dedicated to my father, Joseph, for his wisdom and to my wife, MaryAnne, for her patience. Their ongoing support has made this work possible.

Abstract

This thesis is a detailed examination of the relationship between historical faith and rational religion in Immanuel Kant's philosophy, especially as presented in Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason. Due to recent contemporary philosophical debate about Kant's philosophy of religion, the goal of this work is to shed some light on Kant's perspective on revealed faith. This will be completed by first outlining the contemporary debate and Kant's treatment of historical faith and rational religion. The relationship will then be examined in depth by addressing two apparent contradictions in the relationship: the necessity of historical faith and the equality of historical faiths. From this a more general picture of the relationship will be illustrated that shows the unique role that historical faith plays in Kant's philosophy of religion and what implications that has for the recent debate and philosophy of religion in general.

Preface

Kant's attitude towards religion is aptly summarized by A. W. Moore as one of "profound ambivalence."[1] This ambivalence results in a number of paradoxes appearing in Kant's writings on religion.[2] This is nowhere more clearly demonstrated then in Kant's treatment of historical faith and rational religion in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. The exact relationship between faith and religion in this work is difficult to define and filled with seeming contradictions. The ongoing ambivalence throughout Kant's philosophy of religion has caused a renewed contemporary interest in Kant's philosophy of religion and stimulated recent academic debate. In order to address some of the issues brought up by this renewed debate, it is my intention to examine in depth the relationship between historical faith and rational religion in Kant's philosophy of religion. This relationship is central to Kant's philosophy of religion and addressing some of its apparent contradictions can help clarify some of the issues that have been debated.

In order to accomplish this I will look at two specific issues of apparent contradictions in the relationship between historical faith and rational religion. First is the extent to which historical faith is necessary for rational religion. Kant claims that historical faith is both necessary for rational religion to come into being but also that it ultimately becomes completely dispensable. Second is the issue of to what extent different historical faiths are equal. Kant often tries to show a type of equality among different historical faiths but also treats certain faiths in very different manners. By addressing these specific issues, I intend to draw more general conclusions about the exact nature of the relationship between faith and religion in Kant's work.

---

[1] A.W. Moore, *Noble in Reason, Infinite in* Faculty (New York: Routledge, 2003), 147.

[2] See Chris L. Firestone and Nathan Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's Religion* (Bloomington: Indianna University Press, 2008), 83-100 for a listing of some of these paradoxes. Hereinafter cited as *In Defense.*

I will also draw further conclusions about the implications of this relationship for contemporary scholarship in Kant's philosophy as well as for contemporary philosophy of religion.

Before providing an in depth examination of the apparent contradictions, I will first give a general overview in Chapter One. I will begin by giving an outline of the contemporary debate that has occurred in Kantian scholarship and in terms of that outline show how my examination of the relationship between faith and religion will be relevant to that debate. I will then go over a general description of Kant's philosophy of religion as developed in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, paying particular attention to the relationship developed between historical faith and rational religion. Once that is completed I will outline in more detail my project to investigate these two apparent contradictions. Chapter Two will address to what extent for Kant historical faith is necessary while Chapter Three will deal with the issue of equality among historical faiths. Chapter Four will draw more general conclusions about the relationship between historical faith and rational religion in Kant, as well as implications for Kantian scholarship and philosophy of religion.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

CB "Conjectural Beginning of Human History"

CF "Conflict of the Faculties"

CPR "Critique of Pure Reason"

CPrR "Critique of Practical Reason"

CJ "Critique of the Power of Judgment"

E "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?"

ET "The End of All Things"

FT "On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy"

G "Groundwork of the Metaphyics of Morals"

IH "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View"

L "Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion"

MM "Metaphysics of Morals"

OT "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?"

R "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason"

Chapter One:

Kant's Philosophy of Religion

Kant is profoundly ambivalent about religion in his works, at turns being a defender of religion but also highly critical. It is therefore difficult to determine what Kant's ultimate opinion about religion is. Thus, when it comes to contemporary commentators on Kant's philosophy of religion, there are two distinct camps. There are those who argue that Kant was ultimately critical and skeptical about religion and religious matters, and then there are those who argue that despite his criticisms he was a defender of faith and devoutly religious. While the first position has been dominant among English-speaking Kantian scholars for the past century, the second position has recently become more pronounced.

A new debate has now opened up among these two positions. The collection of essays in *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered* in 1991 began this trend.[3] In that work, Leslie Mulholland, Sharon Anderson-Gold, and Philip Rossi argue that "Kant's philosophy is more open to theological concerns than is typically supposed."[4] However, it was not until 2006 in *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* that this new interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion was clearly outlined as a direct challenge to the "traditional" interpretation. The editors clearly admit that "the purpose of this book is to bring together an all new sampling of theologically affirmative interpreters of Kant with a view to articulating that alternative to the tradition more forcefully."[5]

---

[3] Philip J. Rossi and Michael J. Wreen, ed., *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
[4] Chris L. Firestone and Stephen Palmquist, ed., *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indianna University Press, 2006), xx.
[5] Ibid. xxi.

Since the publication of *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, the debate between these two camps has continued to intensify. In *Kant on God*, published in 2007, Peter Byrne reaffirms the traditional position in direct contrast to a "certain trend in English-speaking philosophy of religion . . . that turns to Kant and discounts the religious skepticism . . . in the Critical Philosophy."[6] On the other hand, a year later, Chris Firestone and Nathan Jacobs provide a detailed defense of this newer trend with *In Defense of Kant's Religion*, noting that the "traditional interpretation is in need of renovation, if not outright demolition."[7] Additionally, a new translation of Kant's *Religion* was recently published by Werner S. Pluhar under the title *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (2009) that included an introduction by Stephen Palmquist, one of the most outspoken proponents of the newer interpretation.[8] Regardless of the merit of this recent debate, it has created a renewed interest in Kant's philosophy of religion.

In order to show how my research will be relevant to this debate, I will first present a more detailed view of each position. Labels will be required to simplify the discussion of these positions. I have opted to refer to the first position as the "skeptical" position, and the second position as the "theisitic" position. Although these are not the labels commonly used by other commentators to describe these positions, I find them to be still accurate and more philosophically neutral. In *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, the skeptical position is either referred to as the "traditional" or the "theologically negative" view, implying an outdated and narrow minded approach compared to the "affirmative" position of the book's contributors. Peter Byrne on the other hand scathingly calls the newer position "revisionist." The labels I have

[6] Peter Byrne, *Kant on God* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007) 2.
[7] Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense*, 2.
[8] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the bounds of bare reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2009).

chosen describe the positions accurately without being dismissive of either position. Whether either of these labels is an appropriate description for Kant will be addressed in the final Chapter.

The Skeptical Position

Chris Firestone notes three recurring themes in the skeptical interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion.[9] The first is the "metaphor of a boundary", the second is a "two-world" reading of Kant and the third is the reduction of Kant's philosophy of religion to his moral philosophy. The first two themes are related and so I will deal with them together. In Kant's critical philosophy, there is a sharp distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves. The world that we experience and that we can know and interact with is the world as it appears to us. In other words, everything we experience is shaped by universal modes of perceptions that are necessary before it can become an object of our experience for finite human beings. When I experience an object, like a refreshing beer, there are certain ways that I must experience it. For example, I must experience it in time and space. How the object is in itself (the beer without my experiencing it), although thinkable, is completely unknowable to me. If I could know it, then I would be experiencing it.

The problem with this distinction when it comes to religion is that a central theme of religion is the experience and interaction of something that we can not "experience" like any other object. Religious concepts like God and heaven refer to realities that are outside both time and space, and therefore must be things-in-themselves rather than appearances, or else they appear to us in ways outside our human modes of perception. The metaphor of a boundary and the two-world reading of Kant are related because on the skeptical interpretation there is an impenetrable "boundary" between the "two worlds" of appearances and things-in-themselves. Our genuine knowledge is limited to appearances, as a positive enabling limit, and anything

[9] Firestone and Palmquist, ed., *New Philosophy of Religion*, 2-3.

beyond that can only be speculation. If that is the case then there can be no knowledge or experience of God and the immortality of the soul for Kant. In contrast, the theistic position tries to show that there are possible bridges between things-in-themselves, like God, and our experiences.

The third theme of the skeptical interpretation is the reduction of religion to morality. There is an obvious connection between Kant's moral philosophy and his religious philosophy. Kant's argument for belief in God and immortality is based upon a need of practical reason (*CPrR*, 132-134) and Kant's recurring definition of religion is the recognition of all duties as divine commandments (*R*, 153-154). The skeptical position holds that there is nothing essentially different between these two domains of his philosophy and that everything in Kant's religious philosophy can be explained by his moral philosophy. At best religion is simply an application of morality for Kant. At worst, it is a half-hearted attempt to appease the religious censors of the time.

This point is often explained by the use of Heinrich Heine's satirical story about Lampe, Kant's manservant. In the first *Critique*, Kant famously rejects all possible theoretical proofs of God's existence. Combined with the unknowability of things-in-themselves, Kant effectively removes God from all human experience. Heine describes this move as "world-shattering."

> "Kant, the Robespierre of thought, is . . . not content with his deicide. He cannot forget about his old servant Lampe and the ordinary good-hearted people he represents. Lampe stands before his master, tears in his eyes at the prospect that the consoling thoughts of traditional religion are delusions. Kant has pity on him. He says to himself: old Lampe must have his God and so I will give him his God back by letting practical reason vouch

> for God. Thus Kant, having killed God with theoretical reason, tries to enliven God's corpse through the magic wand of practical reason."[10]

This idea of God being an appeasement to a public that cannot handle a world without the irrational comforts of religion is often referred to as "Lampe's God" by Kantian scholars.

Although these are the common recurring themes among those who hold the skeptical position, there is still a wide range of individual positions about Kant. Some, like Allen Wood and Denis Savage, hold that Kant is ultimately a deist. He believes in a God, but rejects all forms of divine revelation and any personal connection with God. Keith Ward and Don Cupitt, see Kant's philosophy as being amenable to theological non-realism, where the concept of God is an internal one and not an external one. Finally, writers, like Matthew Alun Ray and Yirmiahu Yovel, hold that Kant must either be an atheist or an agnostic.[11] All of these positions still hold that Kant was ultimately skeptical about religious claims to some extent and so they can be grouped together as the skeptical position. They can also be grouped together by their mutual rejection of the theistic interpretation.

The Theistic Position

Some of the subscribers to the theistic position include Ronald Green, Ann Loades, Stephen Palmquist, Adina Davidovich, John Hare, and Elizabeth Galbrath.[12] To this list must be added Chris Firestone, Nathan Jacobs, Michel Despland, and the early Allen Wood.[13] Wood has since shifted his position to claim that Kant was a deist. Of these writers, I would like to point out that Palmquist, Hare, and Firestone are perhaps the most vocal and adamant in defending this

---

[10] Heinrich Heine, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1835), summarized and quoted from Byrne, *Kant on God,* 3.
[11] Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense,* 2.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense,* Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), and Allen Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

position.[14] Though these writers differ in their opinion of Kant just as much as, if not more so than, the skeptical position, there are still some views held in common.

The theistic position can easily be defined in contrast to the skeptical position. This position holds that there can be meaningful talk about God and religious concepts in Kant's philosophy of religion. There is no absolute boundary between appearances and things-in-themselves. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the theistic position holds that Kant's philosophy of religion is not merely reducible to his practical philosophy. Both of these claims seem to contradict major points in Kant's philosophy and are thus not simple points to prove. The first point I do not intend to address at all, but will instead be focussing on the unique role of Kant's philosophy of religion. Michel Despland made this point as early as 1973 in *Kant on History and Religion*:

> "I voiced my dissatisfaction with a tradition of interpretation which, having found a system in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, proceeds to find nothing in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* except a confirmation of the theses of that system . . . I shall contend that there exists in Kant the elements of a self-subsisting philosophy of religion."[15]

The theistic position admits to the similarities between Kant's practical philosophy and religious philosophy (the similarities are undeniable) but also claims that there is something unique about his writings on religion, especially in *Religion*.

What I would add to these themes is the claim that Kant accepted religion as a human organization founded on revelation. This is why I have opted to label this position "theistic." While the skeptical position can range from labeling Kant a deist to an atheist, they all reject the

[14] Byrne sums up the debate between the two positions as "Heine versus Hare." Byrne, *Kant on God*, 3.
[15] Despland, *History and Religion*, 12.

claim that Kant is a theist. Normally, the definition of deism is the belief in an impersonal God, typically founded in reason alone, while theism is the belief in a personal God, typically supported by divine revelation. Since Kant avoids talking directly about God's nature, it might seem an irrelevant question. However, the question of theism and deism in Kant was famously recast by Allen Wood in "Kant's Deism."[16] The question is no longer about what type of God Kant believed in, but whether he believed in a religion of pure reason alone (deism, agnosticism, atheism) or accepted a faith based upon some revelation (theism). Of course Kant's ambivalent nature to religion will mean that he will not fit clearly into either definition but these categories provide a helpful way of structuring the contemporary debate.

As a deist Kant is able to admit a role to religion but finds all of the current incarnations of human religion, based upon revelation, to be unsuitable. In order to correct this, there must be a religion created of pure reason, and all forms of revelation must be expelled.[17] The theistic position in contrast claims that Kant accepted current "theistic" religions based upon revelation. Another one of the hallmarks of the theistic position is to argue that Kant is a Christian.[18] If Kant is a Christian then he is a theist and if he is not a Christian then he is very likely to not be a theist.[19] This certainly does not mean that Kant gave his unconditional endorsement to revealed religions. Numerous are the faults of organized religion according to Kant, and he did not shy away from pointing them out. However, the theistic position holds that despite these problems, Kant still accepted it as a reasonable position.

---

[16] Allen Wood, "Kant's Deism" in Philip J. Rossi and Michael J. Wreen, ed., *Kant's Philosophy of Religion, Reconsidered* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-21. I say famously, since Wood's work has been addressed either directly or indirectly in most of the works on Kant's religion since. For example, see Christopher McCammon, "Overcoming Deism" in Chris L. Firestone and Stephen Palmquist, ed., *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indianna University Press, 2006), 79 – 89.

[17] Note: a religion of pure reason is different from a religion within the boundaries of reason. This is a theme I intend to develop more thoroughly later on.

[18] See in particular Stephen Palmquist, "Immanuel Kant: A Christian Philosopher?" *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (January 1989): 65 - 75.

[19] The chances of Kant subscribing to another theistic religion seem remarkably slim.

Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason

Now that the positions of the debate have been established, I will demonstrate why the relationship between historical faith and rational religion is significant to the debate. It is important to know the context of *Religion* first. *Religion* was one of Kant's later works, being published after his three *Critiques.*[20] It is often considered to be one of Kant's minor works, and in contrast to the Critiques this is true. However, it is perhaps one of the most substantial of Kant's minor works. Whereas several of Kant's works deal with religion at some point and all three of Kant's Critique's end with religious questions, *Religion* is one of the few published works that deals exclusively with the subject. It is also worth noting that Kant received a royal request after the publication on *Religion* to refrain from writing on religion or face "unpleasant measures."[21]

The work itself is divided into four books which were originally meant to be four separate but connected essays[22]. Kant begins the preface to the second edition by comparing revelation and philosophy as being concentric circles, with philosophy and reason being contained with the wider sphere of revelation (*R* 6:12). The goal of *Religion* is to confirm this image, and show that "between reason and Scripture there is, not only compatibility but also unity" (*R* 6:13). Kant wants to begin an experiment where he starts with reason and sees whether he is able to restructure the basics of revealed faith, specifically Christianity. Similarly, Kant believes that someone could take a particular revelation and see "whether it does not lead back to the same pure *rational system* of religion" (*R* 6:12).

---

[20] *Critique of Pure Reason (CPR)*, *Critique of Practical Reason (CPrR)*, and *Critique of Judgment (CJ)*.

[21] Kant, as a loyal subject, obliged this request as long as the King lived. Fortunately for Kant, that was only for 3 more years, and then he published another work on religion, *The Conflict of the Faculties*. *CF* 7:6.

[22] George Di Giovanni, "Translator's introduction" in Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni ed., *Religion and Rational Theology*, (England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41-49.

The topic of the first book is radical evil in humanity. This is a new concept for Kant. Previously in his practical philosophy, there was no sense in which a human being could be truly evil. A person can either follow their obligations or their inclinations. In this book, Kant takes it as a given fact that humanity has a propensity to evil.[23] In the second book, Kant discusses how this propensity can be combated by becoming a new man committed to good, in light of the concept of a morally perfect being, the Son of God. While the second book shows how evil can be combatted, the third book shows how evil will eventually be wiped out by establishing the kingdom of God. Evil cannot be overcome individually. It requires a collective union of moral beings. This union can only be founded in a church, and thus religion is needed to remove the evil found in humanity. The fourth book discusses religion more generally and specifically some of the faults that religion can fall into.

It is in the third book that Kant presents his arguments concerning historical faith and rational religion. Kant's argument can be summarized as follows:

1. *Humanity's evil is social in nature.*

Kant's claim is that humanity is not just evil independently but that a man becomes subject to all types of evil "as soon as he is among human beings" (*R* 6:94). The term that he uses for this concept in his writings on history is "unsocial sociability" (*I* 20-21). Human beings are social creatures, and yet our association with other human beings causes mutual moral corruption. "Envy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these", are all conditions that would not exist with a human being in isolation but that arise "*as soon as he is among human beings*" (*R* 6:94). Since the problem of evil is not caused by individuals alone, it can not be overcome by individual solutions. It requires a solution for all of humanity. This indicates a shift away from Kant's moral philosophy, which is primarily individualistic. In the

[23] The term propensity is significant and I will deal with it more in Chapter Two.

Critique of Practical Reason, for example, moral perfection can only be attained through the endless progress of the individual (*CPrR* 5:123).

2. To combat social evil, humanity must join into an ethical community.

Kant draws a comparison between the juridical state of nature and the ethical state of nature. Before the founding of states, mankind was in a constant state of war where each person only gives the law to himself. To avoid that mankind left the state of nature to form political communities. Similarly, mankind can be in an ethical state of nature, which is also marked by constant conflict between individuals' conflicting interests and the absense of a law that rules over all. Humanity must also leave the ethical state of nature and form an ethical community. Kant states that this is a duty *sui generis*, "not of human beings toward human beings but of the human race toward itself" (*R* 6:97). Every species of rational beings are "destined to a common end, namely the promotion of the highest good as a good common to all" (*R* 6:97). There are two important concepts in that statement that require more elaboration.

First is the concept of an end. For Kant, there are three components to any finite rational volition: a motive, a maxim, and an end.[24] The motive is the determining ground of the action, the maxim is the formal condition of the action (the rule that is applied) and the end is the material condition of the action (the object or purpose). Every time a rational being makes a decision, there must be an end towards which it is directed. When I decide to take a trip, I may have many reasons for taking that trip, but I require a destination in order to fulfill that decision. It does not matter if I ever reach my destination, but I must have one in mind when I set out if I am to act rationally. When a rational being is acting morally, according to Kant, there should only be one end to their moral action: the highest good.

[24] Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 40.

The concept of the highest good was developed in detail in the second *Critique* (*CPrR* 5:107-148). Kant believes that the highest good is the combination of moral perfection with corresponding happiness. A rational being acting morally ought to have this as his end. It is this concept that is the foundation of Kant's "moral argument" for the practical postulates of God and the immortality of the soul. Adopting the highest good as an end is only rational if that end is possible. According to Kant the highest good is only possible on the supposition that an all-powerful moral judge exists and that human beings can endlessly progress towards moral perfection. Therefore, in order to adopt the highest good as an end, human beings are rationally justified in believing in God and the immortality of the soul. In *Religion*, Kant is pointing out that humanity as a species ought to have as an end the promotion of the highest good for everyone. It is not just enough that we individually try to obtain moral perfection and happiness; we are obligated as a species to promote it for all of humanity.

The ethical state of nature is an obstacle to this end. As long as humans remain in the ethical state of nature, they will be subject to the moral corruption of being among other human beings. Therefore, as part of the obligation of the species, humanity is also obligated to leave the ethical state of nature. So although the function of the ethical community is to overcome the social evil of humanity, the reason why it must be entered into is the duty *sui generis* to promote the highest good for all humans.

3. An ethical community must take the form of a church.

For any law abiding community, there must be public legislation with all the laws "being regarded as commands of a common lawgiver" (*R* 6:98). Since the community is an ethical one, which for Kant is based upon internal dispositions, the lawgiver cannot be any human being. Human laws can only govern external actions and hence can only enforce the legality of an

action. What is required is a legislator who "knows the heart" (*R* 6:99), or the internal disposition of a moral agent. This is the only lawgiver that can determine if human beings are acting morally and not just legally. A lawgiver that can know the heart of humanity is "the concept of God as a moral ruler of the world" (*R* 6:99). Therefore, the community "is conceivable only as a people under divine commands, i.e. as a *people of God*, and indeed *in accordance with laws of virtue*" (*R* 6:99).

Kant does want to make the qualification that God does not create the moral law. Rather, God commands the moral law to which rational agents subject themselves. This fits with Kant's ongoing definition of "religion" as the "recognition of all our duties as divine commands" (*R* 6:153). Knowledge of God is not required for this definition of religion. All that is required is the acknowledgment that if God exists, then God would command us to fulfill our duties. This also allows Kant to maintain that the "minimum" required for religion is only the "problematic assumption" (*R* 6:154n) of God's existence. In other words, it must be accepted that it is possible for God to exist in order to be a part of the ethical community but there need not be any certainty about God's existence.

Now the "ethical community under divine moral legislature is a church" (*R* 6:101). Kant makes the distinction between the church invisible and the church visible. The invisible church is "the mere idea of the union of all upright human beings" whereas the visible church is "the actual union of human beings into a whole that accords with this ideal" (*R* 6:101). The reason for the distinction is:

> "the sublime, never fully attainable idea of an ethical community is greatly scaled down under human hands, namely to an institution which, at best capable of representing with purity only the form of such a community, with respect to the means for establishing a

> whole of this kind is greatly restricted under the conditions of sensuous human nature. But how could one expect to construct something completely straight from such crooked wood?" (*R* 6:100).

What makes a visible church the "true" church is its ability to display the invisible church "inasmuch as the latter can be realized through human beings" (*R* 6:101), however inadequately it may be to the ideal. Kant then indicates a few marks of the true church. These are that the church is united, purely moral, freely joined, and unchanging in its constitution (*R* 6:101-102).

4. A church is always founded on a historically revealed faith.

Kant then argues that the only faith that can create a universal church is a pure rational faith. This is not faith as it is normally understood as a "leap" to believing in things without sufficient evidence, but beliefs that we are rationally justified in holding in order to make sense of our moral experience and realize the highest good. All human beings are capable of coming to the same conclusions and beliefs if they use this rational faith alone. However because of the peculiar constitution of human beings, "pure faith can never be relied on as much as it deserves, that is, [enough] to found a Church on it alone" (*R* 6:103). Human beings also require a faith that is based upon some historical revelation in order to establish a church.[25] Kant calls this "ecclesiastical" faith but it is also referred interchangeably to as historical or revealed faith. A revelation is an event in history where God supposedly communicates directly or indirectly with humanity. Any given revelation can thus never be confirmed by reason alone. First, it can never be rationally confirmed that it was God communicating in the event. The infinite can not be knowingly grasped by the finite, and so God could only be revealed as a finite appearance. Second, reason alone can never confirm that the historical event actually occurred since it would

[25] Kant's exact argument for why historical faith is required for a church will be examined in more detail in Chapter Two.

be an empirical event and thus would need to be experienced in order to be known. To determine something by reason alone it must be necessary, while empirical claims are contingent. In the case of Christianity, it cannot be determined by reason alone (*a priori*) that Jesus was the Son of God, but it also cannot be determined *a priori* that there existed a man named Jesus of Nazareth from approximately the years 0 to 32 AD. Therefore historical faith can not be founded upon reason alone and thus is not universally accessible.

Historical revelation provides statutory legislation for the church, that is, obligations that have no basis in reason. These obligations are believed to provide direct service to God in addition to moral action, or instead of moral action in many cases according to Kant. However, this also provides a "public form of obligation" for the moral community (*R* 6:105), a way of giving the community a sensible form of expression. Kant's stance on statutory laws appears to be that although being often problematic they are not necessarily bad, but that they should never be considered to be necessary in order to become pleasing to God. The only thing that can be considered necessary to serve God is moral action. However, the human condition needs this sensible form of the ethical community in order to give the senses something to hold on to and so "ecclesiastical faith naturally precedes pure religious faith" (*R* 6:106).[26]

An important point to clarify is that historical faith is not completely contingent. Kant's point in illustrating revelation and reason as concentric circles is that revealed faith already begins with the seeds of rational religion. There are already rational principles at work in historical faith, or else it would have to be rejected as a false revelation.[27] However, historical faith is not completely rational and is based upon historical, contingent beliefs. In that sense, historical faith can have rational aspects, but by definition there are aspects that are not based on

[26] The reason why historical faith precedes ratioanl religion, and why it is necessary for humanity, will be examined in detail in Chapter Two.

[27] A revelation that contradicts the moral law cannot be from God according to Kant, *CF* 7:63.

reason alone. In that sense when I am referring to historical faith it is to the "larger circle" which includes the smaller circle. However because I am investigating the relationship between historical faith and rational religion my emphasis in discussing historical faith will be on the contingent elements as opposed to the purely rational ones.

5. Historic faith will gradually transition to pure rational religion.

Kant begins to contrast religion and faith at this point and develop the relationship between them. He begins with the statement: "There is only *one* (true) *religion*; but there can be several kinds of *faith*" (*R* 6:107). This simple statement distinguishes several points about faith and religion. First, Kant makes the terminological shift of calling what is normally considered religion (the major organized religions of the world) different types of *faith*. This fits well with Kant's general understanding of religion being a type of moral attitude rather than a set of beliefs. Different types of faith on the other hand are called that precisely because they involve different sets of beliefs, not necessarily different moral attitudes.

Faith comes in many forms because faith involves the acceptance of a particular historical revelation. Since the veracity of any given revelation cannot be determined conclusively, there is no way to conclusively accept one revelation over another; hence the multitude of faiths that exist in the world. Historical faith is therefore always contingent and particular. However, pure religion is based upon reason and so there can be only one religion which is necessary and universal. Any rational being, according to Kant, is capable of coming to the same rational conclusions about religion. So while the religions of the world are very different, there are also many similarities. All of the sectarian violence amongst religions has "never been anything but squabbles over ecclesiastical faiths" (*R* 6:108), that is over sets of

beliefs. On the other hand, the "golden rule" of morality appears throughout numerous world religions.

Rational religion and historical faith can thus exist simultaneously in what we normally call religion. Historical faith serves as the "vehicle" for rational religion. In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant makes an analogy of a man and his garments (*CF* 7:53). A man without a set of clothes is not well protected and cannot last long in the external world, and a set of clothes without a man serves no purpose. Similarly rational religion requires historical faith as a vehicle in order to exist in this world, and implicitly historical faith without any rational religion is useless. The same man can put on many different types of clothing and remain the same man just as the same religion can be found in different faiths. Of course in the case of religion and faith, as opposed to a man in clothes, the same religion can exist simultaneously in different faiths.[28] In fact, it will either be the same religion existing in the many faiths or else it will not be religion at all since there is only *one* religion.

Kant argues that, although faith and religion must exist simultaneously, religion ought to be supreme over faith. This is done by having rational religion as the "supreme interpreter" of historical faith. In order to ensure that historical faith can serve as the vehicle for rational religion, there must be an interpretation of the revelation that harmonizes it with the

> "universal practical rules of a pure religion of reason . . . This interpretation may often appear to us as forced, in view of the text (revelation), and be often forced in fact; yet, if the text can at all bear it, it must be preferred to a literal interpretation that either contains absolutely nothing for morality, or even works counter to its incentives." (*R* 6:110).

[28] It is possible to image a man wearing several suites at once but it is not the appropriate image for faith and religion. A more appropriate image would be the classic understanding of matter (faith) and form (religion). There are many horses in the world but the same form of horse-ness exists in all of them.

Whenever there is a conflict between faith and reason, the interpretation must always side with reason.[29] If a historical faith is able to do this, it will lead to the introduction of rational religion.

Now historical faith is required to found a church, which is required to form an ethical community, which is required to bring about the end of the universal ethical commonwealth in this world. No one historical faith can create a universal community though. Since the historical faith is based upon beliefs that cannot be accepted as necessary by every rational being, it can never be universally accepted. Although the historical faith can include rational religion, and in fact must include rational religion in order to be effective, the historical elements of the faith will always be contingent. The only thing that could be accepted universally would be pure rational religion with no traces of historical elements. Therefore, in order for any historical faith to bring about the end it is meant to bring about, there must be a transition away from historical faith to pure rational religion. "In the end religion will gradually be freed of all empirical grounds of determination . . . thus at last the pure faith of religion will rule over all" (*R* 6:121).

Kant is clear that this must be a gradual transition. Any planned dramatic revolution from one set of religious beliefs to another "cannot be introduced according to plan without damage to freedom" (*R* 6:122). Historical faith cannot just be removed in one stroke. Rather the historical elements must become "bit by bit dispensable" (*R* 6:121), until they are finally removed completely. Since this is a task that can be far removed from any current human capabilities, Kant states that all that is required is a principle of gradual transition towards rational religion and then we have reason to say, "the Kingdom of God is come into us" (*R* 6:122). Indeed, this continual approximation towards pure religion Kant calls the "coming of the Kingdom of God"

[29] This has led Kant to some controversial interpretations of the Bible, such as denying that God would ever tell Abraham to kill Isaac (*R* 6:87).

(*R* 6:115). Thus historical faith, which was required in order to introduce rational religion, becomes eventually dispensable.

It should now become clear how the nature of the relationship between historical faith and rational religion is significant to the debate between the skeptical and theistic positions. The skeptical position holds that historical faith is a bulky shell that weighs down rational religion. Kant wanted it cast off as soon as possible and the necessity of it to found an ethical community is dubious. The theistic position affirms that historical faith is necessary and though it can be "trimmed" down, rational religion will always require some form of historical faith as a vehicle. How faith and religion relate to one another is therefore central to the debate between these positions. Since Kant maintains his ambivalent attitude throughout *Religion*, it is not obvious which interpretation has more merit.

An in depth examination of the relationship between historical faith and rational religion in light of Kant's other works and recent scholarship will be able to clarify many of the issues of contention between these two positions. As stated in the beginning, I intend to do this by looking at two specific issues concerning the relationship between faith and religion and then draw more general conclusions about the relationship between historical faith and rational religion for Kant. These issues as stated earlier are to what extent is historical faith necessary for rational religion and to what extent are historical faiths equal. Each of these issues revolves around an apparent paradox in the relationship resulting from Kant's ambivalence.

The necessity of historical faith

One of the central issues of contention between the skeptical and theistic positions is the necessity of historical faith. In *Religion*, Kant states that historical faith is necessary in order to establish an ethical community but it will also eventually become dispensable. Therefore

historical faith appears to be both necessary and unnecessary. The skeptical position points out that historical faith is ultimately meant to be cast off. In the words of Wood, "the historical function of ecclesiastical faith is to serve as the *vehicle* for pure rational religion. But it is also the *shell* in which rational religion is encased and from which it is humanity's historical task to free the religion of reason."[30] The theistic position, on the other hand, points out that a vehicle will always be necessary for rational religion and that "Kant does not foresee for humankind, in any possible 'maturity', the obsolescence of revealed religion."[31]

In Chapter Two I will address this issue by first considering in what sense historical faith is deemed necessary in order to establish rational religion. Why is it necessary for historical faith to establish a church and subsequently an ethical community? Second, I will determine to what extent historical faith can be dispensed with in the future of humanity. I intend to argue that despite the skeptical position, Kant held that some vehicle of historical faith will always be necessary for humanity to have rational religion. Though the vehicle can be greatly reduced, it can never be completely removed. This will be made clear by examining Kant's argument concerning the dissolution of historical faith in comparison to his other works on religion.

After establishing this point I will then address some of the arguments brought up by the skeptical position. These arguments are expertly summarized by Allen Wood in his article "Kant's Deism" and so I will be addressing his arguments directly.[32] The intention of Wood's article is to show to what extent Kant is a deist in the sense that he believes in a "religion founded on unaided reason, but not in a revealed religion."[33] Essentially Wood is arguing that Kant ultimately rejects historical, revealed faith. I will show that Wood is basing his arguments

[30] Wood, "Kant's Deism", 5.
[31] McCammon, "Overcoming Deism", 80.
[32] Wood, "Kant's Deism."
[33] Ibid. 2.

on a misinterpretation of Kant's arguments. If Kant admits that historical faith is and always will be necessary for humanity to form an ethical community, then he cannot consistently reject revealed faith and hold that the ethical commonwealth is possible.

The equality of historical faiths

The second issue that I will address in Chapter Three is whether the relationship between the one rational religion and the many historical faiths is equal among the different faiths or whether some faiths are superior to others. This issue was originally raised by Stephen Palmquist as an unresolved issue among the theistic interpreters. Does Kant hold all religious traditions to be equal or can some historical faiths be better vehicles than others? Again there is ambivalence in Kant's work. On the one hand Kant seems to treat historical faiths with a type of equality, citing Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and "late" Judaism as all providing appropriately moral interpretations of their scriptures (*R* 6:111). On the other hand Kant clearly has a preference towards Christianity that appears in all of his works. Additionally, Kant has an equally clear disapproval of ancient Judaism (though not necessarily modern Judaism) stating that it is not technically a "religion" (*R* 6:125).

This issue is also relevant to the theistic-skeptical debate. An issue that is constantly raised in the debate is to what extent Kant is a Christian. How Kant views the issue of religious pluralism can shed some light on this question. If Kant holds all revealed faiths to be equal vehicles for religion then there would appear to be no reason for him to be considered a Christian specifically. In that case, he accepts that revealed faith is necessary but subscribes to none in particular. In contrast, if Kant holds that some faiths could be superior to other faiths, he could be seen as subscribing to Christianity but this seems difficult to justify rationally. Why should

Christianity be considered better than any other faith?[34] In this case Kant can seem to either be derogatory to other religions or else catering to the Christian majority of his time. Either way, the claim that Kant was a Christian appears difficult to maintain in light of this issue.

In Chapter Three, I will first show in what way Kant can consider faiths to be equal. That he sees a type of equality among faiths is obvious from several of his passages and his attempts to show the universality of certain religious claims. After that I will examine extensively the two situations where Kant treats historical faiths unequally: Christianity and Judaism. Although I believe Kant is mistaken in his interpretation of Judaism, I will show that his criticism of it demonstrates a negative criterion of faith. There are some faiths that can not serve as vehicles of religion. I will also demonstrate that although Kant viewed the major historical faiths equally from an objective perspective, subjectively there must be some faiths that are held superior to others. It is not possible to be completely indifferent to the vehicle of religion. So although objectively Kant did not subscribe to Christianity, subjectively he did.

Once I have completed discussing these issues, in Chapter Four, I will show how my conclusions are relevant to Kantian scholarship, specifically the debate between the skeptical and theistic positions, as well as to some issues in contemporary philosophy of religion. Not only will my findings provide support for the thesitic position over the skeptical position, but they will also create new ways of viewing Kant's perspective on religion and his arguments in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Additionally, Kant's treatment of faith and religion can provide new ways of viewing problems in the more general field of philosophy of religion, such as the definition of theism, the role of organized religion, and the issue of religious pluralism.

[34] This is especially difficult to demonstrate for Kant. Since there can be no conclusive knowledge of a given revelation, there is no way to show that one revelation is true and another is not.

Chapter Two:

The Necessity of Historical Faith

One of the first questions concerning the relationship between rational religion and historical faith is to what extent historical faith is necessary for rational religion. Kant creates the awkward situation in Book Three of *Religion* where historical faith appears to be both necessary and unnecessary for humanity's moral development.[35] Historical faith always precedes the constitution of any church which is required for pure rational religion, (and thus appears to be necessary) but also becomes gradually dispensable (and thus appears to not be necessary).[36] This has become a frequent point of contention between the skeptical and theistic interpretations of Kant's philosophy of religion. The skeptical interpretation focuses more on how ecclesiastical faith is supposed to be dispensed with eventually, whereas the theistic interpretation focuses on how "necessary" faith is as a vehicle for rational religion.[37]

In order to properly address this question, there are two things that I intend to do: first to determine to what extent historical faith is necessary for rational religion in the first place and, second, determine to what extent historical faith is eventually dispensable.[38] I will do this by examining Kant's argument for why historical faith must be used as a vehicle for rational religion and Kant's argument for the gradual transition towards the exclusive domain of pure religion, respectively. I intend to demonstrate that, although the dissolution of historical faith

---

[35] Firestone and Jacobs refer to this as the "Unnecessary Necessity Paradox." Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense*, 99.
[36] See Chapter One, 17-20, for a more detailed description.
[37] For listing of skeptical and theistic interpreters, see Chapter One, 7-11.
[38] There is a sense in which rational religion is necessary for historical faith as the necessary condition for the possibility of historical faith. However this understanding of rational religion is as a pure rational concept (the invisible church) which requires no physical instantiation; it exists in reason alone. In order for rational religion to be effective in this world (the visible church) a vehicle is required. As will be shown in Chapter Three, historical faiths can exist that are not "religions" at all, and so there is a sense in which the rational concept that exists prior to the vehicle must be developed/brought about in historical faith to become real.

must be an end for all religion, historical faith of some form will always be necessary for human beings as we are. I will conclude this chapter by critiquing Allen Wood's article "Kant's Deism."[39] In that article Wood presents strong arguments for why Kant ultimately should be considered a deist and not a theist. While Wood's arguments specifically try to show that Kant is a deist, they can be applied to any skeptical interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion since they are primarily concerned with rejecting the claim that Kant was a theist who accepted revealed faith. These arguments will need to be refuted in order to affirm my conclusion that historical revealed faith is necessary for rational religion.

Why is historical faith needed in the first place?

The role that Kant gives to historical faith is as the "vehicle" for rational religion (*R* 6:106, 6:135n). The image of vehicle indicates that the main purpose of historical faith is as a means towards rational religion. Rational religion requires a vehicle because to appear in the sensible world it must have a sensible means. As mentioned in Chapter One, Kant also uses the image of a man (religion) and garments (church/historical faith) implying that a garment without a man is useless but also that a man unclothed is "not well protected" (*CF* 7:53). What is required at this point is to determine why historical faith instantiated in a particular church (as opposed to some other institution) is necessary to be the vehicle of rational religion. It will then be determined whether religion will always require a vehicle. I have already illustrated Kant's argument for why a church is required to establish the ethical commonwealth, and so now it remains to be seen why historical faith is required in order to establish a church.

[39] Wood, "Kant's Deism."

The main reason why historical faith is required in order to found a church appears to be what Kant calls a "peculiar weakness of human nature."[40] Kant elaborates this weakness as follows:

> "Conscious of their impotence in the cognition of supersensible things . . . human beings are yet not easily persuaded that steadfast zeal in the conduct of a morally good life is all that God requires of them to be his well-pleasing subjects in his Kingdom. They cannot indeed conceive their obligation except as directed to some *service* or other which they must perform for God . . . and thus arises the concept of a religion of *divine service* instead of the concept of a purely moral religion" (*R* 6:103).

Reason informs us, according to Kant, that the only thing that can make us pleasing to God is a morally good life. Reason is not able to inform us of any "extra" service that needs to be performed to please God because rationally there need be no other service required. However, Kant is noting that human beings are not convinced of this and need to know other ways of pleasing God directly. Since reason can tell us of no other way to please God, knowledge of this "divine service" can only come from some form of revelation that reveals God's will directly. Therefore, because of this weakness, the human species will only join a church that has a basis in revelation, as opposed to a church founded on reason alone.

Taken alone, this argument appears unconvincing and even circular. Humanity requires historical faith because there is a "weakness" of humanity that results in humanity requiring historical faith. However, it should first be noted that this is not the entirety of Kant's argument. At the beginning of the next section, Kant has this to say:

> "because of the natural need of all human beings to demand for even the highest concepts and grounds of reason something that the *senses can hold on to*, some confirmation from

[40] For why a church is required for humanity in the first place see Chapter One, 15-16.

> experience or the like, (a need which must also be seriously taken into account when the intention is to *introduce* a faith universally) some historical ecclesiastical faith or other, usually already at hand, must be used" (*R* 6:109).

The tone of the language has shifted significantly. Rather than discussing a "peculiar weakness" Kant is talking about a "natural need" that must be taken seriously. Rather than a tendency towards divine service, humanity merely needs something for the senses to hold on to. As Kant states in the first *Critique*, "thoughts without content are empty" (*CPR* B75). There needs to be sensible content to human thoughts. What is odd is that this argument has the same form as the "weakness" argument (i.e. there is a unique condition of humanity that requires ecclesiastical faith in order to establish a church) and yet the argument has a very different content.

There are two possibilities for these similar looking arguments, which I will label the "peculiar weakness" argument and the "natural need" argument respectively. Either Kant is using these arguments interchangeably as the same argument in different clothing (perhaps one for more skeptical readers and the other for more theistic readers), or else he intended these to be two separate and complimentary premises of a single argument. Given that they are presented so close together in the same work I am inclined to the later interpretation. It seems unlikely that Kant would feel the need to revise his argument in the space of a few pages. The more likely option is that these are unique arguments and need to be understood each in turn before they can be understood together. I will therefore examine both of these arguments in greater detail.

The "Peculiar Weakness" Argument

The most important clue for discerning what Kant means by the "peculiar weakness" argument is the fact that he refers to it as the "human *propensity* to a religion of divine

service."[41] This is significant because in Book One of *Religion*, Kant spends a great deal of time discussing the "propensity" to evil in humanity. Kant has a very specific understanding of what a propensity is.

> "By *propensity (propensio)* I understand the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination . . . insofar as this possibility is contingent for humanity in general. It is distinguished from a predisposition in that a propensity can indeed be innate yet *may* be represented as not being such" (*R* 6:29).

A propensity is a complicated term since it is in a sense both innate and not innate. It is innate in that it applies universally to all human beings, but it is not innate in that we bring it about ourselves and are thus responsible for it. Kant uses this term specifically to justify the existence of radical evil in humanity, so that humanity can be considered evil by nature but can still be held responsible for that evil and thus are required to combat it. In other words, it is not necessary that human beings are evil, but all human beings are evil nonetheless.

By using the same term in the same work to describe humanity's weakness towards religions of divine service, it can be assumed that Kant intends a similar understanding. In *Religion*, radical evil is a condition that affects all of humanity. Using biblical terminology, human beings are all born into sin but they can and must turn away from this sin. Individual human beings can combat this evil by a process of moral reform.[42] However, no matter how many individuals reform, this radical evil will always be a condition of humanity in general. In that sense, the propensity to evil is a universal condition of humanity as a species but not a necessary condition for any individual human being. This may appear to be a contradiction in terms. However, Kant would probably consider it an antinomy, one that is resolved by

[41] My emphasis. *R* 6:106.
[42] This moral reform is the topic of Book Two of *Religion* and also relies heavily on biblical imagery.

considering a two-viewpoint perspective.[43] Instead of the appearance/thing-in-itself viewpoint, the two viewpoints are humanity viewed as a species and humanity viewed as individuals. This fits with Kant's claim that a human being can only gain "freedom from the *dominion* of evil" but that the causes of evil for an individual human "do not come his way from his own raw nature, so far as he exists in isolation, but rather from the human beings to whom he stands in relation or association" (R 6:93).

The propensity for a religion of divine service is thus also a condition of humanity as a species but not a necessary condition when considering humanity as individuals or individuals in particular communities. So it is possible for humanity to overcome this weakness, but only as unconnected individuals and not as a species. It might even be possible for every human being alive to overcome this weakness, but that would not eliminate the propensity for future human beings. Just as having every living human being reform from evil will not ensure that future human beings will be free from evil. Each individual can only combat the propensity for him or herself and not for anyone else. Therefore the propensity to a religion of divine service can be overcome but only at an individual level and never as a species.

What is still unclear is why this propensity should be taken into consideration in order to establish the ethical commonwealth. There are certainly limitations to humanity that must be considered when dealing with any human organization but that seems different than this "weakness" of humanity. This weakness first of all can be overcome, at least at the individual level, and furthermore the implication is that it ought to be overcome if possible. Why should the ethical community accommodate this weakness in the first place at all? Does the propensity

[43] Kant frequently presents antinomies as part of his critical process, and then resolves them by invoking a two-viewpoint perspective. For example, human beings seem to be both free (in our moral actions) and determined (by natural processes). This antinomy is resolved by understanding that there are two different ways of viewing humanity, as a moral agent and as a natural being.

alone make revealed faith *necessary*? Humanity has a propensity to evil, but that does not mean that we must relax the moral law because of it. We are still responsible for the actions caused by our propensities.

There is, of course, one obvious difference between the propensity to evil and the propensity to divine service, namely that one is necessarily evil and the other is not necessarily. Most acts of divine service are neither good nor evil but are morally neutral.[44] Praying, going to church, making sacrifices, pilgrimages, fasting, and so on are all morally neutral according to Kant so long as they do not directly violate the moral law. These actions neither infringe upon autonomy nor actually help anyone. Kant certainly believes that many of these can be a waste of time that could be better spent improving the world, but Kant cannot condemn actions that are morally neutral. Therefore, the propensity to divine service cannot be rejected outright as the propensity to evil is.

However, even if the propensity is not blatantly immoral it is not entirely rational or good. If a person was acting on reason alone, they would not feel obligated to perform any acts of divine service. Given a choice, it would seem that Kant would prefer to be rid of the propensity entirely. Why then should historical revealed faith be considered necessary based upon this propensity alone? This line of argument is implied throughout skeptical interpretations of Kant's philosophy of religion. The "weakness" of humanity comes across as a merely descriptive term. It explains why there is historical faith in the first place but not why there needs to be historical faith. At most it can establish that there once was a need for revealed faith but that need has no reason to continue. If there is no continuing need for historical faith, then there is no sense in which Kant can accept contemporary revealed religion, which is the main

[44] Any act of divine service that violates the moral law would however be evil, as in the case of Abraham sacrificing Isaac (*R* 6:87). However the propensity to evil necessarily leads to evil acts while the propensity to divine service only leads to evil acts incidentally and not by necessity.

contention of the skeptical interpretation. In order to address this argument appropriately I will now turn to the second argument that Kant presents: the "natural need" argument.

The "Natural Need" Argument

A "natural need" differs from a propensity in two ways. First it appears to apply to humanity as a species but also to human beings as individuals since it is the "natural need of *all human beings*" to have something that the senses can hold on to.[45] Second, the propensity appears to be an undesirable trait that should be overcome, whereas the natural need is an acceptable fact that does not need to be changed (and must even be taken seriously). This implies that the natural need is a necessary condition of human beings in general. At the very least there is no obligation to change this need. It would then seem like this natural need is a stronger argument for historical-ecclesiastical faith than the "weakness" argument. If one had to choose between accommodating an undesirable propensity or a natural need, then the later seems like an obvious choice.

The short coming of this argument is that it does not make a clear connection from premise to conclusion.[46] Presumably the argument has the following structure:

1. There is a natural need of humanity for something the senses can hold onto
2. Therefore, humanity has a need for historical faith.

While the propensity to a religion of divine service leads to a need for statutory laws that can only be provided by a reported revelation, it is not clear that historical faith based upon divine revelation is the only way that this natural need of humanity can be satisfied. This is primarily because of Kant's ambiguity as to which concept requires sensible material in founding a church. Is it for the concept of God, or the concept of divine commands, or the concept of an ethical

[45] My emphasis. *R* 6:109.
[46] In general this argument is less developed than the "weakness" argument since it only really occurs in one paragraph while the latter takes up most of Section V of *Religion. R* 6:103-109.

commonwealth? All of these concepts could receive sensible material through a divine revelation. A revelation can give us a physical manifestation of God, or a concrete listing of divine commands, or it may just provide the basis for a sensible form of the ethical commonwealth. In that brief passage, Kant does not clarify which it is.

Although all of those options are possible, the following passage provides some illumination:

> "A church which is the union in a moral community of many human beings of equally many dispositions, needs a *public* form of obligation, some ecclesiastical form that depends on experiential conditions and is intrinsically contingent and manifold, hence cannot be recognized as a duty without divine statutory laws" (*R* 6:105).

There is once again an expressed "need" of human beings, which could be expressed as an instantiation of the need for something the senses can hold onto. This public form of obligation is required because the ethical community is based upon the moral dispositions of its members which are not something that can be known by humans.[47] How then are human beings supposed to know who is a member of the ethical community? Membership must be marked by a visible sign, which Kant claims is a public form of obligation.

Kant is making an interesting point by claiming that a visible form of membership is a "public form of obligation", as opposed to matching uniforms, membership cards or even special handshakes. A human community is defined by its shared obligations. There are good grounds for this claim. Fraternities often maintain some form of secrecy that all members must swear to uphold. The keeping of secrets becomes a shared duty and helps to create a sense of camaraderie and community. If a member should break their oath of secrecy, it is grounds for expulsion because they have relinquished their communal obligation and thus the grounds for their

[47] The only good without qualification is the good will (*G* 4:393), i.e., the inner disposition of a rational being.

membership. Though Kant would not consider an oath of secrecy an appropriate public form of obligation for an ethical community, it still illustrates the connection between shared obligations and the creation of a community.

It is easy to see how most forms of traditions, customs, and rituals that normally define a given community can be understood in terms of public obligations. Nations have anthems, during which citizens are obligated to stand and to sing at certain occasions. School sport teams usually require members to dress formally before a game. Similarly, the public obligation of religious groups (attending church, performing rituals, observing specific holidays, etc.) creates a sense of community and marks out its members from non-members. You may still be an "official" member of the church even if you no longer perform the public forms of obligation, but you would cease to really belong to the community. You would be a member in name only.

Therefore, in order to make the moral community a *human* community, there needs to be a visible expression of it in the form of public obligations.[48] Where should this form of public obligation come from? Kant entertains two possibilities. Either we must establish the nature of this community ourselves, or else God will. Kant points out that it would be presumptuous to assume either possibility.

> "We should not therefore forthwith presume that the determination of this form is a task of the divine lawgiver; . . . But it would be just as arrogant peremptorily to deny that the way a church is organized may perhaps also be a special divine dispensation" (*R* 6:105).

This argument therefore concludes with a type of stalemate. We know that there must be a form of public obligation in order to establish a human moral community, but we do not know how to

[48] Of course the public obligations for the ethical community should be of the sort that they are consistent with the ends of religion. This concept will be developed further in Chapter Three especially in discussing Kant's criticism of Judaism.

determine what this public obligation is. It is presumptuous to assume that God determines the form of this obligation but also presumptuous to assume that God does not.

The two arguments can now be combined. The propensity to a religion of divine service means two things. First, there is already a form of public obligation based on divine statutory laws, determined through revelation in a religion of divine service. It can be virtually guaranteed that there will always be a religion of divine service in existence because of the human propensity towards them. Second, human beings will naturally reject any form of public obligation created by human beings alone. Human beings want to please God directly and why should one human being know better than another how to do so?

> "Thus it happens that human beings will never regard either union into a church, or agreement over the form to be given to it, or likewise any *public* institution for the promotion of the moral [content] of religion, as necessary in themselves but only for the purpose of, as they say, serving their God" (*R* 6:106).

Therefore, the only option that is available for establishing a form of public obligation for a church is to use a pre-existing historical faith, which will be based on some historical revelation. So long as that form does not contradict moral religion then there is no reason not to use it.

Thus the two arguments compliment and complete each other. The "natural need" argument explains why we need to accommodate the propensity to divine service in founding a church, and the "peculiar weakness" argument addresses how to fulfill the human need for a visible form of the church. Neither argument is completely sufficient on its own. If we just had the propensity to divine service then there would be no reason why it should be considered when forming a church. However, that propensity fulfills the natural need of humanity to have a sensible community. Since it is not (necessarily) immoral and fulfills a need of humanity, there is

no problem with it being accommodated by using historical faith to establish the ethical commonwealth.

However, in what sense does that make historical faith necessary for the ethical commonwealth? Clearly it is not necessary in and of itself, but it is necessary for human beings as human beings. The propensity and the natural need are both conditions of humanity. The presence of those two conditions means that historical faith must precede rational religion (as demonstrated by Kant's argument). Therefore as long as those two conditions are present in humanity, historical faith appears to be required as a vehicle for rational religion. In order for historical faith to become truly dispensable, one of those conditions – either the propensity or the natural need – will have to change. Whether Kant believes that this is possible can now be addressed.

Is historical faith dispensible?

Kant's argument for the eventual dissolving away of historical faith is almost as elusive as his argument for why it is required in the first place. There are two phases to this argument; first Kant must establish that historical faith *ought* to be dispensed with, and second he must establish that it *can* be dispensed with.

Kant is clear that the reason ecclesiastical faith ought to be removed is because it is not fully rationaly and therefore not universal. "The distinguishing mark of the true church is its *universality*" (*R* 6:115), and this is clear since the purpose of the church is to unite the human species in a single ethical commonwealth. It therefore must be accessible to every human being, in that every human must be capable of being convinced of it. This can never be the case with historical faith because it is entirely dependent upon an empirical, historical event (a given revelation in time). Thus, whereas every human can eventually be convinced that they should be

good as opposed to evil, not every human can be convinced rationally that there once existed a carpenter who turned water into wine.

It is not just a problem with people not buying into it. Kant is making a stronger claim. Everyone on earth could become Christian (or Muslim, or Hindu, etc.). However, the beliefs of the people would always be contingent upon that historical event. If there was no Jesus there would not be any Christians.[49] The true universal church must carry the mark of necessity; so that it could exist regardless of whatever historical revelations might occur and therefore be true for all times. Based on this argument it is clear that ecclesiastical faith cannot exist indefinitely as the true church. The historical elements ought to be removed so that only what is determined by reason alone remains in order to become truly universal.

Since historical faith *ought* to be dispensed with, the next phase of the argument is to determine if ecclesiastical faith *can* eventually be dispensed with. Kant's argument is slightly more complicated than it needs to be. Kant believes there is an antinomy that needs to be resolved, specifically, whether we should start with faith in satisfaction (atonement) or faith in being capable of good-life conduct. The complication is that faith in satisfaction is viewed as coming from historical faith and faith in good-life conduct as coming from rational religion. If it cannot be determined which type of faith is to come first, then ecclesiastical faith may always be necessary.[50] Kant goes into great detail about the antinomy (*R* 6:116-118) but resolves it ultimately by showing that faith in satisfaction can be determined by reason alone (*R* 6:118-120). The concept of the God-man (Jesus Christ) can be viewed as a moral prototype based in our practical reason.

---

[49] Kant arguably challenges this notion in Book Two of *Religion* by stating that the "Son of God" is a rational concept. *R* 6:60-62.

[50] If faith in satisfaction must precede faith in a good-life conduct, then historical faith will always be necessary for rational religion. The antinomy does not claim that this is the case but merely that it cannot be ruled out.

Kant's argument can be critiqued more thoroughly, but for now it is sufficient to say that his conclusion is that it is possible to have a saving faith that is purely rational, and thus the historical elements of faith can be removed from rational religion. Given that we ought to remove historical faith in order to maintain the universality of the church and that we can remove it and maintain the required articles of faith based on reason alone, Kant hypothesizes that

> "It is therefore a necessary consequence of the physical and, at the same time, the moral predisposition in us . . . that in the end religion will gradually be freed of all empirical grounds of determination, of all statutes that rest on history and unite human beings provisionally for the promotion of the good through the intermediary of an ecclesiastical faith. Thus at last the pure faith of religion will rule over all" (*R* 6:121).

There are two extra conditions that Kant wants to place on this argument. The first is that this transition can only occur by gradual reform and not by revolution. This is not only because the transition can only occur by having pure rational religion "permanently taking place within all human beings" (*R* 6:122) but also because Kant is highly doubtful of the benefit of revolutions, which must be "left up to Providence and cannot be introduced according to plan without damage to freedom" (*R* 6:122). Rational religion in that way is similar to leading a moral life. It cannot be forced upon anyone but must be accepted freely and rationally in order to take hold.

The second condition is that a church only requires

> "the principle of the gradual transition from ecclesiastical faith to the universal religion of reason . . . For since this principle contains the basis for a continual approximation to the ultimate perfection, there lies in it (invisibly) – as in a shoot that develops and will in the

> future bear seeds in turn – the whole that will one day enlighten the world and rule over it" (*R* 6:122).

The complete removal of all empirical conditions from religion is a task that is far removed from our human capabilities. Therefore all we need is to have a principle of approaching the ideal, and we can consider ourselves as having attained it in a way.

As stated above, two conditions of humanity make ecclesiastical faith necessary for humanity in the first place: the propensity to religions of divine service and the natural need for something the senses can hold onto. In order for historical faith to cease being necessary, at least one of those conditions must change. Given the choice between a "peculiar weakness" and a "natural need", it would seem obvious that Kant would prefer to have the first condition removed. This is reinforced by the fact that the first condition is a propensity, which by Kant's definition can be changed (albeit at an individual level). There is no sense in which the natural need can be changed or should be changed. Therefore if there is to be any "gradual transition" away from the empirical conditions of religion, it will be because of a transition away from the propensity to divine service.

This fits naturally with Kant's general argument. The reason why Kant expects a gradual transition as opposed to a revolution is that the propensity to divine service can only be changed at an individual level and only through conscious deliberation. There is a sense in which humanity has to mature in faith. The childish faith is the one of divine service whereas the mature faith is one of pure reason. This "maturing" is a process everyone must go through individually, but the rest of humanity can either help or hinder this maturation. This is also why a religion as a human organization only requires the principle of gradual transition. Having this principle ensures that the religion is helping the maturation of its members without forcing it.

What is significant, though, is that there is no sense in which the natural need for something sensible is ever altered. That condition appears to persist for humanity – it is after all a *natural* need. So even if the propensity to divine service that is not based on practical reason is to be overcome, there still seems to be a human need for a visible expression of the ethical commonwealth. As stated earlier, this would involve some form of public obligations that would not be accepted as coming from humanity alone. Given that the church is founded on a revealed, historical faith, and Kant sees no reason for a sudden upheaval of that faith, it can be hypothesized that the historical faith would persist as the vehicle for rational religion but would be cleansed of any pretense of divine service. This might inevitably alter the form of those public obligations but there is no sense in which they must be or even can be eliminated.

There is evidence that this is Kant's true opinion when he makes the following footnote concerning the ceasing of the form of the church:

> "Not that it 'will cease' (for it might always be useful and necessary, perhaps, as vehicle) but that 'it can cease'" (*R* 6:136f).

Kant's concern is not the complete abolition of historical faith but a change in its nature. There is nothing inherently wrong with the historical aspects that would require them to be elminated completely. The historical aspects of faith are only problematic so long as they are viewed as being necessary in themselves. They must be able to "cease" and so are not to be considered necessary. For example, there is nothing inherently wrong with me drinking a beer assuming that I have enough self control to be able to stop drinking beer when I need to. If I thought that drinking beer was necessary in order to carry out everything else in my life I would become an alcoholic and problems would ensue. The act of drinking beer is not wrong in and of itself, only

in so far as I view it to be necessary. Similarly with historical faith it is not the external form itself that is problematic but the relationship it has to the individual.

What is also significant about this quote is that Kant states that historical faith, despite being able to cease "might always be useful and *necessary*." This seems like an apparent contradiction. A typical understanding of necessity is that it cannot cease. How can historical faith always be necessary and yet be able to cease? The answer is that Kant is admitting a necessity for historical faith in general but denying necessity to any particular historical faith. To return to drinking beer, it is not necessary for me to drink beer but it may be necessary for me to drink something. Therefore in a sense drinking beer is necessary and in a sense it is not. Likewise it is necessary that there is a vehicle for rational religion but no individual vehicle is necessary in and of it self.[51] In the words of Kevin Smith, "it doesn't matter what you have faith in, just that you have faith."[52]

Therefore, it is the propensity to divine service that needs to be eliminated and not the natural need for something sensible. The propensity to divine service is what makes humans believe that a particular faith is necessary in the first place. Once it is accepted that God does not require extra service, the content of a particular revelation does not appear to be necessary. The only thing necessary to become pleasing to God is to lead a morally good life as determined by practical reason. However, the natural need of humanity means that historical faith in general is necessary for human beings. The natural need only needs to be satisfied by some historical faith that can provide a form of public obligation. There is no sense in which the natural need can or

[51] In logical terms it is "N(E(x))" as opposed to "E(N(x))", where E is the existential quantifier (there exists an x), and N is the necessitation quantifier (it is necesarry that). Therefore, "it is necessary that there exists an 'x'" as opposed to "there exists an 'x' that is necessary."

[52] *Dogma*, Dir. Kevin Smith, Lions Gate Films, 1999. Chapter Three will qualify this claim since it is not the case according to Kant that *any* faith will do.

ought to be eliminated and so historical faith can continue to be considered necessary for rational religion.

Another important consideration is that this transition away from historical faith to pure religion functions as an ultimate end of humanity, in Kant's robust understanding of the word. In that sense, Kant's argument runs parallel to his arguments about the highest good.[53] The highest good is the end of all of our moral strivings; it is the ultimate goal that we must adopt when we act morally. Since we must adopt this goal, we must also believe that it is possible of attainment in order to act rationally.[54] However, Kant's particular understanding of the highest good (moral perfection combined with deserved happiness) requires that there be a supremely powerful judge to determine and deliver deserved happiness and an infinite amount of time to obtain moral perfection. Thus in order to believe that the highest good is possible, one must believe in God and immortality of the soul.

Wood emphasizes that Kant intended this argument to function as a *reductio ad absurdum practicum*. If I do not believe in God and immortality then I cannot believe that the highest good is possible and that would make me a "scoundrel" in my own eyes.[55] There is a type of rational instability that comes from adopting an end that is not attainable.[56] It is not important that the end is actually achievable so much as that it is considered possible. Kant consistently insists that this argument does not prove the existence of God and immortality but merely gives a practical reason for adopting the belief. This belief is meant to fulfill a practical

---

[53] Kant deals with various forms of this argument in almost all of his major critical works. One of the most developed is in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (*CPrR* 5:107-148). There is also a more concise version in the preface to the first edition of *Religion* (*R* 6:3-7).
[54] See Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, especially 10-37.
[55] Ibid. 29.
[56] See John E. Hare "Kant on the Rational Instability of Atheism" in Chris L. Firestone and Stephen Palmquist, ed., *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indianna University Press, 2006), 62-78.

need in our moral life but does not give us any information about a reality beyond our experience.[57]

This is the same idea that Kant has for the exclusive dominion of pure religious faith. It is the end of our religious life, just as the highest good is the end of our moral life. This can be seen because his argument establishes the obligation to bring about this pure ethical commonwealth and the possibility of bringing it about. There is nothing else mentioned about whether this will actually be brought about. What makes this transition necessary is the "moral predisposition within us" (*R* 6:121). It is being propelled by our moral attitude. It is therefore not something that "will" happen but something that "can" happen and "ought" to happen and thus functions as an end. It might also function as an inevitable historical result but it is an end first and foremost.

The numerous parallels between Kant's argument for the ethical commonwealth and his argument for the practical postulates further confirm this. For example, Kant claims that we only require the principle of gradual transition "though the actual setting up of the state is still infinitely removed from us" (*R* 6:122). This parallels Kant's argument for the immortality of the soul. Perfect moral virtue is infinitely removed from us. All we can do is gradually improve and develop our virtue. It is only through an infinite series of gradual improvements that we can achieve moral perfection. But God can view all of this at once and therefore can take our principle of gradual improvement as satisfying the requirements of virtue (*CPrR* 5:123). Likewise holding the principle of gradual transition from faith to pure religion is meant to substitute for the actual achievement of it.

[57] This is a particular formulation of Kant's moral argument and not the only possible one. There is a great deal of scholastic disagreement about the exact form of Kant's moral argument but for the purposes of this work, this formulation is sufficient. Chapter Four will further discuss how the different formulations of the moral argument are not relevant to my overall conclusion.

The fact that this argument establishes an end of humanity and runs parallel to Kant's argument for the practical postulates can inform us more about his conclusion. The first is that this end is largely symbolic and apocalyptic. It represents not only the end as a goal of humanity but also the literal *end* of humanity as a finishing point. Kant admits, right after discussing the dissolving of the form of the church at the end time,

> "This representation in a historical narrative of the future world, which is not itself history, is a beautiful ideal of the moral world-epoch brought about by the introduction of the true universal religion and *foreseen* in faith in its completion – one which we do not *see directly* in the manner of an empirical completion but *have a glimpse of* in the continuous advance and approximation toward the highest possible good on earth" (*R* 6:135-136).

Kant did foresee the removal of the empirical form of the church as actual but only as a "beautiful ideal" or as an end. Even holding the principle of gradual transition can mean little more to humanity than to adopt the removal of the form of the church as its end. There is little else that can be done to achieve a task so far removed.

The second thing that this tells us is that the completion of this ideal is not likely to be accomplished by humanity alone. The achievement of the highest good was only possible upon the postulate of God and his direct involvement in our lives. It is not a far stretch to conclude that the ideal of a pure ethical commonwealth is only realizable under divine providence. Kant even states, "To found a moral people of God is, therefore, a work whose execution cannot be hoped for from human beings but from God himself" (*R* 6:100). Kant constantly refers to the "infinite" gap that lies between our current state and the envisioned ideal of pure religion. It is a gap that humanity can narrow but not ultimately cross without God's assistance.

Stephan Palmquist even goes so far as to argue that Kant presents a "religious" argument for the existence of God in *Religion* that is unique from his typical moral arguments.[58] God is a necessary part of completing the ethical commonwealth, and since we have a duty as a species to bring about the ethical commonwealth, we ought to believe in God in order to believe that end possible. Although Palmquist is perhaps too enthusiastic about the implications of this argument, it is important to note that this is not a theoretical "proof" of God but a rational justification for believing and hoping in the effective reality of God. This, of course, means that human beings must act as though everything depended on them; "human beings are not permitted on this account to remain idle" (*R* 6:100). However humans are justified in believing that God can allow humanity to cross the infinite gap between its current state and its end in order to realize the destiny of the species.

Wood's Objections

The conclusion established above differs from many skeptical interpretations of Kant's religious philosophy. First, the skeptical interpretation generally sees Kant's philosophy of religion as being reducible to his moral philosophy. However, historical faith is not necessary from the perspective of Kant's ethics.[59] Thus, if historical faith is necessary in Kant's philosophy of religion, it indicates a significant difference between these two branches of Kant's philosophy. Second, the skeptical position rejects the claim that Kant is a theist in the sense that he accepts revealed faith. Allen Wood makes several arguments for this in his article, "Kant's Deism."[60] Wood argues that typical distinctions between deists and theists should be recast in terms of

[58] Stephen Palmquist, "Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God", *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 26, No.1, (January 2009): 3-22. How this argument differs from the moral argument will be address further in Chapter Four.
[59] The requirement of Kant's ethics is that we fulfill our duties for the sake of duty, as determined by the categorical imperative. Kant's argument for the practical postulates only establishes a rational belief in God and immortality; it says nothing about the need for historical, revealed faith.
[60] Wood, "Kant's Deism."

whether revealed faith is accepted or not. As a deist, Kant would accept that there is a God but reject any type of revelation. Although Wood is specifically arguing for Kant being a deist, he does so primarily by arguing how Kant is not a theist (that he does not accept revealed faith), and therefore his arguments can be applied to the skeptical interpretation in general. Therefore, I will now address Wood's arguments as they are important objections to my conclusion.

> One of Wood's first arguments for Kant's supposed deism is that
>
> "Kant does, however, look forward to the time when ' the form of a church itself is dissolved, the viceroy on earth steps into the same class as the human being raised to a citizen of heaven, and so God will be all in all'. The plain intent here is eventually to abolish the church's hierarchical constitution."[61]

Wood is only partially correct here. Kant is intent on abolishing the structure of the church, but that is an ultimate end, not an immediate end. Kant looks forward to it the same way he looks forward to realizing the highest good. It is something he hopes for and works towards but is not something realizable in this world without God's assistance.

A big clue to this is the quote above concerning the viceroy that Wood uses from *Religion*. Out of context, it seems like the viceroy refers to the authority figures of the church. [62] This would then be a situation when the lordly clergy is dissolved and all become equal. However, Kant speaks about the viceroy just before that passage as the representative of God governing His Kingdom on earth, "who has again come down [from heaven])" (*R* 6:134). This is not a revolution of the church's hierarchy but quite literally the second coming of Christ. That further confirms the apocalyptic nature of the dispensing of historical faith. It occurs at the end of history and only with God's direct intervention.

---

[61] Ibid. 5.

[62] Viceroy is translated as "vicar" in Wood and di Giovanni's translation of *Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 138.

Wood provides two more substantial arguments for Kant's deism as well, which he labels the theoretical and the practical premises.[63] The practical premise is meant to show that there is something morally questionable about organized historical faith. In this particular case, Wood illustrates that it has an increased tendency to put people in a state of "tutelage":

> "When someone's thinking is subject to the guidance or direction from others, as the thought and conduct of children is to the direction of their parents, then that person is in the condition of 'tutelage' . . . The greatest human indignity occurs when free adult human beings are also in a state of tutelage."[64]

Although tutelage can occur in many areas of life, religion appears to be one of the worst. There is therefore a practical call for all human beings to think for themselves and this thinking for yourself is called enlightenment (*OT* 8:146n). Since organized religion causes human beings to be in a state of tutelage, the conclusion is that human beings ought to reject it.

This argument is meant to show that Kant does not actually accept any faith based on revelation. If Kant finds tutelage to be a great crime, and revealed faith causes people to be in tutelage, then according to Wood's argument Kant would reject revealed faith. There are two problems with this argument. First, in order to reject revealed faith because it causes tutelage, there would have to be a necessary connection between tutelage and revealed faith. But there is no necessary connection. It is logically possible to accept a revealed faith and "think for yourself." As has been shown above it is possible to accept revealed faith on rational grounds as a means to establishing the ethical commonwealth. So long as rational beings continue to think independently and accept historical faith on rational grounds, there appears to be no reason why they can not accept a revealed faith and be free from tutelage. Admittedly, even if the content of

[63] Wood's intention for labelling these "premises" as opposed to arguments is that they are meant to be premises that support the conclusion that Kant is a deist. There are still separate arguments though.
[64] Wood, "Kant's Deism", 5.

a revelation is compatible with enlightenment, there can be several aspects of the institution of faith that promotes being in tutelage. However enlightenment is ultimately an individual's responsibility and therefore it is possible for a rational being to overcome this. Although this can be greatly discouraged and hindered, no one can force you to remain in a state of tutelage.

The second problem with Wood's argument is that it assumes that Kant would completely reject revealed faith just because it has caused something bad. If that was Wood's assumption then why stop at tutelage? Kant himself lists over a dozen deplorable deeds done by Christianity throughout its history that concludes with the exclaimed quote by Lucretius: "tantum religio potuit suadere malorum!"[65] Despite all of these evils (to which "tutelage" could be added) Kant believes that it is clear

> "from its founding that Christianity's true first purpose was none other than the introduction of a pure religious faith . . . whereas all that turmoil which has wrecked the human race, and still tears it apart, stems from this alone: because of a bad propensity in human nature" (*R* 6:131).

These evils, such as tutelage, are caused by human beings and not by revealed faith.

Wood's second major argument is the theoretical premise. This argument is simply that Kant cannot accept any faith based on revelation because he clearly states that no human being can ever have grounds for accepting revelation. "For if God should really speak to a human being, the latter could still never *know* that it was God speaking. It is quite impossible for a human being to apprehend the infinite by his senses" (*CF* 7:63). Since a human being can never have grounds for accepting a particular revelation (even if they received it directly), then there can never be grounds for accepting a faith based on revelation. If Kant does not accept a faith based on revelation then he must at most be a deist and certainly not a theist.

---

[65] "Such evil deeds could religion prompt!" (*R* 6:130-131).

The problem with this argument is that it is forgetting Kant's distinction between knowledge, opinion, and belief (*CPR* A822/B850). Knowledge is objectively and subjectively sufficient. Opinion is neither objectively nor subjectively sufficient. Belief is objectively insufficient but subjectively sufficient in that it fulfills a universal need of practical reason. Kant clearly states that a human can never "*know*" that a revelation is truly from God, but that does not mean that a human being cannot believe that it is. Kant is merely eliminating the objective certainty of a revelation. There are no positive objective grounds but it may still fulfill a need of practical reason. If there is a particular revelation that does not contradict the moral law and is fulfilling the obligation of humanity to bring about an ethical commonwealth, then that seems like sufficient subjective grounds for believing that revelation to be divine. What is at dispute here is what it means to "accept" revealed faith. If acceptance requires objective certainty, then Kant could not be considered a theist in that sense. However, according to Kant, no one could be a theist in if it required objective certainty of God's existence since no one can have that level of certainty. If acceptance means rationally believing in the revelation (not just having a fleeting opinion), then Kant can be considered to accept revealed faith even if he cannot know that it is truly from God.

Wood's arguments therefore do not hold up. There are several mistakes that he makes. First, he mistakes Kant's hopeful outlook towards the end of time as a call to bring that state about immediately. Second, he sees the fact that faith promotes an injustice as a reason to reject it completely. Third, he claims that a faith can only be "accepted" if it is objectively known. These mistakes could have been avoided, if he had paid more attention to the ongoing necessity of historical faith for human beings, rather than the far-removed end of the historical faith being

dispensable. Kant's commitment to the exclusive domain of rational religion does not make him a deist any more than his commitment to the highest good makes him a utilitarian.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated that historical revealed faith is an ongoing necessity for human beings in order to realize rational religion. It fulfills a natural need of humanity to have a sensible expression of an otherwise invisible ethical community. Although the propensity to divine service that makes human beings see a particular revelation as being necessary in and of itself can be combatted, the natural need for a sensible vehicle of religion will persist for humanity. The end of humanity is not to eliminate historical faith but to stop viewing any one historical faith as being necessary, though some historical faith or other will be necessary. This end is also one that can only be gradually approached by humanity; it requires the intervention of God to fully realize. That end can still inform the actions of humanity and decisions about religion but there is a gap that cannot be closed by human beings alone. Human beings can certainly improve their condition, mature their faith, and advance towards that ideal, but it will always be allusive. In the mean time, it is historical faith that remains a necessity for human beings to bring about rational religion and the ethical commonwealth.

Chapter Three:

The Plurality of Historical Faiths

In the introduction to *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, Stephen Palmquist raised the question "whether Kant's approach to theology and religion aligns itself (or can be aligned) more closely with one particular religious tradition, or whether it *must* be nonsectarian and/or ecumenical."[66] In other words, how does Kant address the issue of religious pluralism? Palmquist points out that it is a question that has been "intensified" in light of the theistic interpretation of Kant.[67] In the paradoxical style that is common to his treatment of religion, Kant makes simultaneous claims about the equality of historical faiths but also shows a clear preference towards Christianity, even claiming it is "*destined* to be the world religion" (*ET* 8:339). This issue can be recast as an issue involving the relationship between historical faith and rational religion. Are all historical faiths equal vehicles for rational religion or are there some clearly better than others? If there are some that are better, what makes those faiths superior to others? What then would this tell us about how to treat other religious traditions in the world?

In this chapter I will investigate this aspect of the relationship between faith and religion. I intend to argue that Kant maintained an equal respect for almost all historical faiths but that from a subjective standpoint some faiths will inevitably be preferred over others. I will first make the case for why Kant holds that historical faiths are equal and in what sense they are equal. Following that I will address two contexts in which Kant does not appear to treat historical faiths equally. The first is Kant's criticism of Judaism and the second is Kant's clear preference towards Christianity. Both of these contexts lead to important points about Kant's view on historical faiths. Kant's treatment of Judaism shows that there can be objective criteria for

[66] Firestone and Palmquist, ed., *New Philosophy of Religion*, 28.
[67] The skeptical position has "rarely cared" about this issue according to Palmquist. Ibid. 28.

evaluating potential vehicles of religion. On the other hand, Kant's preference for Christianity shows that subjective opinions must be taken into account when dealing with historical faiths but only when dealing with essential features of that faith. I will conclude by illustrating how these objective and subjective criteria can relate together.

The Equality of Faiths

The root of Kant's equal treatment of various religious traditions and their implied faith commitments can be traced to the first *Critique*. One of the primary goals of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was to determine the "extent and boundaries" of speculative reason (*CPR* Axii). It is in this vein that Kant rejects all theoretical proofs for the existence of God, since God's existence and nature are outside the realm of our possible knowledge. No matter how hard we try, we as humans will never know whether God exists or not. However, by the same token we will never be able to disprove the existence of God. By taking the question of God outside of the realm of possible knowledge, Kant can give strength to theism since it will never be disproved or made impossible. Hence Kant's famous statement; "I had to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*" (*CPR* Bxxx).

Kant maintains this "agnosticism" towards almost every religious concept about the supernatural. There is one ultimate negative criterion that Kant persistently maintains and that is that no religious concept or practice can contradict the moral law as determined by reason.[68] The moral law always takes precedence in religious matters. Therefore, concerning an alleged revelation, Kant claims that a human being could

> "never *know* that it was God speaking . . . but in some cases the human being can be sure that the voice he hears is *not* God's; for if the voice commands him to do something

[68] Kant also argues that historical research or scriptural scholarship can cofirm certain facts about a revelation (*R* 6:112). However this criterion is also ultimately negative. Scholarship might be able to determine, or disprove, that there once lived a man named Jesus, but it can never determine objectively that Jesus was the Son of God.

> contrary to the moral law, then no matter how majestic the apparition may be, and no matter how it may seem to surpass the whole of nature, he must consider it an illusion" (*CF* 7:63).

However, assuming that the revelation does not contradict practical reason it could never be disproved that it was God speaking either. It is simply not knowable by finite rational beings. Similarly, Kant also states that religious concepts such as the divine Trinity are "a mystery surpassing all human concepts" (*R* 6:142). Kant persistently says that these things can neither be known nor disproved.

Because of this agnosticism all supernatural claims have a type of equal worth, so long as they do not contradict practical reason. The truth of them can never be proved nor disproved; all of them are possible. There can never be one faith claim that is "truer" than another; they can simply be believed with greater or lesser conviction. It is because of this approach that Kant claims,

> "Whether the devout individual makes his statutory visit at *church* or undertakes a pilgrimage to the sanctuaries in Loretto or Palestine; whether he takes his formulas of prayer to the heavenly authority with his *lips*, or by means of a *prayer-wheel*, like the Tibetan . . . or whatever the surrogate for the moral service of God might be, it is all the same and of equal worth" (*R* 6:173).[69]

How we ought to serve God aside from a morally good disposition, whether we can or not, is beyond the capacities of our reason to determine. Therefore, there is no objective way of determining what religious practices may be better or worse aside from their correspondence to the moral law. The same point about religious practices can be made about the revelations of

[69] It should be noted that in this particular context Kant is pointing out that all of these practises are equally *worthless* if they are taken to be more important than a moral disposition in serving God. However, the point is that the external forms and practices of different faiths make no difference so long as they are not immoral.

certain faith traditions. There are no objective grounds for determining what revelation (whether the Bible, the Qur'an, the Vedas, etc.) is truly from God. Therefore, no revelation can be held to be innately superior to any other. There can still be significant differences in how those faiths are put into practice but the core beliefs, so long as they meet the broad negative criterion, will always be of equal worth.

It is also important to note again that Kant defines religion as "the recognition of all our duties as divine commands" (*R* 6:153). This means that religion for Kant is not a particular set of beliefs about God but a type of moral outlook. As Wood defines Kant's moral faith, it is

> "no more than the courage to struggle toward the attainment of one's moral ends, sustained through hardship and apparent failure by a loving trust in God as the wise and beneficent Providence in whose hands all will be well. Moral faith is the choice of finite rationality to remain rational while confronted by its finitude, the choice of sober hope rather than wild despair."[70]

The argument that Kant makes in *Religion* is that a result of this outlook is the need to create an ethical community. What makes a historical faith a vehicle for religion is not only the creation of the ethical community but also the introduction and development of this rational moral outlook.

As a result of the equality of beliefs of different faiths, Kant can maintain that there is equal potential for historical faiths to be vehicles for rational religion. Michel Despland points out that for Kant,

> "All faiths have potentially and some consciously within themselves the regulatory principle which will bring them in the future to a greater purification and to an ultimate convergence in the cosmopolitan religious community."[71]

---

[70] Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 250.
[71] Despland, *History and Religion*, 240.

There is a human predisposition towards rational religion (*R* 6:111), in contrast to the propensity to historical faith, and so the seeds of rational religion can be found in all faiths. All that is required to realize that potential is to interpret the revelations in a way that "harmonizes with the universal practical rules of a pure religion of reason" (*R* 6:110).

Kant also shows that this is how all types of faith are treated and that "rational and thoughtful teachers of the people have kept on interpreting them until, gradually, they brought them, as regards their essential content, in agreement with the universal principles of moral faith" (*R* 6:110-111). He cites the Greeks and Romans who knew to "interpret even the coarsest polytheism as just a symbolic representation of the one divine being", as well as late Judaism, Christianity, "Mohammedans" (i.e. Muslims), and Hindus as all making these "reinterpretations" of revelation (*R* 6:111). Although there are people who claim to accept the literal interpretation of a particular scripture (i.e., without any reinterpretation), it would still probably be a challenge to find someone who believes literally all of that scripture and does not reinterpret some aspect of it. For example, Steve Falkenberg states that,

> "I've never met anyone who actually believes the Bible is literally true. I know a bunch of people who say they believe the Bible is literally true but nobody is actually a literalist. Taken literally, the Bible says the earth is flat and setting on pillars and cannot move (Ps 93:1, Ps 96:10, 1 Sam 2:8, Job 9:6). It says that great sea monsters are set to guard the edge of the sea (Job 41, Ps 104:26)."[72]

Reinterpretation of scripture is necessary, even for the staunchest biblical literalist.

Since all faiths reinterpret their revelations, at least in some part, it means that all are possible of the greater reinterpretation required to bring about rational religion. That does not

[72] Stephen Falkenberg, "Biblical Literalism", <http://web.archive.org/web/20080615062211/http://www.newreformation.org/literalism.htm>.

mean that they require "natural" interpretations that remove all elements of the supernatural. As stated before, Kant is agnostic about supernatural claims. All that is required is to reinterpret what "either contains absolutely nothing for morality, or even works counter to its incentives" (*R* 6:110) in favor of an interpretation that supports our moral reason. This is something that must be done, regardless of how forced it is, "for the final purpose of even the reading of these holy books, or the investigation of their content, is to make better human beings" (*R* 6:111). Hence, all faiths appear to have the same potential to bring about rational religion. The fact that Kant argues that some faiths do not have this potential at all will be examined more closely when addressing Kant's criticism of Judaism. However, assuming that two faiths have any potential at all to serve as vehicles for rational religion then their potential should be equal.

Given that all historical faiths that have the potential to be vehicles for rational religion have equal potential, it also means that all faiths share the same destiny; namely, to join in the universal ethical commonwealth. In other words, all historical faiths must adopt the same end: the dissolving of all historical elements. Once all that is historical is removed, or no longer thought of as necessary, then what separates the different faiths will cease. With no doctrinal issues to dispute and the acceptance of rational religion, all historical faiths will be joined in the invisible church. That does not mean that all will necessarily share the same visible church, but that there will be a type of spiritual unity among all faiths.

To use an analogy common to religious pluralism, historical faiths can be viewed as different paths up a mountain. Each path is completely distinct but all the paths converge on the mountain top. So although there may be serious differences among the various faiths, they all converge in the end. What makes this analogy especially appropriate for Kant is that as the paths travel up the mountain, the distance between the different paths decreases. So too, as the

different faiths gradually transition towards their shared goals, they will naturally find more and more in common with other faiths traveling on separate paths. The less that a faith holds onto the necessity of historical elements, the greater the possibility is of finding harmony with other faiths. Conversely, the more that a faith clings to historical elements (scripture, doctrine, etc.) the more likely that faith will alienate itself from others and cause disharmony. "Wherever sectarianism is to be found, it arises from a mistake on the part of the ecclesiastical faith: the mistake of regarding its statutes . . . for essential parts of religion" (*CF* 7:50).

An important note is that this destiny can be shared equally by all of the different faiths. It is not necessary that only one historical faith will achieve this destiny, though that certainly is a possibility. In other words, it is not necessary for everyone to all become Christian (or Muslim, or Jewish, or Hindu, etc.) in order for the ethical commonwealth to be realized. What is necessary is that all faiths adopt that unification as an end and work towards it in their own way. Kant uses Catholics and Protestants as a specific example:

> "Enlightened Catholics and Protestants, while still holding to their own dogmas, could thus look upon each other as brothers in faith, in expectation (and striving towards this end)" (*CF* 7:52).

Although it could be argued that there would be benefits to achieving this end if all shared one historical faith, there can be no obligation to accept that faith over another so long as there are historical elements to a faith.

Judaism

Although historical faiths have the same epistemic worth, the same potential as vehicles for religion and the same destiny of forming the ethical commonwealth, there are two notable contexts where Kant treats historical faiths differently. While the more prominent is his obvious

preference for Christianity throughout his writings, in *Religion* he shows an equally obvious disapproval of Judaism.[73] Rather than viewing Judaism as another historical faith that has an equal potential of serving as a vehicle for religion, as Kant does with almost every other historical faith, he claims that,

> "Strictly speaking Judaism is not a religion at all but simply the union of a number of individuals who, since they belonged to a particular stock, established themselves into a community under purely political laws, hence not into a church" (*R* 6:125).

For Kant, Judaism is a juridical community alone, as opposed to an ethical community, and therefore not a church. If Judaism is not a church then it cannot serve as a vehicle for religion at all, since the ethical community can only take the form of a church.[74] Hence it is not on equal footing with all other historical faiths. I intend to show that Kant's criticism of Judaism, whether accurate or not, shows that there are some "faiths" that cannot be vehicles for religion and thus are not equal to faiths that can be.

Before beginning this discussion, it should be noted that Kant's conception of Judaism is taken from a very literal interpretation of the Old Testament and does not necessarily correspond to the actual practise of Judaism at any time in history. Although it might appear that Judaism was only based upon political laws, the inner dispositions of the Jewish people, which would determine their morality according to Kant, is unknown to any other human being and thus cannot be commented on. Similarly, the focus on inner disposition that Kant finds in Christian scripture does not necessarily protect against a purely "political" practice of Christianity.

---

[73] Kant's criticisms are specifically directed towards Ancient Judaism. Kant's mention of "Late Judaism" at R 111 indicates that modern Judaism may have improved in his opinion but aside from this brief point there is no other positive mention of Judaism in his writings.

[74] See above, Chapter One, 15-16.

Therefore, Kant's criticisms should not be taken to be directed against Judaism in its entirety but only against a rather narrow interpretation of it.

It should also be emphasized that this does not mean that there is anything wrong with Jewish scripture, at least not more so than any other faith. This is only based on a *literal* interpretation of the scripture and is not the only possible interpretation. As noted above Kant indicates that modern Judaism uses a more moral interpretation of their scripture and thus could have the same potential for religion as any other faith.[75] It is only when Judaism is understood as a people following the laws of an ever-present and wrathful God who strikes down their enemies that the faith contains no religion. Also, this is only based on some of the Old Testament. There are many other parts of the Old Testament that do not have this problem, even under a very literal interpretation. For example, Kant holds that the only possible response to the problem of evil is found in the character of Job.[76]

The reason why Kant's criticism is still significant, even if it does not necessarily correspond to Judaism, is that it shows that there can be a historical faith, whether real or not, without any religion. In that case, not all historical faiths have equal potential to be vehicles for rational religion. There is at least one faith according to Kant, namely, his interpretation of ancient Judaism, which has absolutely no potential for religion. Furthermore, Kant's criticism can be applied to any faith that falls into the same problems. Therefore his criticism presents a more general negative criterion for faiths to be potential vehicles for rational religion. In order to determine what this negative criterion is Kant's criticism needs to be explored further. [77]

---

[75] See footnote #73.
[76] *FT*, 8:264-267.
[77] Despite this, Kant might still seem undeservedly harsh towards Judaism. How undeserved this criticism is would have to involve a more historical investigation into Kant's personal views and the overall anti-semitism of Koënisburg at the time. My intention is only to examine the philosophical importance of his criticism.

Kant lists three arguments for why Judaism can not be considered religious (*R* 6:126-127). First, its commandments only deal with external actions and not internal dispositions (the true measure of morality according to Kant). There is an overwhelming abundance of laws that must be followed to the letter rather than in the spirit of the law. Second, the rewards and punishments for following the commandments or not are all of "this" world. Obeying God led to victory and riches while disobeying God led to slavery and suffering. Third, Judaism is exclusive in nature by focussing on the "chosen" people of God set apart from the rest of the world. You are a Jew by being born a Jew, and by not being born a Jew you will never be a part of the people of God.[78]

What ties these three arguments together is that they all show how Judaism (as thus understood) fails to fulfill the function of religion. As stated in Chapter Two, there are several parallels between Kant's arguments for religion and Kant's practical postulates of God and immortality. With the practical postulates, there are two propositions which have no evidence to support or contradict them but which nevertheless can be rightly believed. What gives a person justification for believing in the practical postulates is that they fulfill a necessary need of our moral life. There is a function that they serve, and so long as the postulates fulfill that function a person can in a way be "granted permission" to believe them despite having no evidence.

Organized religion is also something which from a purely practical perspective has no particular support for existing or not. Revealed faiths appear neither to create an overabundance of morally good people nor of seriously morally flawed people, despite the disagreements of Richard Dawkins and company.[79] Certainly there does not appear to be enough evidence to dispose of all the world's religions but there also seems to be no reason why organized religion

[78] Keeping in mind that this is Kant's particular interpretation of ancient Judaism.

[79] For a more detailed argument against the claim that organized religion causes immoral actions see Joseph A. Buijs, "Atheism and the Argument from Harm", *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 42-52.

should continue to exist. Kant's discussion of faith and religion is meant to show that there is a natural need that organized religion fulfills. Religion fulfills the duty *sui generis*: the duty of the human race towards itself to "promote the highest good as a good common to all" (*R* 6:97). Historical faiths do this by adopting as an end the creation of an ethical commonwealth of all human beings. So long as a historical faith fulfills this function then there is justification for the existence of that historical faith, even if it may not have any other obvious reason for being.

The arguments that Kant is presenting against Judaism are all examples of how Judaism is not fulfilling the natural function of religion. The first two arguments show that Judaism is not creating an *ethical* commonwealth. The ethical commonwealth stands in contrast to the political commonwealth in that the ethical commonwealth has laws of virtue as opposed to "*public juridical laws* (which are all coercive laws)" (*R* 6:95). Kant sees ancient Judaism as only being concerned with fulfilling certain public obligations which were done in order to receive blessing from God or avoid punishment. As such, the motivation for fulfilling these laws was based on inclination instead of obligation and thus not truly moral. So any commonwealth that Judaism, on this view, establishes would not be truly ethical in nature.

The third argument shows that Judaism is not creating an ethical *commonwealth*, in the sense that it is not being established for all of humanity. Even if it were an ethical community as Kant understands it, by being exclusive it could never adopt the end of all of humanity being united. The end of Judaism is the salvation of a particular people, not of all people.[80] It therefore is not fulfilling the duty *sui generis*. Thus, all of these arguments show that Judaism on Kant's interpretation does not fulfill the natural function of religion and can not be considered as a

[80] Once again, this is based on a literal interpretation of some parts of the Old Testament and is not to be taken as an indictment of the entire Jewish tradition.

religion. There is no "justification" for practicising this particular type of historical faith and so it has a practical worth similar to the epistemic worth of an unsubstantiated opinion.[81]

As I have attempted to maintain, these criticisms apply to a particular understanding of Judaism which does not necessarily correspond to the actual tradition of Judaism. However what is significant is that Kant sees that this particular faith (regardless of whether it is real or not) can not serve as a vehicle for rational religion. This faith does not stand on equal footing with other faiths; it has no potential for developing rational religion. Neither does any faith that falls into these same criticisms. What this demonstrates is that there are some historical faiths that will not be able to be vehicles for rational religion. Therefore, there is a way in which some faiths are superior to others according to Kant.

The way in which faiths differ in this regard is in their potential to fulfill the natural function of religion, namely, to establish an ethical commonwealth amongst humanity. As seen with Kant's example of Judaism there can be some historical faiths that are unable to fulfill this function. This is more than just failing to adopt the end of pure rational religion or not doing all that is possible to bring rational religion about. These are faiths which will never be able to fulfill the function of religion as they are currently constituted. On some fundamental level, they contradict the goals of religion. As Kant showed with "ancient Judaism", this could be that they are not truly ethical or that their goals contradict the end of religion. However there are other possible examples. There could be faiths that are blatantly immoral rather than just lacking the call for the inner moral disposition required for virtue.[82] These faiths would also not be considered to be religions.

---

[81] By analogy, a faith that serves as a vehicle for religion would be equivalent to a rational belief (*glaube*) (*CPrR* 5:126) which is neither knowledge nor mere opinion.

[82] Film and television are full of groups like this such as the human-sacrificing cult of *Indianna Jones and the Temple of Doom* or even the Sith of *Star Wars*. However, historical cults such as the Peoples Temple Agricultural

This provides a type of negative criterion for historical faiths. There are certain conditions that a historical faith must fulfill in order to be considered as a potential vehicle for rational religion. Quite literally, they must be potentially capable of fulfilling the function of rational religion. Once the faith meets this condition then it can be considered to be equal, more or less, to all other faiths that also are able to fulfill that condition. However the faiths that fail to meet those basic conditions are to be rejected as potential vehicles for rational religion and therefore have no practical "justification" for being.

This is not a measurement of degrees. Either a historical faith has the potential or it does not. For example, I could potentially speak Mandarin. I have the same potential to speak Mandarin as any other human being, in a strictly physical understanding. All humans after all have the vocal equipment necessary to speak any human language, despite having some cultural and personal obstacles. There are certainly many other humans who have actualized more of this possibility than I have, but I still have the same possibility. A dog, however, does not have the potential to speak Mandarin, and neither does a can of beer, a car, or even a highly intelligent ape. It is not that I have more potential for speaking Mandarin then those other animals and objects. Rather I have the potential and they simply do not.

It becomes slightly more complicated with historical faiths because they can substantially change. As Kant understands Judaism, ancient Judaism had no potential for religion while "late Judaism" seems to have some potential for it. How can a faith at one point have no potential and then gain potential? It would either have to have had potential all along or else it does not truly have the potential now. However, that is only on the understanding that the faith of Judaism remained fundamentally the same. If Kant maintains that ancient Judaism was not a religion at

---

Project in Jonestown that committed mass suicide or polygamists groups that practice underage marriage could arguably meet this definition as well.

all, while late Judaism at least potentially is, then he must maintain that these are fundamentally different faiths.[83] These two faiths might share the same scriptures and many of the same practices but they are still distinct in their interpretation of that scripture.

It is not the scriptures and the practices that make a faith a potential vehicle for rational religion. Rather it is the willingness and ability to create an ethical commonwealth. While there may be several ways in which this willingness can be manifested, there are two specific ones that can be extrapolated from Kant's criticism of ancient Judaism. First, a faith must be able to read true morality into its scripture. This does not mean that the faith always does so, but that it could do so eventually. For example, a faith that insists upon a literal interpretation of its scripture would not meet this criterion, but a faith that allows for a reinterpretation of its scripture could. Second the end of the faith must be consistent with the end of rational religion. Once again, these ends do not have to be identical but do have to be consistent. In the case of ancient Judaism, the end of the faith was the salvation of a specific group of people which is not consistent with the highest good being a good common to all rational beings.

There may be other specific reasons why a faith cannot be used for religion. What is important is that there are reasons why a particular faith has no potential for religion. Therefore, it is not the case that all faiths or belief systems are equal. There is a negative criterion that makes some faiths potential vehicles and others not. It is possible for a faith to transform itself to the point that it could become a potential vehicle but that requires a dramatic adjustment to the interpretation of scripture and the end goal of the faith. Pending those dramatic changes, the faiths would have to be considered to have no rational justification for being practiced and would not be considered a true religion. Kant seems to believe that all the major world religions satisfy

[83] This also helps to explain how Kant can be highly critical of ancient Judaism and not necessarily of contemporary Judaism. When he is criticizing ancient Judaism, he is criticizing a faith completely distinct from the Judaism he would have encountered in his life.

this criterion, so it is not necessarily difficult to satisfy. However, it does provide a way of distinguishing between mainstream faiths and questionable cults.[84]

Christianity

More noticeable than Kant's criticism of Judaism is his consistent preference towards Christianity. Though this is mostly indirect, such as repeated New Testament references and Christian imagery, there are also direct references to Christianity being the "first true *church*" (*R* 6:159), "the most adequate" form of faith (*CF* 7:36), and "*destined* to be the world religion" (*ET* 8:339). This "bias" towards Christianity also raises a problem for the supposed equality among different historical faiths. If Kant believed that Christianity is superior to other faiths, then it demonstrates that some beliefs may have greater value and thus that some faiths have greater potential towards religion and alone can claim the destiny of the human species.

In order to address Kant's treatment of Christianity I intend to first examine what separates Christianity from other faiths. Whatever is significantly different would logically have to be what makes the faith better than others. I will show that the only grounds for distinguishing faiths are the essential features found in their revelation or scripture. Second, I intend to show that Kant believed in the objective equality of all potential vehicles of religion, but that subjectively there inevitably will be preferences for some faiths over others. However, these preferences can only be taken into account when dealing with the essential features of a faith.

There are many ways in which historical faiths can differ from each other. It can be the structure of their institutions, the general conduct of its members, the nature of their founding revelation, the extent of their doctrines, and so on. To list all the ways in which Christianity differs from other faiths would take a great deal of time and it still would not uncover what differences are significant. Fortunately there is a clue in Kant's treatment of different Christian

[84] By cults I mean the blatantly immoral organizations listed above in footnote #82.

sects. There are almost as many differences among Christian denominations as there are among entirely different faith traditions. However, Kant goes out of his way to show that there is no significant difference among Christian denominations. This is particularly noticeable when he discusses Protestants and Catholics.

Kant was surrounded by Protestantism his entire life and thus would have little reason to support Catholicism in any way. However, Kant never shows any allegiance to any particular Protestant denomination. Allen Wood argues extensively that Kant's frequent label as "the philosopher of protestantism" is "particularly harmful and misleading."[85] He was certainly a proponent of freedom of thought and independent faith but Kant did not find those qualities aligned with any particular denomination. This view is well summarized in the following passage from *Religion*:

> "If a church which claims that its ecclesiastical faith is universally binding is to be called *catholic*, and *protestant* a church that protests against such claims of others (though it would often gladly exercise them itself, if it could), then the attentive observer will come across many a renowned example of protestant catholics and, by contrast, still more offensive examples of arch-catholic protestants; the first are human beings whose frame of mind (though this is not that of their church) is given to *self-expansion*; by comparison with these the second clearly stand out, but not at all to their advantage, with the *narrowness* of theirs" (*R* 6:109).

In other words, not all Catholics are bad and not all Protestants are good, and vice a versa.

What makes a Christian a good Christian has nothing to do with their denomination. Kant in many places even seems harder on Protestants, as people tend to be whenever they believe that someone should know better. Kant points out the officials of a Protestant church that

[85] Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 197-199n.

> "do not display themselves in hierarchical splendor as spiritual officials clothed with external power but even protest in words against any such thing, in fact wish to be regarded as the exclusive chosen interpreters of a holy Scripture . . . thus they transform *service* of the church (*ministerium*) into a *domination* of its members (*imperium*), even though they make use of the modest title of the former" (*R* 6:165).

These types of Protestants come across as hypocrites. Although the Catholics may be guilty of the same crime, at least they are not pretending that they are not according to Kant.

Kant certainly did not align himself any more with Catholicism however. Kant's opinion was that the distinctions between Catholics and Protestants were completely irrelevant and more than a little inane. Kant demonstrates this inanity with this humorous passage:

> "When the Catholic Church says: Outside the (Catholic) Church there is no salvation, it speaks more consistently than the Protestant Church when it says: Catholics too can be saved. For if that is so (says Bossuet), then the safer choice is to join the Catholic Church" (CF 7:62n).

The differences between the Catholic and Protestant faiths are so irrelevant, that the choice to join one church over the other can be settled simply by covering one's bets.

All of these passages demonstrate that Kant saw no significant difference between the various Christian sects. Yet there are an abundance of differences between the various sects of Christianity. Although Kant may not have been exposed to many of the contemporary forms of Christianity, he still would have been aware of the vast differences between rituals, dogmas, and hierarchy. The only thing that could be said to be a common factor among the Christian denominations is their scripture. No matter the shape and constitution of their visible churches,

they all believe (to some extent) in the same Bible (more or less). Therefore, what sets all of Christianity apart from every other historical faith is the nature of their scripture.[86]

What is important to note at this moment is that Kant believed that the nature of a historical faith's revelation is more significant than any other aspect of the faith. It is the content of the revelation of a faith that constitutes the faith's essential nature as opposed to any dogma, ritual, practice or structure. All of those features aside from revelation are merely incidental compared to a faith's revelation. It should also be noted that it is specifically the content of the revelation that is essential. The supposed veracity of a revelation is not an issue, since Kant states there can be no confirmation of a revelation. The message contained in the revelation, however, is the essence of a faith. And so if a faith is to be considered superior to another faith, it will be because of that faith's essential nature, i.e. its revelation, and not because of any other feature.

When Kant shows a preference towards Christianity, he is thus showing a preference towards Christian scripture or revelation. What makes Christian scripture superior to other faith's can now be discussed. It is my intention to argue that while Kant saw many reasons why Christian scripture could be preferred to other faiths, he can not successfully argue that Christianity is objectively superior to any other historical faith that has the potential for religion. By objective I mean that he can not present an argument that would convince every rational being of the superiority of Christianity. While Kant may present arguments that attempt to show a type of superiority for Christianity, if these arguments are taken to be objective then they are not consistent with the rest of his philosophy. Instead, the most that Kant can establish is that

[86] The role and importance of scripture does vary among Christian denominations. For example, most Protestants hold that scripture alone is the source of revelation while Catholics hold that revelation comes from a combination of scripture, tradition, and the authority of the church. Despite this, the content of Christian scripture is still accepted as revealatory among the denominations, even if the importance or meaning of it is disputed.

Christianity can be subjectively preferred to other historical faiths. I will also demonstrate what that subjective preference entails.

There are two types of arguments that Kant appears to present in order to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over other faiths. The first is that Christianity, specifically Christian scripture, corresponds to rational religion more often than any other faith. The concepts of religion can all be determined by reason alone. However, these concepts occur repeatedly in Christian scripture.[87] Thus, Kant sees Christian scripture as containing religion at its core while other faiths might require a more "forced" reinterpretation of their scripture. So although Christianity cannot be considered to be the founder of religion which "is inscribed in the heart of all human beings" it can be considered "as the founder of the first true *church*" (*R* 6:159), since it is the first faith to be founded upon principles that can be determined by reason without the need for faith.[88]

The second argument is that there are some concepts in Christianity required by practical reason that are not yet found in any other faith. For example, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant indicates that Christianity provides "a concept of the highest good (of the kingdom of God) which alone satisfies the strictest demand of practical reason" (*CPrR* 5:128). Kant's concept of the highest good requires the inseparable combination of moral virtue and corresponding happiness.[89] In the Christian concept of the kingdom of God, Kant finds this perfect combination present as human beings strive to obtain moral perfection with the hope of gaining proportionate happiness in the next life, as "nature and morals come into harmony" (*CPrR* 5:128). This

[87] For an extensive list of correspondence between rational religion and the New Testament, see *R* 6:159 – 162.
[88] When presented through a revelation, it can be argued that these principles are not being determined by reason, but Kant's point is that reason *could* have come to these same principles without any revelation.
[89] For an excellent summation of Kant's argument for the highest good, see Allen Wood, "Rational Theology, Moral Faith, and Religion" in Paul Guyer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 401-403.

argument can be modified for *Religion* where the kingdom of God corresponds to the highest good of the ethical commonwealth. The kingdom of God is a representation of the ethical commonwealth as a people of God (a church) living in moral harmony. Another example is the moral prototype of the Son of God. In Book Two of *Religion* Kant introduces the concept of the Son of God as being a rational concept. Our practical reason has a concept of a human being that is morally perfect, a moral prototype, which makes him like God but still human. The historical figure of Jesus Christ matches this rational concept perfectly according to Kant, since he preached morality according to inner disposition and maintained his commitment to morality even up to "the most ignominious death" (*R* 6:61). In both cases Christianity shows the presence of rational concept unique to Christianity as a historical faith.

Both of these arguments can demonstrate ways in which Christianity is superior to other faiths; however they fail to demonstrate an *objective* superiority. In order to demonstrate an objective superiority, Kant would need to show how Christianity is superior *a priori* to other faiths. Assume that instead of comparing faiths, we are comparing hockey players. We can give reasons why our favorite player is a better hockey player than every other hockey player. He may be a faster skater, or score more goals, or get more assists than every other player. However, can we objectively determine that he is the best hockey player or even a better hockey player than every other player? First we would have to be able to compare him to every other player and we may not know every other hockey player in the world. There may be an amazing hockey player in Siberia that we simply do not know about. Second we would have to be able to compare him to hockey players of the past and the future. Is this hockey player better than the legends of the past, or will he be quickly surpassed by a young upstart? Finally, are the reasons why we think he is a better player the only reason why someone is a good hockey player? He may score more

goals than anyone but perhaps he is terrible at defence. Other people may pick a more defensive player as the best hockey player. There is no way to *objectively* (*a priori*) determine the superiority of any particular hockey player, just as there is no way to objectively determine the superiority of Christianity (or other religious traditions).

The same problems arise when trying to objectively compare historical faiths. Kant may list all of these reasons why Christianity is superior, but does this mean that Christianity is better than all other possible faiths? Kant would first need to compare Christianity to all other faiths in the world. Even though Kant demonstrates extensive knowledge of world religions it would be a stretch to say that he was familiar with all forms of historical faith around the world and it is simply impossible for him to be familiar with any future forms of faith. The Christian faith may be the current historical faith that corresponds best to rational religion but there is no guarantee that another faith will be created that corresponds even better. Finally, Christianity may have certain aspects that are better than other faiths but is this sufficient to say that Christianity is completely superior to other faiths? There may be other factors to consider which Kant has not. For example, would a Christian church that obeys none of its moral teachings be superior to a Jewish community that consistently acts morally? At the very least there appear to be other factors aside from scripture to be taken into consideration when evaluating historical faiths. Just like the hockey player, it can not be determined *objectively* that Christianity is superior to all other historical faiths.

The other flaw with these two arguments is that the features that make Christianity superior are all, according to Kant, able to be determined by reason alone.[90] However, if these features and concepts are able to be determined by reason alone, then what benefit is it that they are contained in scripture? Any rational beings can come to the same conclusions according to

[90] In fact, that is why these features are considered to be superior.

Kant. These concepts are not exclusive to Christianity. Kant even states "all types of faith" have interpreted their revelation to bring it gradually "in agreement with the universal principles of moral faith" (*R* 6:111). The only obvious advantage to Christian scripture is that it would require less of a reinterpretation. But if all faiths are moving towards the same end based on reason then it only means that Christianity has a head start. The same rational religion is found in many faiths, not just in Christianity, and so the same concepts can be found in many faiths.

For example, Kant's statement in the second *Critique* about the kingdom of God being the only concept that satisfies the demand of practical reason does not indicate a feature exclusive to Christianity. The context of that statement was to compare the concept of the highest good present in the ancient Greek schools of the Epicureans and the Stoics (*CPrR* 5:111, 5:126). The Epicurean concept of the highest good only contained happiness, while the Stoics' concept only contained moral virtue. Compared to these schools of thought, Christianity is superior because the kingdom of God includes the combination of these. Kant is indicating the superiority of religious thought compared to other types of philosophical thought because religious thought alone fulfills this need of practical reason. Hence Kant's statement a few pages below:

> "For this reason, again, morals is not properly the doctrine of how we are to *make* ourselves happy but of how we are to become *worthy* of happiness. Only if religion is added to it does there also enter the hope of some day participating in happiness to the degree that we have been intent upon not being unworthy of it" (*CPrR* 5:130).

It is not specifically the Christian concept of the kingdom of God alone that fulfills the demand of practical reason, but the concept of the highest good found in rational religion. The kingdom of God is an example of the highest good, and since it is ultimately a rational concept it can

potentially be found in several different faiths. It is that rational concept of religion in general that creates hopes, not the specific example of the kingdom of God.

Likewise the rational concept of the Son of God is contained in reason and therefore does not require a correspondence to a historical figure. There may be some benefit to having that correspondence since it can help to "awaken" the concept that was already known by reason, but it would be inconsistent for Kant to say that this is a feature that is objectively unique for Christianity. That is why Kant clearly states that "there is no need, therefore, of any example from experience to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us; the idea is present as model already in our reason" (*R* 6:62). The moral concept of the Son of God exists independently of Jesus Christ and therefore could be present within any historical faith that is a vehicle for rational religion.

While Kant can argue that Christianity has some features that make it superior to other faiths, he can not establish that Christianity is objectively superior. In other words, Christianity might have some reasons to be preferred, but these reasons can not convince all rational beings to become Christian. However, what Kant's preference does indicate is that historical faiths *can* be preferred to other historical faiths. It is not the case that any faith will do for a particular person. This point is made clearly in the following passage from the *Conflict of the Faculties* concerning religious sects:

> "Finally, false peacemakers (syncretists) arise, who want to satisfy everyone by melting down the different creeds. These syncretists are even worse than sectarians, because they are basically indifferent to religion in general and take the attitude that, if the people must have a dogma, one is as good as another so long as it lends itself readily to the government's aims. This principle is quite correct and even wise when the ruler states it

> in his capacity as ruler. But as the judgment of the subject himself, who must ponder this matter in his own – and indeed his moral – interest, it would betray the utmost contempt for religion; *for religion cannot be indifferent to the character of its vehicle* which we adopt in our dogma." [91]

It is one thing to say that all faiths containing religion are equal from an objective perspective, but another to say from a personal perspective that one faith is as good as any other. Subjectively the character of the faiths must make a difference.

There is a helpful parallel in Kant's moral philosophy. A person at any given time has a wide range of possible actions they can perform or decisions to make. There is an objective standard for these actions though; they cannot break the moral law. Yet, once those actions that are obviously immoral are eliminated, is it the case that all actions have equal worth? Of course not. Helping the poor is not the same ethically as taking a bath; one is beneficent and helpful to humanity, and the other is not.[92] However, there is no longer an objective standard of evaluating these actions that are specifically "not immoral." I cannot objectively determine if helping the poor is better or worse than helping the elderly.[93] Kant states that the law "leaves a playroom (*latitudo*) for free choice in following (complying with) the law, that is, the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act" (*MM* 6:390). We still must make a rational decision about which act to follow (we cannot be indifferent) but we cannot say which choice is right for everyone.

On the other hand, there can still be subjective standards of behavior. I can demonstrate a preference to certain actions that are valid for me. It would be ridiculous and irrational if I simply

---

[91] My emphasis. *CF* 7:51-52.

[92] Arguably in some cases it would be beneficient and helpful towards humanity for some people to take a bath, but intuitively aiding the poor would be more helpful.

[93] This is of course using a Kantian system of ethics. According to a utilitarian there would be an objective standard, namely whatever creates the most utility.

deemed all actions to be of equal worth. In that case I would be perfectly justified sitting around and drinking beer by myself, without contributing to society at all. A person like that could be compared to the syncretists that Kant criticizes for being indifferent about the character of faith. What does it matter what you are doing so long as you are not acting immorally? From an objective standpoint, you could claim that all non-immoral actions are equal, but to actually act as though all actions are equal is to show indifference to moral virtue.

Kant's preference towards Christianity is an exercise of his own subjective standards for historical faith. He is demonstrating not only that a historical faith can be preferred to another faith, but also that there must be some type of subjective preference when it comes to historical faith. If you do not care what faith you subscribe to then you are not taking the goals of religion (the establishment of the ethical commonwealth) seriously. It can be said that objectively all faiths are equal, but personally you must take a stand on the issue.[94]

This resolves the seeming contradiction of Kant in discussing faiths as equals but showing a clear bias towards Christianity. The faiths are equal from an objective perspective, just as actions that are not immoral have objectively equal worth, but from a subjective perspective faiths cannot be considered equals. As a moral agent, a person has to be engaged with the goals of morality. They cannot just meet the base level that morality requires of them. Therefore, they must take a personal interest in how the goals of morality are brought about. Likewise, a person must be personally engaged in the goals of a faith in order to take religion seriously.

It is important to bring up that the main issue of subjective preference is the nature and content of the faith's revelation or scripture. A person can still be more or less indifferent to the rituals and dogmas of a particular faith but they do have to subscribe on some level to the basic

[94] This also corresponds well with Kant's comment that from the perspective of the ruler, an objective perspective, it is correct to say that one dogma is just as good as another. However the subject himself cannot be indifferent.

foundation of the faith. Kant seems to be pointing out that it is important to care about the vehicle of religion, but this has to be balanced with the goal of uniting humanity. If you agree on the fundamentals of faith (i.e. revelation and scripture), then the incidentals should not matter so much (i.e. dogma, ritual, etc.). Kant's subjective preference is for Christianity, not for Protestantism or Catholicism. A focus on the "incidentals" of faith results in greater schism between people who still fundamentally agree on the essentials of faith and thus opposes the goal of uniting humanity.

Kant makes this argument in the *Conflict of the Faculties.* He states that the multiple churches of Protestantism are "desirable" because they demonstrate freedom of religion but that

> "such a public state of affairs in religion is not a good thing unless the principle underlying it is of such a nature as to bring with it universal agreement on the *essential* maxims of belief, and to distinguish this agreement from conflicts arising from its *non-essentials*."[95]

The subjective preference of a faith is based upon the essential nature of the faith. The non-essential features of the faith are quite simply, and tautologically, not essential. So if someone agrees with the fundamentals of a faith but disagrees with the incidentals, Kant would tell them that it is better for them to stay with that faith than to leave it for another sect in the same faith. The goal of religion after all is an ethical community, which must be united.

Conclusion

Kant's treatment of Christianity and Judaism has brought up two important ways of evaluating historical faiths. First, there is the objective criterion which differentiates between the faiths that can potentially be vehicles for religion and those that cannot. Second, there is the

[95] My emphasis. *CF* 7:52.

subjective criterion which differentiates faith by subjective preference of the essentials of faith. An analogy can be useful to see how these two criteria interact.

Religion is based upon a goal or a purpose. So anything that brings about religion does so by fulfilling that purpose. Similarly a knife can be defined by its purpose, namely, to cut something. We can look at a wide variety of objects and some will be able to fulfill the purpose of cutting while others will not. This is the objective criterion of a knife. There are some things that can be a knife and other things that cannot. This is a fact based upon the potential of the object to fulfill the purpose of the knife. The objective criterion of religion similarly divides historical faiths into those that can potentially fulfill the purpose of religion and those that cannot. There may even be faiths that resemble potential vehicles of faith that have no potential themselves, just as there are utensils (forks and spoons) that may resemble a knife in many ways but are not a knife.

There can still be many things that are potential knives, because they can fulfill the purpose of a knife, but there will be some that are a better or worse knife for you subjectively. A ten foot blade can be a potential knife, but you would be a fool to accept it to cut your potatoes. You might also have a preference based on your particular situation. A vegetarian will not likely want a steak knife and a person with a steak would not want a butter knife. These preferences are subjective though. The ten foot blade might be the preferred knife of a giant. It can not be said objectively that one knife is better than the other, but it can be said subjectively which is better. This is the subjective criterion of faith. Some faiths may simply be better for certain people. It does not mean that the faith is objectively better than any other, but a person still has to choose the faith best suited for them. A person can also not be indifferent, just as a person cannot be indifferent to the knife they use (less they are handed the ten foot blade).

A type of knife will also have a number of incidental features, for example the number of serrated teeth in a butter knife. It may be rational for a vegetarian to prefer a butter knife to a steak knife, but it is not rational for a vegetarian to prefer a butter knife with 38 teeth to a butter knife with 42. The number of teeth is not essential to the design of a butter knife and does not significantly affect the knife's ability to fulfill its purpose of cutting. Even if it did make a difference in the purpose of cutting, the trouble of procuring a 42 tooth butter knife when there are only 38 tooth butter knives around negates any possible advantage. Likewise, there must be a subjective preference for faith but it must be based upon the essential features of the faith and not upon the incidental features.

Finally there is the physical condition of the knife. A knife can be rusted over or made dull. In that case the knife is still a knife, because it has the potential to fulfill its purpose, but its physical state might hinder this goal. So far Kant has only looked at the forms of historical faith and not their material composition. The form of Christianity may have all the markings of a true church for him, but that is based upon the potential of Christianity and not upon the actual practise of Christianity in the world today. Even a knife of the greatest design is nothing if made dull. Kant is only concerned with the form of faith because the material is so mutable. A knife can be sharpened and dulled at any time and a faith can become better or worse practitioners of religion. It is important that these philosophical evaluations of faith concern the form and potential of the faith and not the material instantiation of it. You must choose your knife based upon the potential of the knife, it is then up to you to sharpen and maintain it.

So to return to the initial question of this Chapter: what is the relation of religion to multiple faiths? From an objective perspective all faiths that have the potential to fulfill the purpose of religion are equal. The faiths and belief systems that do not have this potential bare no

relation to religion at all. Subjectively, however, there will be faiths that bare a closer relationship to religion. That superiority is only based from a subject's unique and individual perspective and says nothing about the inherent worth of one religion over another. In actual practice, some faiths may be closer to fulfilling the goal of religion but they are still equal in their beliefs, in their potential, and in their destiny. So long as a faith has the potential of being a vehicle for religion, it must be given the same respect as any other vehicle of religion.

Chapter: Four

Implications for Kantian Scholarship and Philosophy of Religion

In Chapter Two I demonstrated that for Kant some historical faith will always be necessary for rational religion to exist among human beings. Humanity as a species must adopt the end of forming a universal church based on reason alone, but humanity can not achieve that end without belief in divine assistance. Furthermore, that end only involves making any particular historical faith able to be dispensed with, without actually needing to dispense with it. In Chapter Three I demonstrated that according to Kant there are some faiths that can serve as vehicles for rational religion and some that cannot. A faith's potential to serve as a vehicle is based upon its ability to fulfill the purpose of religion. The ones that can serve as vehicles can be viewed as being equal vehicles from an objective perspective, but subjectively there must be preference given to some one vehicle over others. Moral agents cannot be indifferent to the character of religion's vehicle any more than they can be indifferent to their moral actions.

It is my intention to now show the greater significance of these conclusions. I will begin by showing the relevance to contemporary Kantian scholarship, specifically how it impacts the debate between the skeptical and theistic interpretations of Kant's philosophy of religion. One of the major points of contention between these two positions is whether Kant's philosophy of religion is uniquely different from his moral philosophy. With the conclusion of the previous chapters I can address this issue directly and show that although there are parallels between Kant's moral philosophy and philosophy of religion, they ultimately lead to unique conclusions. After that, I will address two recurring questions between the skeptical and theistic positions: to what extent can Kant be considered a theist and to what extent can he be considered a Christian? Although my conclusion is that Kant can be considered a theist and a Christian, the way in which

he is a theist and a Christian needs to be reinterpreted from what the theistic position normally maintains. Kant does not fit into these categories as the typical scholastic debate understands them; instead he attempts to redefine these categories. The way in which Kant redefines these two categories can then be used to address more general issues in contemporary philosophy of religion. Therefore, the second part of this chapter will show how my conclusions can be relevant to contemporary definitions of religion as well as the issue of religious pluralism.

The Moral Argument versus the Religious Argument

As mentioned in Chapter One, a common feature of the skeptical position is the reduction of Kant's philosophy of religion to his moral philosophy and a common feature of the theistic position is their adamant rejection of this point.[96] The theistic position maintains that despite similarities, these two areas of philosophy for Kant are unique and irreducible. Throughout my arguments I have relied upon the parallels between Kant's arguments for the practical postulates to draw further conclusions about Kant's philosophy of religion. The reason why this has worked is because the relationship between historical faith and rational religion presented in Book Three of *Religion* ultimately forms an argument for the existence of organized religion that has the same form as Kant's argument for the practical postulates. However, despite having the same form, Kant's "religious" argument takes a different direction.

The similarities between Kant's moral argument and the argument found in *Religion* are numerous. They are so numerous that the religious argument can often be dismissed as an apparent recasting of the moral argument in a slightly different form. To use Kant's own words against the cosmological argument, "it sets up an old argument in disguised form as a new one,

[96] It should be noted that Kant's moral philosophy does "make room for faith" by use of the practical postulates for God and immortality of the soul and so already does include a philosophy of religion. While this point is ignored to varying degrees by both interpretations, the point here is whether *Religion* is a unique philosophical work from the practical philosophy found in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

and appeals to the agreement of two witnesses . . . where only the first is there all alone, merely altering his clothing and voice" (*CPR* A606/B634). It is easy to see why these arguments might be mistaken as identical. For one, Kant constantly grappled with the "moral argument" for God, having it show up in one form or another in the vast majority of his works. Wood states:

> "Kant's moral arguments for God, freedom, and immortality represent an abiding concern throughout his critical works. We find attempts of greater or less clarity and detail to state these arguments in no fewer than eleven of Kant's critical writings, and innumerable allusion to them throughout these writings."[97]

Each time the argument is addressed by Kant it takes on a slightly different form. The argument as presented in the second *Critique* is quite different from that presented in the third *Critique*. However, these arguments are all trying to establish the same conclusion, namely the rational justification for believing in God and the immortality of the soul, and do so by using a similar argument. In that sense these arguments can be grouped together.

Since Kant constantly recast the moral argument and there are numerous similarities between the religious and moral argument, the conclusion that they are identical could easily be drawn. However the conclusion drawn by the religious argument, as I will argue, is fundamentally different from the conclusion drawn from the moral argument. The moral argument in many ways is a central feature of Kant's moral philosophy and arguably his entire philosophical project. Likewise Kant's "religious" argument holds a similar central position in *Religion*. After the groundwork has been laid in Book One and Two, the grand conclusion comes in Book Three.[98] Therefore, if the religious argument presented in *Religion* is in fact distinct from the moral argument presented in the rest of Kant's works, it would demonstrate that Kant's

---

[97] Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 10.

[98] Despland points out that Book Four of *Religion* "offers no major new insight and presents no major difficulty" since it is mostly an application of previously established principles. Despland, *History and Religion*, 210.

philosophy of religion and moral philosophy are also distinct from each other. I will therefore go through a more detailed examination of these two arguments and show how they fundamentally differ.

Providing an adequate presentation of Kant's moral argument is unfortunately not a simple task. In addition to the various versions that Kant himself presents, there are also many scholastic disagreements about what Kant's argument actually is. To discuss the various disagreements on the form of Kant's moral argument would require a section unto itself, and that would still not settle the issue of which version is most appropriate. However, the exact form of Kant's argument, as will be shown, is not necessary for my conclusion and so for the purposes of this work I have opted to use a version developed from Allen Wood's *Kant's Moral Religion*. Although it is not the only way to present Kant's moral argument for the practical postulates, it will serve to demonstrate my point about his argument in *Religion*.

Wood's interpretation of the moral argument can be summarized in the following form:

Kant's Moral Argument

1. Finite rational beings ought to act morally.
2. Acting morally requires the adoption of the highest good as an end.
3. Adopting the highest good as an end requires the belief that it is possible.
4. The highest good is possible only if human beings are immortal and God exists.
5. Therefore, finite rational beings are rationally justified in believing in immortality and God.[99]

[99] The nature of this "belief" will be further qualified. It is not a belief based on a theoretical reality but on a practical reality. The justification is for a belief in the practical reality of God and immortality in our moral and religious lives. In a sense this does not prove that God exists, but it justifies human beings in living their lives as if God does exists.

The first premise is established by Kant's entire preceding moral philosophy. Every finite rational being is obligated to act in accordance with the categorical imperative. The second premise is established because according to Kant every action requires an end towards which it is directed.[100] The end of moral action is the highest good. The third premise is the crux of the *reductio ad absurdum practicum*.[101] There is a type of rational inconsistency by adopting an end that you do not believe is possible. It is logically possible for a person to deny its possibility but it leads "to an unwelcome conclusion about the person himself as a moral agent."[102] The fourth premise is developed out of Kant's conception of the highest good being the inseparable connection of perfect moral virtue and corresponding happiness. In the *Critique of Practical Reason,* human beings can only obtain moral perfection through an infinite progression and, correspondingly happiness can be given only if there is an all-powerful moral judge. Hence the highest good is possible only under the assumption that human beings are immortal and God exists. Thus the conclusion is that human beings are rationally justified in believing that God exists and human beings are immortal.

There are several qualifications to this conclusion. First, this is not a proof of God's existence. There is no logical guarantee that the highest good is possible of attainment; rational beings merely must act as though it is. Second, there is no obligation or requirement to believe in God and consequently to believe that the highest good is possible of attainment. Rational beings are only ever obligated to act morally. This argument just shows that belief in God and immortality can be rationally justified because it fulfills a purpose of practical reason. In that sense the argument is not meant to generate or create belief in a person that does not already believe but to justify beliefs that already exist. Third, even if this argument did generate belief

[100] See Chapter Two, 42-45.
[101] See Wood, *Moral Religion*, 25-34.
[102] Ibid. 29.

the most it could require is the belief that the existence of God is not logically impossible.[103] It therefore is only justifying a type of agnosticism, where the existence of God is neither known to be necessarily true or false. Finally, the concepts of God and of immortality that are justified to be believed as not impossible are vague. The afterlife is simply an opportunity to endlessly progress towards moral perfection and God is an-all powerful just judge who sustains the world. This is not necessarily a loving God, and the afterlife is not necessarily a pleasant experience.

All of these qualifications to Kant's moral argument have resulted in a great deal of criticism. Peter Byrne alone cites over a dozen individual criticisms concerning Kant's practical postulates.[104] A common criticism is that the conclusion is meant to justify religious beliefs (the existence of God and immortality of the soul) and yet the conclusion of the argument is deeply unsatisfying from a religious perspective. Palmquist explains that "interpreters still tend to view Kant as having a highly abstract, excessively rational theology, with little or no relevance to the experience or belief affirmed by church-goers."[105] A rational justification for believing in the possibility of a vaguely defined God is not a great deal of comfort for a person with normal religious beliefs. Palmquist then argues that there is a separate "religious argument" presented in *Religion* that resolves this common criticism by presenting an argument with a "great deal more 'comfort' than the moral argument."[106]

The argument that Palmquist outlines takes this form:

1. Human beings have a collective duty (*sui generis*) to promote the highest good among all human beings.

[103] Kant states that the minimum cognition required for religion is that "it is possible that there is a God." *R* 6:154n.
[104] Byrne, *Kant on God*, 120-121.
[105] Palmquist, "Religious Argument", 5.
[106] Ibid. 7.

2. Fulfilling this duty requires the uniting of individual moral agents into an ethical community, which humans are not able to do on their own.
3. If human beings are obligated to do something it must be believed as possible.
4. The uniting of individual moral agents into an ethical community is possible only under the assumption of a higher moral being that can complete the work human beings are not able to complete.
5. Therefore, human beings are rationally justified in believing in God.[107]

The form of this argument is more or less identical to the form of the moral argument. Although Palmquist discusses the promotion of the highest good as a duty, Kant refers to it specifically as a "common end" (*R* 6:97). The duty of the species is to pursue that end. In that case once again the argument begins with an end that must be adopted by human beings. In order to rationally adopt that end it must be believed to be possible. Since the end can only be possible with the assistance of God, belief in God is rationally justified. The difference is that the highest good in Palmquist's argument is concerned with the creation of an ethical *community* of the human species rather than the *individual* attainment of moral perfection and corresponding happiness. The role of God is no longer to judge and deliver happiness but to unite the intentions of human beings into an ethical community, specifically a church.

Palmquist further argues that this religious argument for belief in God avoids several of the problems typically associated with Kant's moral argument. Rather than the hypothetical idea of a divine being, he states that this argument concludes that "belief in the idea of God is now *necessary*" and "our belief must be in an *actual* God."[108] The reason for this is that if God were merely an idea or only possible the "ability to fulfill the destiny of our species is doomed to

[107] Paraphrased. Ibid. 11-17. It should also be noted that Palmquist is using a form of the moral argument that differs from Wood's interpretation, and thus it does not run exactly parallel to version of Kant's I have presented.
[108] Ibid. 18.

fail."[109] The other reason this religious argument avoids the problems of the moral argument is that it presents the human species with a duty to found a visible church that approximates the ideal church that only God can fulfill. While only God can ultimately fulfill the end of the species, human beings must still do everything in their power to bring about that end, which in this case entails the establishment of a church. Both of these reasons are meant to overcome the objection that the moral argument is a "cold" comfort to the average church-goer.[110]

While I agree with Palmquist that there is a separate religious argument in *Religion*, I disagree with his formulation of the argument. The argument that he presents does not avoid the objections against the moral argument because it is merely another recasting of the moral argument. Arguably it presents a more developed conclusion in that it focuses on how belief in God is important for a human community in the world. However, in both arguments, the moral argument and Palmquist's interpretation of the religious argument, the conclusion is a rationally justified belief in a divine being that fulfills the end of human beings. This being is still vaguely defined and the belief is simply that this being is not impossible.

As stated before, this type of argument works under the assumption that there is a rational instability about adopting an end that you believe is impossible. This instability is resolved so long as the end is possible of attainment; it does not need to be necessary of attainment. For example, if I adopted the end of winning the lottery it would be irrational for me to hold that end and not buy a lottery ticket. In that case it would be impossible for me to win the lottery and irrational to adopt it as an end. However, that end is no longer irrational if I buy a lottery ticket because it is then possible that I could win. That does not mean that I will necessarily win the lottery because I adopted it as my end. It just means that the end is no longer irrational. Similarly

[109] Ibid, 18.
[110] Ibid. 20.

it must be believed that the end of the highest good is possible and hence that God must be possible. This does not guarantee that the highest good will be attained and hence does not guarantee the existence of God, at least in a theoretical sense.

Palmquist is mistaken in his claim that this argument creates a "necessary" belief in an "actual" God. His argument follows the same form as the moral argument and comes to the same conclusion. The primary difference is that the end being adopted is a unique end for the human species, as opposed to the end in the moral argument that is held by any finite rational being. Because of that the specific role that God fulfills differs between the two arguments, but the general role is the same: making the fulfillment of an ultimate end possible. Hence the form of the argument that Palmquist presents is not different from the moral argument; it is simply the same argument transposed from the rational individual to the human species.

However this is not the only "religious" argument that can be found in Book Three of *Religion*. Palmquist touches on this argument when he indicates that human beings have a duty to establish a visible church in order to fulfill their collective end. From what I have demonstrated throughout this work, the religious argument can be formulated as follows:

1. Human beings ought to overcome the evil that comes from being among other human beings.
2. Overcoming that evil requires adopting the end of establishing an ethical commonwealth.
3. Adopting the ethical commonwealth as an end requires the forming of a church.
4. A church can be formed by human beings only by using historical faith as a vehicle.
5. Therefore, finite rational beings are rationally justified in accepting historical faith.

This argument still has the same form as the moral argument and Palmquist's formulation. There is an end that human beings ought to adopt and human beings are rationally justified in accepting

what makes that end possible. However rather than justifying belief in a vaguely defined God and afterlife, the justification is for historical faith based on revelation. That historical faith is necessary for the end of establishing an ethical commonwealth was demonstrated in Chapter Two, while the character of that historical faith was explicated in Chapter Three. This formulation of the religious argument is fundamentally different from the moral argument because it is justifying belief in revealed faith but also justifying the practice of that faith and the formations of communities as churches. In other words Kant is rationally justifying organized religion as we know it, as a human institution based upon a historical revelation. Although it is not being justified as an end in itself, historical revealed faith is justified as a means towards the establishment of the ethical commonwealth for finite rational beings.

The significant difference between the moral and the religious argument relies in this distinction between reason and revelation. The practical postulates of the moral argument are concepts determined by reason. There is a need of practical reason and the concepts of the practical postulates are defined by their fulfillment of that need. There is no need for revelation to come to the conclusion of the practical postulates nor is revelation required to understand them. The religious argument on the other hand, while it is also a rational argument, ends with the conclusion that revelation, not just reason, is needed as a means to fulfill the end of the human species. Therefore, although Kant does not leave the realm of reason in his philosophy, he finds a role for revealed faith to play in our moral and religious lives. There is a rational function that revealed faith fulfills for humanity in the establishment of an ethical commonwealth. While this role must still fit within the boundaries of mere reason, it is a role that is necessary for human beings as human beings in order to fulfill their ultimate end. This conclusion is not supported in Kant's moral philosophy. Reason alone is able to tell human beings what they ought

to do and to justify the practical postulates. However, this argument shows that revealed faith is necessary for human beings to fully answer the question, "what may I hope."[111] Therefore the religious argument is unique from the moral argument and thus Kant's philosophy of religion is also uniquely different from his moral philosophy.

As stated earlier there are disagreements about what the exact form of Kant's moral argument is. However, regardless of what the form of the moral arguments is, this conclusion still stands. All of the formulations of Kant's moral argument conclude with the rationally justified belief in the practical postulates (God and the immortal soul). What belief in those practical postulates entails varies depending what the form of the moral argument is, but there is always an argument beginning with the highest good and concluding with the practical postulates. Essentially the religious argument concludes that revealed historical faith serves as a practical postulate for the human species (though not necessarily of all finite rational beings). It begins with the highest good (the establish of the ethical commonwealth) and that is only possible for human beings through the use of historical faith as a vehicle. If the moral argument is presented in a different form, but still moves from highest good to the practical postulates, the religious argument can still run parallel to it. The role of historical faith would simply be changed with the change, if any, in the role of the practical postulates. Therefore Kant's religious philosophy can still be considered unique from his moral philosophy, despite the disagreements on the exact form of the moral argument.

Although the religious argument might be able to provide more "comfort" for a church-goer than the moral argument, there are still several qualifications associated with this argument. The argument rationally justifies the beliefs of church-goers (based on revelation), but reason is

[111] Kant lists three fundamental interests of reason: "what can I know?", "what should I do?", "what may I hope?." *CPR* A805/B833.

still unquestionably supreme. Revelation has a role; it does not necessarily have a say. Thus, the religious argument does not prove that the revelation is theoretically true, just as the practical postulates do not prove that God is theoretically true. As discussed in Chapter Three, there are even historical faiths that cannot be justified at all by this argument. Furthermore, it only justifies the acceptance of some historical faith and not of any one historical faith in particular.[112] Finally, "accepting" a historical faith in this argument may be more relaxed than some church-goers would be comfortable with. Once again it just must be believed that the claims of the revealed faith (that do not contradict practical reason) are possible of being true. However, the difference between accepting the practical postulates and accepting historical faith is that accepting historical faith still demands the joining and active participation of a religious community. Accepting a faith means you do not have to believe everything about the faith is necessarily true but it does mean you still ought to go to church.

Although accepting a particular historical faith does not have much value theoretically under this understanding, it still has tremendous value existentially. As Kant famously declared in the first *Critique*, he "had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith" (*CPR* Bxxx). Once again, Kant is denying knowledge of God in order to leave room for meaningful faith. The argument for the practical postulates in Kant's moral philosophy was meant to justify belief in the effective reality of God and immortality in our moral life as human beings. The practical postulates are therefore effectively real objects of hope that are needed in order to make sense of our moral lives. The religious argument adds historical faith to this as a type of practical postulate for human beings and thus the acceptance of it is also as an effectively real object of hope in order to make sense of our religious lives. This is all part of Kant's goal of shifting faith away from belief in theoretical propositions towards rationally justified practical beliefs. The

[112] See Chapter Two, 42.

religious argument therefore justifies the acceptance of historical faith existentially as it affects a person's religious life here and now.

The Skeptical – Theistic Debate Revisited

The debate between the skeptical and theistic interpretations of Kant's philosophy of religion can now be revisited. As shown above the conclusion of Kant's moral philosophy is a God that is defined by reason alone. According to Wood, that means that Kant's moral philosophy leads to deism. Other skeptical interpreters would make their own cases about what this leads to but the important point is that, according to them, there is no basis for the acceptance of revealed faith in Kant's moral philosophy. Therefore, if Kant's philosophy of religion is reducible to his moral philosophy (as the skeptical interpretation claims), Kant's philosophy of religion would also lead to some form of non-theism. However, I have demonstrated that Kant's philosophy of religion is not reducible to Kant's moral philosophy precisely because his philosophy of religion does lead to the acceptance of revealed faith, at least in an existential sense. Hence, using Wood's definitions of theism and deism, Kant's philosophy of religion does, in a way, lead to theism.

Obviously this scores a critical point with the theistic interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion. Kant can be understood to be a theist because he accepts revealed faith. Furthermore Kant can also be understood as a Christian because the particular revealed faith he accepts is clearly the Christian faith. These are two points that the theistic interpretation rally behind and more importantly two points that the skeptical interpretation strongly contests. However, the debate can not be conceded to the theistic side without examining more in depth in what sense Kant can be considered a theist and in what sense Kant can be considered a Christian.

As discussed throughout this work, Kant is not a theist in the normal sense. The major way that Kant differs from the normal understanding of theism is that his acceptance of revealed faith is not based upon any experience or knowledge of revelation. Religious beliefs are normally understood to be propositions that are believed to be true or to make truth-claims.[113] A person is a Christian because they believe that the statement "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" is true.[114] The truth of those statements is typically accepted because of an experience of revelation, where God supposedly reveals the truth of those statements to the person in a way that transcends reason. Kant does not fit into this category. First, his acceptance of revealed faith is not dependent upon any actual experience of revelation. As a result, Kant does not accept the truth of the revealed faith in the same way that someone who claims to experience revelation. Kant is not convinced the theoretical propositions of Christianity must be true. Instead, he is convinced the claims of Christianity are not logically impossible and accepting the truth of its claims fulfills a practical, rational purpose. This does not exclude the possibility of experiencing revelation but Kant's argument justifies the acceptance of revelation regardless of that experience.

This type of belief is not unique to Kant's philosophy of religion and is perhaps best explained in his moral philosophy. When discussing the practical postulates, Kant states that they "can be called *belief* and, indeed, a pure *rational belief*" (*CPrR* 5:126). The term belief was defined in the first *Critique* as being neither knowledge, which is objectively and subjectively sufficient, nor opinion, which is objectively and subjectively insufficient, but as holding something true on objectively insufficient but subjectively sufficient grounds (*CPR* A822/B850). Kant's moral philosophy shows that the practical postulates can be accepted as this type of

[113] Michael L. Peterson, et al., *Reason & Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.
[114] I am using the theological/theoretical term "Son of God" here, meaning literally conceived by God, instead of Kant's rational term, meaning the moral prototype.

rational belief, and Kant's religious argument which follows the same format would conclude that the claims of historical faith could also be accepted as rational beliefs (assuming the claims are still consistent with the end of religion). Therefore, Kant is not stating that the claims of the historical faith are true as most practitioners of religion would claim but that the claims can be accepted as true so long as they fulfill a rational purpose.

It might seem that Kant's acceptance of revealed faith constitutes a type of religious nonrealism. As defined in *Reason and Religious Belief*,

> "Religious nonrealists hold that since religions are a human construction, the assertions they make are not about anything sacred, divine, or transcendent. If religions say anything meaningful at all, they refer to human personal and social behavior and experience"[115].

Understood as a nonrealist, Kant is stating that revealed faith is acceptable because it fulfills a human purpose and is therefore beneficial to humanity. There is a utility to historical faith as it satisfies a need of humanity. For example, most adults do not believe that Santa Clause exists but they are willing to continue participating in the "myth" of Santa Clause because it is seen as fulfilling a purpose for human beings, specifically to children.

Kant's acceptance of revealed faith, though it might sound similar, does not fit into this category. The pursuit of the end of humanity is not in the same category as mere utility. Wood describes the pursuit of this end for Kant as follows:

> "Human reason defines for man a final end, a single highest purpose for his existence, an ideal inseparably related to his finite rationality itself. The rational pursuit of this end in the face of man's own necessary limitations, in the face of the failure and uncertainty which surrounds his efforts, demands a *moral faith*, an outlook which he cannot renounce

[115] Peterson, et. al., *Reason & Religious Belief*, 17.

> without at the same time renouncing his reason and his rational destinations themselves."[116]

While the moral faith that Wood refers to is more specifically the acceptance of the practical postulates, the religious argument shows that this moral faith includes an acceptance of historical, revealed faith. It does not just fulfill a human purpose, it fulfills *the* human purpose. Therefore, even though the faith does not need to be accepted with the certainty that is typically understood as theism, it nevertheless must be accepted wholeheartedly.

In a similar fashion, the way in which Kant could be called a "Christian" differs from typical understandings. This has made it difficult for many Kantians and Christians alike to call Kant a Christian. The religious argument demonstrates that it is rationally justified to accept a historical faith; it does not justify any faith in particular. Therefore, Kant does not accept that the claims of Christianity are true out of necessity nor does he accept that the claims of Christianity are objectively superior to all other possible historical faiths. Christianity is merely the historical faith that he deems to be subjectively preferred to all other faiths. It is how Kant fulfills the need for historical faith. Many Christians may object to calling Kant a Christian because of this. For example, in the gospel of John, Jesus says that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."[117] An interpretation of this passage is that Jesus alone, and thus Christianity alone, has the "truth." This is a statement that Kant cannot comfortably accept. It can not be determined objectively that the claims of Christianity have more truth than the claims of another historical faith. For many Christians, though, this is a central claim of the faith and so if Kant does not accept it then he does not truly accept the Christian faith. What exactly defines a Christian is a matter that is better left to theology, and so I cannot address all of

[116] Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 250.
[117] John 14:6.

the objections against Kant being called a Christian. However, I have demonstrated that there are at least some grounds for calling Kant a Christian, as opposed to the skeptical interpretation that claims there are no grounds at all because Kant is either a deist, or an atheist, or so on.

Although it is possible to call Kant a theist and a Christian, it is only possible under a revised understanding of both of these terms. Many of the theistic interpreters of Kant do not make this qualification when labeling Kant a theist and a Christian. Instead they use more "typical" understandings of these terms which do not work with Kant's philosophy of religion.[118] Therefore, while my arguments favor the theistic interpretation, this does not settle the debate between the skeptical and theistic positions. My arguments demonstrate that there are some major flaws with the skeptical interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion. Kant's philosophy of religion is not reducible to his moral philosophy since there is a unique religious argument that, while taking the form of the moral argument, rationally justifies the acceptance of historical, revealed faith. However, my arguments do not demonstrate that all of the theistic interpretations of Kant's philosphy of religion so far have been correct. In that way, the labels of "skeptical" and "theistic" are not entirely appropriate for Kant since he is skeptical in the sense of denying knowledge of God but theistic in the sense of accepting the practical reality of God. Neither category, as traditionally understood, fits Kant. Kant's constant ambivalence towards religion creates a philosophy of religion which continues to defy normal categorization.

Issues in Philosophy of Religion

Kant's understanding of religion can also have several implications for contemporary philosophy of religion. Since his philosophy of religion does not fit well into contemporary categories, it can provide new ways of viewing classic problems in philosophy of religion. The

[118] Certainly in Palmquist's attempt to label Kant a Christian he defines a Christian as someone who "has some immediate *experience* of God." Palmquist, "Kant: A Christian Philosopher?", 65.

two most obvious problems that a Kantian view of religion can address are the definition and role of religion and the problem of religious pluralism. Kant's view of religion redefines what religion is and what role it should have in human lives. Similarly, Kant's treatment of religious pluralism, discussed in Chapter Three, provides a simple and yet profound model for dealing with the multitude of religious beliefs in the world that is a direct result of Kant's redefining of religion. I will now look briefly at both of these issues for philosophy of religion and show how a Kantian view can provide new insight for these problems.

The first problem in any philosophy of religion textbook is to define religion. It can be quite difficult to proceed with a philosophical investigation of a subject without knowing what that subject is. Although there are numerous definitions of what religion is most contemporary definitions focus on the importance of beliefs about something transcendent (outside our realm of empirical experience). Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach, and Basinger use the following as a working definition:

> "Religion is constituted by a set of beliefs, actions, and experiences, both personal and corporate, organized around a concept of an Ultimate Reality which inspires worship or total devotion."[119]

While this definition is purposely quite broad, it still implies that what constitues religion is a relationship to a transcendent reality. That relationship then leads to all the other aspects of religion. In other words that relationship to the divine, or faith, has a primal role in religion. A person accepts certain beliefs by faith first and then religion draws rational conclusions from that. If a person accepts that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, then it follows that they should

[119] Peterson, et. al., *Reason & Religious Belief*, 7.

obey his teachings. Philosophy of religion under this conception is, as St. Anselm stated, the process of "faith seeking understanding."[120]

Kant's view of religion, while not disputing this perspective on religion, attempts to take a different approach. As Kant illustrated in the introduction to the second edition of *Religion* rational religion is contained within revealed faith as two concentric circles. He states that there is unity between reason and revelation such that "whoever follows the one (under the guidance of moral concepts) will not fail to come across the other as well" (*R* 6:13). Therefore, it is possible to start with the claims of revelation and come to the claims of reason and vice versa. What Kant has done in *Religion*, especially with his treatment of rational religion and historical faith, is demonstrate that reason does eventually lead to revelation, or to faith. This is a reversal of the approach of "faith seeking understanding." Instead it could be classified as "understanding seeking faith."[121] Although many philosophers have tried to make rational arguments for the claims of faith, Kant's approach is unique in that reason leads to faith not because it is logically necessary but it is existentially necessary. Faith fulfills a distinctly human purpose, indeed the highest purpose as Wood stated.

Kant's approach to religion is best illustrated by an argument C. S. Lewis uses in *The Silver Chair*. In that story two children visit the magical world of Narnia and subsequently go on a quest below the ground to Underland. There they are eventually confronted by the evil Queen of Underland who convinces them that their experiences of Narnia were all a dream. When the children tell her about Aslan, the lion/Christ figure who rules Narnia she tells them that they

[120] Anselm, *Proslogion*, Trans. by M. J. Charlesworth (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 115.
[121] Anselm never specifically uses this phrase.

have only dreamed of a cat that they wanted to be bigger and better.[122] Just before the children completely succumb to the Queen's arguments, Puddleglum, the children's Narnian companion, makes a final counter-argument.

> "Suppose we *have* only dreamed, or made up, all those things . . . then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours *is* the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one . . . That's why I'm going to stand by the play-world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia."[123]

With that, the children are able to resist the suggestions of the Queen and maintain the belief of their experience of Narnia.

Kant is not denying that there can be religious experiences or revelations. However religious experiences can be philosophically problematic. No matter how convincing the experience may be for the individual, it can not be objectively communicated. There is no way to convince another person that what you experienced was true and not just a mental delusion or wishful thinking. Kant even goes so far to point out that you can not even convince yourself beyond all doubts that what you experienced was from God (assuming it was morally consistent). Now even though a person can believe whatever they want, there is both a philosophical and a practical purpose to approaching religious belief and practices from reason first as Kant does.

---

[122] C. S. Lewis in this passage is clearly mocking the argument of Sigmund Freud that the idea of God is the result of people imagining a father figure that is bigger and better. See Steven Lovell "Puddleglum versus the Green Witch" in *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy: The Lion, the Witch, and the Worldview,* 43-44.

[123] C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, (Glasglow: HarperCollins Manufacturing, 1953), 145.

Philosophically there is always going to be doubts about the validity of religious beliefs. For Kant, as well as for many religious thinkers, this is a reflection of a healthy and mature faith. Puddleglum's argument, and Kant's by comparison, is not going to create belief where there was none before but it can address a faith that is experiencing rational doubts, just as the children use it to address the doubts raised by the Queen. The power of this argument is that it accepts the premise that the religious beliefs may be false but that there is a reason to accept them anyway. Therefore regardless of the theoretical truth of the religious beliefs, a person can have a rational justification for accepting those beliefs. This fits with Kant's proclamation of denying knowledge to make room for faith (*CPR* Bxxx). Kant denies the certainty of knowledge associated with God, so that faith can be created that is not dependent upon any proof or objective certainty. As I have shown, Kant's move in *Religion* is to perform the same move with the entirety of revealed faith. There can be no certain knowledge of the tenets of a faith, but they can still be rationally believed.

The more practical purpose of this type of approach is that it provides a person with a way of rationally communicating with people who do not accept their claims of faith, whether people of different faiths or of no faith. There is no rational argument that is going to convince a devout atheist that there is a God.[124] This has led several notable atheists to draw the conclusion that religious belief is not rational and therefore harmful.[125] So long as these atheists believe that religion is not rational, they will hold that religion is harmful. This can make dialogue between religious and non-religious people challenging. Kant's argument can therefore have a practical purpose by giving a rational justification for religious belief that is not dependent on proving the

[124] Kant's claim is that there is no rational argument that would completely convince a theist that God exists either. The existence or non-existence of God is not something that can ever be theoretically known.
[125] In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins draws the conclusion that raising children religiously is equivalent to child abuse because it reinforces a delusion.

external truth of the faith claims. The argument may still not be entirely convincing for non-religious people but it shifts the debate away from a permanent stale-mate and into an area of debate where there can be potential progress. Instead of debating the truth of claims that can not be proven, it can be debated whether religion can be rational regardless of the truth of it beliefs. This can also be used with dialogue between different faiths. It may not be possible for a Christian to convince a Jew that they are wrong in their beliefs but they can both accept a type of rationality behind their individual religious practices.

A confusion made by the skeptical interpreters of Kant is that his rational approach to religion simultaneously denies the approach by faith to religion. If Kant's statements about revelation leading to reason and vice versa are to be believed, then he is stating that both approaches are important. Although most philosophy of religion recognizes this to some extent, their approach from reason to faith is problematic. There is still a focus on providing rational arguments that attempt to prove the existence of God.[126] The way that Kant redefines religion is by changing this "rational" approach. The way reason comes to faith is not by showing that the claims of faith are true or probable. Reason comes to faith because there is a rational and fundamental human need that faith fulfills. It is important that this need is rational (not just an unexplained human weakness) and that it is fundamental to our very being (not just a benefit to our mental health). This does not prove the claims of faith beyond all doubt, but it rationally justifies the claims of faith despite all doubts.

Religious Pluralism

This approach to religion can also have important implications for addressing the problem of religious pluralism. The multitude of historical faiths in the world creates a

[126] *Reason & Religious Belief*, under the chapter "Theistic Arguments" lists several versions of the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments but only one brief mention of a moral argument. Peterson, et. al., *Reason & Religious Belief*, 90-116.

fundamental philosophical problem; how can all historical faiths be right? Since religions around the world have very different and often contradictory beliefs, logically not all the beliefs can be true. This has also led many outspoken atheists to the conclusion that all faiths must be wrong. Although it does not logically follow that all faiths must be wrong, it still seems to make it impossible to determine which faiths would be supposedly true. Contemporary approaches in philosophy of religion have presented several different models for explaining how the issue of religious pluralism can be addressed: exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism. Exclusivism holds that only one faith can be true and thus lead to salvation and that all other faiths are wrong. Pluralsim holds that there are many faiths that can lead to salvation, despite conflicting claims. Finally, inclusivism holds that only one faith can be true but that many faiths can still lead to salvation.[127] There are problems with each of these positions. If it is held that only one faith can be true, how can one be sure which faith, if any, is true? If it is held that all faiths can be true, then why accept one faith over another?

By shifting the rational focus of religion away from truth claims, Kant is able to provide another model for religious pluralism that can address many of these problems associated with religious pluralism. When Kant stated that there is only one religion but many faiths (*R* 6:107-108), he re-emphasizes his point that religion has nothing to do with the truth of certain propositions but also presents a model for how the plurality of religions can be understood. Religion can exist in many different faiths because true religion does not depend on the "truth" of transcendent claims. Therefore, it is not the case that one particular faith is going to lead to salvation at the exclusion of all other faiths. It is also important to note that it is the same religion that exists among the different faiths. It is only the matters of faith, the truth-claims, which differentiate the various world religions. Thus Kant's model of religious pluralism creates a

[127] Ibid. 290-309.

dynamic picture of how different faiths relate to one another. The more that a faith focuses on the importance of the truth of their faith claims, the more they are going to separate and isolate themselves from other faiths. If my faith-claims are true, then it is a simple deduction that those claims that differ are going to be wrong. On the other hand if a faith focuses on acting morally and bringing about the Kingdom of God, this will inherently unite them with other faiths that are doing the same thing since they will recognize the same religion and the same mutually inclusive goals. As Kant states, people of different faiths, "while still holding to their respective dogmas, could thus look upon each other as brothers in faith" (*CF* 7:52).

This may sound similar to the models of pluralism or inclusivism listed above, by stating that several faiths can lead to salvation, but there are several important differences. The first is that the models listed above are still ways of addressing the truth-claims of different faiths. Kant's model does not deal with truth claims because it simply states that the truth of these claims is not important to religion. It does not matter if only one faith is true or if several faiths are true, because regardless of its truth a faith can still contain the same religion. The second important difference is that Kant's model not only provides a philosophical perspective for addressing religious pluralism but a practical one as well. In *Reason & Religious Belief*, there is a point made that the models of religious pluralism should not influence practical treatment of other religions.[128] For example, an exclusivist may hold that all other faiths are wrong but that they can still be treated with respect. While this is a valid point, it is difficult to treat people of other faiths with equal respect when you believe that they are fundamentally wrong. Philosophical outlooks still influence practical actions. By stating that the exact same religion exists in several different faiths, Kant creates a way in which different faiths can be treated with equal respect without confirming or denying the truth of any one faith. A person of one faith can

[128] Ibid. 292.

look on a person of another faith living a morally good life and see the same religion and thus give that person the same respect that they would give a person of their own faith.

Another important difference from this model and the model of pluralism in particular is that it provides an objective way of evaluating faiths. As discussed in Chapter Three, there is an objective negative criterion for a particular faith to be a potential vehicle for religion. A problem with pluralism in particular is that if you admit that many faiths can be true without a way of distinguishing their truth, you must be willing to admit that morally questionable faiths could be true as well. This is also a common argument of atheists; if there is no objective way of distinguishing different religions then one religion (Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, etc.) must be objectively equivalent to another (cults, extremists, etc.). Since some of those religions promote immoral acts, all religions must be immoral. This particular argument is not valid, since it does not follow that all religions are immoral because some are, but the argument still points to a problem. Without an objective means of distinguishing one set of faith claims from another, there is no way to deny the potential truth of objectionable faiths. By having an objective way of evaluating faiths, Kant is able to address this particular problem. An immoral faith is not the same as all other faiths because it cannot serve as a vehicle for religion. It cannot be justified and thus could not be considered "true" at all.

Kant's model in this sense has the best of all the other models for addressing religious pluralism. The benefit of the pluralist model is that it provides a way in which different faiths can be treated equally. The benefit of the exclusivist model is that it provides a way of distinguishing the claims of different faiths. Kant's model provides an equal objective treatment for faiths while also distinguishing morally inappropriate faiths from morally acceptable ones. In this way, Kant's model is quite similar to the inclusivist model, which also attempts to find this middle

ground. However, the inclusivist model is not as successful as Kant's because it maintains that there is still one faith that has the truth. With Kant, the question of truth is not answerable and therefore not applicable to dealing with faiths. Therefore the faiths that are potential vehicles of religion must be treated equally from an objective perspective because there is no way to determine which set of faith claims are true. Unlike the inclusivist model, for Kant there is no one faith given objective priority over the others.[129] Although a Kantian model is not likely to be universally adopted for addressing the issue of religious pluralism, this should at least demonstrate that a Kantian approach to the issue of religious pluralism may provide a new perspective on the issue.

In conclusion, Kant's philosophy of religion, while running parallel to Kant's moral philosophy, is a unique and irreducible branch of his overall philosophy. Arguably through the influence of skeptical interpretations, Kant's perspective on religion has not been taken seriously by contemporary philosophy of religion. While Kant's perspective will not necessarily solve the problems of philosophy of religion, it can still present new ways of viewing certain problems. Although Kant's view of the relationship between historical faith and rational religion can be relevant to philosophy of religion, the greater implication is still for Kantian scholarship. The skeptical interpretation which has been dominant in Kantian scholarship has been appropriately challenged by the theistic interpretation. Kant's philosophy of religion is not reducible to his moral philosophy and provides a unique argument for justifying religious beliefs. Although the theistic position is not always correct in its interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion, it is correct in disputing the claims of the skeptical interpretation. The relationship between rational

[129] Subjectively, there is a way to give one faith priority according to Kant, so in that way he could be considered a type of inclusivist. However, his model makes the distinction of one faith only being subjectively superior rather than objectively.

religion and historical faith shows that Kant found a fundamental human need for revealed faith that must be respected so long as that faith fulfills the purpose of religion.

Bibliography

Anselm. *Proslogion.* Trans. by M. J. Charlesworth. Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Beiser, Frederick C. "Moral Faith and the Highest Good." *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*. Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 588-629.

Buijs, Joseph. "Atheism and the Argument from Harm." *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 42-52.

Byrne, Peter. *Kant on God*. Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007.

Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006.

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

Falkenberg, Stephen. "Biblical Literalism." *New Reformation Home Page*. 2002. <http://web.archive.org/web/20080615062211/http://www.newreformation.org/literalism.htm>. Last accessed April 23, 2010.

Firestone, Chris L., and Nathan Jacobs. *In Defense of Kant's Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

Firestone, Chris L. and Stephen Palmquist, ed. *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Hare, John E. "Kant on the Rational Instability of Atheism." *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. Chris L. Firestone and Stephen Palmquist. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. 62-78.

Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" *Practical Philosophy*. Ed. Mary J. Gregor. 1st pbk ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 11-22.

---. "The Conflict of the Faculties." *Religion and Rational Theology*. Ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. 1st pbk ed. England: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 233-327.

---. "Conjectural Beginning of Human History." *On History*. Trans. Lewis White Beck, Robert E. Anchor, and Emil L. Fackenheim. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963. 53-68.

---. "Critique of Practical Reason." *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and Ed. Mary J. Gregor. 1st pbk ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 133-271.

---. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. and Ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. 1st paperback ed. Cambridge, Eng: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

---. "The End of all Things." *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*. Trans. and Ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 193-205.

---. "Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals." *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and Ed. Mary J. Gregor. 1st pbk ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 37-108.

---. "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View." *On History*. Trans. Lewis White Beck, Robert E. Anchor, and Emil L. Fackenheim.Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963. 11-26.

---. "Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion." *Religion and Rational Theology.* Trans. and Ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. 1st pbk ed. England: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 335-451.

---. "The Metaphysics of Morals." *Practical Philosophy.* Trans. and Ed. Mary J. Gregor. 1st pbk ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 353-603.

---. "On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy." *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings.* Trans. and Ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 15-30.

---. "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Religion." *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings.* Trans. and Ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 31-191.

---. *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2009.

---. "What does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings.* Trans. and Ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 3-14.

---. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. and Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Lewis, C. S. *The Silver Chair*. Glasglow: HarperCollins Manufacturing, 1953.

Lovell, Steven. "Puddleglum Versus the Green Witch." *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy : The Lion, the Witch, and the Worldview.* Ed. Gregory Bassham and Jerry L. Walls. Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 2005. 41-52.

McCammon, Christopher. "Overcoming Deism: Hope Incarnate in Kant's Rational Religion." *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion.* Ed. Chris L. Firestone and Stephen Palmquist. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. 79-89.

Moore, A. W. *Noble in Reason, Infinite in Faculty : Themes and Variations in Kant's Moral and Religious Philosophy*. London; New York: Routledge, 2003.

Palmquist, Stephen. "Immanuel Kant: A Christian Philosopher?" *Faith and philosophy* 6.1 (1989). 65-75

---. "Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God." *Faith and philosophy* 26.1 (2009). 3-22.

Peterson, Michael L., et al. *Reason & Religious Belief : An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Rossi, Phillip J. and Michael J. Wreen, ed. *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Dogma. [Videorecording]. Dir. Smith, Kevin. Prod. Mosier Scott, and Laura Greenlee. Perf. Affleck, Ben, Matt Damon, Linda Fiorentino, et al. Lion's Gate Films; View Askew Productions; Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2008.

Wood, Allen W. "Kant's Deism." *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered.* Ed. Philip J. Rossi and Michael J. Wreen. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. 1-21.

---. *Kant's Moral Religion.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970.

---. *Kant's Rational Theology*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1978.

---. "Rational Theology, Moral Faith, and Religion." *The Cambridge Companion to Kant.* Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 394-416.