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AGNOSTICISM: KANT

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CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter identifies the results of Kant's philosophical system on the contemporary discussion concerning an inerrant revelation. Knowledge, for Kant, is possible only as the forms and categories of the mind organize the raw data of the senses. Beyond this phenomenal world, the mind can only postulate what must or ought to be. It cannot know what is. The first postulate of this practical reasoning is freedom. The individual is autonomous, knows the good, and is capable of willing and doing as he ought.

Within such an epistemological framework, revelation becomes unnecessary, useless, and unverifiable. Inerrancy is not only false but incomprehensible in such a system. Since Kant's theory of knowledge largely dominates contemporary theology, it is inevitable that inerrancy cannot be seen as an option.

AGNOSTICISM: KANT

THERE IS FAIR agreement among historians of thought that Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) must be regarded not only as the great creative genius of the modern period but also as one of the most important framers of the contemporary mind. His significant contributions to epistemology have secured him wide fame, while his influence on the development of theology has been unparalleled.

Part of Kant's greatness lies in the fact that he was able to synthesize the two dominant but conflicting modes of thought of the Enlightenment, empiricism and rationalism, into an integrated whole. That, however, should not blind us to the originality of his thought, in which the other part of his greatness is to be found. This two-sidedness—a synthesizer, yet original—forces us to study Kant against the background of his historical and cultural setting. He is as much a culmination of preceding thought as he is a foundation for what was to follow.

Having said all of this, I must hasten to add that Kant's influence has not been regarded as salutary in all corners, especially among evangelical theologians. A few examples will suffice. John Gerstner states that it was Kant who began "the philosophic revolt against reason which for contemporary man has made any sort of rational apologetic impossible."¹ Clark Pinnock, in a similar vein, refers to Kant's "repudiation of ra-

tional religion,"² the result of which has been that "the objectivity and rationality of divine revelation have been philosophically questioned."³ Francis Schaeffer claims that "with his work, the hope of a unified knowledge was on the threshold of splitting into two parts, neither having a relationship with the other."⁴ Schaeffer is referring here to the isolation of metaphysics, and with it religion, from factual knowledge. This split, and the placing of religion in the realm of the *postulated* but not *known*, is for Schaeffer the source of contemporary "autonomous" man⁵ who determines for himself the God in whom he will believe.

As these quotes might indicate, most theologians have focused on Kant's epistemology. In this essay, therefore we will spend some time developing this foundation of his thought and will return to it in the closing critique. However, most of the essay focuses on Kant's views on revelational religion, as he presents them in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793).

This study is divided into four sections. The first is a brief history of Kant's life. Second, we look at the basic structure of Kant's system, in particular the possibility of knowledge. We turn then to the question of religious knowledge and the implications of his epistemology for revelation. The concluding section presents critical remarks and shows the importance of Kant's influence on contemporary theology.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Most of Kant's biographers have noted—sometimes to the point of exaggeration—that his life was singularly uneventful. Certainly in comparison to many other philosophers Kant had a rather ordinary life. On the other hand, the productivity of his last twenty years is extraordinary to say the least. But let us start at the beginning.

Immanuel Kant was born in 1724 in Königsberg. His father was a saddler and quite poor; his grandfather was an emigrant from Scotland. Königsberg, and with it Kant's family, had felt the influence of the Pietist movement. Without doubt, the Pietist renewal within the Lutheran church was a major influence in Kant's life, particularly in the person of Franz A. Schultz, the family's pastor. The young Kant attended the Pietist Collegium Fredericianum from 1732 to 1740. Schultz became the director there the year after Kant entered.

Pietism had been founded by Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–

1705). His mantle fell on his student August Franke. The key to Pietism was its concentration on experience, including an insistence on a clear, sometimes exaggerated, conversion experience. Pietism also emphasized the practical rather than dogmatic use of Scripture—that is, the purpose of Scripture is to nourish and sanctify. Many commentators have stressed the negative results of this view of Scripture—particularly on Kant—but that ought not to blind us to the positive aspects of this renewal movement. German historians trace the beginnings of social programs for the needy, including orphanages and missions, to Spener and Franke. There is no doubt that Pietism also brought about a concern for a disciplined and separated life on the part of the believer.

At the Collegium Fredericianum this concern developed into a regimented, regulated routine that impressed Kant as being superficial and led to his total—and lifelong—rejection of religious practice in general. Though Kant retained a permanent respect for Pietism, he consistently refused to attend church or take part in any sort of church activity.

At age sixteen Kant became a student in the faculty of theology at the University of Königsberg. Here he encountered the second major theological influence that molded his philosophy: Wolffian rationalism. Though Königsberg had previously been staunchly Pietistic, it had, in the decade before Kant began his studies, come under the influence of English "free thinkers" and deists and especially that of Christian Wolff's (1679–1754) theological development of Leibniz.

Whereas Pietism stressed revelation and the experiential, Wolff looked to the rational and metaphysical. He held that reason is capable of developing the doctrines of Christianity without the assistance of, though perhaps at the instigation of, revelation. Wolff deduced, with geometric precision, a complete theology beginning from the ontological argument for God's existence.⁶

Kant learned most of his philosophy during these years from Martin Knutzen, a Wolffian, though a favorite pupil of the Pietist Schultz. Knutzen introduced Kant to the broad scope of his knowledge from mathematics to astronomy, but particularly physics. Kant's earliest writings were in physics, including his dissertation in 1755, and he remained interested in the work of Newton throughout his life.

During the eight years between the completion of his studies at Königsberg and the dissertation, Kant earned a meager living as a family tutor. For the fifteen years that followed, Kant was unsuccessful in securing a professorial appointment at the university. He was forced to remain in relative poverty as a private lecturer, despite the fact that he quickly gained a reputation as a brilliant teacher and attracted students from far beyond Königsberg.

In this period, from 1755 to 1770, Kant was strongly influenced by Rousseau and Hume. The former gave Kant the importance of the concept of freedom; the latter awakened him from his "dogmatic slumbers" as Kant himself put it. The Kant who emerged from these years had shed his Wolffian rationalism and come to grips with empirical skepticism at the other extreme.

Having rejected appointments at two renowned universities, Kant was finally offered the chair of logic and metaphysics at Königsberg in 1770, a position he held until poor health forced him to retire in 1797. He died in 1804.

The years following 1770 were marked by unbelievable productivity. During the first ten years he carefully worked out his system. In 1781 his chief work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, appeared. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic* was published in 1783, followed by *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals* in 1785 and *Metaphysical First Principles of Natural Science* the following year. In 1788 Kant published the second great critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, and in 1790 the third, *The Critique of Judgment*. The last of the great works of this period, and the main source for this discussion, is his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, published in 1793.

This last-named work, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, precipitated the only real "event" of Kant's life. In 1786 Frederick William II had ascended the Prussian throne. His officials imposed rather stringent censorship on religious publications. The first section of the *Religion* passed without much problem. The other sections were not approved at Königsberg; Kant was forced to gain the *imprimatur* from the faculty at Jena. Outraged, the king demanded that Kant no longer publish on matters of religion, a demand to which Kant assented, though the *Religion* itself was frequently published and revised in following years.

KANT'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Kant's epistemology begins with the rejection of the two major options that faced him: Humean empiricism and Wolffian-Leibnizian rationalism. Nevertheless, Kant does make use of many of the insights of each. With Hume he agrees that knowledge is of sensations, but with Leibniz he recognizes that knowledge is possible only when the mind determines the nature of its data.

The problem in Hume is that limitation of the mind to the passive reception of impressions makes knowledge impossible. Kant argued that if Hume were correct, there could never be anything beyond the impressions. Knowledge presupposes the recognition and comparison of causal, spatial, and temporal relations, and much more. None of this, however, is provided by the senses. They give us only tastes, odors, color patches, and so on. If there is knowledge, and Kant never doubted that there is, then Hume must be wrong.

We should note here Kant's method for philosophy. He does not begin with definitions, as did Wolff, nor does he attempt a psychological analysis of knowledge, as did Locke and Hume. Rather, Kant asks for the logical prerequisites of what we know to be the case. There is knowledge. How then is it possible? What must be the case for it to occur? This is the "critical" or "transcendental" method, the first method designed specifically for philosophy.

How then is knowledge possible? Kant begins the introduction to *The Critique of Pure Reason* with the following statement:

There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience. . . . In the order of time, therefore, we have no knowledge antecedent to experience, and with experience all our knowledge begins.⁷

Kant accepts, then, the view of the empiricists regarding the senses. The senses are passive receptors of isolated and atomic sensations—sounds, color patches, and so forth. They are also the only means by which any content can be provided for our minds to process.⁸

Kant is equally adamant, however, that sensation by itself cannot be knowledge. Without the operations of the mind, there can be no determination of the data. The impressions do not identify, coordinate, or categorize themselves. We do not neces-

sarily know what we are seeing when the mechanism of the retina registers light impulses. Knowledge begins with sensation, but it does not end there. Kant himself puts it this way: "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."⁹

Just what is it that the mind adds to the sensations so that knowledge results? First, the sensations *are* always sensed, and *can* be sensed, only within the structures of time and space. If the impressions were not put in sequence, arranged in relationship to each other, and determined in size, extension, and so on, we could not know at all. Since time and space are not actual impressions yet are presupposed by the possibility of knowing, they must be *forms* of intuition for the mind. They are not part of the data, but are rather the ways in which our minds conceive the data.

There is, further, a "transcendental logic," that is, the necessary *categories* whereby the mind judges the nature of sensations in respect to their quantity, quality, relations (this includes, for example, causal dependence), and modality. Together, the forms and the categories are the filters that give order and determination to the data of the senses.

Knowledge, then, is the mind's conceptualization of the data. When there is no sensory input, there can be no knowledge. As we shall see, the initial conclusion of Kant's epistemology is significant for his treatment of revelation.

Kant is convinced, however, that there is another type of judgment that we can make. The judgments that we make regarding the contingent data of the senses are, to use Kant's term, *a posteriori*. But, Kant asks in the *Critique*, how and in which disciplines is it possible to make judgments that are *necessary* and *universal*? Such judgments would have to be *a priori*, that is, before and independent of the sensory data. The judgments that we make on the basis of the senses could never meet the criteria. They cannot be universal since no one could ever observe every possible instance of a judgment. The geometric judgment that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line—universally—cannot be known from observation. Perhaps it will turn out differently the next time! Likewise, our observations cannot establish the necessity of any judgment. The senses, says Kant, can only tell us what is, in fact, the case. They cannot support a judgment about what necessarily is the case.

In fact, we have already come across the source of universal and necessary judgments. The forms of intuition (time and space) and the categories are concepts that govern *every possible* sensation and thus meet the criteria. Kant considers these to be the foundations of mathematics and the sciences. These disciplines are thus firmly based. Their principles are known as universal and necessary truths.

Is there metaphysical knowledge? We can now ask if, and how, it is possible for an individual to know anything about the ultimate nature of reality—the existence and nature of God, the condition and destiny of man, the status and source of values, and so on. At this point it is important to restate the essential conclusion of Kant's epistemology: While sensation provides the data of knowledge, it is the mind that actually makes the knowing possible by forming and categorizing. Furthermore, it is only the "pure" understanding of the concepts of the mind that is universal and necessary.

Kant argues that there can be no knowledge of metaphysics because an attempt at such knowledge takes the concepts of the mind beyond their proper use. In the section of the *Critique* titled "The Antinomies of Pure Reason," Kant claims to demonstrate that when reason is applied to the ultimate, that is, the absolute or infinite, a curious fact ensues: both sides of a contradiction can be proved. The best known of Kant's four examples is the third antinomy. He states it this way:

Thesis: Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only causality from which the appearances of the world can one and all be derived. To explain these appearances it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality, that of freedom.

Antithesis: There is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with the laws of nature.¹⁰

Kant takes the antinomies to be proof that our rational abilities are meant to function only in relation to the realm of sensible data. We cannot know reality in itself. We know only the appearances, not what is really out there. We cannot get beyond our agnosticism by extending the use of the categories to the metaphysical realm of freedom, God, and values; nor can we ever have direct acquaintance with the objects of our world. The possibilities of knowing are limited by the forms of intuition and the categories of judgment in their *proper function*.

Kant's discussion, however, does not end here. While it is true that we have exhausted the realm of pure reason and knowledge proper, Kant discovers a second use of reason. Reason in relation to experience can find only purely causal relations between physical objects. Nevertheless, reason knows that there must be an initiation of causal chains by the will. Knowledge of the "phenomena," to use Kant's term for the appearances as ordered by the mind, could never include the freedom of the will as an agent of events. Yet the chain of natural causes cannot be thought of as going back infinitely. For no link in the chain provides a complete ("sufficient"¹¹) explanation. There must be an absolute beginning, a "prime mover."¹²

There can be only one solution to the third antinomy. Freedom is not part of the phenomenal world but of the unknowable "noumenal" world—the world as it really is, not as it appears to us to be. Freedom *must be* the case, but we do not *know* it. This precisely is the second use of reason, namely, in relation to what ought to be, not what is. Kant refers to this function as *practical reason*, the subject of his second major "critique." Practical reason is to be identified as *will* in its intellectual function of determining action.

Thus, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant has determined the possibility of freedom and the noumenal. But this, of course, does not give us actual evidence for the reality of freedom. For this step there must be experience.

In the case of freedom there can be no empirical evidence. The data of the senses give us no clue. We experience desires, emotions, and feelings; but these could all exist without the freedom to fulfill them. Kant holds that there is experience of the moral law. It is at this point that we turn to the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

The moral law shows its reality, in a manner which is sufficient even from the point of view of the *critique* of theoretical reason, in adding a positive characteristic to a causality which so far has been conceived only negatively and the possibility of which, although incomprehensible to theoretical reason, had yet to be assumed by it. This positive characteristic is the conception of reason as immediately determining the will (through the condition that a universal form can be given to its maxims as laws). Thus, for the first time, the moral law can give objective (though only practical) reality to reason which always hitherto had to tran-

scend all possible experience when it put its ideas to a theoretical use. . . .¹³

For Kant this experience is unassailable. The conclusion of the *Critique of Practical Reason* begins with the oft-quoted statement of the two things that "fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe. . . : the starry heavens above and the moral law within."¹⁴ The moral law is apprehended as a sense of *duty*. Duty, in turn, implies an obligation that is necessary (it does not depend on how any individual *in fact* behaves) and universal (it applies to all human beings). It has a "categorical imperative," to use Kant's term. That is, maxims or principles of action confront me as applications of a moral law.

Kant concludes that there can be only one possibility for a moral law that is necessary and universal and therefore unconditional. The categorical imperative is: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."¹⁵

From this position we can derive all the great ideas of metaphysics: freedom, immortality, and God.¹⁶ Freedom is, for Kant, the immediate postulate of the moral law. The very notion of a moral duty is senseless unless I am free to perform it. The concepts clearly imply each other. Without freedom there could be no moral law. Apart from the moral law I would not know that I was free.

Again, as a reminder, we are not dealing with the realm of knowledge. Freedom is a postulate of practical reason, not an item of knowledge of pure reason.¹⁷ Moreover, freedom is an immediate postulate. My apprehension of duty is senseless without it.

The second postulate of Kant's ethical religion is immortality. This postulate follows, Kant says, from the necessity of the moral law and the principle that what is in fact a duty is also achievable.¹⁸ The moral law demands perfect holiness. This is possible only with infinite progress. Thus the soul must be immortal in order to achieve this perfection.

The third postulate is the existence of God. In the first *Critique* Kant had argued that pure reason is incapable of establishing any argument for God's existence.¹⁹ Thus the existence of God cannot be *known*, but it can be *postulated*. This is, however, the weakest even of the postulates; it is third in line. Practical reason

must assume that happiness is coincident with obedience to the moral law. Happiness, however, is the condition of man in the world, that is, the *causal* world. But a person is not able to ensure such harmony of the noumenal will and the phenomenal world. Thus, if perfection is attainable, then there must be an infinite God who harmonizes morality and nature and ushers in the final state of perfect existence. Christian doctrine refers to this state as the kingdom.

In this way practical reason gives us not only the main elements of metaphysics but also leads to religion: an *ethical* religion. That is, its only content pertains to how I ought to act, how free action is possible, and what the conditions are under which obedience is attainable. Religion, Kant says, is "the recognition of all duties as divine commands, . . . as essential laws of any free will as such."²⁰ We turn next, then, to Kant's development of religion by practical reason and the position and possibility of revelation.

THE POSSIBILITY AND VALUE OF REVELATION

In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* Kant works out his natural theology. That is, practical reason is allowed to fully work out its postulates in relation to the major themes of religious knowledge. The work is divided into four sections. In the first section Kant explores the subject of man's natural inclination to evil. In section 2 he discusses the conflict between good and evil and the nature of salvation. Section 3 is concerned with the nature of true religion and especially the contrast between rational and revealed systems. It is this part that occupies most of our attention as we discuss directly the possibility of revelation. The final section provides the meaning of service and the general mode of life under a rational religion.

On the Radical Evil in Human Nature

Is man innately good or evil? Kant's answer to this question is two-sided. On the one hand he holds that there is no reason to think that any of man's original predispositions are aimed in any other direction than toward the good. Kant divides these original predispositions into animal (preservation, sex, community), human (equality), and personal (respect for law, consciousness of law). On the level of these natural instincts man is directed toward the moral law.

On the other hand Kant considers it obvious that man's will is inclined toward evil. In fact, he offers no argument for the position; it is self-evident.

How, then, is this propensity to evil to be explained? What is corrupt is not man as man, but the "subjective ground" of his will.²¹ That is, the maxims or rational principles of choice are no longer pure. Man is still conscious of the moral law, however, and thus practical reason as such is not destroyed. Evil has become, as Kant says, subjectively necessary. It is not innate to the species.

What accounts for the origin of subjective evil? Kant's response to this problem is vague at best, and at this point we begin to see the difficulties with his rational and nonhistorical, or even antihistorical, religion. Since evil's origin is not related to the species, it cannot have a single, temporal nature. Kant says that historical accounts such as that in Scripture have a *moral* use in helping us understand the nature of a subjective change; but if the change is, in fact, related to the will, then its event is not phenomenal—that is, having historically identifiable causes—but rather noumenal. Thus Kant adds in a footnote to this discussion that the "historical knowledge which has no inner bearing valid for all men belongs to the class of *adiaphora*, which each man is free to hold as he finds edifying."²² He even tells us that as far as our ordinary awareness is concerned, each evil act is to be viewed as directly and individually a fall from innocence.²³

If a temporal explanation fails, then what explanation will do? Evil must have originated in a rational act of will to incorporate improper maxims into—that is, alongside of—the categorical moral law, which it continues to know. Kant's difficulty at this point is that the rational origin of evil maxims is inscrutable.²⁴ Evil acts can come only from an evil will, but there is nothing that might explain the subjective choice of an evil maxim of will on the part of a good individual. How should a good man with a good will come to act out of selfishness or cruelty?

Nevertheless, Kant is convinced of the radical evil of man, though man remains accountable because he remains rational and free. We are always able to do what we ought to do.²⁵ This leaves Kant in a second difficulty. Just as the initiation of discordant maxims is inscrutable yet obvious, so also the condition of an evil will is irreversible yet restorable. It is irreversible for the same reason that its origin is incomprehensible: it is noumenal,

not phenomenal, and there is no cause that can explain the reversing of the will, understood as practical reason.

Much of Kant's predicament here results from identifying the will with reason in its practical function, and from placing the will in the noumenal realm. There can be neither causes nor independent reasons for choices of maxims, except for the moral law itself. The universal law is the only maxim that conforms to freedom and it is, therefore, a reflection of man's true autonomous nature. To obey it is thus the only choice conceivable for the rational will. Yet it is just this radical autonomy that makes possible the rejection of the freedom to be good. There remains no explanation for the adoption of irrational and evil maxims, nor for the return to rational functions—except that man is *free* to do so.

Man *himself* must make or have made himself into whatever, in a moral sense, whether good or evil, he is or is to become. Either condition must be an effect of his free choice; for otherwise he could not be held responsible for it and could therefore be *morally* neither good nor evil.²⁶

Salvation must also share this noumenal nature. It must be possible to return to purity of maxim, but we cannot understand how. It must be possible because duty demands it, not because revelation tells us. Salvation, Kant says, consists of a simple, yet radical change of will, even though the actual change in a man's life is gradual. Nevertheless from God's viewpoint (that of timeless reason), regeneration and sanctification, to use more traditional theological language, are a simple unity.

What role does God play in salvation? We again face a dual answer. From the point of view of rational freedom any work of grace or divine assistance is contradictory in Kant's system.

For the employment of this idea would presuppose a rule concerning the good which (for a particular end) we ourselves must *do* in order to accomplish something, whereas to await a work of grace means exactly the opposite, namely, that the good (the morally good) is not our deed but the deed of another being, and that we therefore can *achieve* it only by *doing nothing*, which contradicts itself.²⁷

Theoretically, then, Kant considers grace a useless concept. A free will must correct its own principles of choice. Nevertheless, Kant knows that this is impossible:

But does not this restoration through one's own exertion directly contradict the postulate of the innate corruption of man which unfits him for all good? Yes, to be sure, as far as the conceivability, *i.e.*, our *insight* into the possibility, of such a restoration is concerned.²⁸

Faced with these difficulties, Kant concludes that while we cannot adopt the notion of a work of grace into our maxims of reason, we do know that much is beyond our comprehension and we can, therefore, choose to accept it by *reflective faith*.²⁹

Concerning the Conflict of the Good With the Evil Principle for Sovereignty Over Man

In the second section of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* Kant deals with the actual nature of salvation. The first section begins to give, however indirectly, a picture of Kant's view of the function of revelation. It is clear that individual autonomous reason, functioning "practically" in relation to the moral law, must be the ultimate source of knowledge. This now becomes much clearer, particularly in Kant's discussion of the role of Christ in salvation. Kant has already dismissed the rational function of a redemptive act of grace, but what about the *revelational* role of Christ? While Kant deals with other problems as well in this section, it is this topic to which he repeatedly returns.

In the course of section 2 Kant offers at least five reasons why revelation—in the form of a model—is unnecessary. The first is perhaps the most obvious. There is nothing to be known from revelation that practical reason cannot postulate by itself. (We must remember that practical reason, strictly speaking, does not *know*.) What is required of man, why it is required, that he can perform it—all of this is already present to each individual.

The second reason follows from the first. If man already has what he needs, then the search for an example or any sort of verification is precisely an act of unfaith, not faith. The very act of believing in Christ rather than relying on free autonomous practical reason is an act of disbelief.

Third, Kant argues that a living example, known only as a phenomenon, could never disclose what is really necessary, namely, the purity of maxims of the will. The latter is of course a noumenal act of reason. Kant states it thus:

According to the law, each man ought really to furnish an example of this idea in his own person; to this end does the archetype

reside always in the reason: and this, just because no example in outer experience is adequate to it; for outer experience does not disclose the inner nature of the disposition but merely allows of an inference about it though not one of strict certainty.³⁰

Fourth, if any man can achieve purity of maxims, then Christ, even if it could be proved that his origin was supernatural, can be of no benefit to us. There is nothing Christ could reveal to us by way of example that is not already understandable by the natural man.

Finally, Kant argues that it is already difficult enough to follow the moral law known to us. It only makes matters worse to bring in an outside example. Kant argues in the following way:

And the presence of this archetype in the human soul is in itself sufficiently incomprehensible without our adding to its supernatural origin the assumption that is hypostasized in a particular individual. The elevation of such a holy person above all the frailties of human nature would rather, as far as we can see, hinder the adoption of the idea of such a person for our imitation.³¹

Salvation, then, is found in reason, in conformity to the archetype known to the mind.

Now it is our universal duty as men to *elevate* ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, that is, to this archetype of the moral disposition in all its purity—and for this the idea itself, which reason presents to us for our zealous emulation, can give us power.³²

Kant does have a high regard, however, for the person of Christ. At one point he even affirms that we find salvation through a "*practical faith in this Son of God*."³³ Kant makes one suggestion as to how the archetype known to reason can also be faith in the Son of God. The mind itself, he says, cannot be the source of the moral law as a universal and necessary ideal. It can only "*come down* to us from heaven"³⁴ and is thus a "humiliation."

Kant's ethical religion, then, as shown in the reasons given above does not find itself in need of revelation in the sense of a historical model. While Kant acknowledges and respects the historical Christ, the statements of Scripture that refer to Christ are to be understood *existentially*, to use a contemporary term. That is, the christological statements are to be understood as statements about *my* self. The revelation of the ideal man in Christ is, in fact, the rational apprehension by man's reason that duty is

identical to the will of God. Scripture's language is "figurative,"³⁵ or "vivid,"³⁶ or pictorial.³⁷ For example, Kant says the following concerning Scripture's use of "evil spirits" to signify the enemies of the archetype:

This is an expression which seems to have been used not to extend our knowledge beyond the world of sense but only to make clear *for practical use* the conception of what is for us unfathomable.³⁸

Another example of Kant's use of Scripture can be seen in his examination of the concept of sacrifice as necessary for payment of debt. Kant can say that it is the archetype that bears the penalty for sin. What that means, however, is roughly the following existential translation.³⁹ The sacrifice is the giving up of selfish maxims by the rational will. It constitutes "*punishments* whereby satisfaction is rendered to divine justice."⁴⁰ In fact, each man must do this for himself.

We turn next to Kant's remarks directly concerning revelation. This involves us in the question of the actual nature of religion.

*The Victory of the Good Over the Evil Principle,
and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth*

In section 3 Kant is concerned to show how a universal religion is possible. That is, how can all individuals be brought to recognize the need to adopt a purity of maxim? The answer is simply that revelation cannot achieve this recognition, while rational faith can—and has done so. We must seek the truth within us, not in an external revelation. Kant allows for revelation only in a subservient sense. It may show what "has hitherto remained hidden from men through their own fault."⁴¹ I count in this section thirteen reasons why rational faith is superior to revelation. This section, then, applies Kant's epistemology to revelation and clarifies revelation's status in relation to religion.

1. *Rational faith is ethical.* As we have seen, Kant concludes that religion is ethical in nature. Its tenets are postulates of practical reason. Thus the purpose of revelation, says Kant, can only be to serve practical reason. The principle of biblical exegesis shifts in Kant from Luther's explicit christocentrism to ethicocentrism: What does the Bible tell me to do?⁴² Clearly, rational faith is superior, since it admits of direct cognizance of the moral law. Revelation is indirect at best.

2. *Rational faith is necessary.* The religion of practical reason is a necessary postulate. It *must be* true if we are to make sense of our knowledge of moral law. Revelational propositions merely *are* true.

Revelation would have to be verified by reason to be of any use. This would have to occur in one of two ways. Either reason directly determines the truth of the *propositions* of revelation or it verifies the *source* of that revelation. In the former case revelation is, of course, uselessly repetitive. It is necessarily true, but only because of its verification, line by line, by reason. In the latter case, revelation may provide us with additional information hitherto undiscovered by reason. However, it cannot be known with necessity. Any verification of source, Kant says, must involve historical or factual considerations.⁴³ As a result, our knowledge will be a posteriori and contingent, not necessary.

3. *Rational faith is universal.* The problem with revelation as a means of providing man with information on how to act is, according to Kant, that it can never reach everyone. Revelation is empirical in nature and thus bounded by social, linguistic, and practical conditions. As a result, individual revelation can be the source only of localized, dogmatized *faiths*, not the universal true religion.

Pure religious faith alone can found a universal church; for only [such] rational faith can be believed in and shared by everyone, whereas an historical faith, grounded solely on facts, can extend its influence no further than tidings of it can reach, subject to circumstances of time and place and dependent upon the capacity [of men] to judge the credibility of such tidings.⁴⁴

4. *Rational faith is prior.* Any revelation, Kant argues, is immediately posterior to reason in that it must first be verified or authenticated by reason.⁴⁵ Reason must interpret revelation.

Kant is forced to deny any notion of a self-authenticating knowledge of revelation. There is no knowledge without the operation of pure reason. All else is superstition. In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant explains that rational religion prevents theology from becoming theosophy (the use of transcendental concepts above reason) and it prevents religion from becoming theurgy (the belief in feeling or direct contact with the supernatural).⁴⁶ The general epistemological principle cannot be broken, even for a supposed divine revelation.

5. *Rational faith is an act of free will.* It is thus not only ethically prior, but also ontologically prior, to revelation.⁴⁷ Revelation may assist the less thoughtful, but any faith that relies on it denies the nature of man.

Revelation can produce only an ecclesiastical faith. It cannot, by itself, give a person true understanding of what is required of him. It can tell him, but this is always for Kant an external source of knowledge. Thus it indicates a reliance of the will on heteronomous sources. This is, of course, a denial of man's autonomous freedom.

Of all of Kant's reasons, it seems to me that this one strikes at the heart of what is important to him. Whereas the others indicate mostly epistemological inferiorities of revelation, this reason concerns the very being of man. Rousseau's influence on Kant is quite apparent here. But it is also true that Kant's doctrine of freedom is firmly grounded in his epistemology. Nothing can be known without the operation of pure reason. Nothing can be postulated without the uncaused adoption of practical reason.

6. *Rational faith is self-promoting.* Closely connected to the above is revelation's dependence on a "learned public" that is related to the origin of the revelation by a tradition of scholarship.⁴⁸ In a sense, revelational faith is thus elitist. It cannot continue without highly skilled exegetes and theologians who verify and interpret the revelation to the common man. Rational faith needs no such assistance. It promotes itself. Every person is capable of full comprehension of the dictates of practical reason.

7. *Rational faith is an end.* Ecclesiastical or revelational faith, because it is not fully rational, can only be a means to an end and not an end in itself.⁴⁹ It serves as a vehicle for rational faith but it can never function as a goal. Rational faith embodies the fulfillment of human existence. Man's ultimate goal is found in free moral conformity to the categorical imperative.

8. *Rational faith is complete.* A truly saving faith must accomplish two purposes, Kant holds.⁵⁰ It must first provide "atonement"; that is, it must undo sin and return a person to purity of maxim. Second, it must provide morality. It must give a person a new life and tell him how to live.

The atonement of revelation is incomplete. It does not tell a person how to live a new life but tells him simply that he is forgiven without first improving his life. No thoughtful person can bring himself to believe this. The best proof of this, says

Kant, is that if it were true then surely people would universally respond. This is clearly not the case, but Kant is certain that universal response would be so for the ethical religion of reason.

9. *Rational faith is productive.* Revelational faith, and Kant includes Christian revelation here, is not universally effective in changing men's lives.⁵¹ Some will choose to obey it—and even that is, of course, a decision for heteronomy—but many will not alter their conduct. Rational faith, however, never fails. Recognition of the moral law always converts the free will that sees there the fulfillment of its being.

10. *Rational faith is private.* Revelation produces actual, local ecclesiastical faiths. These are external and public congregations. Rational faith, at least until the goal of universality is achieved, “has no public status.”⁵² It is purely an inner change, an invisibly developing church.

11. *Rational faith is ultimate.* Kant's theology is specifically goal-oriented. The title of one of his shorter works is translated *Perpetual Peace* (1795). The German title is *Zum ewigen Frieden*, that is literally, *To Eternal Peace*. Kant outlines here how his ethical religion works itself out in political policies. He is convinced in the *Religion* that the religion of reason will lead to universal peace and harmony. Revelational faiths may accomplish limited peace. The ultimate stage of human history, however, will not be ushered in until rational faith has become universal.⁵³ Ultimacy is thus tied to universality.

12. *Rational faith is permanent.* Since rational faith will usher in the ultimate end of history, and since a will with pure maxims cannot corrupt itself, the results of such faith are permanent. Reason's victory is eternal.⁵⁴

13. *Rational faith is identical with revelational faith.* After all that has been said, this final point may seem contradictory. Kant's point, however, is important to the question of *inerrant* revelation. Kant seems always to assume that despite all of the inferiorities of revelation, if it could, in fact, be shown to be authentically divine in origin—by prior reason—that would constitute proof of its truthfulness.

We have already seen, however, that Kant interprets the nature of truthfulness in a moral or existential rather than a descriptive and historical sense. Thus a literal sense of inerrancy cannot apply in Kant's view of revelation. *Genuine* revelation must be identical in content to purely rational faith. In both the

content is the archetype of human conduct, “lying in our reason, that we attribute to [Christ] (since, so far as his example can be known, he is found to conform thereto).”⁵⁵

When we, then, properly understand a verified revelation, its content will coincide with the product of reason alone. This is the proper function of religion. Kant says, “It concerns us not so much to know what God is in Himself (His nature) as *what He is for us* as moral beings (emphasis added).”⁵⁶

Concerning Service and Pseudo-Service Under the Sovereignty of the Good Principle

While Kant's stated subject in this section deals with the organizational aspects of religion, the section serves also as a summary statement on the relationship between reason and revelation. I am commenting on it here for just that purpose.

Kant's position on revelation begins, of course, with his epistemology, which requires that religion in general be ethical in content. Religion is simply the understanding of the moral imperative, no longer abstractly, but as God's will. As Kant phrases it, religion is “the recognition of all duties as divine commands.”⁵⁷

Since religion is concerned only with *individual behavior* (it is in that sense *existential*), it is not the imparting of true propositions either of fact or metaphysics.

As regards the theoretical apprehension and avowal of belief, no assertorial knowledge is required (even of God's existence), since, with our lack of insight into supersensible objects such avowal might well be dissembled; rather it is merely a *problematical* assumption (hypothesis) regarding the highest cause of things that is presupposed speculatively. . . . The *minimum* of knowledge (it is possible that there may be a God) must suffice, subjectively, for whatever can be made the duty of every man.⁵⁸

Religion, however, is not simply a list of particular duties and services. It would then offend man's autonomy. Religion is simply the recognition that duty, apprehended in the moral law, is related to God as postulated by practical reason.

Religion, so defined, must rest on universal human reason. Any revelation will lead to an individual and local church because of its empirical character. It cannot command unconditional allegiance because its authenticity and authority must first

be determined by reason. Kant says this of revelation's claim to authority:

Since assurance on this score rests on no grounds of proof other than the historical, and since there ever will remain in the judgment of the people . . . the absolute possibility of an error which has crept in through their interpretation or through previous classical exegesis, the clergyman would be requiring the people . . . to confess something to be as true as is their belief in God. . . .⁵⁹

Our belief in God rests on a postulate of practical reason. Belief in the truth of revelation could never be more than possible and contingent. Thus Kant warns us of the problem when we "seek religion without and not within us."⁶⁰

EVALUATION AND CRITIQUE

There can be little doubt that Kant's epistemology figures largely in the contemporary discussion concerning the possibility and actuality of inerrant revelation. Many of the characteristics of the positions of those who deny authoritative and inerrant revelation are drawn directly from Kant. In many cases the reliance on Kant is explicit and admitted. And, while it is true that some elements of this position are prior to Kant, it seems evident that it was Kant who first put them into a coherent whole and introduced them into the mainstream of Christian (particularly German) theology. From Kant the line of influence is not difficult to trace through Schleiermacher to nineteenth-century liberalism, and then to contemporary neoliberalism. Schubert Ogden, perhaps the most prominent interpreter and critic of Bultmann in the late 1950s, is the spokesman of those who are currently working out a "process" theology, following Whitehead and Hartshorne, on top of an existential epistemology.⁶¹ I will use Ogden as a source throughout the Evaluation and Critique.

The Value of a Revelation

We will examine two aspects of Kant's philosophy that show his influence: first, the bifurcation in Kant's epistemology between facts and values and the effect of that bifurcation on arguments for the existence of God and on the value of an inerrant revelation; second, the view of salvation and human nature and

Kant's emphasis on choice—the free act of the will—and the implications of that view for the necessity of revelation.

The bifurcation between facts and values shows itself in Kant as the two functions of pure and practical reason. While contemporary theologians may use different terminology, the result is the same: the source of science is different from the source of values. There is a difference not only in source, and thus in the mode of verification, but also in status. Facts are *known*; values are not, even though they are considered important. This bifurcation is clearly seen in the many variations of existential theological epistemologies as the distinction between "objective" knowledge known by the senses and "existential" awareness. (The latter is the direct, intuitive confrontation with the inner self and its possibility of authentic existence.)

The existence of God is included in the list of what ought to be, not of what, in fact, is. This goes hand in hand with the summary rejection of the arguments for God's existence. In existential theology this becomes the denial of God as "an object among objects." Ogden's only argument, if that is the correct term, for God's reality is a strictly moral one, similar to Kant's. God must exist, says Ogden, or else our trust in the value and meaning of life makes no sense.⁶² There is no argument based on the objective data but only on the demands of existentialist awareness.

Kant's position and influence are curiously two-sided at this point. There is, on the one hand, no denying the fact that Kant believed there is a God and that Kant was pious and religious, at least in an ethical sense. Kant is clearly not intentionally a naturalist. On the other hand, Kant's position leads to a rejection of supernaturalism as a *rational* option. God's existence cannot be known, only postulated. Following Kant there have been, not surprisingly, a series of noncognitive, subjective or practical attempts to justify belief. Feeling, experience, encounter, pre-cognitive choices of categories or language games, and many other options have been suggested. They all agree on one thing: they concede with Kant's agnosticism that a truly rational approach is impossible. The specific objections that Kant raised to the theistic arguments have long been countered from many quarters. Nevertheless, the opinion that the arguments are unreliable and that religion is nonrational has continued as the majority view, frequently even among conservative theologians and evangelicals in philosophy.

This influence of Kant seems to me to be one of the primary factors that have led many contemporary theologians to deny the real value of an inerrant revelation. If the truly important matters of life, such as God and the possibility of authentic existence, are not to be known by ordinary knowledge, then they will not be known by propositional communication, particularly not that of historical events. The language of facts is well suited for science and ordinary activities, but it will not do for the inner and the subjective. Thus any revelation in objective language, the Bible in particular, must be, to use the contemporary term, "demythologized" and interpreted existentially. Kant did not use this vocabulary, but his position is substantially the same: the pictorial language of Scripture must be translated into moral language.

This Kantian view of revelation is one of the main ingredients in what was to become the German "higher criticism" movement. There had already been many Enlightenment thinkers who had dismissed the miraculous elements of Scripture wholesale. Johann Semler (1725-1791) appears to have been the first to advocate the individual consideration, from a critical literary and historical standpoint, of the separate books of the Bible. Kant's contribution to this movement, as we have seen, is the criterion for translating Scripture into a useful contemporary reading and seeking for its moral function. In this operation practical reason remains, of course, the authority.

Kant's influence has clearly extended also to the view of salvation. Since revelation is, at best, an aid to slow and less-developed minds, salvation becomes the dual process of recognition and self-change. For Kant, this recognition is of one's failure to live in true freedom (autonomy) as God intends. For Ogden, and like-minded theologians, this recognition is that we are not maximizing the potential for authentic existence exemplified in Christ. Increasingly, this authenticity is interpreted as freedom. Such has always been true of existential theologians, Bultmann in particular, but in Ogden such an interpretation is now more explicit because of the influence of liberation theology.⁶³

Self-change is the other aspect of the process of salvation. This is the deliberate, free, and understanding act of the will. In Kant it is the choice toward purity of maxims. This is simply to say that the possibility of freedom is open when it is recognized. I

can change my behavior toward freedom if only I know I can. The identical transition can be found in contemporary followers of Kant. There is no need for redemptive atonement, certainly not for propitiation. There is no just and holy God. Freedom, and thus authenticity, is there for the choosing.

Furthermore, this salvation is not only possible but, in some sense, partially present. For Kant, the recognition may need some prodding from revelation. For Ogden, too, it is helpful to have a historical example. But in neither view can revelation be necessary. It is a rational postulate that all men must make in order to make sense of their moral experience. Ogden refers to this recognition as "original revelation" given to all men. Nothing additional could or need be said.⁶⁴ For Kant, of course, anything more would be illusory.

The convergence of the characteristics of Kant's position and of those who deny authoritative, inerrant revelation, results from a root identity, namely, in epistemology. I shall simply trace the logic of Kant's position, reversing in the following section the order of the logic of the system and moving toward its starting point.

Kant and Inerrancy

The conclusion of Kant's system is a curious mixture. Kant never denies the possibility of revelation, yet his epistemology precludes its authoritative nature. If the revelation comes in the form of visual or audible data, then it is *known* only by rational judgment. If it is some form of direct intuition or dictation, then it cannot be known—unless judged to be true by an independent reason. In either case, the possibility of an inerrant revelation appears to be precluded. There can be no inspired source that is epistemologically authoritative for man. Revelation can be meaningful only as a sample of moral behavior.

A parallel conclusion is the lack of necessity that pertains to the atonement of Christ. For Kant Christ is an example. For Ogden he is an objectification of human potential. In neither case is there any redemptive value, and even the revelational value is contingent.

All of the conclusions regarding the function of revelation follow from the Kantian principle that a person can do what he ought to do. In other words, man, despite the radical evil in him, is still capable of pure ethical action. While Kant's (and Og-

den's) epistemology explains the nonnecessity of the atonement, it is this position of the inherent goodness and ability of man that really implies it.

Again, however, we must ask for the final basis in Kant's system from which his view of revelation and his ethics result. The answer, I think, is found in his doctrine of the autonomy of reason. The first sentence of the preface to the first edition of the *Religion* is this:

So far as morality is based upon the conception of man as a free agent who, just because he is free, binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws, it stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him, for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty.⁶⁵

Thus, while religious man recognizes the connection between duty and the will of God, reason itself, whereby he makes that judgment and determines his action, is wholly free. Even knowledge of the sensible universe depends on the operation of that reason. The autonomy of reason is, then, related to the split between reality and appearance, between the noumenal world itself and the phenomenal world that I know.

It is not surprising then that contemporary theologians cannot accept an authoritative, inerrant Scripture. Kantian epistemology still reigns. Ogden, for example, goes so far as to say this:

Kant's philosophy has come to have unofficially something like the same status among Protestants as Thomas' has long had among Roman Catholics—and this for the very good reason that Kant's distinction between man's theoretical and practical rationality made possible a salvage operation typical of modern Protestantism and comparable in significance to that previously carried out by Thomas in distinguishing between reason and faith.⁶⁶

It is clear, then, that any theology that accepts inerrancy and authority must construct an alternative epistemology to Kant's. To do so will involve destroying two key tenets of his position. The first is the atomic, sensationist theory of empirical data; that is, that there are isolated and purely physical impulses detected by the body without order or meaning apart from the function of reason, and thus that reason and the senses are entirely separable in operation. The second, and closely related, tenet is Kant's principle (the "transcendental deduction") that what is presup-

posed by our understanding of the data cannot be part of, or included in, the data. Thus time, space, oneness, causality, and so on, are part of the mind's functioning, not of the data.

Traditionally, attempts to refute the Kantian epistemology have involved either some version of realism (that is, that we in some specified sense know the real world), or idealism (that is, that knowledge is of ideas whose source, in some versions of idealism, is God). Kant himself attempted to refute idealism in his first *Critique* by demonstrating the "emptiness" of rational concepts apart from externally derived content. His arguments are, I think, successful. If they are valid, then it may well be that a commitment to the inerrant authority of Scripture rests on a defense and continued refinement of a realist epistemology.

This essay is not the place to attempt any positive construction of an epistemology. It must suffice to point out that neither of Kant's tenets is necessary. The first, that of atomic impressions, he derived from Hume. It is the cornerstone of the Enlightenment model of perception, shared both by rationalists such as Descartes and Leibniz and by empiricists such as Locke and Berkeley. While these philosophers, as well as many subsequent philosophers continuing into the present, disagree as to the value of impressions, they all agree that those impressions are atomic. That is, in their primitive state as apprehended, they are individual sounds, colors, tactile impressions, and so on.

It is not, however, either obvious or clear that we see, hear, and feel impressions rather than reality⁶⁷ or individual data rather than a total environment.⁶⁸ Choosing the model of atomic data leaves the extremely difficult problem of explaining how and with what authority the mind coordinates these bits and pieces and interprets the results. There is an alternate model, that is, that we apprehend directly a segment of the real world. This model leaves some serious problems as well, but they are not insurmountable. The typical arguments for the atomic model can be countered.⁶⁹ We can thus avoid the skepticism about the noumenal world that plagues Humean and Kantian epistemologies.

Kant's second epistemological tenet is similarly susceptible to criticism. A. N. Whitehead has argued that Kant's attempt to base objectivity on subjectivity is "thoroughly topsy-turvy."⁷⁰ One does not have to agree with Whitehead's own position to see the cogency of his rejection of Kant's. Because Kant's model of

awareness is that of the passive reception of impressions, he must conclude that anything beyond the simple "thereness" of impressions is an active contribution of mind. This necessity falls, however, if we reject Kant's model of atomic impressions and allow for a fully personal interaction with a total environment. But, again, I am not concerned to demonstrate an alternative, only to show that Kant's whole position depends on his epistemology, which itself depends on some debatable assumptions.⁷¹

The task of constructing an epistemology is extremely crucial. The availability of supernaturalism as a fully rational option, and an inerrant revelation as even viable, let alone factual, hangs in the balance. If Ogden is correct in his assessment of Kant's present influence, and I think he is, it is not surprising that the doctrine of a supernaturally given Scripture, authoritative and inerrant, is held by most of our contemporaries to be not only false, but *incomprehensible*.

TRANSCENDENTALISM: HEGEL

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