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## On the So-Called Conundrums in Kant's Philosophical Theology

**Overview: In which three conundrums of Kant's pure religion—the good will, radical evil, and grace—are addressed, and three strategies employed for understanding the role of the afterlife in religion (noting that pure religion is concerned with the moral improvement in history of the species generally and not merely the moral improvement of the individual). We conclude with an examination of the question of Theodicy in Kant's pure religion.**

Philo: Irenaeus, as we have repeatedly noted, from the perspective of Critical Idealism, *pure* religion focuses on the highest capacity of humanity, specifically, on practical reason—that is, creative freedom and morality. We become human when and as we exercise this highest capacity. In this, we are always assisted by an invisible community past, present, and future, one that encourages us, but does not seek to tell us which principles we are to apply. On the one hand, no one can exercise our autonomous, creative freedom for us, and on the other, we are faced with doing so responsibly. Naturally, we are dependent upon the mysterious, “divine” gift of the physical and moral orders, which we cannot prove yet must take ‘on faith’ if we are to understand anything or to act at all. Nonetheless, we are capable of elevating ourselves, in part, *above* nature and *above* a life driven exclusively by our “appetites” or our desire to obtain prestige and status in the eyes of others. We do this when we acknowledge that we are not entirely determined by physical causality, but possess the ability to initiate intentionally, not merely instinctually, a sequence of events that nature could never accomplish on its own – and when we recognize that we can exercise this autonomous freedom independent of our self-interest. Remarkably, given all of our limits, we are in fact capable of “doing the right thing because it is right,” not merely because we will profit from it in some fashion. Having said all that, I recall four themes from Kant that are troubling to me. I hope that you are amenable to addressing them for me.

Irenaeus: I will try, Philo. What are the themes?

P: One theme is the famous aphorism from the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, with which the text opens: “Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a *good will*.” This implies that one can have either a *good* or a *bad* will. Were one to have a *bad* will, presumably then also without qualification, one would be incapable of moral improvement; one would not possess the necessary capacity to pursue such improvement.

A second theme comes from *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. It holds that humanity is trapped in a radical evil that is constitutive of our nature. This is particularly perplexing for me, because I know that Kant, in several texts (frequently even in *Religion*), rejects the notion of “original sin,” the idea that we are evil from birth. It also seems to contradict the first point, the basic capability of a good will.

Third, another theme from *Religion* also confuses me. This is Kant's discussion of the "revolution of the disposition," which is the condition for participating in *pure* religion. Kant appears to embrace a notion of 'assisting grace' to accomplish this revolution; I find that very difficult to reconcile with his general suspicion with respect to grace, or with his discussion of the moral improvement of humanity as a whole, or with his rejection of a heteronomous source for morality (God).

Finally, I would be interested in hearing your thoughts on the place of theodicy in Kant's pure religion.

I: Yes, the first three themes do seem to contradict Kant's mantra that "If I should, I can." Were it necessary to have a good as opposed to an evil will in order to do the good, then possession of an evil will would mean that "I can't" be moral. Likewise, were I to be radically evil in the sense of original sin then, again, I would be incapable of doing good because "I couldn't." Finally, were I dependent upon grace for the accomplishment of good, then I would not be capable of doing good on my own initiative but would be dependent upon the source of this grace (God) in order to do good, which would transform the motivation for morality into self-interest and currying favor with this deity. Let's address these three problematic elements first, and then turn to the question of theodicy.

P: One point that I would want us to underscore right up front is that Kant's phrase, "If I should, I can," does *not* mean "If I should, I *must*," as Nicholas Wolterstorff has it. The latter would involve a heteronomous demand, if not a determinism, that would contradict the very conditions for the "should" in the first place. I take Kant to mean with his aphorism that I possess a creative freedom, which is the condition of possibility for my being answerable to any *should*. I raise my questions about these initial three themes precisely because they seem to strike at this very condition of autonomous, creative freedom. All of them, in one way or another, suggest that Kant held that I am not an autonomous agent, that I may possess an *evil will* rather than a *good will*, particularly if I am entirely corrupted by *radical evil*, and finally, that in my unfreedom I am dependent upon *grace* in order to accomplish the revolution of the disposition that makes adherence to any "should" possible in the first place.

I: This is a profound challenge, Philo. If these themes are at the core of Critical Idealism, as you suggest, then Kant would surely be contradicting himself. We are confronted with a choice: Either we assume that Kant was inconsistent, or we presume that he was profoundly consistent and that these apparent contradictions serve as a stimulus for us to engage our own reflecting judgment. That would mean seeking the clarifying concept that appears to be absent or is simply misunderstood.

P: I presume you wish to defend the latter, Irenaeus; I eagerly await your reflections.

### On the Good Will

I: The reading that you have presented of Kant's famous aphorism with respect to the "good will," Philo, is a classic example of the kind of anachronistic reading of Kant that claims: "Kant must have meant what we today mean with his terminology." We discussed in Book I of Part I, for example, the distortions of Kant's notion of "synthetic judgment" – by no less than Heidegger, among many others who fail to distinguish between synthesis as "*in*

*common*” to a set of phenomena (identified *a posteriori*) and synthesis as “adding to” phenomena (as *a priori* synthesis).

P: I found that discussion extremely helpful, Irenaeus. As you know, I was among those who completely overlooked Kant’s distinction between synthesis as “uniting” and as “adding to”. As a consequence, I completely misunderstood the significance of his claim that transcendental consciousness must *add things to* phenomena in order to understand them. I now understand that this very distinction with respect to synthetic judgment is why the Copernican Revolution is so significant for Kant because the only way that we can understand that the sun is not moving around the earth, but vice-versa, is by adding (a *priori synthesis*) a mental model that represents the relationships between these two bodies in space that cannot be perceived in the senses.

I: In the case of the “good will,” we risk giving ontological status to what Kant took to be a fundamental capacity that distinguishes to a profound degree, so far as we can know, humanity from every other species on this planet.

P: Wait a minute, Irenaeus! So the erroneous reading comes from the mistake of not grasping the significance of Kant’s shift from *contents* to *capacities*?

I: Absolutely, Irenaeus! Kant’s “good will” has been read as a *state or content* (moral goodness) rather than the *capacity* to initiate a sequence of events (“*I can*”) in light of a self-legislated moral principle (“*I should*”). As we will see, the good will is an *amoral* “good” as a necessary but not sufficient condition for us to be able to choose between a good and an evil maxim upon which to act.

P: Oh my! Given the efforts that you have taken over the course of our conversations, Irenaeus, I am embarrassed that it never occurred to me to read the “good will” here as a capacity rather than a specific content.

I: I wish that I could say that you are alone, Philo, but you are probably among the majority of Kant’s readers. It is amazing how widely, and how insistently, this mistake continues among those who write about Kant. It leads to fundamentally misleading views on Kant’s thought, and it is a major reason he has not been appreciated in many quarters.

P: And here I am compounding the error. Well, then, what does Kant say about the amoral capacity of the good will?

I: Kant states explicitly: “An absolutely good will, whose principle must be a categorical imperative, will therefore, indeterminate with respect to all objects, contain merely the *form of volition* as such and indeed as autonomy; that is, the fitness of the maxims of every good will to make themselves into universal law is itself the sole law that the will of every rational being *imposes upon itself, without having to put underneath it some incentive or interest as a basis*” (emphasis added). (*Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, AA IV 444) This underscores what is said just prior to this passage (*ibid.*), where Kant rejects the notion of perfection as the motivation for morality: “In every case where an object of the will has to be laid down as the basis for prescribing the rule that determines the will, there the rule is none other than heteronomy; the imperative is conditional, namely: *if or because* one wills this object, one ought to act in such *or* such a way; hence it can never command morally, that is, categorically. Whether the object determines the will by means of inclination, as in the

principle of one's own happiness, or by means of reason directed to objects of our possible volition in general, as in the principle of perfection, the will never determines itself *immediately*, just by the representation of an action, but only by means of an incentive that the anticipated effect of the action has upon the will: *I ought to do something on this account, that I will something else ...*"

P: These passages make clear to me that what makes for morality (with its categorical maxims) is not the consequences (the goals) of one's actions, but the imperceptible principle on which one acts. Either one acts "hypothetically," hence, heteronomously, with respect to an "if" or a "because," or one acts "categorically" with respect to an autonomous principle that is right, regardless of the consequences it brings. I imagine that this does not mean that consequences are entirely irrelevant, just that we cannot control them, they escape our grasp, they can even be the opposite of what we intend, and they cannot be the basis for action or for morality for that very reason. This forces us always to turn to something that precedes any possible consequences – and if it is not to something arbitrary or externally imposed, it must be to the principle of doing what is right because it is right.

I: Yes, Philo, and we can self-legislate a moral principle categorically because such legislation is a statement of our freedom over against any and all heteronomous lists of moral principles, whose authority comes from some other source than the self, and because our freedom consists in our creativity *above* (but never independent of) nature. Both elements, the moral maxim and the autonomous, creative, free will, are two sides of the same coin, although without the latter the former is meaningless. In his most recent book, *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. Eine Philosophie der Freiheit*, Otfried Höffe, quoting Kant, observes: "Morality is the epistemological ground (*ratio cognoscendi*) for freedom as the ground of being (*ratio essendi*). Only the moral law justifies our 'assumption' of freedom whereas without freedom it would be impossible for us to encounter 'the moral law in us' (AA V 4\*; see *ibid.*, 30, 132)." In short, we exercise an efficient causality that is not reducible to nature's efficient causality, which allows us to bring about things that nature cannot; similarly, we can examine our motivations in light of a self-legislated moral maxim.

P: The efficient causality of autonomous, creative freedom is what Kant means by "volition"?

I: Precisely! He writes in the *Groundwork* (AA IV, 394): "A good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, *but only because of its volition—that is, it is good in itself, and regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favor of some inclination and indeed, if you will, of the sum of all inclinations* (emphasis added)." This good will is a capacity we possess as an "idea of reason" as Kant claimed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This efficient causality is referred to there to be one of the three regulative ideas of pure reason that are incapable of proof or disproof but that are necessary for us to exercise the capacities that we *appear* to possess.

P: So we must assume such a capacity given the appearances we experience; at the same time, because the ideas of reason are themselves nowhere in appearances, but instead are what we add to appearances in order to grasp them at all, we can only assume them and not prove them.

I: Furthermore, in the *Groundwork* (AA IV, 396) Kant speaks of this assumption of the will with reference to its power to select a maxim rather than accomplish an end: “Since [*sic.*] reason is not sufficiently competent to guide the will surely with regard to its objects and the satisfaction of all our needs ..., [T]he true vocation of reason must be to produce a *will* that is good, not ... *as a means* to other purposes, but *good in itself*, for which reason was absolutely necessary. *This will need not, because of this, be the sole and complete good, but it must still be the highest good and the condition of every other* (in part, emphasis added) ...”

P: Irenaeus, this language of “good in itself” still sounds ontological to me, a substance rather than a capacity ....

I: It would be ontological if measured by its consequences, Philo. If the measure of my good will was that I always accomplished the right thing – that is, the consequences of my action were perfect --, then the good will could be measured by external criteria: Can I be shown always to have acted correctly, even perfectly? Of course, not! If the good will is an ontologically good content, then I obviously don’t have one.

P: So Kant is not talking about the good will in terms of its consisting of an ontologically good content.

I: No, he is talking about it as an *amoral* capacity (i.e., it is *good* that I have this capacity for otherwise I could not become human; not that it always does what is good). In short, it is the capacity to do proper and improper things. Without this capacity *that is prior to* (!) *my inclination* to do what is proper or improper (in other words, that is prior to the self-legislation of good or evil maxims), there would be no role for moral principles: we would be pre-programmed to do good or evil. The *necessary presupposition* for any and all experience of moral principles is that we possess an *autonomous* (i.e., to a degree independent of nature), creative freedom.

P: And without this autonomous, creative freedom as the condition of possibility for me to choose between a good and an evil maxim, the ontological status of my will would be either as good or as evil, and I would always do one or the other.

I: Yes, which is why Kant speaks of this efficient causality of *autonomous*, creative freedom as a good *in itself*. Of course, this is still an *amoral* good, in the sense that it is the necessary condition for one’s being able to choose between a good and an evil maxim, not yet the sufficient condition that determines whether I will *choose* a good or evil maxim.

P: So ... a good will is not defined or evaluated by the content of its actions?

I: Right! Kant wrote in the *Groundwork* (AA IV, 446) that the good will is a cause: “*Will* is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it, just as *natural necessity* is the property of the causality of all non-rational beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes.”

P: This sounds like freedom is a capacity that is random, even entirely capricious over against the necessity of the physical laws that govern the “foreign causes” of material nature.

I: Ah, you have put your finger on the crucial implication, Philo! However, the meaning of “necessity” here is crucial. Otfried Höffe, in *Can Virtue Make Us Happy? The Art of Living and Morality*, reminds us that we must distinguish between dogmatic and methodological necessity. There is a “blind” necessity that governs physical events, because physical events are governed by physical laws, not civic or moral laws. To understand physical phenomena, I must necessarily assume that the only causal order governing them is the order of physical laws. However, were I to insist on a monolithic, efficient causality that is exclusively physical to account for *all* phenomena, both sensible and supersensible, I would be claiming that I can prove my causal explanations. We cannot prove (or disprove) any causal explanation because effects are all we see, *to which we add a causal explanation*; but we can make the critical turn to examine the conditions and capacities that make our experience of physical phenomena possible.

P: So this opens up the possibility that not only is there a physical, efficient causality in experience, but also an autonomous freedom that is not reducible to physical, efficient causality.

I: Yes, and here, the option of methodological determinism surfaces for me. That means I can approach physical phenomena *as if* it were governed by a single form of causality (physical laws), while leaving open the option that there is, in addition, a form of efficient causality of autonomous freedom that is not reducible to physical laws.

P: So, as with physical processes, there is a kind of necessity that governs freedom as well, but it is not the “blind” necessity of physical events?

I: Exactly. Now, frequently, the necessity of autonomous freedom is announced initially in the derivative sense, meaning that once the individual has established a technical or pragmatic goal to be accomplished, s/he must *necessarily* engage certain steps to accomplish that goal.

P: Which would mean that if I want to construct something (a technical goal), or pursue a particular career (a pragmatic goal), it is necessary that I follow a certain sequence of steps to accomplish those goals.

I: Again, yes, although I have a degree of creative freedom above and irreducible to the necessity of the physical laws governing the accomplishment of my goals because I can select a goal that transforms nature ... In general, with the determination of a technical or a pragmatic goal, I self-impose a kind of necessity upon myself in order to accomplish those goals. Beyond this, though, the *real* necessity that governs freedom in a non-derivative and immediate sense is that, analogous to the physical laws that apply to nature, there is a law that applies to freedom: the moral law. Creative freedom is nothing random or capricious! Creative freedom’s efficient causality always depends upon a set of laws, just as nature’s efficient causality is governed by a set of physical laws – with one important difference: in contrast to the laws of nature, I can choose to ignore the moral law. That is part of the constitution of our human autonomy. The moral law is something that the individual *necessarily* must *freely* legislate for her-/himself. *We do not create this moral law, but rather must assume it.* We can assume it because we experience causal systems only as effects (i.e., through their appearances), not in themselves. The alternative to this assumption would be to deny our capacity for creative freedom, which does not match our experience, and would in any case then make us creatures entirely determined by external realities and our

transformation of nature would be merely the result of instinct. The moral law, then, is the only kind of necessity that is compatible with our creative freedom: it is a self-selected and self-imposed or *self-legislated* necessity.

P: This distinction between dogmatic and methodological necessity makes clear how unusual creative, autonomous freedom is, Irenaeus. If I have understood what we have established so far, our “good will” is not *an ontological content that is good* but *an amoral capacity that is good in and of itself* because without it we couldn’t be the species or the individual that we are. Our “good will” is not good because of what we accomplish (or don’t accomplish). What makes our *amoral, good will (autonomous, creative freedom)* “good without qualification” is its exercising of its freedom to self-legislate a good rather than an evil maxim to govern its actions. So it is a capacity of efficient causality that can (and, paradoxically, must!) legislate for itself what it *should* do.

I: Yes, and this is the categorical moment of morality in contrast to the hypothetical moment. Our *amoral, good will* would not be free if it did not have the categorical option (rather than merely conforming to hypothetical necessity) to select among good and evil maxims.

P: Then, as we discussed earlier [Part I, Book III], this is the reason why Kant spoke of humanity as “radically evil.” He could just as well have spoken of humanity as “radically good,” because without the categorical option between good and evil maxims we would not be free, but, most profoundly, without this freedom we could not be (become) human. *To the extent that we are categorical beings*, we have an *amoral, good will*. In addition, both the causality and the moral principle that we select to govern that creative, autonomous freedom are *determined* by the individual. The difference between these two categorical moments of causality and moral principle is that the former comes *entirely* from ourselves in that it is derived from nowhere else but the individual whereas the latter, moral principle, is *not a creation* of the individual but a self-legislated principle by the individual to govern her/his action. We don’t create our capacity of autonomous freedom or the moral principles that govern our freedom any more than we create the appearances that are the physical order or the physical laws that govern those appearances. Nonetheless, even as the physical laws are not written on the appearances of nature but are something that we must *add to* the physical appearances to understand their necessity, so, too, the moral principles are not given with autonomous creativity. We must *add them to* our categorical efficient causality if we are to be successful in life. When we select and self-legislate a good maxim to govern our decision, then we are “good without qualification” because the qualification comes from us and not from our circumstance (as hypothetical or heteronomous). Our creative freedom and moral principles are *a priori* synthetic judgments that we must *add to* our experience. This all means that neither our understanding of nature nor our creative freedom is random and capricious. They are both governed by laws although a different set of laws in each case: physical laws for nature; moral laws for creative freedom.

I: I accept entirely your formulation, Philo. All that I would add is the reminder that, when it comes to our autonomous, creative freedom and morality we are concerned with non-epistemic faith. We can neither prove nor disprove that we possess this creative freedom. That is why, again, Kant calls freedom one of the three regulative ideas of pure reason. Furthermore, I can never establish unequivocally that the moral principle upon which I intend to act is acknowledged by all universally, but I can place upon myself the expectation that *I would want* this moral principle to be universal *as if* it were a law of nature. Additionally, I

can and must subject my self-legislated moral principle to the criteria that it allow me to treat others as well as myself as ends and not mere means, which means acknowledging all other rational beings as autonomous, creative (i.e., free) individuals. When we add the three maxims of the understanding (think for oneself, think from the perspective of the other, and be consistent with the highest of which one is capable) to these three modes of the categorical imperative as we discussed the other day [Part I, Book II], we have a set of criteria for adjudicating among moral principles and can self-legislate a good principle “without qualification,” although we have no way of proving them. Their proof is a matter of non-epistemic faith.

P: You have demonstrated earlier [Part II, Book II], Irenaeus, that the *good will* is anchored in religion (non-epistemic faith). This allows us to turn, then, to the second conundrum that I find in Kant. From what we have just said about the “good will without qualification,” we are already well on our way to resolving it. I can now at least imagine that Kant’s discussion of radical evil is not concerned with anything ontological, but it has to do with our categorical capacity of *autonomous*, creative freedom.

### On Radical Evil

I: You have clearly anticipated the strategy I propose we take with respect to radical evil, Philo. As you say, we have already addressed this issue, but there is value in making the theme the explicit focus of our attention again.

P: By shifting from ontological content to capacities, one would presumably focus not on evaluating whether the consequences of an action are good or evil but on whether or not the individual (any human being) has the capacity to decide for or against good and evil.

I: Entirely correct, Philo! However, we should tease out the issues here with a bit more precision. In addition to whether or not one has the capacity to decide for or against good and evil, there is the deeper question about what the necessary conditions are for us to be able to exercise such a capacity.

P: Intriguing, Irenaeus; because now you seem to be implying that there are capacities connected with our moral nature. If I hear you correctly, you want to propose that, in order to be moral beings, not only must we have the capacity to decide between good and evil, but also we must possess an additional capacity that grounds it. If critical reflection shifts the focus of analysis away from discriminating among particulars to discerning the conditions necessary for us to experience those particulars in the first place, I take it that this “deeper” capacity is something that must necessarily be there in order for us to exercise any decision for or against good and evil.

I: Precisely, Philo! The very tendency to place the focus of ethical reflection on the evaluation of whether or not some particular consequence of one’s actions is good or evil puts the cart before the horse. The moral claim of Critical Idealism is that we are not good or evil because of the consequences of our actions. Rather, we are good (!), first, because we possess and exercise a particular capacity to decide between good and evil principles to govern our actions and, second, because we have the categorical capacity to self-legislate the principles to govern our actions. We possess a good will *without qualification* when we exercise both aspects of our categorical capacity: creative freedom and self-legislation of a good rather than an evil maxim.



P: Are you saying, then, that I should not be concerned about the consequences of my actions?

I: By no means, Philo, but whether or not you, I, or anyone else is a moral being is not, as we have already discussed [Part I, Book III, see also, Part II, Book II], determined by the consequences of our actions. Crucially, we have control over our principles; but we are seriously limited when it comes to consequences. We can *hope* that the consequences of our intentions are good, of course, but we have little control over them. We have stressed several times that in Critical Idealism reason is seen as profoundly limited, that we do not create the phenomena of our experience, much less the relations to which those phenomena must conform in order to be what they are. We did not originally create ourselves although, once we exist, we play a crucial role in creating what we will *become*. We are dependent, then, on an original generation of the cosmos even if we are incapable of saying anything more about that origin than that it obviously happened.

P: Our own creative freedom is a mystery to us as well, I presume.

I: Even more, there are a number of *inexplicable* elements to the human condition that emphasize our weighty limits – but *without* leaving us trapped in skepticism! To give some examples: the *ground* of desires in general is as much a mystery as the *ground* of evil; the transformation from an immoral to a moral life is inexplicable; it is inexplicable how assisting grace might aid the accomplishment of our moral goals once we have made our best effort (a theme to which we will return); it is unfathomable how the notion of the exemplary moral individual can occur to us; and, finally, not only is creative freedom itself inexplicable, we cannot explain how divine and human freedom can be related.

P: This sounds more like a justification for why we are *not* moral beings, rather than providing the basis for concluding that we *are* radically moral beings. If we are so limited, particularly with respect to such crucial themes as God, cosmology, freedom, our grasp of our own identity, the origin of desires and evil, the moral revolution of the individual, the role and function of grace in that moral revolution, the origin of an exemplary moral individual, as well as how our creative freedom is capable of coordination with the creative source of the cosmos, then how can we possibly claim that we are moral beings at the core of our being?

I: Philo, you are merely stunned by the particularities of our limits. I have no doubt you fully grasp that Critical Idealism does not rest with particulars and “lists” of whatever kind – including lists of limits. Rather, Critical Idealism shifts its focus, as we just said, from the details of particulars and lists to ask: Just what is *necessary* that we can experience such particulars and lists in the first place?

P: So, in other words, the mantra of Critical Idealism is that we must turn from a concentration on *contents* and *causes* to seek out *conditions of possibility* and *capacities*.

I: Yes! Rather than our limits immobilizing us as moral beings, our limits illuminate for us that we possess certain *necessary* capacities, and our experience involves *necessary* conditions that make it possible for us to experience the world and cosmos as we do *as moral beings* rather than as creatures merely of drives, instinct, or habit.

P: It helps to be reminded of that on which we should focus, Irenaeus, but surely such a substantial list of limits to reason and experience makes the claim that we are moral beings extremely ambiguous if not outright impossible.

I: The greatest hindrance to the acknowledgement of our moral nature comes when we emphasize what we can't do rather than seek out what we can. This sounds simple but everything turns upon it. If we only emphasize our limits, then we will never grasp our extraordinary capacities and the profound creative freedom they represent. At the same time, our limits are a reminder, as Ernst Cassirer underscores repeatedly in *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung (The Philosophy of the Enlightenment)*, that we live and act by faith and not by absolutes (metaphysical or empirical) that dogmatically establish in advance what we *should* experience.

P: You are confusing me here, Irenaeus. We have said that if something is *necessary*, we *must* do it, right? If that something is *necessary* in my experience, then it will *always* be necessary in any and all circumstances. If that is so, then it is something absolute that I can and must establish either metaphysically or empirically *in advance* and to which I *must* conform. Why do you then use the words like 'dogmatic' and 'should' instead of 'must'?

I: Indeed, Philo, you are again confusing "necessary" for "sufficient" conditions. By focusing on necessity in terms of the consequences or outcomes of our actions and not on the conditions and capacities that make experience possible in the first place, talk of necessity sounds like determinism. However, *we can discern necessities only because we experience appearances!* It is not that we experience appearances because we know what is universally *necessary*. For us the appearances are contingent, not absolute. We don't act because we know; we know because we act. Although there are *necessary* conditions and capacities that make it possible for us to experience those appearances, these *necessary* conditions of possibility and capacities do not constitute the sufficient ground of appearances. *There is absolutely no dualism in Critical Idealism. Appearances and necessities are two sides of the same coin; phenomena and concepts are two sides of the same relational "system;" body and mind are two sides of the same set of phenomena; form and content are two sides of a common whole ....*

P: Ah, so *necessity* is relative to *appearances*; it is not metaphysically independent and the sufficient ground of appearances. If I didn't experience a world of appearances, I could not experience any necessity. From this perspective, Platonic Rationalism and Empirical Positivism are adumbrated dogmatic positions in which the richness of our experience shrivel and atrophy. The one reduces empirical phenomena to *mere copies and shadows*; the other overlooks the role of *a priori* synthetic judgment in any and all understanding of phenomena.

I: Yes, Philo! The task of Critical Idealism is to maintain the totality of our experience and to avoid reductionisms of all kind – including those of Rationalism and Positivism.

P: OK, Irenaeus, but how do we get from our experience of the limits we have just listed to the *necessity* of our being moral animals? You are clearly not claiming that I come into this world already metaphysically programmed to be a good (or evil) person. That would be a dogmatic conclusion, to know that in advance that I must *necessarily* be good or evil. It would ignore that any and all *necessity* we might experience is inseparable from the appearances that make them necessary. How, then, do the appearances and our limits over against them establish the *necessity* of our status as moral beings?

I: Philo, this is exactly the point that we made above with respect to Kant's "good will without qualification." I come into this world with an autonomous, creative freedom that is an *amoral good* because I cannot be (or become) human without it. In itself this capacity for creative freedom is good; but it does not yet determine how I will use it. The use of it is my autonomous decision. In short, I neither come into this world *predetermined* with a good or evil will, nor is my status as good or evil *decided* by the *consequences* of my actions.

P: Yet Kant has claimed that we are "radically evil"!

I: We can now turn to reflection about this claim as you have requested. Obviously, our "radically evil" status can be nothing metaphysical or ontological. Can it have something to do with our capacities?

P: If my capacity is radically evil, then I cannot imagine how that could be anything but a metaphysical or an ontological statement, which in advance makes it necessary that I act evilly, Irenaeus.

I: We need to sort out a crucial difference here: between some *content* or state-of-affairs incapable of change (for example, being radically evil and, hence, incapable of acting otherwise than evilly) and a *necessary capacity* to do evil (should I not possess this capacity, I could not be a human being, merely an animal or mechanical automaton). What makes such a capacity "radically" evil is that it is *incapable of being eradicated*; for without this capacity, we would not be able autonomously to choose how and by what we will act – we would not be human at all. Being "radically" evil in this sense does not mean that *I can do nothing but evil deeds*. Rather, *radical evil is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to account for my moral status*.

P: You have added a new element to our understanding of human beings, Irenaeus. You have just claimed that the key to one's being human is that one necessarily is *radically* evil, but that this is about how I might or might not apply my capacity, rather than a metaphysical or ontologically pre-condition. Can you clarify a bit more how the radicality of evil is necessary for us to be, even more precisely, to become human?

I: If we were incapable of *both* good *and* evil inclinations, Philo, we would either be capable of only doing good or of only doing evil. For us to be free from all heteronomy (metaphysical, ontological, and dogmatic), we must be capable of *both* good *and* evil inclinations. Our freedom is categorical, not hypothetical, as we have established. Again, the categorical points to a dimension of ourselves that is entirely independent of any and all particular situations. I am, in principle and in actuality, capable of initiating a sequence of events that nothing else in my situation (except, possibly, another human being) could accomplish.

P: And as we've said, the hypothetical, in contrast, is driven by one's situation.

I: Yes, and then, *if* I want to accomplish some task (technical) or pursue a particular career (pragmatic), there are corresponding technical and pragmatic imperatives that I must necessarily follow. However, deeper than the choice between technical goals and pragmatic goals is my capacity to be inclined (what Kant calls a particular *Hang* or "disposition") toward a goal whatsoever, a capacity *grounded* in my creative freedom though not reducible to it. Inclination, the preferable translation of the German (*Hang*) rather than disposition, can

be summarized at its core as the capacity to preference between good and evil with “preference” meaning here the understanding of a “live option,” not a pre-established, ontological behavioral pattern.<sup>1</sup> Again, were we incapable of such inclination, then we would be pre-determined with respect to good or evil. Hence, *good and evil inclinations are “radical.”* That is, *our capacity of good and evil inclinations are constitutive of our condition as a species and as an individual. The eradication of the capacity for good and evil inclinations would mean the eradication of our species.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Disposition“ is used by Aquinas for Aristotle’s „habitus.“ Aquinas (drawing on Augustine) treats “disposition” as an ontological condition (i.e., a content), not a capacity. Bonnie Kent writes in “Lovable virtue: Aquinas on character and will” in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. By Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 91-109. In “6.3.2. Dispositions, including Virtues,” Kent writes: “Aquinas’s commentary on *EN* 3.2 includes one of those passages where he segues from explaining Aristotle to introducing a view with no basis in Aristotle, leaving readers puzzled over whether he misunderstood Aristotle’s thinking. The passage begins with the indisputably Aristotelian thesis that decision or choice – *prohairesis* in Greek, *election* in Latin – is not the same as opinion; but it proceeds to invoke an eyebrow-raising dictum from Averroes and concludes with the un-Aristotelian thesis that people are called good *simpliciter* because they have a good will:

Aristotle shows that choice is not the same as a certain kind of opinion, namely about those things it is in our power to do. And he shows this by five arguments, the first of which is this. From the fact that we choose good or bad things we are called certain kinds of people, namely, good or bad ones; we are not called good or bad from the fact that we have an opinion about good or bad things, whether true or false ... The reason for this difference is that someone is called good or bad not on the basis of capacity but on the basis of action, as it says in Book 9 of the *Metaphysics*, that is, not from the fact that someone is able to act well but from that fact that he does act well. It follows from the fact that a person is perfect in understanding that the person is able to act well, but not that he does act well, as it follows from the fact that someone has the disposition of grammar that he is able to speak correctly; but to speak correctly is requisite that he will this – for a *disposition is that whereby one acts when one wills* [*habitus est quo quis agit cum voluerit*], as the Commentator [Averroes] says [in his commentary] on Book 3 of *De anima*. Thus it is evident that a good will makes a person act well according to every capacity or disposition obedient to reason; and so from the fact that someone has a good will he is called a good person without qualification. From the fact that he has good understanding a person is not called good without qualification, but only good in a relative sense, for example a good grammarian or a good musician. (*SLE* 3.6 lines 31-8, 40-58; *Met.* 9.9.1051a4-15).

In effect, the definition of a disposition (*habitus*) attributed to Averroes marks a transition from Aristotle’s thought to Aquinas’s own psychology and ethics. Dispositions are a topic of great concern to Aquinas. He treats them in enormous detail in the *Prima Secundae* (qq. 49-54). Aristotle has much to say about dispositions (ἕξεις) too, though not in his *Ethics* ...

The saying attributed to Averroes appears again and again in Aquinas’s theological works: ‘A disposition is that whereby one acts when one wills (*habitus est quo quis agit cum voluerit*).’ Never does Aquinas attribute this conception of a disposition to Aristotle himself. Sometimes the saying attributed to Averroes appears in conjunction with one attributed to Augustine: either ‘a disposition is that whereby one acts when there is a need (*cum opus est*),’ or ‘a disposition is that whereby one acts when it is time to do so (*cum tempus affuerit*).’

What Averroes actually says differs significantly from the dictum Aquinas repeatedly invokes. According to Averroes:

This is indeed the definition of a disposition, namely, that someone having a disposition understands by virtue of it what is proper to himself in his own right and when he wishes [*quando voluerit*], without needing something external for this.

One might perhaps take ‘*voluerit*’ to mean *wills* rather than *wishes*; but the passage cannot reasonably be taken to mean that a disposition is that whereby one *acts* when one wills, as opposed to *understands* when one wills.” (106-107)

Aquinas, apparently influenced by Augustine in this regard, has not only distorted Averroes but also Aristotle to turn the notion of “disposition” into an ontological condition rather than as a capacity. With the word “*Hang*,” Kant recovers the Aristotelian/Averroesian meaning of “inclination” in terms of a capacity of understanding, not as an ontological condition.

P: What you are saying, Irenaeus, is that we are *both* “radically evil” *and* “radically good.” We require the capacity of both kinds of inclinations in order for us to be the creatively, free individuals and species that we are. We can choose which inclination shall govern our acts (even if we can’t control how those acts work out). Were either inclination to be absent, we would be determined and incapable of creative freedom. We have a “good will” not because of our inclination (again, the preferable translation over “disposition”) toward good maxims, but because the “good will” (as *amoral*, autonomous, creative freedom) is the capacity (*Anlage*) that precedes any inclination (*Hang*) to a good or evil maxim to govern our actions. Were we incapable of “inclining” toward a good or an evil maxim, we would not be free. Hence, the good or evil maxim is itself, in this sense, secondary to the amoral good that is our creative freedom and to our ability to be inclined toward a good or evil maxim.

I: You have understood me perfectly, Philo! The inclusion of radical evil in Critical Idealism no more involves an internal contradiction than does Kant’s notion of a “good will” – as long as we focus on *conditions of possibility and capacities* and not on metaphysical, ontological, or dogmatic *contents*. We are *both* radically evil *and* radically good in this view because that alternative is necessary for us to be creatively free. Our creative freedom, in other words, our “good will,” must necessarily *precede* our ability to be inclined toward (to view as a live option) good and evil maxims. Both freedom (as *Anlage*) and inclination (as *Hänge*) are amoral in the sense that they precede any moral determination about how we should act. They represent an amoral goodness not because they always result in our acting on the basis of a good maxim, but rather, *simply because they are!* Were we not to possess this categorical, creative capacity of creative freedom and the ability to be inclined either to good or evil maxims, we could not be human – we could not be who we are in the order of things. The capacity to be or become human (that is, the capacity to exercise creative freedom and to be inclined to good and evil maxims) is good in the amoral sense because it makes for the realization of (moral) possibilities that could not be accomplished in any other fashion.

P: You have made a helpful distinction for me, Irenaeus. “Good” is being applied here to two very different aspects. “Good” *applies, first and foremost, to creative freedom itself as the ultimate pre-disposition (Anlage), and it applies, as well, to good inclinations that are the opposite of evil dispositions (Hänge).* So *humanity is ultimately good* because it possesses these extraordinary creative capacities.

I: Precisely, Philo! Clearly, here, humanity’s goodness refers to its capacities, *not* to its exercising of those capacities. It is for this reason that Kant reminds us: “If I should, I can” rather than maintaining that “if I can, I should.” Furthermore, Kant emphasized already in 1775, in his *Lecture on Moral Philosophy (Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie<sup>2</sup>)*, that this capacity of creativity *in principle* gives us the power to destroy the earth. In other words, the capacity is good, but there are no guarantees that we’re going to exercise this creative capacity responsibly out of actually acting on the basis of good inclinations. *The vulnerable point of creativity is the individual because it is the individual who alone can legislate the moral principle (good or evil) to govern her/his actions and who alone can know that s/he has done so. We cannot judge from the consequences (which could be good, bad or ambiguous) what principle governed the individual’s action.* We can only know that the individual possesses the capacity, and we can urge her/him to do so.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie*, Werner Start ed. (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2004): 177.

P: The “good will,” “radical good,” and “radical evil” have raised the stakes for humans beings almost beyond calculation, Irenaeus. Here we are animals among other animals with all of our appetites and desires (what Kant calls our “animality”); here we are a species that seeks status and prestige in the eyes of those whom we recognize as significant to us (what Kant calls our “humanity”); but here, too, we are an extraordinary species with a creative potential that can destroy everything because we can initiate a sequence of events that nature cannot accomplish on its own. Yet, it need not be that way either. We can apply a moral principle that consists of our assuming responsibility for that creative potential, a responsibility to which we can adhere regardless of the consequences for us (this Kant calls our “personality”).

I: However, each individual is decisive for the outcome of the human experiment. In order for us to be creatively free, each individual must be capable of establishing goals and of applying the appropriate moral principles for taking responsibility for those goals. No one can do either of these tasks for anyone else.

P: Yes, I guess if we could exercise this capacity for someone else, we would violate the very efficient causality (creative freedom) that makes us individuals (and the species) that we are.

I: Yes, Philo, on top of that, no one else but the individual can know whether or what moral principle was applied in the decision. We are a moral species, and each individual assumes the moral burden for the entire species as s/he assumes personal responsibility for her/his creative freedom.

P: As a species and as an individual, we have little difficulty accepting that our “animality” and “humanity” are *natural*. That’s what most people write about and focus upon. And we seem readily to seek out excuses and justifications to *deny* that “personality” is not only *natural* but also what makes us remarkable as a species is that it involves a capacity that is *above* nature.

I: This puts a whole new light on what Kant is saying with his aphorism: “If I can, I should.” Not only does “should” presuppose “can” (rather than vice versa), but also only the individual has access to and/or control over this “can.” No one can be moral for someone else, and no one can know the moral status of the other (regardless of what appear to be obvious consequences). As far as we can know, no other species possesses these conditions and capacities as we do.

P: Nonetheless, the significance of these conditions and capacities is not that they are unique to us as individuals or as a species, which is an issue that we cannot prove or disprove. Their significance is that *we can* exercise them and that we must necessarily *presuppose* that *we do possess them* in order to be who we are – creatures who do exercise such freedom.

I: ... and to think that all of this is grounded not in absolutes, but in what must necessarily be the case if we are the finite and limited species that we are – limited to appearances. I am reminded of what Kant said in the *Critique of Pure Reason* with respect to “theoretical reason,” which is concerned with understanding experience, but I think that it applies even more so to “practical reason,” which is concerned with creative freedom and morality. He said:

“We have now not merely explored the territory of pure understanding [and, we can add now, morality], and carefully surveyed every part of it, but have also measured its extent, and assigned to everything in it its rightful place. This domain is an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth – enchanting name! – surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion, where many a fog bank and many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores, deluding the adventurous seafarer ever anew with empty hopes, and engaging him in enterprises which he can never abandon and yet is unable to carry to completion. Before we venture on this sea, to explore it in all directions and to obtain assurance whether there be any ground for such hopes, it will be well to begin by casting a glance upon the map of the land [we can add: to discern whether or not there is anything here that is *necessary*] which we are about to leave, and to enquire, first, whether we cannot in any case be satisfied with what it contains – are not, indeed, under compulsion to be satisfied, inasmuch as there may be no other territory upon which we can settle; and, secondly, by what title we possess even this domain, and can consider ourselves as secured against all opposing claims.” (*Critique of Pure Reason* B 294-295)

Kant could offer no better retort to those who want to dismiss him because he is tied to Euclidean Geometry and Newtonian Physics. Our circumstance and capacities force us ever onward – even beyond the security of our intellectual certainties -- in our quest for understanding and with the moral exercising of our creative potential. However, he also anticipates Jean Paul Sartre’s aphorism that “humanity is condemned to freedom.” Although we have no choice but to sail on, we do have a choice with respect to the establishment of our goals and with respect to assuming responsibility for our efforts. Both our limits and our capacities make us extraordinary individuals and an extraordinary species, Philo. Before we set out on our voyage, it is best that we have a clear sense of the domain that is clear to us. Kant has told us in the third critique that a “domain” is where we legislate (but do not create) the laws (physical and moral) to govern our understanding and action. What Kant is proposing, then, is that we survey the territory of our island in order to clarify whether or not the domains of physical law and moral law are present as the *conditions of possibility* (i.e., as the *capacities*) that are necessary for our understanding and moral action before we set sail beyond the shores of this clarity. When we do, we discover that they make us *necessarily* not only an understanding but also a moral being/species.

### On the Revolution of the Moral Disposition

P: We have now addressed two of my themes, Irenaeus. In light of our conversation, however, the next theme has taken on an entirely different dimension. It is clear to me that this “revolution of the moral disposition” is *not* a metaphysical or an ontological revolution that would somehow transform the individual from being ontologically “evil” to being ontologically “good.” Such a revolution would deny the necessary conditions of our creative freedom.

I: Yes, and I recall that you are also perplexed over Kant’s invocation of a role for “sustaining” grace when it comes to this revolution.

P: Exactly! How can any notion of grace be reconciled with morality? The heart of the moral disposition is that I choose to act on the basis of a principle that is right; not on the basis of a principle that is going to serve my interest. As soon as grace enters the picture, the waters of morality surely get murky because it is difficult to believe that I would not succumb

to a concern for my personal interest were I to believe that a higher power can assist me. I would naturally be concerned to be the recipient of such grace. The consequence would be that I would seek to satisfy or appease the source of grace, God, in order to be its recipient. In such a circumstance, though, I would be pursuing my personal interest to receive something from this God rather than pursuing my desire to be moral for the sake of morality.

I: You have formulated well the issue of grace for Critical Idealism, Philo. We seem to have at least a rhetorical conclusion with respect to the revolution of the moral disposition comparable to what we have just said concerning the “good will” and “radical evil.” The rhetorical conclusion is that Kant is contradicting himself. As we saw with our examination of the “good will” and “radical evil,” however, we are best served by shifting our focus from “content” to “capacities.” Perhaps such a strategy will help us with our understanding of the revolution involved here in relationship to grace.

P: You reminded me a bit earlier of Ernst Cassirer’s *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*<sup>3</sup> in which he suggested that the difference between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe was the difference between *a priori* dogmatic philosophical systems from which all truths could be deduced, and an approach to the human condition as a “body” constituted of various parts but held together by an *internal*, invisible unity – the consequence of the interrelationship of all parts in a totality. The task of philosophy, according to Cassirer’s take on the Enlightenment, is twofold (without being dualistic): *resolutive*, and *compositive*; that is, analytical in establishing precise distinctions within phenomena, but also synthetic by adding an awareness of the concealed relationalities that govern the inter-relationships between and among the phenomena as a whole. Could we not use this approach to examine first the meaning of the “revolution of the moral disposition” and any possible role for grace in Kant’s reflections, and then afterwards to seek the synthetic unity to what otherwise might appear to be disparate and even contradictory parts?

I: I like this strategy, Philo! Our first task, then, is to investigate just what this “revolution of the moral disposition” means for Critical Idealism. Then, we can turn to the issue of grace and the question of its compatibility with this revolution.

P: Kant, I recall, rejected the notion of moral “reform” as adequate for understanding the moral improvement of humanity but insisted on our need for a “revolution” of the moral disposition. So just what is the difference between a “reform” and a “revolution” of the moral disposition?

I: Let’s begin with this rejection of “reform” for labeling the change in the moral disposition as it is understood by Critical Idealism. In the General Remarks at the end of Part I of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant insists that the notion of “moral reform” is concerned with *consequences* and not with *capacities*. A focus on consequences would mean we can empirically evaluate moral transformation evaluation by means of the senses, that is, by way of “seeing” the moral improvement of the individual. Moral reform is also gradual, whereas Kant argues that the crucial moral transformation of the individual consists in a “single and unalterable decision”, one that is entirely imperceptible to the senses.

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<sup>3</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2007).



P: So no one but the individual can know whether such a revolution has in fact occurred. Still, whereas the apparent inadequacies of moral *reform* are clear, it remains unclear to me what this *revolution* actually involves, Irenaeus.

I: Kant's language here is confusing, I admit, Philo. He speaks of a "single and unalterable decision" while simultaneously speaking of an "incessant laboring and becoming" grounded in one's hope of being on "the good (and narrow) path of constant *progress* from bad to better." He then adds that if we penetrate to the "intelligible ground of the heart", this "endless process is a unity" that "is the same as actually being a good human being ... and to this extent the change can be considered a revolution." Having said this, Kant proposes that we can assess ourselves and the strength of our maxims "only by the upper hand they gain over the senses in time", so that "the change is to be regarded only as an ever-continuing striving for the better, hence as a gradual reformation of the inclination – *Hänge* [toward good or evil maxims], in contrast to our predisposition (*Anlage* [of creative freedom]) – to evil." Kant seems to be suggesting that the transformation of the moral disposition can be viewed from two *internal* perspectives: 1) One that constitutes a revolution; 2) a second that is experienced by the individual as a gradual reform of *the inclination* to evil.

P: Say more about these two internal perspectives, Irenaeus. I was reading them as a contrast between an internal and an external perspective!

I: The key for me is Kant's claim that "a human being's moral education must begin, not with an improvement of mores, but with the transformation of his attitude of mind." He adds: "A revolution is necessary in the mode of thought [*Denkungsart*] but a gradual reformation in the mode of sense [*Sinnesart*], and [that both] must therefore be possible." However, the former is the condition for the latter. The individual needs a revolution in thought before the reform of character is possible. This first step with respect to the transformation of attitude is *the establishment of one's confidence in the goodness of one's creative capacity and one's commitment to the moral maxims to which one's creativity should conform*. This creative capacity and the goodness of moral maxims are part of what Kant, in Section I of Part I of *Religion*, calls humanity's three-fold *Anlage* (translated as "predisposition", but more accurately translated "capacity") of "animality," "humanity," and "personality."

P: Given what we have said before, presumably our creative capacity and the goodness of moral maxims are, in fact, the conditions of possibility for "personality"?

I: Yes, it is only because of our capacity for creative freedom that we might become a "personality" in the Kantian sense. Kant contrasts this capacity (*Anlage*) from the inclinations (*Hänge*) to good or evil. Whereas one's inclinations can be consistently devoted to evil, humanity possesses "*a germ of goodness left in its entire purity, a germ that cannot be extirpated or corrupted*" (Kant, *Religion* [AA VI, 45, see as well, *ibid.*, 41 and 46) (emphasis added); the "restoration of the original predisposition [*Anlage*] to good in us is not ... the acquisition of a *lost* incentive [*Triebfeder; Hang*] for the good, because we were never able to lose the incentive [*Triebfeder; Anlage*] that consists in the respect for the moral law, and were we ever to lose it [*Triebfeder; Anlage*], we would also never be able to regain it." (AA VI, 46)

P: So unlike Augustine, who claims that we can lose our freedom, Kant says that it is impossible for us to lose this autonomous, creative capacity.

I: Yes, and the restoration of this good capacity is “[...] not therefore the acquisition of a *lost* incentive for the good, since we were never able to lose the incentive [...] The *restoration* is [...] only the recovery of the *purity* of the law, as the supreme ground of all our maxims ... as the self-*sufficient* incentive of that power [of choice/inclinations]” (Kant, General Remark Part I AA VI, 46). The revolution of the mode of thought, then, is a recovery of our confidence in the *amoral* goodness of our creative capacity (it is good that we have this capacity). This simultaneously involves a recovery of our commitment to the *purity* of the moral law that governs the exercising of our creativity. As we have seen, the *amoral*, good capacity of creativity and the *purity* of the moral law are two sides of the same coin. Without the one, there cannot be the other.

P: So ... the revolution of the disposition is a revolution in one’s confidence in one’s capacity (*Anlage*) of creative freedom as well as confidence in the *purity* of the moral law independent of personal interest – meaning that the moral law is right because it is right, not because of what it might accomplish for me.

I: Precisely, and this change is a revolution rather than anything gradual! I either consciously grasp that this creative freedom is extraordinary and inexpugnable, or I don’t. Merely to pre-consciously presuppose this autonomous power would be to be unaware of its significance. When it comes to the awareness of the goodness of our creative capacity, we are in a situation similar to what Ralph Waldo Emerson said in “The Transcendentalist” about the relationship between “idealism” (we would say, Critical Idealism) and “materialism”: one can go from being a materialist to be a (Critical) Idealist but never from once having discovered (Critical) Idealism return to materialism. *The perspective change that accompanies the shift from materialism to Critical Idealism is a revolution that can never be reversed.*

P: On what basis can I hope that such a revolution can occur? Is it merely something purely accidental, dependent, say, upon my meeting up with someone like you, Irenaeus, who has an awareness of what the revolution involves? Or is there something about each individual that grounds any hope for a revolution of the moral disposition?

I: You surely recall that Kant in his *Logic* proposed that philosophy (really, philosophical theology, as he says in the first preface to *Religion*) is concerned with four questions: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope for? What is a human being?

P: Yes. The first question is concerned with theoretical reason; the second with morality or practical reason, the third with religion, and the fourth with what Kant calls “anthropology.”

I: Right, and your question about hope for a revolution of the moral disposition, Philo, goes to the heart of what Kant means by *pure* religion. *Pure religion involves more than merely moral effort. It involves, as well, our awareness of those conditions not of our creation that make it possible for us to be moral beings in the first place.* The revolution of the moral disposition is concerned with our relationship to these conditions of possibility. It has only secondarily to do with whom we might chance to meet or any other event in our

situation. That could only be a hypothetical, capricious circumstance and not a categorical element of experience.

P: This is helpful, Irenaeus! The revolution that we are talking about concerns the categorical dimension of morality, not any consequences of our moral effort. In principle, then, the individual can discover the conditions and the need for this moral revolution on her/his own. In fact, the goal of pure religion is to aid the individual in the very self-discovery of this potential.

I: Exactly! *Knowing* what morality is, we can now ask *how can we hope to become a moral being* if both radical good and radical evil are constitutive elements of that which we are, “above” nature. This issue arises when we discover our moral potential even though we are already driven by anything but pure moral principles: by our appetites and desire for status and prestige in the eyes of others. Kant describes this as us having privileged the senses above moral principles. Of course, he does not mean that sense experience or reason could itself be evil. In *Religion* (Part I, III, AA VI, 35) he says that sensuous nature is *too little* to be the ground of evil because, if only sensuous, then freedom is eliminated; and reason in itself would be *too much* to be the ground of evil, because an evil reason would turn resistance to the moral law into a maxim, making the subject “a *diabolical* being.” In either case, of sensuous evilness or reason’s evilness, we would eliminate autonomous, creative freedom.

P: Surely Kant is not so sanguine as to presume that overcoming the entanglements ensuing on an individual’s development of an immoral character is easy, much less likely, and surely he acknowledges that one can readily doubt the possibility of the revolution of the disposition necessary for overcoming the entanglements? Isn’t this why we must speak of *hope* and not *confidence* when it comes to our moral revolution?

I: Exactly! This revolution is *grounded* both in uncertainty and in a legitimate doubt with respect to its likelihood – but not with respect to one’s capacities. We cannot prove or disprove the creative freedom that is the necessary presupposition of our possession of a categorical nature, just as we cannot prove or disprove that this creative freedom is governed by a moral order analogous to the laws of nature that govern the physical order. Of course, we have every reason to be doubtful about the *consequences* of our moral efforts, given our limits. But the moral status of the individual is governed not by the *consequences* but by the *starting point* of our moral efforts – our ability to self-legislate a moral principle to govern the exercise of our autonomous, creative freedom. Over this *starting point* there can be no doubt – if we are to be (become) human.

P: Presuming that I possess a categorical freedom, I have control only over the legislation of the moral principle upon which I act.

I: Precisely. The claim of Critical Idealism is *not* that our actions (the consequences) can or would be morally perfect were we to be successful moral beings. We have little if no control over those consequences. Rather, our moral status is dependent upon those things that we *can* control – primarily, the inclination upon which we act, which we can control, and *not* the consequences of our action, over which we have no control. Of course, as Kant says in the first Preface to *Religion*: *If we would concentrate as a species on those things over which we have control, we can then hope that the consequences will be actions that indeed contribute to the moral enhancement of the individual and the species generally.*

P: This reminds me, Irenaeus, of Plato's discussion of justice in the *Republic*. His succinct definition of justice is: "not meddling in the affairs of others." This definition presupposes that we possess not only the capacity to meddle, but also the capacity to control ourselves with respect to meddling. Plato suggests that we look to a model of the state (something large) in order to learn something about our own exercising of justice (small in comparison). Plato's state consists of three classes: 1) handworkers; 2) soldiers; and 3) philosopher kings. The latter are appropriately rulers because they look to the "unchanging heavenly patterns" and seek their emulation in human affairs. In other words, philosopher kings are aware that the physical and moral worlds are governed by invisible systems of law (physical and moral). What this teaches us about justice is that for the state to function harmoniously, each of the three classes must concentrate on doing what it does well *and not meddle in the affairs of the other* classes. This restriction applies to the philosopher king, as well, even when s/he is concerned to establish harmony among the three classes .

I: Thanks, Philo, for reminding me of Plato's strategy for trying to discern what justice is. I do recall at least in part his method of negation here. He introduces the four cardinal virtues (insight, prudence, courage, and justice), and suggests that if we can define the first three, what is left over will be justice. I have never found that particularly convincing, and I am not exactly sure where you are going here.

P: I am trying to underscore your point that concern for the *internal* elements of morality will eventually have an appropriate *external* consequence even if the focus of moral improvement must be the internal elements, and not the external consequences.

I: It is precisely this point at which I am confused, Philo.

P: Allow me to turn to Plato's discussion of the smaller of his three-tiered societies, the individual, and you will quickly grasp my point. Plato proposes in the *Republic* (Book IV 435b-436b; Book IX 580d ff), that the individual soul is also constituted of three "classes": 1) appetites; 2) *thumos* (often translated "passion," but more appropriately as "rage" at least according to R.B Onians in *The Origins of European Thought*); and 3) reason. Plato draws an analogy between how harmony (justice) is established among the three classes of the state and the three classes of the individual soul. He doesn't say that we should eliminate the appetites or rage and only focus on reason. That would deny our humanity. Rather, he suggests in *Theaetetus* (176b) that "we should become as divine as we possibly can." In the case of our internal social order, this means to exercise "divine" reason (with its invisible orders of physical and moral laws) to govern our *this-worldly* lives! Reason is to be cultivated to exercise sovereignty in grasping order and establishing harmony among the appetites, rage, and reason. Reason does not take over the roles of the appetites and rage (remember, justice consists in *not meddling in the affairs of other*), but it consists in each of the classes of the soul properly performing its function complementary to the other two.

I: OK, but what does this have to do with the *internal* capacities of the individual serving as the moral key to *external* consequences, Philo?

P: Plato assumes that I will manifest *external* justice in my actions *if* I have established an *internal* harmony over my nature. In other words, *the focus of justice (and morality in general) is to get one's internal house in order, and the consequences will eventually be manifest in one's actions.*

I: Oh my, Philo, ... it appears that Plato and Kant have more in common, perhaps the most essential in common, than one might be led to believe in light of Kant's attack on Platonic Idealism in his "Refutation of Idealism" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

P: When it comes to our having to assume that there are *two invisible orders* (physical and moral) that govern experience and the insistence that one's moral status comes from getting one's *internal* kingdom in order rather than focusing on *external* consequences, Plato and Kant clearly have the most essential in common. What Kant rejects in Platonism (whether or not it is actually Plato's position or one found only in Platonism) is the metaphysically transcendental nature of ideas, but that aspect of Plato, although often taken to be the crucial Platonic teaching, pales in light of Plato's and Kant's moral teaching. If I understand him correctly, what Kant adds to Plato is an emphasis on *the hope* that there is in fact a unity between this revolution of the moral predisposition and the consequences over which I have no control. In short, Kant adds pure religion to the internal balancing act of the individual.

I: I thoroughly agree, Philo, and their comparison helps us precisely to understand Kant's notion of (religious) *hope*. Hope is sought not with respect to the issue of whether I can achieve some *external* status of moral perfection. Rather, it rests on my faith in the revolution through my confidence in my predisposition or capacity (*Anlage*) of creative freedom, anticipating that the consequences of my self-legislation of moral maxims internally, even though I do not control those consequences, will in fact result in the good or justice externally. Kant takes a step beyond Plato here by giving us an account of *how* this transformation in the *internal* realm can be manifested in the *external* realm. He anchors moral revolution in creative freedom *that cannot not act*. For Kant, then, although the weight of the moral disposition is on internal effort, not external consequences, he nonetheless establishes far more clearly than Plato just how it is that we can hope for an external effect of our moral efforts. Plato can just assume that getting one's internal realm in order will somehow be manifest in one's external world. Kant, in contrast, anchors that internal realm in creativity, which is an efficient causality with external effects.

P: That's an astute articulation of the similarities and differences between Plato's and Kant's moral theories, Irenaeus. Because the revolution of the moral disposition involves our *internal* capacities and not the *external* content of our moral effort, wouldn't we have to conclude that, as long as we have the capacity of creative freedom with its self-legislated moral principles, we always and already possess the potential for this revolution? The conditions for a revolution of the moral disposition exist as long as we exist!

I: Precisely, Philo! Is this not exactly what Kant says in the General Remark at the end of Part I of *Religion*, as we said above: "The restoration of the original predisposition [*Anlage*, i.e., the categorical goodness of creative freedom] to good in us is not therefore the acquisition of a *lost* incentive for the good, because we were never able to lose the incentive that consists in the respect for the moral law, and were we ever to lose it, we would also never be able to regain it." Kant emphasizes our respect for the moral law here, but he immediately underscores that it involves its *ground*, which is the capacity for creative freedom (the categorical dimension of humanity). "The restoration is therefore only the recovery of the *purity* [emphasis in the Cambridge English translation] of the law [in contrast to the corrupt evil maxims], as the supreme ground of all our maxims, according to which the law itself is to be incorporated into the power of choice (*Willkür*; meaning, according to Eisler's Kant-Lexikon, not mere "choice" but autonomous, creative freedom), not merely

bound to other incentives, nor indeed subordinated to them (to inclinations) as conditions, but rather in its full purity, as the self-*sufficient* incentive of that power.” (AA VI, 46) The key to the *purity* of the law is its anchor in creative freedom through self-legislation. This is indicated by the shift in focus to choice (*Willkür*, creative freedom) and “its full purity” as the “self-*sufficient* incentive of that power.” Freedom is the self-sufficient incentive of the power of inclination to good or evil.

P: *Pure* religion, with its revolution of the moral disposition, is grounded in the *pure* self-sufficient incentive of autonomous, creative freedom, which respects the law, both natural and moral, as the invisible order that governs creative freedom.

I: Yes, and our hope in the moral improvement of the individual as well as of the species, *despite* all manifestations to the contrary and the horrible atrocities of which humanity will ever be capable, is no merely, speculative hope. It is grounded in our faith in the capacities that must *necessarily* be in order for us to be (*to become*) human.

### Grace

P: Now that we have established that (religious) hope is *grounded* in our always and already possessing the capacities for our moral improvement, given that the revolution (not mere reform) of the moral disposition is grounded in our creative freedom, which we can never lose so long as we exist, I would appreciate your turning one more time to discuss Kant’s invocation of *cooperating if not supplementary grace* in our moral improvement. What possible role could grace play, if the seductive consequence of grace is that we would focus on pleasing or obtaining the assistance of the source of such grace rather than *do the right thing merely because it is right* – that is, rather than *self-legislate* an *internal* moral principle to govern our actions? What role could grace play if it means turning to some *external* power to assist us in our moral efforts?

I: We don’t know what the role of grace is!

P: That’s an elusive answer, Irenaeus! Kant seems to invoke a hope in such cooperating and supplementary grace. Did he know something we don’t?

I: Definitely not, Philo! Kant knew that we don’t and *cannot* know whether or not there is anything like cooperating or sustaining grace. As with our own creative freedom, there is nothing that we can know with certainty about the ultimate categorical origin of the cosmos except that it *necessarily* exists given the fact that we experience a cosmos. Any anthropomorphic language that we might employ to talk about this ultimate categorical origin is *necessarily* symbolic and equivocal, not literal and univocal, Kant tells us in the *Prolegomena* and in *Metaphysik Mrongovius*.

P: Then why would Kant invoke such symbolic language as cooperating and sustaining grace within the context of humanity’s moral improvement?

I: Because we are incapable of knowing about them, Kant’s strategy with respect to such matters as our creative freedom and grace is to ask: what would be the impact on our understanding of who we are were we to accept or to deny these things? Kant, in the General Remark of Part III of *Religion*, (AA VI, 137 ff) explicitly views cooperating grace as the “abyss of mystery,” which is unknowable and unable to be “communicated.” In contrast,

*creative freedom*, itself, is not a "mystery" because it can be communicated to everyone. However, its ground is inscrutable and unknowable, hence, a mystery. As a consequence, it belongs to the "holy mysteries" (*heilige Geheimnisse*) that make it one of the three ideas of reason that must be presupposed as regulative ideas, not known.

P: But freedom is not entirely a mystery because we can share our awareness of it with others.

I: The difference here is between two of the ideas of reason (God, the soul) and the third idea of reason, that Kant calls in the second *Critique* the one "fact" of reason (freedom), which we discussed earlier [Part I, Book II]. Freedom, Kant points out in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, is the one idea of reason that, though not confirmable in the senses, nonetheless is as close to a fact as one can get because without it we could not be what we are. Claims with respect to the "holy mystery" of cooperating grace, on the contrary, Kant takes to be *enthusiasm/delusion* (*Schwärmerei*), because *we can neither experience its source in the senses nor, unlike our experience of freedom, exercise any influence on it* (Part IV §2 *Religion*).

P: Your point is that both cooperating grace and freedom are secrets, but whereas cooperating grace is entirely inaccessible and incommunicable, freedom is a conviction that all must acknowledge.

I: Yes, even those who deny our creative freedom as independent (at least to a degree) of physical determinism in fact ironically affirm their possession of creative freedom because their very understanding of physical determinism requires them (creatively) to add to physical phenomena an imperceptible causality (all causality is imperceptible) combined with a presupposition of the univocity of all causality. In other words, to deny freedom is to invoke *the assumption* (itself an act of autonomous freedom) that there can be only one causality; otherwise one assumes that one has dualism, which would deny the univocity of physical causality that one assumes. As we've seen [Part I, Book III], acknowledgment of two forms of efficient causality is not dualistic, any more than the acknowledgment of multiple causes in the physical world results in a fragmentation of reality. Causal explanations satisfy the criterion of complementarity, within as comprehensive a totality of causal explanations as possible, without being capable of absolute proof – especially the further we go beyond those rare circumstances where we can duplicate the empirical conditions of the causal event.

P: As we have said, we can neither prove nor disprove our freedom, but its assumption makes all the difference in the world with respect to understanding who we are, what our capacities are, and what our responsibilities are. The point, then, is that freedom is a "reasonable" assumption, grace is an "enthusiastic"/"delusionary" assumption? If that is the case, why would we even invoke grace when it comes to our moral improvement?

I: There are at least two reasons, Philo: 1) Because we cannot prove or disprove cooperating grace, it would be as irrational to dismiss it outright as it would be to embrace it as certain; 2) so long as we don't lose sight of the purpose of our invocation of grace, we can leave it entirely open whether or not there is cooperating grace and a role for the afterlife in our understanding of our moral improvement.

P: Are you not contradicting yourself, Irenaeus? We've established that cooperating grace is a judgment of enthusiasm/delusion (*Schwärmerei*), but now you suggest that we can

invoke both cooperating grace and speculations about the afterlife into our discussion of moral improvement!

I: We would have a contradiction, Philo, if we were talking about *certainties*. However, we are talking about *secrets*. There is a place for *secrets* in our discussion of moral improvement *so long as those secrets assist us and do not undermine the capacities that we can know we must necessarily possess*. This is why Kant *always*, but always, insists that *before we turn to invoke cooperating grace* (if we wish to do so), we must first exercise our capacities – *not to earn* divine assistance but to make us *worthy* of it.

P: You appear to be engaging in hairsplitting again, Irenaeus! What is the difference between “earning” and “being worthy of” divine grace?

I: Earning divine grace would involve calculation. I know that I have achieved so many points that permit me to claim such-and-such an amount of grace. In contrast, worthiness of divine grace leaves all calculations and claims out of account, and only maintains that I have made my best possible effort *regardless of its acknowledgment by anyone else (including God)*.

P: What I can know, then, is whether I have done my best. I take this to mean that I know whether I have exercised my creative freedom in light of a self-legislated moral principle as adjudicated by the three modes of the categorical imperative and the three maxims of understanding. I cannot know in advance or control the consequences of my efforts, and I cannot know whether or not my efforts will be supplemented by the “holy mystery” of cooperating grace – just as I can’t be certain that they won’t be supplemented. Either way, I am responsible for how I exercise my creative freedom.

I: Yes! ... and, as long as cooperating grace does not become a distraction from the exercising of my moral capacities by shifting attention to earning such grace by pleasing or manipulating its source, then there is no harm done in leaving open whether or not it can make a contribution to our moral improvement. However, people who talk about grace seem to devote more time and energy to that than they do to making their best moral effort.

P: This is very helpful, Irenaeus. Because any contribution that cooperating grace could make to our moral improvement can only be in terms of reform and not revolution, there is surely no danger to our moral efforts by leaving the question open.

I: Let’ hear just how Kant says it all, in §3 of Part IV of *Religion*:

“The *fear* of God is ... from *imposed* duty ... The *love* of God is ... one’s own free *choice* and from pleasure in the law ... Now, which is more natural ...: to expound the doctrine of virtue ahead of the doctrine of divine blessedness, or that of divine blessedness ahead of the doctrine of virtue ...? The two obviously stand in necessary connection with one another. This is not however possible, because they are not *of one kind*, except [in this way]: one must be conceived and expounded as end [virtue] and the other merely as means [divine blessedness] ... [T]he doctrine of virtue stands on its own (even without the concept of God); the doctrine of divine blessedness contains the concept of an object which we represent to ourselves, with reference to our morality, as a cause supplementing our incapacity with respect to the final moral end. Hence, divine blessedness cannot of itself constitute the final end of moral striving but can only serve as a means of strengthening what in itself makes for



a better human being, [i.e.] virtuous disposition; and this it does by holding out to this striving and *guaranteeing for it* [my emphasis] ... the expectation of the final end for which it is itself powerless. The concept of virtue, by contrast, is derived from the soul of the human being. It is already within him in full, though undeveloped, and, unlike the concept of [historical (my addition)] religion, is not in need of ratiocination through inferences. In the purity of this concept; in the awakening to consciousness of a capacity otherwise never surmised by us, of being able to become master over the greatest obstacles within us; in the dignity of the humanity which the human being must respect in his own person and personal vocation, and which he strives to achieve – there is in this something that so uplifts the soul, and so leads it to the very Deity, which is worth of adoration only in virtue of his holiness and as the legislator of virtue, that the human being, even when still far removed from allowing this concept the power of influencing his maxims, is yet not unwilling to be supported by it. For through this idea he already feels himself to a degree ennobled, whereas the concept of a world ruler, who makes of this duty a commandment for us, still lies far removed from him, and, were he to begin with it, he would run the risk of dashing his courage (which is an essential component of virtue) and of transforming divine blessedness into a fawning slavish subjection to the commands of a despotic might. The courage to stand on one's own feet is itself strengthened through the doctrine of atonement which follows from it. For this doctrine ... opens up for us the path to a new conduct of life; whereas, when the doctrine is made to come first, the futile endeavor to render undone what has been done (expiation), the fear concerning the imputation of expiation, the representation of our total incapacity for the good, and the anxiety lest we slip back into evil, *must take the courage away* [my emphasis] from the human being, and must reduce him to a state of groaning moral passivity where nothing great and good is undertaken but instead everything is expected from wishing for it. – As regards moral disposition, everything depends upon the highest concept to which the human being subordinates his duties. If reverence for God comes first ... then this object [of reverence] is an *idol*, i.e. it is thought as a being whom we may hope to please not through morally upright conduct in this world but through adoration and ingratiating; religion is then idolatry. Thus divine blessedness is not a surrogate for virtue, a way of avoiding it, but its completion, for the sake of crowning it with the hope of the final success of all our good ends.” (AA VI, 182-185)

P: Irenaeus, there is no more fitting conclusion to our discussion of grace, which can never substitute for *internal* virtuous effort that *pure* religion illuminates. Now, help me with one more point before we end for the day. Kant claimed in *Religion* that a religion without the afterlife is no religion. What does that mean?

### The Afterlife

I: The context in which Kant makes this claim is as significant as the claim itself, I would argue, Philo. In Division Two of Part Three of *Religion*, Kant introduces the necessity of a notion of the afterlife for religion in his attempt to distinguish Judaism from *pure* religion. Granted that Kant's conception of Judaism would hardly be recognized by Jews, he offers three elements that, in his judgment, make it a historical and not a pure religion.<sup>4</sup> Judaism is a historical religion because: 1) "... all its commands are of the kind which even a political state can uphold and lay down as coercive laws, since [*sic.*] they deal only with external actions" (AA VI, 126): 2) its notions of reward and punishment "are restricted to the

<sup>4</sup> The Neo-Kantian, Hermann Cohen, portrayed Judaism, in contrast to Kant, as the origin of the notion of the one pure religion, and his Messianic vision for the next life is central to his claim. See *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, ed. By Bruno Strauss (Wiesbaden: Fourier Verlag, 1995).

kind which can be dispensed to all human beings in this world indifferently. And not even this is done in accordance with ethical concepts, since [*sic.*] both rewards and punishments were to extend to a posterity which did not take any practical part in the deeds or misdeeds ....” (AA VI, 126); and 3) the “totality of the human race [is] excluded from its communion.” (AA VI, 127) In short, Kant viewed Judaism in terms of a heteronomous statutory, political community that based the authority of its moral maxims on their origin (revelation from God), which is exclusive, not inclusive, with respect to the human species as a whole. In these senses, it is a *particular* religion, rather than the ground of a *universal* human capacity that is *pure* religion. Here we aim to unpack what it could mean with respect to *pure* religion when he says, in this context, that “no religion can be conceived without faith in a future life.”

P: The notion of the afterlife seems necessarily to involve divine judgment, even the possibility of condemnation, which would influence our moral efforts through fear of the consequences. How do we reconcile the afterlife with Critical Idealism’s dis-interested approach to morality? Even more perplexing to me is how we might go about reconciling this notion of moral improvement in the afterlife with Kant’s several references to moral improvement as the open-ended historical odyssey of the species as a whole, not the moral status of the individual her-/himself?

I: Our discussions of miracles and grace should aid us here, Philo, because the afterlife is a doctrine that functions analogously to these other teachings. As with miracles and grace, we can neither prove nor disprove an afterlife. The denial or the affirmation of any of these teachings would and could only be dogmatic, not reflective or regulative. Either way, we would assume a knowledge that would undermine all the insights of Critical Idealism.

P: Why would *denial* of the afterlife *contradict* Critical Idealism, Irenaeus? From what we have concluded thus far, *certainty* with respect to the afterlife can only be a contradiction of the morality of Critical Idealism, not the other way around. If the afterlife consists of divine judgment with a consequent reward or punishment, it would obviously contradict *pure* religion (inseparable from morality) because it would introduce into morality a profound concern for one’s own personal self-interest and undermine our commitment to moral principles merely because they are right and not for what they can accomplish for us. Yet, you want to maintain that some notion of the afterlife remains compatible with *pure* religion.

I: Were the doctrine of the afterlife to consist exclusively of such a teaching of divine judgment, Philo, it would constitute the contradiction that you describe. However, we are caught on the horns of a dilemma here. Because we can neither prove nor disprove the afterlife, including whatever content it may possess, the *denial* of its reality would require us to assume an omniscient perspective that we do not have within the limits of reason. We would commence a slide down a slippery slope of dogmatism. Which is worse: embracing a possible teaching that *threatens* our moral efforts, or insisting upon a dogmatic knowledge that *denies* the limits to our reason?

P: Formulated as a *threat* versus outright *denial*, we can only choose the former. Still, I find the doctrine of divine judgment far more than a mere threat to our morality. How could I possibly acknowledge divine judgment and *not* have it influence my moral decisions?

I: It may help us here once again to invoke the difference between a *determining* and a *reflecting* judgment, Philo. If we took the doctrine of divine judgment as a *determining*

judgment (one grounded in the certain or absolute grasp of a concept for classifying a phenomenon we're told in the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment*), then we would have the outright contradiction you find so uncomfortable. However, Kant proposes that *all* determining judgment at some point arose out of reflecting judgment. This gives us grounds to be suspicious of dogmatic conclusions, because it suggests that all our judgments are human, hence never absolute. When it comes to our question of the afterlife, we are dealing with a claim that we can only encounter on the basis of a historical revelation; the possibility *and the content* of an afterlife we can neither prove nor disprove in empirical experience. We experience no appearances of the afterlife. Given a revelation of the afterlife (i.e., the only way in which it could appear to us in this life), we are challenged to seek out an appropriate concept in order to understand its potential significance for us. Our judgment in such a case is by definition *tentative* and *uncertain* because it involves an open-ended process of *reflecting* judgment, not an absolute conclusion established by a dogmatic, determining judgment. Any judgment of certainty that goes beyond the limits of reason would by definition be a determining, not a reflective judgment.

P: Is your point, then, that the threat to morality accompanying the judgment that there is an afterlife, which would include divine judgment of the moral status of individuals, should not be confused for a *determining* judgment because that would not only violate the conditions of such a judgment but also contradict the conditions for our being moral? At the same time, we may leave open any conclusions with respect to the afterlife and divine judgment because it is *necessarily* a *reflecting* and *not a determining* judgment?

I: Yes, but our emphasis on reflecting judgment here is merely the *first* step in my response to the claim that any true religion must not only include the notion of the afterlife, but also the notion of divine judgment, Philo. Though such notions constitute a *threat* to morality, they are not necessarily destructive of our moral nature because we *can* make a determining judgment with respect to the *necessity* of our capacities as a creative, hence, moral being. In contrast, we can leave open our questions with respect to miracles, grace, and judgment in the afterlife as *reflecting* judgments in light of our profound limits while, nonetheless, insisting upon holding ourselves accountable to the *necessities* of determining judgment regarding our capacities and the revolution of the moral disposition that sets us on the path of true moral improvement. To declare that we can prove miracles, grace, and judgment in the afterlife as determining judgments, would be to undermine the understanding and application of the capacities that we *must necessarily* possess.

P: Acceptance of the notion of the afterlife, then, is necessary for pure religion not as a determining but as a reflecting judgment that we must acknowledge as incapable of resolution, at least at this point in our experience, while simultaneously acknowledging both the advantages and the danger that it possesses for our moral lives.

I: Indeed, Philo! These doctrinal teachings cannot hurt our moral efforts as long as we *recognize them for what they are: speculative (not enthusiastic/delusionary) reflections that are meant to encourage our moral efforts in this life even when the indicators to the contrary from our experience are so overwhelming that our moral efforts seem futile and even fruitless.*

P: OK, but you said this insight about *reflective* judgments is the *first step* in addressing the issues surrounding the afterlife. What are the second or other steps that we should take ...?

I: It is one thing to come to a conclusion with respect to the content of such judgments; it is another to come to a conclusion with respect to the impact of such judgments on what we must accept as *necessary but not sufficient capacities for us to be moral beings*. Given that morality is grounded in the *necessity* of our possessing an efficient causality irreducible to the efficient causality of nature, the second step in the question of the afterlife is to ask what, if any, impact it can have to encourage us in our moral efforts *in this life* – the only life for which we have ever experienced this *necessity*.

P: Here is precisely where the doctrine of the afterlife and divine judgment seem to become worthless, Irenaeus. I can only imagine them as undermining our moral efforts in this life because it is hardly possible for them not to be turned into an activity of stifling anxiety and currying the favor and blessings from a deity to satisfy a personal desire to gain benefits in the next life.

I: You have thoroughly grasped the danger of *self-interest* to our moral development, Philo; but perhaps there is another positive purpose that the notion of the afterlife might play for our moral efforts in this life.

P: I am all ears, Irenaeus! I can hardly imagine a more serious threat to our moral nature ...

I: The ground of *hope* in *pure* religion is that we are capable of a *revolution* in the moral disposition and *not a mere reform*; moreover, there is a unity between this revolution and the contingent consequences of the change in our moral disposition. This revolution restores us to our *original condition* as a categorical agent in a world that, otherwise, only imposes hypothetical imperatives upon us. Despite all the cultivated habits of behavior that enslave us to our appetites and to the quest for status and prestige in the eyes of others, the revolution of the moral disposition maintains that it is possible for the individual to embrace *an even deeper condition* – the categorical possibility of *personality* – “above” our *animality* and *humanity*. Furthermore, for *pure* religion such a revolution is absolute; it can never be revoked. The *hope* of *pure* religion is precisely that such a revolution is possible and is irrevocable. Without such a revolution, there can be no moral transformation. Given the threats to our moral situations in this world, our absolute dependence on a categorical capacity may seem slight, our confidence in it ill-founded. Furthermore, our experience seems to confirm that precisely those who ignore the moral life seem to gain the most in life. It even frequently seems that adherence to our categorical moral capacity only serves the advantage of the unjust because, as Plato underscores in Books I and II of *The Republic*, we become vulnerable to the unjust whenever we seek to act on the basis of virtuous maxims. In light of the empirical evidence, it seems we are fools even to want to act virtuously. There appears little correlation between the revolution in the moral disposition and its contingent consequences, which leads us to doubt our hope in a moral revolution in the first place, much less to be confident of our moral transformation.

P: Irenaeus, that’s a rather bleak picture for *pure* religion! In Book I of Plato’s *Republic* Thrasymachus defines justice as aiding one’s friends and harming one’s enemies, while ridiculing those who view justice as somehow related to doing the right thing. *If* a revolution of the moral disposition is a possibility, why would one embrace it if it is only going to lead to the advantage of the unjust?

I: Perhaps here we have a very different reason to embrace the notion of the afterlife, Philo? Might the *positive* role of the afterlife in *pure* religion have something to do with these discouraging circumstances rather than with divine judgment in the next life?

P: If so, Irenaeus, then I would surely have to revise my skepticism. And we would have another example of how Critical Idealism responds to skepticism: by looking not at specific contents but the conditions of possibility and capacities, that make the exercise of our moral capacity possible and necessary irrespective of any specific circumstances.

I: Right! Now, as the revolution of the moral disposition is not hypothetical (it is anchored in the categorical), our very moral capacity undermines, at least in part, Thrasymachus' argument: the part that encourages us to doubt our possession of such a capacity. It is precisely the assumption of (or belief in) such a capacity that makes it possible for us to be the *end* of "creation", Kant proposes in the third *Critique*, as the creature that is capable of exercising an efficient causality found nowhere else in nature – as far as we can know.

P: Still, humanity is free to ignore its capacities. This confronts us with the temptation to deny them. This is the second aspect to Thrasymachus' argument: the part that encourages us to deny our categorical capacities and to pursue merely our hypothetical interests. Socrates' logic in response to Thrasymachus is that the scoundrel's mere pursuit of hypothetical interests depends upon the unjust *wanting more* than what they are like (they are like other unjust persons), as well as *wanting more* than their opposite (they are opposite to wise and just persons). In contrast, the just and wise *want no more than what they are like* (those who are wise and just) *but to be more than ignorant and unjust*. Rather than injustice being wisdom and strength, injustice is folly because it wants to be more than wise and just. The exclusive pursuit of hypothetical self-interests thus both contradicts our categorical capacity, and, in wanting to be more than wise and just, leads us to be fools – the very opposite of Thrasymachus' claims.

I: But a teaching of the afterlife might contribute an argument for us *to embrace our categorical capacities despite the temptations of our hypothetical condition*.

P: Wouldn't the afterlife then involve some kind of perpetual preservation of the conditions for us to be moral beings?

I: Yes, ... suggesting that our moral revolution has a meaning no matter when it occurs in life and no matter how it might appear that the good suffer to the advantage of the unjust.

P: That would mean, if the conditions of possibility for morality are eternal, that any judgment about the success or failure of one's moral development could not hinge merely on the efforts one made at any particular point in life. We would not then need to claim *that one will be rewarded or punished with respect to one's moral efforts in the next life*. The afterlife would then be thought of as a preservation of the conditions of possibility for morality in perpetuity. As a consequence, we could never feel that our moral efforts are too late.

I: I see no other value to the afterlife than that, Philo. The contribution it makes to *pure* religion has nothing to do with an absolute dogmatic claim, based only upon the hypothetical. In conformity with this argument, the afterlife would serve to encourage our moral efforts, now anchored in the categorical. Our current moral condition would not suffer in light of

such a claim for the afterlife. Surely there is no greater satisfaction in life than knowing that one has chosen to act on the basis of a moral principle because it is right, regardless of the consequences. In brief, one's moral improvement is not a matter of quantity but of quality. So the claim that there could be a perpetual preservation of the conditions of possibility for morality would encourage us in our moral efforts despite any objective evidence to the contrary.

P: Now we have gained two things in understanding the notion of the afterlife for *pure* religion, Irenaeus. First, recognizing that any claims about the afterlife involve a reflective judgment confirms the limits to our reason, prohibits any absolute conclusion about its reality, and avoids it being turned into an element of mere self-interest. Second, the afterlife can be viewed as a strategy for eliminating any temptation to discouragement about the hope for the revolution of the moral disposition and for moral improvement. Is there a third step, Irenaeus?

I: Yes, I think there is! One might argue that the very notion of *satisfaction* over one's moral efforts that can be known only to the individual would be a form of *self-interest* driving one's embrace of the revolution in the moral disposition and one's moral efforts at self-improvement. That would suggest that I am not necessarily doing what is right merely because it is right, but in order to experience the satisfaction of having done so.

P: That is an extremely nuanced sense of *self-interest*, Irenaeus; but you are correct. I would then be choosing to act on the basis of a moral principle to gain satisfaction, and that would interject a notion of *self-interest* into my deliberations – however innocuous.

I: Here the notion of the afterlife might be valuable, Philo. Critical Idealism insists that “If I should, I can.” In other words, if I experience a moral expectation, it is because I can initiate a sequence of events by means of an efficient causality irreducible to, though complementary to, nature's physical causality. Although I can neither prove nor disprove an afterlife in which the conditions of possibility for morality will be preserved or in which I will be rewarded or punished for my efforts in this life, I *can* know in this life that I have the capacity to be moral, and I can experience a revolution in my orientation toward my own capacities. Now the possibility of an open-ended, even eternal, moral improvement can serve as an encouragement of moral effort in this world *worthy* of that open-ended opportunity in the afterlife. In Kant's language, a belief in the afterlife would encourage my efforts at “worthiness” (not personal satisfaction). Though one might not always experience personal satisfaction, *one knows whether or not one is worthy of it*.

P: Something still troubles me about this notion of “worthiness,” Irenaeus. It still sounds like I am *earning* something thereby – not personal satisfaction but now eternal life.

I: A good point, Philo. It may sound like Critical Idealism embraces a kind of “works righteousness” with the notion of worthiness. That would surely contradict the categorical imperative prohibiting a role for self-interest in our moral efforts. Yet, we can distinguish between a “subjective” and an “objective” sense of worthiness.

P: I have learned throughout our conversations, Irenaeus, that you introduce such distinctions not to be clever but to eliminate obfuscation. Yet I am totally perplexed by this distinction between a “subjective” and an “objective” sense of worthiness.

I: Thank you for the benefit of the doubt, Philo. I hope that what follows confirms your generous spirit around our reflections. Is not the key to a teaching of “works righteousness” that, through objective criteria, I can earn divine grace? As Augustine of Hippo warned in his controversy with the Pelagians, such a claim would inevitably place a limit on God as well as encourage human hubris. God *would have to* (!) *reward* our efforts, and the expectation that we will have to be granted such grace would lead to moral pride.

P: It seems you have no interest in defending an objective meaning to “worthiness,” Irenaeus.

I: Absolutely not, Philo! The subjective sense of “worthiness” is what one acquires simply by means of exercising one’s creative capacities in conformity with self-legislated moral principles *without concern for any self-interest*. Here “works righteousness” is eliminated at the outset, because works-righteousness is concerned not only with objective criteria for determining one’s success, but also exclusively with self-interest. I don’t prove objectively to God (or to anyone else) that I am worthy. Rather, my aim is to exercise my moral capacity to the best of my ability so as to fulfill the hope that makes this capacity the “end of nature.” If the afterlife or some other “reward” (e.g., assisting grace) is somehow added, fine! But I don’t make my best moral efforts in order to be objectively rewarded. *I make my best moral efforts to be worthy of my subjective capacities!*

P: Irenaeus, these reflections satisfy the criteria of Critical Idealism without succumbing to the negative consequences of enthusiasm/delusion. The afterlife is an ingredient in *pure* religion not as a fact, but only as a condition of possibility that is entirely compatible with my moral conditions of possibility in this life – and that, in a fashion that encourages my moral transformation and improvement *in this life*. I can now embrace the claim that without the notion of the afterlife, whose content can never be determined, one has no religion. Further, these three steps are entirely complementary to our resolution of what were for me three conundrums in Kant’s philosophical theology. I have a far more comprehensive understanding of how “the good will,” “radical evil,” “divine grace,” and the “afterlife” fit into Kant’s *pure* religion without undermining the autonomy that is the condition of possibility for *pure* religion or for the individual (and more importantly, the species as a whole) to *become* human in history as the very end (or goal) of creation.

I: Yes, Kant on several occasions refers to moral improvement involving the open-ended historical odyssey of the species as a whole *in this life*, not simply the moral improvement of the individual. In fact, he portrays this as his philosophy of history in his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* as the moral improvement of humanity in terms of political expectations, which has to do with an improvement of humanity’s future in this world. In his “Conflict with the Faculty of Law,” the second part of the *Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant asks how it is possible *a priori* to prophesy the future? If prophecy claimed to be predicting objective events, it would patently reach beyond the limits of reason, because no one can know in advance what will objectively happen in the future. Yet, Kant claims that such an *a priori* prophecy is possible if the prophet speaks of what already is *necessarily* constitutive of and will always be constitutive of the human condition. Those *necessary* capacities that make us human and that ground morality suggest that the system of life is not “closed,” which would be the condition necessary to conclude that everything was going to hell in a hand basket, or everything is steadily deteriorating, or everything is at a zero sum stagnation where some “win” and others “lose” but there is no

hope of any real improvement – only a balancing out of good and evil (what Kant calls abderitism).

P: But Irenaeus, what would it mean if prophecy does *not* mean to predict a future event?

I: Prophecy would be concerned with understanding *conditions of possibility and capacities* rather than predicting *contents and causes*.

P: Ah, I should have known!

I: If we are able to identify *necessities* regarding the conditions of possibility and our capacities, then we can prophesy that the future would not bring anything contrary to those *necessary* conditions and capacities, unless it was to bring our destruction as a species.

P: Why does Kant even raise the question of prophecy in his conflict with the Law Faculty?

I: The question that Kant sees shared between the Law Faculty and the Philosophy Faculty to which Philosophy can contribute is: Can we say that there is decline (“terrorism”), progress (“eudemonia”), or a still-stand (“abderitism”) when it comes to good and evil in the human condition? (AA VII, 81 ff) Because the answer to the question requires empirical knowledge that we cannot acquire or possess, Kant proposes, in contrast, that philosophy can offer a prediction over the future state of humanity with respect to the transcendental conditions of possibility for any and all experience of phenomena in time (history), not with predicting empirical conditions.

P: Yet, the question of the future is at the heart of the empirical, Civic Law, because the law, at least in the Aristotelian sense of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is concerned with encouraging human beings to do the right thing. Aristotle argues for the importance of the Civic Law because “most people won’t be motivated by arguments” but “by *fear*.” (See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1180a4-6)

I: In Aristotle’s context, what is objective about human nature is that it will be motivated by fear of punishment, which would be confirmed by “terrorism” and “abderitism,” and he would be highly suspicious of the possibility of moral progress, because fear only functions when one thinks one might get caught.

P: Nonetheless, according to Aristotle, if we want people to do the right thing, which is always future (ahead of us), we must introduce the fear factor.

I: This is where Kant would part ways with you and Aristotle, Philo. Kant maintains that once we have tasted of the significance and the power of our creative freedom, there is nothing that can hold back its influence on future events. It may be suppressed by tyranny, and it may *appear* to be motivated by fear, but tyranny can never eliminate creativity so long as there is any representative of the species left -- ... and all actions, even actions supposedly based on fear, presuppose it.

P: Kant’s prophecy for the future, then, is grounded in ineradicable and autonomous, creative freedom.



I: Yes, just as in Part Two of the *Groundwork*, he affirmed human dignity *not*, as one might expect, because human beings are created *in the image of God* – that would make the meaning of image dependent upon the objective reality of an intentional deity – but, rather, because all human beings (and all rational beings whatsoever) possess this autonomous, creative freedom, which we necessarily cannot deny and remain the species/individuals we are.

P: What I remember of the conflict with the Law Faculty is not your theme of prophecy, Irenaeus, but Kant’s defense of enlightened monarchy over against democracy.

I: Yes, in the second section of the *Conflict with the Faculties*, Kant does not appear to be much of a champion of democracy. Yet, he maintains there and elsewhere (for example, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*) that the ultimate goal of society is the encouragement of “culture”, in the sense of the moral improvement of its citizenry. Despite the reputation for the impenetrable style of his writing, he argues, for example at the end of the second preface to *Religion*, that the convoluted articulation of his moral theory does not mean that it is the domain of the educated elite: every child knows what it means to do one’s moral duty. When it comes to his rejection or embracing of democratic principles, in the *Metaphysics of Morals* §45, he argues that society requires a legislative, administrative, and judicial system analogous to the three parts of a rational argument: a major premise, a minor premise, and the conclusion (e.g., in §48 he subordinates the legislative and administrative branches to the judicial branch). In §46 he stresses that the legislative power can only belong to the will of the people as civic citizens. The key attributes of a civic citizen are: 1) the legal freedom to adhere to the civic law over which one has a say (ability to vote is the qualification of a citizen); 2) a system of equality; and 3) independence of the capriciousness of others in society. Still, he did distinguish between a “passive” citizenry that is a “mere tool” of others acting only on command, and an “active” citizenry in which the individual cooperates with others. Even more, nothing should stand in the way of a passive citizen’s elevation to active citizenry. In other words, Kant may not have been such a defender of enlightened monarchy as the *Conflict with the Faculties* makes him out to be.

P: There appear to be grounds for looking deeper into Kant’s political reflections, indeed! My guess is that in the *Conflict with the Faculties*, as with his engagement of historical religion in *Religion*, he is as concerned to encourage *reflective* judgment on the part of his reader as he is to offer conclusive *determining* judgments about either politics or religion.

I: That is surely the safest assumption to make when engaging Kant. The third *Critique* is an ode to reflective judgment, which suggests that Kant is impatient with those who want everything laid out clearly, as a list of determining judgments on an objective platter for easy consumption.

P: But ..., Irenaeus, we have diverted from the primary focus of our reflections now. You introduced your analysis of *a priori* synthetic prophecy in section two of the *Conflict with the Faculties* because you wanted to make a point about the ultimately *this-worldly* focus (rather than *other-worldly* focus) of Kant’s *pure* religion.

I: Right, Philo! My point is that Kant’s reflections on moral improvement are not driven by convictions about the objective reality of the afterlife. What unites Kant’s discussion of prophecy in his political philosophy with pure religion is his confidence (despite all objective

phenomena to the contrary) in the moral improvement of humanity in this life. Although any particular individual's life may demonstrate little, if any, confirmation about the status of humanity generally as a moral species (in the sense that we must *become* moral rather than that we *are* moral or immoral by birth), and although any particular individual's life may objectively demonstrate little if any signs of moral improvement, Kant's *belief* (rather than mere *opinion*, which would be based upon *speculation* and is rejected in §90 of the third *Critique*) is this: As long as there is a rational species (transcendental consciousness), it is *necessary* that the conditions are always and already present that make any and all moral improvement possible. Once one has "tasted" this capacity of creative freedom, one is tenaciously protective of it and wishes to exercise it fully (unless one is in a desperate physical situation, or it has been trained or bashed out of one).

P: You are proposing, Irenaeus, that history is the necessary condition of possibility for any and all moral improvement.

I: You bet, Philo, although our limits require that we acknowledge that there can be no proof or disproof of an afterlife! Kant reminds us many times in his writings that we have no experience of transcendental consciousness without empirical intuition (sense perception) *and* a physical world (e.g., B 75). In fact, he frequently says that any explanation of an event – including an event in transcendental consciousness – must *first* seek to provide as exhaustive an explanation of the event as possible *on the basis of physical laws*, before turning to explanations beyond the physical conditions of experience. Because we "know" (believe in) the moral order on the basis of an analogy to the physical order, any proposal that some future *pure* spiritual state alone would provide the conditions of possibility sufficient for our continued moral improvement can only be mere speculation. I remind you that the last thing Kant envisioned after death was the continued dragging-around of a physical body (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, AA VI, 128\*).

P: Granted that the religious function of the afterlife is to prevent our being discouraged about our moral efforts in the face of the apparent triumph of injustice over justice in life, that very function would mean that the *real* focus of moral improvement is *in this life!*

I: Yes, the Kingdom of God is the invisible (invisible in a world of empirical intuition!) kingdom of ends that includes the maxims of the moral order as end, as well as individuals as ends, who are always ends and never mere means, that shape and guide any and all moral efforts that we can make. Pure religion, then, encourages the individual to seek her/his moral improvement not even for one's own *worthiness* or happiness, but *as a contribution toward the moral improvement of the species as a whole*. Our efforts to create an environment in which we encourage one another to do our best does not mean evaluating one another on the basis of the consequences of actions (over which the agent has little control); it means to encourage each individual to self-legislate moral maxims *internally* to guide her/his actions. That self-legislation can never be known to anyone but the individual concerned, so that encouragement of one another can also not consist in forcing moral principles on one another. Rather, *true* culture (*pure* religion), which Kant calls in the third *Critique* the "culture promoting the will" in contrast to a "culture of skill," consists in our mutually creating the circumstances in which we will want to do what is right merely because it is right and not because it is going to bring us happiness or to satisfy any other interest.

Theodicy

P: Do *pure* religion, the *Kingdom of God*, and the *culture promoting the will* tell us anything about why God would permit evil in this world?

I: Kant places the theodicy question (God's relationship to evil) in an entirely different light. The 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a huge debate over God and natural catastrophes. Voltaire, for example, roundly rejected the idea that a just God would use natural catastrophes as a means of punishment for humanity's sin. Descartes' view that the material world is governed by mathematics, not by a capricious divine will, increasingly led reflective persons to view nature as a set of independent, blind, mechanical processes.

P: Yes, even Newton, who thought that God needed to re-set the natural conditions for this physical process (like a clock-maker who needs to adjust the fine tuning of the clock), viewed nature as itself an independent and blind, mechanical process.

I: At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we have the Rationalism of the Earl of Shaftesbury that defended a theodicy based on the insights of the Book of Job in the scriptures. Essentially, for him evil is an illusion because everything that happens occurs according to a divine plan that we are incapable of grasping – given our limits.

P: I have always found the Book of Job troublesome, Irenaeus. It may be that Job himself comes out rewarded for his steadfast belief in God amidst the tragedies and traumas of the divine testing of him, but what about his original wife and family much less the economic suffering of those associated with Job's wealth and loss of wealth? The family is dead, the economically dependent persons are confronted with financial ruin, and neither his original family nor the economically dependent are included in any account of Job's "recovery" whereas Job reaps the benefits of his faith.

I: Yes, Philo, the theodicy of the Book of Job perpetuates horrendous injustice, and it employs *humanity's limits* to silence any critique of God's plan. Leibniz, however, defended exactly the opposite strategy: We protect God from responsibility for evil not by speculatively assuming that there is a larger divine plan to which we are not privy *because of our limits* but by emphasizing *divine limits*. God in His wisdom has selected the *best of all possible worlds*, which means that God has established a world that maximizes the good as far as possible. This selection of the best of all possible worlds, however, means that God is finite and limited – at least to the degree that God had to choose among given options for the best of all possible worlds. This "solution," then, to the problem of evil has the troublesome aspect to it that it argues for a finite God.

P: John Hick proposes in his *Philosophy of Religion*, and most recently in his *Between Faith and Doubt: Dialogues on Religion and Reason*, that your namesake, Irenaeus, offers a "soul-making" or "person-making" defense of the presence of evil in the world as the necessary condition for humanity to be free and as a defense of religion, particularly Christianity; so evil is really to promote personal development. Were there to be no alternative to goodness in the world, humanity could not be free so that, in order for us to be free, God allows evil to exist in the world.

I: As with the original Irenaeus' theology of recapitulation, we have here both a theology and a theodicy that is pre-critical, though, Philo. We are given a description of objective realities (what God must be/do) and objective conditions (what makes it possible

for us to do good deeds). This is where Kant's Critical Idealism marks a radical change in understanding the human condition.

P: You must help me, again, Irenaeus, because what your namesake suggests with "soul- or person-making" sounds at least similar to Kant's notion of moral improvement?

I: This is why I quickly underscored that Irenaeus' theodicy is pre-critical and concerned with objective realities and consequences in contrast to Kant's critical turn to the subject and her/his necessary conditions of possibility and capacities. Kant's theodicy makes no claims about what God does or must do. He underscores that there are two forms of efficient causality (physical and creative freedom) and that there is an order of law that governs each: physical laws and moral laws. Any suggestion that God can intervene in either form of efficient causality would constitute a contradiction of the physical and moral order upon which our experience depends.

P: So Kant shifts the focus of theodicy away from claims about God's relationship to evil to speak about what are the necessary conditions for humanity to be creatively free *and responsible for its autonomous freedom*?

I: Absolutely! Unlike the historical Irenaeus' defense of evil because the live option of evil *consequences* are what make good *consequences* a free choice, Kant places the alternative between good and evil at the level of inclinations (*Hänge*) that presupposes the amoral, *good* predisposition or capacity (*Anlage*) of creative freedom. If at the subjective level, I am incapable of choosing a good or evil principle to govern my actions, then I can only be exclusively good or exclusively evil. As Kant says, the former claims too much about us, whereas the latter claims too little. Our creative freedom is what grounds these alternatives; and it is good as the capacity that makes us the species and the individuals we are. Hence, evil is an option not as an objective state of affairs that 'teaches' me to pursue objective goods. I don't have control over such objective states of affairs. I do have control over the self-legislation of the (moral) principle that will guide my actions, and that places the struggle between good and evil at a far deeper level of the human condition than Irenaeus realized.

P: In short, then, you are saying that the historical Irenaeus, according to Hick, provides a justification for *objective evil* in the world, whereas Kant is arguing for the necessity of "*radical evil*" as a *subjective capacity*.

I: Yes, Philo! What the Book of Job, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Leibniz, and the historical Irenaeus all have in common, to repeat, is that they are making claims about God's objective reality and the objective reality of good and evil in the world. They all are engaged in speculative claims that far exceed the limits of our reason – for, even when they emphasize the limits to human reason, they do so by making an objective claim about God beyond our limits.

P: Kant's theodicy is certainly extraordinary, Irenaeus. It does not make a claim about what God is, but about what the necessary conditions of possibility are ("radical evil" and "radical good") for us to be (or become) human. Rather than speculate about anthropomorphic intent on the part of God and God's plan for humanity or over how God's intent and plan can allow for the possibility of objective evil, Kant argues that without the

possibility of the disposition/inclination of radical evil in contrast to radical good, we cannot be the autonomously, creative, free individuals that we are.

I: Yes. And he completely removes God from the picture when it comes to the blind processes of nature, other than God serving as the ultimate “origin” of those processes. God no more can be proved or disproved to manipulate such processes to punish or reward humanity than God can be proved or disproved to perform miracles or dispense grace. We may claim that God is the ultimate origin, the ground, if you like, of all that is, but beyond that claim we are silenced. What we can and should do is focus on what is necessary for us to be the creative, hence, moral, creatures that we are and to exercise that capacity on the basis of moral principles that are right rather than be tempted to want to invoke, placate, or please an anthropomorphic deity out of self-interest.

P: The problem of even “radical” evil, then, becomes part of the *necessary* conditions of possibility for us to be free and responsible agents in the world capable of internally legislating moral principles to govern our actions.

I: And so we can understand Kant’s conclusion in *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*:<sup>5</sup> „Wie glücklich sind wir, daß beides, weder moralisches, noch physisches Übel, unsern Glauben an einen Gott, der nach moralischen Gesetzen die Welt regieret, erschüttern kann!“ (“How fortunate we are that neither moral nor physical evil can shake our belief in a God who rules the world according to moral laws.”)

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<sup>5</sup> *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre* (Leipzig: Bei Carl Friedrich Frans, 1817): 214.

## FURTHER READING

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