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Religion and Morality¹

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Abstract

The Call for Papers² maintains that “[m]ost contemporary and early modern scholars have not seen a close affinity between religion and true morality (ethics). The prevailing doxa is that the two are worlds apart.” If there is anyone who was not (and today would not be) surprised about a disconnect between religion and ethics, it would be Immanuel Kant.³ Nonetheless, the two are

¹ My sincerest thanks to Prof. James R. Cochrane, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town for providing feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. Of course, any errors are my responsibility. Having devoted the last twenty years to reading Kant’s works in German and teaching several of his texts in English, as well as translating works by the Aristotelian/Kant Scholar Otfried Höffe, I acknowledge that the framework for my engaging the question of morality and religion is unequivocally Kantian Critical Idealism. The footnotes here document sources for my claims, but, in addition, the reader who has contrary opinions will, hopefully, find the note commentaries on Kantian themes stimulating for further reflection.

² Available on-line at: <https://criticalidealism.org/religion-and-morality-presented-at-the-university-of-cape-town> (as of 4 October 2020) for the “Moral and Ethical Frameworks and Performances” conference held at the University of Cape Town (27 February – 1 March, 2019).

³ In the opening paragraphs of the “Conflict of the Philosophical with the Legal Faculty” (the second section of his *Conflict of the Faculties*), Kant not only rejects the notion of steady progress of humanity (not just with respect to morality), but also refuses to accept that humanity is doomed either to steady decline (e.g., because of “original sin”) or stagnation to claim that, while progress is not guaranteed, what is constant is change. The task of true progress is an open-ended, moral task that involves those inalienable human capacities of transcendental reason (not merely instrumental reason narrowly attributed by many today to the “Enlightenment”) that distinguish us as a species in degree, not in kind, from other species. See, as well, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* AA VI: 19-20.

Kant’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793) was not by any means his first engagement of religion. In his very first publication in 1747 (*Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*), Kant addressed not only the theme of the necessity of the assumption of the irreducibility of living organisms, particularly humanity, to natural causes for our understanding of them. but he also spoke of religion. To be sure, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), he formulated his argument demonstrating the inadequacies of the cosmological, physico-theological, and ontological arguments for God. Nonetheless, the *Critiques of Pure and Practical Reason* (1788) as well as the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) contain his moral argument for God as a “regulative idea” (i.e., presupposition) required for all practical reason regardless of culture or tradition. In other words, one can say that

deeply connected: *there can be no morality without both particular, individual experience in the world and the universally transcendental conditions of possibility shared by all human beings for which the term religion is appropriate.* Yet, Kant by no means “reduces” religion to morality. Kant proposes that there are four key questions: 1) what can I know (theoretical reason); 2) what ought I to do (practical reason); 3) what can I hope for (religion); and 4) what is a human being (anthropology)?⁴ Note, especially: The question “what ought I to do” is not (!) the question of religion. Rather, the question asked by religion is “what can I hope for?”

all of Kant’s corpus is an exercise in what he himself in the “Second Preface” to *Religion* (AA VI: 9) labeled “philosophical theology”, not just epistemology. Philosophical theology drives not only his understanding of religion but also of history, politics, cosmopolitanism, and league of nations. In short, philosophical theology is not limited to particular revelations/texts, traditions, rituals, and doctrines of historical religion, but places religion at the very heart of human experience, understanding, and responsible agency with respect to nature, the other, and the self.

Although some 220 years later, Kant reception is far from unanimous. Already in 1796, just three years after the publication of *Religion*, there was a sophisticated spectrum of response to Kant’s take on religion far more complex (one could say “far more sophisticated”) than the attempts today that claim he was only concerned with religion because he was trying to escape from his “Pietist” childhood. See, for example, Edward Kanterian, *Kant, God and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn* (Routledge, 2018). The “Kantian” theological parties at the end of the 18th Century all opposed the so-called Rationalists of the day, who rejected claims for miracles in the bible and who had sought to provide an account of biblical miracles as the product of mis-perception, mis-guided, or even deceptive intent on the part of the reporters of the miracles.

In *Versuch einer historisch-kritischen Darstellung des bisherigen Einflusses der Kantischen Philosophie auf alle Zweige der wissenschaftlichen und praktischen Theologie* (Hannover: Verlag der helwingschen Hofbuchhandlung, 1796): 55f, 68f, 144, 147, 159, Christian Wilhelm Flügge describes three “Kantian” parties. The first two parties elevate the text above the exegete (miracles confirm the authenticity of the revelation) 1) with the first party positively embracing all miracles and the notion that all true morality is already found in the text, 2) the second party viewing miracles as not harmful, some even are beneficial, to the practical goal of morality. The third party viewing the text 3) from the perspective of a historical context/trajectory that places the exegete at the same “level” of the text but possessing the advantage of improved understanding based on theoretical reason along with a far more sophisticated practical reason in the post-Copernican world. In short, scriptures are manifestations in history, and history itself, as a human process, is developmental.

All three Kantian parties, though, appropriately but narrowly view the key to the text to be morality with the decisive question being: Is morality grounded in religion, or is religion grounded in morality? The first party claims that morality is grounded in religion (revelation); the second party claims that religion is grounded in morality but can be supplemented by miracles; whereas the third Kantian party claimed that revelation (including miracles) undermines both the theoretical and practical reason it depends upon. Although the third party rejects the revelations, speculations, and heteronomy of historical religion, nonetheless, it views pure (or core) religion of all traditions to be a communal project devoted to moral improvement in history – by no means focused merely on the well-being of the individual for understanding of religion.

To be fair to Kant, he did not reject all revelations/texts, traditions, rituals, and doctrines of historical religion. He did reject all heteronomous traditions and doctrines that were grounded in unfounded speculations and raptures beyond the limits of transcendental reason and/or that crippled the exercising of autonomous, practical reason.

⁴ The first three questions are found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 832-833); all four are found in the *Logic* (AA IX: 24-5). Humanity’s hope consists of confidence in the indelible, “perfect” conditions of possibility of humanity’s moral agency because the conditions of possibility of its practical reason can never be eradicated as long as one is living. There can be no proof (or disproof) of autonomous freedom to do things that nature on its own cannot, which is the ground or condition of moral responsibility. There can only be a transcendental defense of autonomous freedom as the required condition for us to be able to exercise this capacity so central to what it means to be human. See *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (AA IV: 459), see as well, *A new Exposition of the First Principles of Metaphysical Knowledge* (1755) (AA I: 403): Although the ground for morality is not the good or bad ontological status of our soul (see *Religion* AA VI: 39-44) or the consequences of our actions (see *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* AA IV: 399-400, Kant does suggest in the “First Preface” to *Religion* that our hope is that

Introduction

Two inter-related questions, concerned with the *origins* of transcendental, rational capacities and *not with the consequences* of decisions and actions, drive the following paper with respect to the relationship between ‘religion’ and ‘morality’:

- 1) Are we humans playing *a materialistic zero-sum game*? Are we merely on a cruise ship with finite resources only able to re-arrange the chairs on the deck according to power relationships as we head towards the melting iceberg?
- 2) ... or is there any place in nature that is open-ended? Is there a species that possesses transcendental capacities capable of embracing responsible accountability for its actions beyond the blind processes of natural events?

On the Role of the Imperceptible in Aristotle

The Call for Papers invokes Aristotle as a model for reflection on moral and ethical frameworks and performances. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* begins with the observation: “All men [*sic.*] naturally have an impulse to get knowledge. A sign of this is the way we prize our senses [...] especially sensing with the eyes.” (980a21)

As important as the senses, especially sight, are for knowledge, Aristotle then points out, however, that knowledge is more than knowing “what” but includes “why.” (981a29-30) The answer to “why?” takes Aristotle *beyond sense experience of particulars* to identify *universal, imperceptible* causes (formal, material, efficient, and final) (983a-25-983b) that must be applied to the four, *perceptible* “eternal,” natural elements (earth, air, wind, fire) (984a8-11) to account for the particular “what” of perception. Explanation addresses the question, “why do

there is a connection between the categorical and the contingent. It is precisely this connection, which, among other elements to be sure, requires belief in (but no proof of!) God (see *Religion* AA IV: 6*). Explicitly though, Kant speaks of religious hope not (!) in terms of receiving divine assistance (grace) but in terms of maintaining our moral attitude (see *Religion* AA VI: 68-69).

combinations and separations [in perception] come about?” (984a19-22), by applying the *imperceptible* causes to the *perceptible* elements. This constitutes a transcendental shift already with Aristotle from appearances to imperceptible conditions of possibility for appearances that came to be the key to Immanuel Kant’s notion of *the Copernican Turn*.⁵

The same logical structure (first, appearances, then turning to imperceptible conditions) drives Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which begins:

“Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.” (1094a1-3)

Again, as important as is the *perceptible* aim of action, the actual answer to the question “why” illuminates the role of universal, transcendental, *imperceptible* capacities that are presupposed by the goal, that is, the good.⁶

⁵ See the “Forward” to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* B xxii* and B xvii.

⁶ The very first capacity, “art” (Greek: ἡ τέχνη, *téchne*) is Aristotle’s general label for humanity’s imperceptible capacity to create things that, otherwise, cannot occur in nature – the very notion that Kant calls *autonomous* freedom – clearly to be distinguished from mere self-determining “liberty” in a socio-economic context.

What Aristotle did not provide is an account of causal explanation grounded in laws.⁷

His account is limited to concepts (forms) and descriptive elements (substances: earth, air, wind, and fire). *Without the notion of “laws,” Aristotle’s empiricism is merely descriptive.*

Consequently, any sense of a “totality” is absent,⁸ and the focus is on particular aggregates (lacking any, lawful, organizing coherence)⁹ of phenomena.¹⁰

⁷ The limitedness to particularity without laws in Aristotle is clear in his causal explanations of physical phenomena in terms of balancing of observable elements (earth, air, wind, fire) and in his account of moral virtue rooted in observable consequences of the individual’s establishing a “mean” of excellence between excess and deprivation with respect to those (particular) things in life of which one can have too much and too little. Nonetheless, both Aristotle’s empiricism and moral virtue are grounded in the givenness of imperceptible concepts (forms and intellectual virtue), which, though, for him are merely an aggregate of particulars absent any awareness of lawful totality. On intellectual virtue and contemplation in Aristotle, see Matthew D. Walker, *Aristotle on the Uses of Contemplation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) as well as the review on-line of the same by Tom Angier from Nov. 11, 2018, in “Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews.”

This restriction to the description of particularities absent lawful accounts for them constitutes Aristotle’s ambiguous influence on the revolution in the natural sciences marked by Copernicus in the 15th Century. On the one hand, the “new” Aristotle of the 13th Century in the West led directly to “empiricism,” but the absence of physical laws led to the rejection of Aristotle in the sciences as of the 16th Century.

The introduction of Aristotle’s writings into the West over Andalusia and the commentaries of the Islamic scholar Averroes constituted a (misunderstood?!) break with Platonic Idealism and embracing of Aristotelian Empiricism with Thomas Aquinas offering a theological synthesis that led to Scholasticism but not science! The success on the part of the natural sciences as a consequence of using imperceptible mathematics to explain perceptible phenomena allowed for the denial of the senses in the Copernican Revolution and resulted in opening the door to the mathematical worlds of Leibniz, Newton, and Wolff. The on-line “Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy” writes: “According to Kant, in the ‘Preface’ to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (2nd ed), [Christian] Wolff is ‘the greatest of all *dogmatic* philosophers.’ Wolff’s ‘strict method’ in science, Kant explains, is predicated on ‘the regular ascertainment of principles, the clear determination of concepts, the attempt at strictness in proofs, and the prevention of audacious leaps in inferences’ (Kant, 1998, 120) (emphasis added). Like many other philosophers of the Modern period, such as Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza [plus Leibniz, Newton, and others], Wolff believed the method of mathematics, if properly applied, could be used to expand other areas of human knowledge.” This is the apotheosis of discursive, instrumental reason. It is not (!) Kant’s notion of transcendental, “pure reason”.

⁸ The last section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled “The Transcendental Doctrine of Method” speaks of the “formal conditions of a complete system of pure reason” as consisting of three parts: a *discipline of*, a *canon of*, and an *architectonic of reason*.

The *discipline of reason* is “critique,” that is the employment of methodological skepticism to determine the *necessary*, transcendental conditions of possibility for theoretical reason. Critique, then, is not “criticism” of a set of phenomena but the identification of the imperceptible, *a priori* elements necessary for there to be a conscious experience of phenomena. Specifically, a critique of transcendental reason is not asking whether reason is “good” or “bad” but how is it possible for there to be reason?

The *canon of reason* is “morality” grounded in autonomous freedom or a rational being’s signature capacity capable of causing a sequence of events that nature on its own otherwise could not achieve. Without autonomous reason there is no theoretical or practical reason.

The *architectonic of reason* is transcendental reason’s dependence upon a unified, systematic totality in which the lawfulness of nature and freedom consist of a coherent whole incapable of being grasped by understanding but a necessary presupposition of understanding and agency, for otherwise there is only chaos. It is not until the third *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgment*, that Kant gives an account of the necessary capacity that unites theoretical and practical reason: *reflecting judgment*. Reflecting judgment is distinguished from determining judgment in the *Critique of Judgment* AA V: 179-181 and in the “First Introduction” to the *Critique of Judgment*

I propose that we retrieve the significance of the *totality* (or *architectonic*) of *theoretical* reason (understanding) and *practical* reason (responsible agency) as grounded in universal, lawful causal orders both perceptible and imperceptible for the sake of identifying the significance of finite, transcendental reason, grounded in religion, not for exercising power¹¹ over nature and others but rather for exercising our rational capacities *responsibly*.

AA XX: 210-216. In other words, the so-called “gap” (*Kluft*) between nature and freedom is not left to the mystery of an “unknown root” that is the imagination (*Critique of Pure Reason* B 30). Rather, now in the third *Critique*, the closing of the “gap” is accounted for by transcendental reason’s commitment (with awe and respect) to a unified totality of imperceptible lawfulness that is the condition of possibility for understanding and responsible action. That condition of possibility is the capacity to seek out the imperceptible, functional relationality that gives a set of phenomena its coherence (that is, reflecting judgment that alone leads to understanding) (see the *Critique of Pure Reason* B 91-116, especially, Kant’s definition of function at B 93). On the significance of the shift in epistemology represented by reflecting judgment see Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity* (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), *Die Begriffsform im mythischen Denken* (Leipzig/Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1922), and *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, 4 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994).

⁹ In the absence of a causality governed by a lawful order, the Gospels, for example, provide only an “aggregate” of moral principles, not a moral system. This is an insight already articulated by the Kant reception at the end of the 18th Century. Christian Wilhelm Flügge points out in *Versuch einer historisch-kritischen Darstellung des bisherigen Einflusses der Kantischen Philosophie* that, although the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament is frequently taken to be a revolution in moral understanding, in fact, 1) there is nothing in Jesus’s teaching that is not found in the Mosaic tradition (232-233), 2) Jesus’ teaching is anchored in his cultural context of fear of God (303), and 3), for this context important, the moral teaching is merely an “aggregate” of moral principles without any organizing principle (the causality of autonomous freedom and moral lawfulness) that makes it a totality (297). David Friedrich Strauß pointed out in the mid-1800s that there are major aspects of ethics not addressed by the Christian gospels (for example, family life, the marketplace, and – hopefully- we would add misogyny, racism, and environmental degradation, etc.).

¹⁰ Aristotle accounts for objects, natural events, and human agency from the perspective of their unique particularity, not because they constitute a lawful, coherent totality.

Arguably, the most enduring influence of Kant on the natural sciences has been his notion of *totality* (architectonic). However, already with his student, Herder, the notion of totality was restricted to theoretical reason as the merely empirical investigation of nature. Herder’s vision of nature in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (4 Vols. Between 1784–1791) was that it constituted a physical totality governed by an ultimate, single causality: energy that unites all phenomena. This view of nature driven by energy inspired Goethe’s as well as Alexander von Humboldt’s materialism, and it continues to govern the natural sciences today. It overlooks, that causal explanations involve a systematic, coherent totality that is always *a priori* and synthetic (added to the phenomena) because we cannot perceive causes, only their effects. In other words, Herder’s notion of energy presupposes both Kant’s theoretical reason and practical reason!

In the absence of an account of the lawfulness of practical reason (freedom and morality) as complementary to the lawfulness of theoretical reason in the natural sciences, even our age is one of materialistic Cyclopes absent the “second eye” of the Critical Idealist’s Philosopher’s Stone. See “The Cyclopes and the Philosopher’s Stone” at <https://criticalidealism.org>.

¹¹ On Foucault’s notion of power as central to “archaeological” and “genealogical” understanding of humanity and “character,” see “Enlightenment: Reflections on Michel Foucault’s ‘Was ist Aufklärung?’ [‘What is Enlightenment?’], 7 February 2016,” at <https://criticalidealism.org>.

**Beyond a Zero-Sum Game to Rational Open-endedness:
Practical Reason Is As, If Not More, Important
Than Theoretical Reason**

Not only did Aristotle himself use a logic of perceptible phenomena grounded in permanent substances that “suffer” change as a consequence of perceptible aggregates of substances (not imperceptible, lawful orders), an examination of the Aristotelian reception in the Latin West demonstrates that the persistent dualism that remains today between subjective Idealism and objective Empiricism comes from the 13th Century, which leaves us with the moral options: heteronomous laws imposed upon us from without (e.g., by God) or socially constructed rules and performances generated as relative norms by particular communities and imposed upon us from without.

The Aristotelian corpus that we have today arrived in the Latin West only in the 12th Century.¹² Duns Scotus (d. 1308) articulated an Aristotelian Christian theology sharply in contrast to Platonic Christian theology.¹³ Distinct from Platonic “Intellectualism” (God has no choice because “He’s” rational), Scotus articulated a new Theism, Aristotelian “Voluntarism” (God has absolutely free choice because “He” is will). At issue between Intellectualism and Voluntarism (already debated with the issue of ‘occasionalism’ in Islamic theology with Hamid al-Ghazali [1058-1111]) are anthropomorphic capacities attributed to God: which has priority in

¹² The Aristotelian corpus that we possess today did not arrive in the Latin West until the 12th Century when translations of Aristotle were made into Latin from Arabic sources. These translations were accompanied by a commentary, also in Latin, from the Islamic scholar Averroes. In the mid-13th Century, Thomas Aquinas along with Albert the Great, his teacher, were among the first to employ the Aristotelian corpus in Christianity and followed in the footsteps of Boethius (6th Century) in defending an ultimate harmony between Platonism and the “new” Aristotle.

¹³ The debate over the relationship between Aristotle and Plato, particularly on the “doctrine of the forms” but framed by the theological anthropomorphism of both, continues today. See for example, the 1 June 2018, review by Lloyd P. Gerson on-line at “Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews” of Mor Segev, *Aristotle on Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) at <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/aristotle-on-religion/> (6 August 2019).

experience: the “intellect” (reason) or the “will” (creativity); stated in terms of today’s apparent options: absolute moral principles (reason) or socially constructed moral principles (will)?¹⁴

On the one hand, the Platonic anthropomorphism of Intellectualism gives the “intellect” priority over the “will.” Divine concepts and moral principles are taken to be prior to, and to stand above, the decisions and agency not only of humanity but also of God. Even God *must* adhere to “His” universal, eternal concepts and moral principles. This is anthropomorphic because it is our experience that thought presupposes concepts, which in turn “must” precede reflection and action. According to Intellectualism, because God is good and aims for the good, God must be “self-limited” by His own eternal concepts and moral principles. Furthermore, Intellectualism is based on a dualism of “originals” and “copies,” also an anthropomorphic projection onto God. Eternal, universal concepts are taken to be the a priori “originals” whereas finite, particular things are taken to be “copies” of the originals.¹⁵ The result is a theological understanding that aims to ever fuller participation in the realm of the “originals” by escaping sensuous particulars (e.g., Greek Logos theology and mysticism¹⁶).

¹⁴ The (anthropomorphic) epistemologies and agencies of Intellectualism and Voluntarism are illuminating for our discussion of universal moral principles (we have no choice in light of moral principles - Intellectualism) over against particular “moral and ethical frameworks and performances” by communities (we are able to create ethical systems - Voluntarism)

¹⁵ Philo of Alexandria explained the need for the two accounts of creation in the opening of Genesis precisely on this anthropomorphic model of “original” and “copy.” The first account is the ultimate origin of creation that occurred when God thought internally (Logos endiathetos, λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), literally, the “word within;” the second account is the “copying” of those thoughts into matter (Logos prophorikos, λόγος προφορικός), literally, the “spoken word”). See §1 of Philo’s “On Creation” (*de opificio mundi; περὶ τῆς κατὰ Μωσῆα κοσμοποιίας*) as well as, David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis, 1993). Philo is so indebted to Plato that Jerome, apparently, coined the famous aphorism: “either Plato follows Philo or Philo Plato—so great is the similarity in doctrines and style.” (*Ibid.*, 313, see as well, 4, 188, 208, and 338).

¹⁶ Kant was dismissive of mysticism. In his *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre* [*Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*] (AA XXVIII) from the 1770’s and ‘80’s (published posthumously in 1817), he spoke of mysticism as “self-annihilation” in which one eliminates the self by sinking into the Godhead. He called mysticism the cessation of understanding in *The End of All Things* of 1794 (AA VIII: 335-336); whereas in *On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy* of 1796 (AA VIII: 398), he spoke of the mystical as the “death of philosophy,” and in *What Real Progress has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?* of 1791/1793, he warned of three dangers: turning theology into Theosophy; moral teleology into mysticism; and psychology into “pneumatics” (AA XX: 309-310). Nonetheless, Kant appears to have seen one crucial value in mysticism: it is less threatening to morality than empiricism (see *Critique of Practical Reason* of 1788 AA V: 71);

On the other hand, the Aristotelian anthropomorphism of Voluntarism rejects the notion of the *a priori* character of concepts and moral principles. Here, concepts and moral principles are *a posteriori* abstractions, *created by the individual (and corporate) consciousness following the experience of particulars* with particulars preceding universals.

This Aristotelian Voluntarism (Nominalism) maintains that we only experience *particulars*, and only after we have experienced a set of particulars are we able to abstract from this to create a concept (name) common to the particular phenomena. For Scotus, then, the will precedes the intellect: we must exercise our will in order *to create* concepts and moral principles. Similarly, the divine will is good in itself so that, because “perfect,” whatever it wills is good even if it ignores the conceptual order of nature (i.e., performs miracles).

Voluntarism, too, has its own “original” and “copy” structure, but it is exactly the reverse of Platonic Intellectualism: the “originals” for Voluntarism are particular things, and the “copies” are the abstracted concepts that are generated *a posteriori*. However, it must be noted that Voluntarism’s “originals” are not as original as it claims. The world of particular things (presumed to be the “originals”) must already be organized by universal concepts in order for us to be able to abstract concepts out of the particulars!

Platonic Intellectualism accounts for concepts/ideas as created in the eternal mind of God whereas Aristotelian Voluntarism accounts for concepts/ideas as the product of a (capricious)

see as well, *Conflict of the Faculties* (AA VII: 74-75). Empiricism is threatening to morality because it eliminates the autonomous freedom that grounds morality by reducing to physical causality all explanations of human behavior. Already in the *Lecture on Moral Philosophy* of 1774/5, Kant had acknowledged this “value” of mysticism’s liberation from the senses, but he immediately dismissed its “transcendental” character because of its enthusiasm (flying high above the empirical) rather than its reason being anchored in and inseparable from the empirical. Even further, at the end of Section I of the *Conflict of the Faculties* (AA VII, 69-75), which is the section on the conflict between the philosophical and the theological faculties, Kant adds a report (“On a pure Mysticism in Religion”) written by a former student (Carol. Arnold Willmans) on the Moravians in which the student praised what he called “Kantian” mystics. Kant rejects the claim. He asked his former student, Reinhold Bernhard Jachmann, to write a response to Willmans. Kant wrote a supporting forward to Jachmann’s *Prüfung der Kantischen Religionsphilosophie* (1800) (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1999).

divine will accessible to humanity because of the endurance of the material order of particular things (the physical world endures, the mind is merely subjectively transient) because of God's goodness.

Above all, both Intellectualism and Voluntarism are anthropomorphic: Finite, limited experience is used to make claims based on analogies for an infinite, eternal, perfect reality. Because of the difference between finite and infinite, there cannot be a greater μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος (*metabasis eis allo genos*), that is, "misapplication of characteristics of one genus to another". To claim to know how "*God must be*" on the basis of "*the way humanity is*" constitutes a fantastic leap of human arrogance.¹⁷ History teaches that humanity is no more dangerous (and, more often than not, no more wrong) than when it claims to know the "thoughts" or the "will" of God.

Despite their anthropomorphic projections, Intellectualism and Voluntarism are Top-Down explanations of experience that claim to *begin with the most universal* (absolute "reason" or absolute "will") in order to *account for particularity*. Both impose their respective notions of universal "necessity" on finite humanity.¹⁸

¹⁷ In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), David Hume questioned the use of humanity as the basis for analogies for speaking of God (14); he pointed out in this respect that our ideas reach no further than our experience (15); an analogy is weaker to the degree it departs in the least from the similarity of the cases compared (16); unless cases be exactly similar, they repose no perfect confidence in applying their past observation to any particular phenomenon (much less, to explaining God) (18); the whole cannot be explained by a part (19); it is hubris to think that the entire universe/God is explained by our minds (19); no mind without a body suggest God to be not an external creator but a soul of the world (40); generation always precedes mind [no example of mind generating matter; furthermore, Hume doesn't say so, but we also have no examples of matter generating mind – so important to Strauß and the materialistic reductionists of the mid-19th Century] 47; any use of an analogy to an ill-designed house, condemns the architect (68); and the questionable consistency of the world does not prove a designer (64).

¹⁸ For Intellectualism, humanity is necessarily dependent upon the divine intellect for its grasp of eternal truth and morality. For Voluntarism, humanity is necessarily finite and in need of an exercising of the divine will to correct our finite understanding and to correct our immorality by means of a grace because God is not limited by humanity's understanding of any conceptual and moral order by its dependence upon particularities.

In contrast and of crucial importance for our discussion of religion and morality, Critical Idealism is Bottom-Up: *All experience begins with particular, historical phenomena*, but the *capacities* of understanding and responsible agency are universal – at least for all finite, “rational” beings.

Other than to say *what is necessary (that is, required) and imperceptible for our experience that commences in, is grounded in, and possible only because of the particularities of appearances in history*, the concern of Critical Idealism is not with determining the correct predicates for *the most universal dimension of experience*, God, but with what we are able to say *in light of the limits of finite, transcendental reason* about human understanding (theoretical reason) and responsible agency (practical reason) in the world?¹⁹

The threshold into Critical Idealism is: What is necessary (required) for us to be able to experience this unitary flow of particular, historical appearances (which includes what we mean by morality)? The short answer is: all consciousness must have a structure of elements *not found in the particular appearances directly* that it applies to the *particular* phenomena in order to grasp their “lawful order” so as to understand and at least be able (even though we may ignore it) to exercise its finite agency responsibly.²⁰ It is precisely this finite, unitary and universal, rational structure (not to be confused with discursive, instrumental reason) that allows us to deny

¹⁹ Critical Idealism is not concerned with a dualism of copies and originals as is Intellectualism (Idealism) and Voluntarism (Nominalism) but with the identification of the structures of transcendental reason that are necessary for there to be a conscious experience of particular appearances. All reason, so far as we experience, is finite and arises in, is called for, and is a response to particular appearances. The immediate content of all experience of the world and the self is a unitary and constant flow of particular appearances by an individual consciousness. See *Critique of Pure Reason* B1: “There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience. For how should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into action did not objects affecting our senses partly of themselves produce representations, partly arouse the activity of our understanding to compare these representations, and, by combining or separating them, work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience?” (emphasis added)

²⁰ Universality here is a question of finite capacities for the experience of a world of particularities, not a question of the infinite capacities of a reason and a will somehow absolutely beyond the limits of any and all particularities.

our senses of particulars in order to understand “properly” (for example, that the sun is *not* moving).

As with Intellectualism and Voluntarism, Critical Idealism (like the physical sciences) is unable to empirically prove or disprove the reality of the universal, imperceptible, transcendental conditions of possibility for experiencing appearances. However, contra Intellectualism and Voluntarism, the elements that Critical Idealism and the physical sciences can neither prove nor disprove are *necessary/required* (but not always determining, as in the case of autonomous freedom, which is required but not determined by anything else) for us *to experience particular appearances* as we do.²¹

What is necessary is that the stream of particular appearances and the universal structures of finite, transcendental consciousness are “given” *and not of our creation*. However, we can only speculate about this “given” other than that it is structured to allow us consciously to experience and act in a world of appearances.²²

However, most significantly, practical reason indicates that there is a place in the midst of the particularities of appearances that is *not entirely governed by the “blind,” mechanical causal order of physical appearances*. It is precisely this place that announces the “open-endedness” of reality: the place is occupied by a finite, “rational” species neither playing a materialistic, zero-sum game with the appearances nor merely consisting of “mechanical” automatons blindly driven by physical causality.

²¹ Although *possible*, it is not *necessary* that God be a pure, universal “intellect” or “will” in order for us to experience the world of appearances as a rational species.

²² The “giver” of the “given” of these structures makes it possible for us to be a rational animal capable of understanding appearances (theoretical reason) and of acting responsibly in appearances (practical reason). Speculations beyond this sufficiency and necessity with respect to the “giver”, though, are a threat to the very theoretical and practical reason that is dependent upon this sufficiency and necessity.

In short, transcendental reason is not limited to merely understanding the world, it is also concerned with changing it – and changing it responsibly. Long before Karl Marx, then, Kant suggests that the aim of philosophy is not merely to describe the world but to change it – although Kant adds, with the capacity to change it *responsibly*.

Finally, it is precisely the universality of practical reason that grounds the dignity of the individual. Dignity is not (!) something that can be legislated by a social group. Dignity is anchored in the transcendental, rational capacity consciously to change the world in ways that nature on its own cannot *and to be able to take responsibility* for those personally initiated changes.²³ In other words, practical reason with its open-endedness in the materialistic order of nature and its immaterial, moral order is at the core of what it means to be and become a rational species to a degree not found in any other species of which we are aware.²⁴ We have now arrived at the link between religion and morality.

Transcendental Reason and Religion: Technical and Moral Culture

The Call for Papers stresses that the track record of religion and morality hardly justifies the conclusion that religion has contributed much to the moral life of humanity. I suggest, differently, that historical religions with their revelations/texts, rituals, traditions, and institutional structures illustrate the “precariousness” of humanity that results from its open-endedness in the materialistic, natural order.²⁵ Human dignity is grounded in a creative capacity

²³ Respect is due to those who not only acknowledge the dignity of all rational beings but also who themselves respect and strive to live by the two domains of law that are the ultimate ground of dignity: nature and freedom. Kant writes in the *Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 467-468 that respect is to be distinguished from dignity and esteem precisely on the basis of *the degree of the individual’s respect for the law*.

²⁴ The qualifications of “degree” and “of which we are aware” denies that this is a claim of speciesism.

²⁵ On humanity’s precarious position, see *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* AA IV: 425-426.

never separate from but also not reducible to material, natural causality – as far as we have experienced.²⁶

We cannot ignore the laws of natural causality, but, because freedom is *autonomous*,²⁷ we can ignore the moral laws that govern autonomous freedom precisely because, unlike physical laws (along with statistical significance and algorithms, we would add today), those moral laws are anchored in freedom, not materialistic determinism (see *Critique of Pure Reason* B 585 ff).

Only an animal with the transcendental capacities of reason (by no means limited to instrumental reason) can recognize and act upon the difference between *can* and *ought* because only such an animal *experiences itself as capable* of initiating sequences of events that nature on its own can never accomplish. Such an animal doesn't create merely by instinct. Although the recognition of these transcendental capacities must occur in everyone for her-/himself, the

²⁶ This qualification “as far as we have experienced” constitutes no denial of an afterlife. Kant even says that “a religion without the afterlife is no religion.” (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* AA VI: 126) Kant’s claim is not that there necessarily is an afterlife (something along with grace and miracles that is incapable of proof or disproof) but that it is necessary to *presuppose* an afterlife because the successful moral improvement of humanity requires an endless process (see Flüge, *Versuch einer historisch-kritischen Darstellung des bisherigen Einflusses der Kantischen Philosophie*, 319). Therefore, any religion that would deny the afterlife 1) would be claiming to know something that we cannot know and, more importantly, 2) that whatever content such an afterlife would involve would have to encourage our moral effort in this life. If otherwise, we would be more concerned about what is in our self-interest for the next life than with doing the right thing because it is right (by trying to be well-pleasing to God). Doing the right thing because it is right may be exactly contrary to our self-interests. If there is an afterlife, the only role it can play in terms of core religion is to be a confirmation of our subjective (not objective!) worthiness of it through our moral effort in this life. (See *Metaphysik Mrongovius* XXIX: 774–77; *Critique of Practical Reason* AA V: 130; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre* [*Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*]: 130, 133, as well as, *Religion* AA VI: 66–68.) “Worthiness,” however, is not an achievement that places a demand of one’s “right to an ‘objective’ salvation in the next life,” but it consists in concentrating one’s efforts on one’s subjective, moral improvement in this life, which when fulfilled provide a satisfaction (good) without need for external applause.

²⁷ Autonomous freedom in Critical Idealism refers to any rational animals’ capacity *consciously* to initiate sequences of events and to create things that nature on its own is incapable of doing. See the definition of freedom at *Metaphysik Mrongovius* XXIX: 861. Humanity appears to possess autonomous freedom to a degree found in no other species of which we are aware. Some other species create and employ degrees of technical skills, but the degree of their difference to humanity borders on a difference in kind. That is, it is driven by instinct, not by rational in-sight. Note: autonomous freedom here is not Hegel’s notion of relative freedom within a social institution. Otherwise stated, autonomous freedom does not refer to the degree of independence an individual (or group) has over against family, tradition, political entities, economic structures, and religion. In short, freedom is not something achieved but exercised!

fulfilment of the promise of theoretical (what *can* be) and practical reason (what *ought* to be) requires more than an isolated subject. *It requires both nature and a social order.*

However, the social order is not simply a “culture of technical skills” that merely serves self-interests²⁸ but also a “moral culture²⁹” that is anchored in “wider,” universal principles *above* self-interest.³⁰ Kant gives examples of these wider, universal principles³¹ as: not allowing ourselves or treating the other as merely a means rather than an end, acknowledging the autonomous freedom (hence, dignity) of all other rational beings,³² not lying, not taking one’s own life out of social embarrassment, developing one’s talents, responding to the suffering of others,³³ not intentionally testifying falsely against another,³⁴ keeping promises,³⁵ not taking

²⁸ Kant by no means claimed that we are to *deny self-interest*. The complete denial of self-interest is impossible for a finite creature. Furthermore, he explicitly acknowledged that we cannot ever know in any particular situation whether we have acted on the basis of self-interest (see the *Groundwork* AA IV: 407. Although we can never be certain whether we acted out of self-interest, we can be certain about our consciously acting on the basis of a moral principle: “[...] what is at issue here is not at all whether this or that does happen, but that reason by itself and independently of all appearances commands what ought to happen [...]” (*Ibid.*, 408.)

²⁹ For Kant’s distinction between a culture of “skills” and a “moral” culture, see the *Critique of Judgment* AA V: 431-432.

³⁰ See section “VII [Internal] Ethical Duties are of Wide Obligation, whereas [External] Duties of Right are of Narrow Obligation” in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, AA VI, 390-391. Kant distinguished between “narrower” (unrelenting, *unnachlässlichen*) and “wider” (meritorious, *verdienstlichen*) duty already in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* IV, 424.

³¹ Although there is no proof or disproof that one is acting on a universal, moral principle, the first form of the *categorical imperative* offers a criterion to avoid merely acting on the basis of self-interest: We ought to act on the basis of a principle *that “we would want”* to be universal, like a law of nature. However, this is no excuse to turn capricious self-interest into a universal law. It is a commitment to seek universals to rein in self-interest.

³² These two imperatives are the second and third forms of the *categorical imperative* articulated in Section II of the *Groundwork*. Rejecting the treating of others as a mere means to one’s ends constitutes the ground for Kant’s rejection of racism, slavery, colonialism, and aristocracies. See “Was Kant a Racist? With an Addendum: On South Sea Islanders in Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals” at <https://criticalidealism.org>.

³³ These four moral principles are Kant’s examples of duties owed to oneself and to the other as *categorical imperatives* in Section II of the *Groundwork*.

³⁴ This moral principle is discussed in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V: 30, 155-156) to illustrate that moral principles are universal because everyone recoils in horror over the false testimony. The discussion of this moral principle is preceded by an account of humanity’s ability to control even its most powerful, physical interest: sexuality (AA V: 30).

³⁵ See the *Metaphysics of Morals*, AA VI: 219-210.

advantage of the inexperience of others,³⁶ proper care of animals,³⁷ ecological concern for nature (the material basis for all theoretical and practical reason),³⁸ etc.

Historical religions are not simply competing revelations/texts, rituals, traditions, and institutional structures that have emerged in *particular* societies, but, in addition and more importantly, they are the social institutions in which it is possible (although not necessarily determined) to encounter the social conditions for encouraging “moral culture.”³⁹

Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives

Finite life is governed by imperatives – things that one *must do*. There are two kinds of “natural” imperatives for a transcendental, rational being, but they must be learned. *Hypothetical imperatives* are socially constructed.⁴⁰ Whereas socially constructed rules are imposed upon us *by society* (civic laws and rules that govern technical and personal welfare, for example, career training), other *categorical imperatives* are self-imposed but *not created by or a mere construction of a finite, rational animal*. The first set of natural imperatives arise out of self-interest on the part of the group or the individual, whereas the second set is grounded in the causality of autonomous freedom in principle free of mere self-interest.⁴¹

³⁶ See the *Groundwork* AA IV: 397.

³⁷ See the *Metaphysics of Morals*, AA VI: 443-444.

³⁸ See *Ibid.*, AA VI: 443.

³⁹ At its universal core, religion is where transcendental, rational capacities consciously encounter their imperceptible conditions of possibility and limits. Religion reminds us that not only are we not the authors of our capacities and conditions of possibility for experiencing, understanding, and transforming the world but also that we are dependent upon three kinds of lawfulness: specific physical laws; socially constructed civic laws and technical rules; as well as wide, moral laws. Whereas civic laws and technical rules are *a posteriori* constructions by humanity, in contrast physical and moral laws constitute an *a priori*, imperceptible, internal divine order manifest in all perceptible, external reality.

⁴⁰ At least in the sense that this set of imperatives arises only in rational animals capable of discerning imperceptible order in phenomena and acting on socially constructed rules, not just instincts.

⁴¹ Already in his own lifetime, Kant’s claim that theoretical (epistemology) and practical (morality) reason “constructed” nature and morality raised eyebrows. Moritz Kronenberg reports in *Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus*, Vol. II (München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1912): 607, that Fichte, Schiller, and Goethe had doubts about the claim, whereas Schelling called it “constructivist” and “in this sense spoke of a construction of nature and the world.” Kronenberg adds in a footnote, though, that Kant’s own understanding of construction “[...] has nothing to do with that most horrendous misunderstanding based on the bizarre notion as though Kant [*der Philosoph*] [...], took his personal vagaries and whim to be the objective, lawful order of nature.” Kant’s

Imperatives, then, are either *hypothetical* or *categorical*. Hypothetical imperatives are driven by a *particular* situation in the sense that “if” (the hypothetical marker) I want to do something in particular (e.g., drive a car, build a house, practice a profession), then I must follow the rules (imperatives) that govern that particular activity. Examples of such hypothetical imperatives are the civic laws of a given society, the “ethical” culture of a corporation, the technical rules required to build a house, and the rules that govern personal welfare like pursuing a specific career.⁴²

Some hypothetical imperatives are universal and demanded by nature (for example, the sequence of constructing a house forbids hanging the roof before laying the foundation and building the walls). However, many hypothetical imperatives are demanded by a particular society out of self-interest. We need rules for the safety of all and want people skilled in their respective professions. Furthermore, we reward people for having learned the hypothetical imperatives by issuing drivers’ licenses, professional credentials, and celebrating the creative achievements of our fellow citizens.

When hypothetical imperatives function well, they serve as a powerful motivation for the individual to make a positive contribution to her/his society. However, the rewarding of the fulfilment of hypothetical imperatives, financially or otherwise, can lead to conscious deception to serve merely self-interest: one can be encouraged to and can personally manipulate the appearances of one’s having satisfied the hypothetical imperatives to “win” the rewards.⁴³ In

“constructivist” claim refers to humanity’s *construction of understanding* of physical and moral laws – precisely, *not humanity’s creation* of the physical laws of the world and of morality at whim.

⁴² In order to drive a car, I must learn the rules of the road for the particular society in which I will drive the car. In order to build a particular house, I must necessarily lay a foundation before installing the roof. In order to pursue a particular career, I must necessarily cultivate the necessary skills and obtain the appropriate credentials of that profession (architect, teacher, physician, musician, etc.).

⁴³ For example: by practicing a profession without the required credentials, cutting corners in the construction of the house, fudging the data from one’s research to portray a greater success than the original data warrant, etc.

short, hypothetical imperatives govern the *successful negotiating of a particular, social world*, but the perceived success and rewards from society can be based on deception.⁴⁴

Not all imperatives, then, are moral even when they satisfy the ethical rules of a particular society.⁴⁵ The civic law can convict the innocent and free the guilty. For a transcendental, rational species to function even adequately (if not entirely properly), its citizenry must adhere to a set of imperatives that are “above” hypothetical imperatives. Hypothetical imperatives require at least a certain level of moral accountability on the part of the individual. This moral accountability is neither constructed by society itself nor can it be imposed from without upon the individual.

Hypothetical imperatives are called *heteronomous imperatives* because they are externally imposed upon the individual. The imperatives that only the individual can impose upon her-/himself are called *autonomous or categorical imperatives*. Categorical imperatives are *autonomous*, but here autonomy is a form of *causality*, not *resistance and/or selfishness*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Patricia Churchland’s *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) defines “morality” as the successful negotiation of a social world. Every Mafia Clan and Drug Cartel would agree. Morality, according to Churchland, is a “four dimensional scheme:” “(1) *caring* (rooted in attachment to kin and kith and care for their well-being), (2) *recognition of others’ psychological states* (rooted in the benefits of predicting the behavior of others), (3) *problem-solving in a social context* (e.g., how we should distribute scarce goods, settle land disputes; how we should punish the miscreants), and (4) *learning social practices* (by positive and negative reinforcement, by imitation, by trial and error, by various kinds of conditioning, and by analogy).” (8) Rather than morality being grounded in autonomous freedom that calls for acknowledgement of wide, universal *categorical imperatives* (of course, that can be ignored), Churchland truncates “morality” to what is in reality social “ethics.” the adherence to *hypothetical imperatives*. According to Churchland, the latter are grounded not in what Critical Idealism calls autonomous freedom, but in the brain’s amygdala and physical hormones, like oxytocin.

⁴⁵ Taking hypothetical imperatives to be categorical moral imperatives turns morality into tyranny either because it is reduced to materialism, as the case with Churchland, or the application of every *hypothetical* rule is mistakenly taken to be the application of a moral, *categorical* imperative. See the *Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 409.

⁴⁶ Kant also rejects the claim that morality involves suppression of the “flesh.” The “flesh” (included in “animality”) is affirmed as the most fundamental, material basis of any and all experience (see *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* AA VI, 26-27). The criterion for sexuality is found in the second form of the categorical imperative that is anchored in the recognition of human dignity: “So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of the other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.” (*Groundwork* AA IV: 429) Furthermore, our “animality” is necessarily presupposed for the two “higher” capacities (*Anlagen*) achievable by a rational being: “humanity” as status and prestige in the eyes of others, and “personality” as respect for the moral law as sufficient incentive for governing one’s moral responsibility (see the *Metaphysics of Morals*, AA VI, 27-28). In short, Kant refutes that morality requires the denial of “sensuousness.” See *ibid.*, AA VI, 408 but

As a form of causality, autonomy has its own lawful system without which we have chaos.⁴⁷ *Categorical imperatives* are neither natural, physical laws nor social constructions for the governance of the achievement of *particular* skills or personal welfare but stand “above” all such hypothetical imperatives. Only when we are concerned with *categorical imperatives* is it appropriate to speak of morality. All other imperatives are *hypothetical*, and at best *hypothetical imperatives* are a social ethic, not morality. We can do everything ethically according to socially constructed imperatives, but we can still be immoral.

Morality and Religion: A Society that Encourages Moral Culture

Given that categorical imperatives can only be experienced and acknowledged *internally* by the individual, it is not possible to discern by the consequences which moral principle the individual chose to act upon much less whether or not the individual acted on a moral principle, at all. The individual, of course, can choose to act purely on self-interest, which by definition contradicts a moral principle because a moral principle is universal, not particular. In any and all

also 384, 390, 394, and 405. Kant also rejects “ethical asceticism.” See “Ethical Ascetics §53” of “The Doctrine of Virtue” in *ibid.*, AA VI, 484-485: “[...] monkish ascetics, which from superstitious fear or hypocritical loathing of oneself goes to work with self-torture and mortification of the flesh, is not directed to virtue but rather to fantastically purging oneself of sin by imposing punishments on oneself [...]. [I]t cannot produce the cheerfulness that accompanies virtue, but rather brings with it secret hatred for virtue’s command.” (*Ibid.*, 485)

⁴⁷ See Kant’s discussion of dreams in *Metaphysik Mrongovius* XXIX: 884f, 927. Kant wrote: “The dream is another phenomenon of the imagination. It occurs entirely naturally. Because the imagination is constantly at work and in sleep the effects of understanding have ceased, only the imagination remains and is thereby given free rein. It gives us representations of things [in the dream] rather than understanding ... [The] productive imagination is especially manifest in a dream. The dream is a sequence of fabrications that are involuntary. When awake, we are in a shared world; in the dream, though, we are in our own world. – The dream’s creativity is similar to that of the waking world but with a difference: in the dream the productive imagination is involuntary, without order and intentionality. In the waking world, in contrast, I can link my fantasy in many ways in all kinds of directions according to an order, and I can always call myself back from my fantasy whenever I wish. In the waking world, fantasy is also involuntary but the creative idea is not so strong as in the dream because in the waking world sense impressions limit us whereas in the dream all of the senses are suspended and only the field [in contrast to territory, where order is possible, and domain where order is necessary] of the productive imagination is active. This is because the dream suspends entirely our consciousness of our circumstance. Consequently, we have that peculiar experience that we can represent the past without knowledge that it is past. Here a subject of the reproductive imagination is opened up in which we swim in fancies without being conscious of our actual situation.” (*Ibid.*, 885) ([Trans. McG]. See as well, Kant’s *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* AA IV: 290-291; and Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* B 520–21.

event, though, the individual gives her-/himself “permission” to decide and act in a certain manner. The analogy from nature that “one can judge a tree by its fruit” is precisely an analogy and not a literal truth because the tree blindly produces its fruit (no “permission” is involved) whereas the individual is capable of consciously producing its “fruits.” Given that only the individual knows what principle s/he has acted upon and that one frequently has little if any control over the consequences, the “fruits” of human agency are no absolute indication of morality. The aphorism “the road to hell is paved with good intentions” reminds us that we don’t control the consequences of our decisions and even our moral and ethical choices can lead to horrendous consequences.⁴⁸

What we can control is the moral principle on which we make our decisions and govern the *oughtness* of our actions. This capacity, though, is one that must be cultivated to be recognized, and it is facilitated by social encouragement because our moral principles can require that we act even contrary to our self-interest. Our having to recognize and act upon physical laws is analogous: Just as the moral law can call us to act contrary to our self-interest, our grasp of the physical law can require us to contradict our senses and say, “the sun is not moving.”

A moral culture, then, is one that not only encourages the cultivation of technical skills but also encourages the cultivation, decision taking, and action on the basis of moral laws simply because they are right and not because they further self- or group-interest.⁴⁹ Learning to apply consciously moral principles to govern one’s decision-taking and agency benefits most from an

⁴⁸ This moral “fact” points out the weakness of Lessing’s “Ring Metaphor” in *Nathan the Wise* for the evaluation of the moral status of a religion. Rather than evaluating religions on the basis of their fallible human consequences, we are better served by focusing on the capacities and their moral cultivation that make it possible for us to be moral, in the first place. In short, we need an *archaeology of morality* that takes us to a core of universal capacities that make moral rationality possible.

⁴⁹ By this definition of moral culture, it is not only religion that has failed morally but human societies have failed.

environment in which such moral “skills” are appreciated and rewarded. This is the vital domain of religion,⁵⁰ far beyond revelations/texts, traditions, rituals, and institutional structures.⁵¹

Conclusions

The theism of Platonic Intellectualism and Aristotelian Voluntarism is top-down and claims to be grounded absolutely, *a priori*. Both theistic options are based on a *literal* anthropomorphism. Although it, too, is *a priori*, the theism of Critical Idealism is bottom-up. It is an *a priori* wager of faith (a *Fürwahrhalten*) that experience is governed by two lawful causal orders not of human creation but upon which all of experience is dependent. At best it employs *symbolic* anthropomorphism⁵² to speak of God, but in such cases, the judgments of *symbolic* anthropomorphism say as much, if not more, about humanity’s limits than allow for (wild) speculations about what divine predicates (what God “is”).

⁵⁰ Kant spoke of “one pure religion,” but he did not mean that one historical religion among all other historical religions is the “true” religion. Rather, he meant that at the core of all historical religions one finds the same pure religion: the religion that cultivates moral culture. See “One World, One Reason, One Faith, but Many Religions: Religious Studies in the Age of Pluralism 7 March 2016” and “Studying Religion: More and Less than Mapping Territories 4 December 2015” at <https://criticalidealism.org>.

⁵¹ Kant viewed Christianity to be only one among *pure* religions but not based on Christianity’s “correct” doctrines. He viewed “Christology” (the teaching about Jesus) to be *inclusive*, not *exclusive*. Jesus is a moral model for all, not the sacrifice necessary for conquering “original sin” and for entering heaven. See Flügge, *Versuch einer historisch-kritischen Darstellung des bisherigen Einflusses der Kantischen Philosophie*, 113-114. Furthermore, Jesus did not establish a *pure* religion but was taken to be the founder of an *historical* church. See *ibid.*, 191.

⁵² In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B723-724), Kant poses three questions: 1) “[...] whether there is anything distinct from the world, which contains the ground of the order of the world and of its connection in accordance with universal laws[?]” He answers: Undoubtedly!; 2) “[...] whether this being is substance [...]?” He answers: This question is meaningless because the limits of transcendental reason restrict our categories (of which substance is one) to objects of possible experience, which God is not; 3) “[...] whether we may not [...] think this being, which is distinct from the world, in analogy with the objects of experience [...]?” He answers: Yes, “[...] but only as object in idea and not in reality,” “[...] as a substratum, to us unknown, of the systematic unity, order, and purposiveness of the arrangement of the world [...].” In the “Conclusion” to *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* AA IV, 350 f; especially, 355-358, Kant proposes speaking of a “symbolic anthropomorphism” when it comes to the “God question.” On the heuristic value for understanding of the anthropomorphic analogy for understanding biological phenomena as well as Kant’s emphasis in stressing that these projections onto the divine Noumenon in no way justify drawing conclusions about “divine predicates” but only for drawing conclusions about what is necessary for finite, human understanding, see “Part Two: Critique of Teleological Judgment” in *Critique of Judgment* AA V, 359 f.

Religions can by no means guarantee that humanity will act morally. Nonetheless, they can foster the capacities and encourage the application of moral principles by this extra-ordinary transcendental, rational species.⁵³ As I have tried to demonstrate, the distinction between hypothetical (externally imposes physical laws and social rules) and categorical imperatives (moral principles) provides a hierarchy of principles governing moral, human agency in which “narrow,” particular hypothetical imperatives are necessarily subordinate to “wider,” universal categorical imperatives.⁵⁴

⁵³ Without space to develop these themes further here, it should be underscored that Kant by no means restricted practical reason to institutional religions. Religion is concerned with the proper pursuit of well-being, not in terms merely of self-interest but governed by moral principles. He also has a powerful philosophy of history grounded in moral capacities, a defense of representative democracy constitutionally by the separation of powers (legislative, administrative, and judicial), a cosmopolitanism that looks far beyond the boundaries of nationalism and views the individual as a member of a global community, as well as calling for a league of nations – but not a world government. In short, one can say that Kant defended a ‚core‘ religion eschatology.

Human transcendental reason is by no means merely subjective and limited to self-selected goals and achievements but, rather, is unequivocally social and historical. (See „Fünfter Teil: Geschichte“ in Otfried Höffe’s *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. Eine Philosophie der Freiheit* [Munich: C.H. Beck, 2012]: 273-337). Given that reason is profoundly limited, Kant’s philosophy of history is not driven by an absolute goal (e.g., Christian salvation or Hegel’s meta-Idea of the Spirit). Kant’s philosophy of history is governed by a “cunning of reason,” again non-Hegelian, that he labels **reason’s “unsocial sociality”**. (See the „Vierter Satz“ [“Fourth Thesis”] of Kant’s *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* AA VIII: 20-22.) Because history begins, for Kant, with the conscious emergence of humanity’s transcendental capacities of autonomous freedom as the ground of its theoretical and practical reason, *history is viewed here as an open-ended project in which humanity seeks to become human (i.e., to properly exercise both its theoretical and practical reason)*.

Individual and groups can and will act contrary to their self-interests in the name what they take to be higher moral principles. Yet, even when humanity acts exclusively based on self-interest, its ability to do so always includes the capacity of practical reason to act morally according to a higher categorical principle. Hence, *the unsocial sociality of humanity consists in the possibilities of humanity’s very practical (moral) reason. This by no means constitutes an embracing of dystopia because humanity’s hope is not dependent upon its achievements or failures but on its originating capacities that can never be eradicated as long as there is such a rational species.*

In other words, the very transcendental, rational capacities that constitute our species marker lead us not merely to exercise our individual, creative capacity but also to create democratic, social orders grounded in representative government with a constitutionally guaranteed division of powers (legislative, administrative, and judicial) as well as leads to international cosmopolitanism and the negotiation of national interests under the auspices of a league of nations but not a world government. (For an account of Kant’s influence on Woodrow Wilson’s vision for the League of Nations, see Gerhard Beestermöller, “Die Umsetzung der Völkerbundsphilosophie in politische Wirklichkeit durch Woodrow Wilson.” In *Die Völkerbundsidee. Leistungsfähigkeit und Grenzen der Kriegsächtung durch Staatensolidarität* [Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1995]: 94-142.)

The very “nature” of humanity’s “unnatural” capacities – all of which, of course, are not of our own or any other human being’s creation – ground reason in a social order, as fragile and precarious as is the human condition.

⁵⁴ On the subordination of hypothetical imperatives to categorical imperatives as the key to the “good,” that is, moral life, see Otfried Höffe, *Can Virtue Make Us Happy? The Art of Living and Morality*, trans. by Douglas R McGaughey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).

Succinctly, it is misanthropic to take heteronomous imperatives drawn from speculative analogies based on finite, human, transcendental capacities to serve as convincing grounds for speculations about the “reason” and “will” of God (or the gods), much less to constitute morality and religion. Yet, it is also misanthropic to take the hypothetical imperatives of heteronomous, socially constructed rules and performances to exhaust ethics.

These two forms of misanthropy profile an antimony of arrogance when it comes to the relationship between morality and religion. What is more arrogant: to place humanity on the throne of God by means of anthropomorphic analogies? or to elevate reason to the divine throne above even God as Barth accuses ‘Enlightenment’ reason of doing? Unlike Karl Barth who accuses Kant of elevating reason above God and drives a wedge between theology (revelation) and philosophy (reason), I propose that the more appropriate understanding of the relationship between morality and religion *reins in speculative analogies as it unequivocally acknowledges the limits to reason.*

Karl Barth wrote, undoubtedly referring to Kant, that the 18th Century elevated reason to an absolute standard:

Since [... the 18th] Century, we encounter the highly problematic theme that we call “critical historical science”. What does this mean other than that in this century humanity began to attribute to itself a fundamental superiority over the past. Humanity assumed the position no longer as reporter over events, no longer of determining what the reports themselves from the past portray, but also to attribute to itself knowledge of the past according to a specific measuring stick. This court of knowledge that was enabled by the [newly acquired] measuring stick adopted by the typical historical perspective of the time was necessary for a highly radical judgment with respect to the past. The applied yardstick, simply stated, is humanity of the present itself: humanity with its confidence in its capacity of observation and judgment, with its sense of freedom, with its mental quest for conquest, with its urge to create, and with its moral self-confidence.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Karl Barth *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century* [*Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*] (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985): 39-40 (All translations of Barth are from McG).

Barth calls this the century of the “individualization and internalization of Christianity” with “individualization constituting the enthronement of humanity”.⁵⁶ Specifically with reference to

Kant, Barth adds:

Revelation [...] is no longer necessary. The connection of morality to religion consists in reasons moral thinking itself: namely, “belief [*Fürwahrhalten*] in what is inaccessible to theoretical knowledge”, in the belief in ideas, above all and decisively, belief in the idea of God that is implicit in every act of the really good will. In light of the inability of theoretical reason to prove that to which this belief refers, we are bound to this faith by no external authority but accomplish it spontaneously according to the laws of freedom (*Critique of Judgment* 462). Acknowledging that “it certainly sounds questionable”, Kant said explicitly that every human being “makes a God for himself, indeed, he must make one according to moral concepts [...] in order to honor in him the one who made him.” [Barth now paraphrases Kant:] A human being must be able to evaluate any possible proclamation, even any personal revelation experienced himself, by means of a self-constructed idea of God in order to know that it is from God (only so is such a judgment possible!) (*Religion* AA VI: 169*). S/he must know God directly already before any and all revelation. Kant [...] doesn’t hesitate – unlike Augustine – to speak of “God within us”, who must be the actual interpreter of all revelation “because we understand no one other than someone who speaks with us through our own reason” (*Conflict of the Faculties* AA VII: 48) [Barth stops quoting Kant at this point. However, Kant proceeds: “[...] in so far as this divinity can be known purely morally and thereby without deception”.]⁵⁷

For Barth, Kant is a “pure Rationalist” who rejects revelation because it “destroys the religion of reason” who is opposed to “positive religion”⁵⁸ and reverses dogma at best “[...] as ‘husk’, whose purpose is openly to bring about the religion of reason.”⁵⁹ In short, for Barth, theology is revelation and stands over against philosophy’s reason.⁶⁰

I claim that Barth has created a caricature of Kant and squeezed him into the narrow box of discursive and instrumental reason ‘over against’ theology, which

⁵⁶ Barth, *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁷ Barth, *Ibid.*, 251-252.

⁵⁸ Barth, *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁹ Barth, *Ibid.*, 254

⁶⁰ See Barth, *Ibid.*, 275.

possesses a higher truth by revelation. Like Thomas Aquinas,⁶¹ Barth places philosophy outside of the science of theology. Rather than demarcating a line of separation, Critical Idealism draws two circles with the sociological manifestations of historical religions constituting the larger circle but with pure (or the core of) religion constituting a smaller circle **within the larger historical circle**.⁶² In other words, neither the arrogance of analogies nor the arrogance of elevating reason/philosophy above God/theology is an adequate framework for understanding religion or general human experience.

I began this paper with two questions. 1) Are we engaged in a zero-sum materialistic game? 2) Is there any place in material nature that is open-ended, that is, not limited entirely by physical causality? I defend the second option not because it claims to be informed by a superior, divine revelation nor because it attributes to reason absolute authority. Both options are highly problematic with the former substituting eisegesis for exegesis and the latter ignoring the profound limits to transcendental reason.

Critical Idealism is neither a defense of any particular, historical religion over all others nor is it a reduction of historical religions down to a core set of rationalist beliefs that calls for the rejection of all revelation/texts, rituals, doctrines, and institutional structures of historical religion. When confronted with doubt (in this case: doubt –

⁶¹ In his *Summa* I, 99, 1, Aquinas wrote: “By faith alone do we hold truths which are above nature, and what we believe rests on authority. Wherefore, in making any assertion, we must be guided by the nature of things, except in those things which are above nature, and are made known to us by Divine authority.” I, 32, 1: “Therefore, we must not attempt to prove what is of faith, except by authority alone, to those who receive the authority; while as regards others it suffices to prove that what faith teaches is not impossible.” I, 1, 6: “**Whatsoever is found in other sciences contrary to any truth of this science [sacred doctrine] must be condemned as false.**” See David Friedrich Strauß, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und im Kampfe mit der modernen Wissenschaft*, vol. I (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009 [1841]): 309, n. 29. (English trans. From http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas_Aquinas/Summa_Theologiae/Part_I/Q1 [6 October 2020])

⁶² See the „Second Preface“ to *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* AA VI: 12-14. Kant invokes here the analogy to oil and water to suggest that historical and core religion can ever again be shaken into a combined mixture “however, they would soon have to separate again and let the purely moral religion (the religion of [transcendental] reason) float to the top.” *Ibid.*, AA VI: 13.

negative or positive - regarding the revelations/texts, rituals, doctrines, and institutional structures of historical religion), Critical Idealism asks: What are the, to be sure, limited conditions and capacities that are required in order for us to experience, understand, and exercise responsibly our creative agency in the world? Its claim is simply: at the core of all traditions of revelation/texts, rituals, doctrines, and institutional structures is limited human understanding that is always susceptible to arrogantly ignoring its limits.

Nonetheless, at this core that can be identified in all historical religions (regardless of the hubris of cultural superiority) are a set of indelible and inalienable, universal conditions and capacities that make it possible for us to experience, understand, and exercise responsibly our agency in the world. *These indelible and inalienable, universal conditions and capacities in no manner diminish the significance of personal and community particularities! Without a world of sensation and without social world, which includes particular, historical, religious traditions, it would be impossible to experience universal conditions and capacities that make it possible for us to experience a world of sensation and a particular social world.*

The kind of conscious, creative agency, which makes it possible to experience a world of sensation and a particular social world, is a kind that we encounter (in degree) nowhere else (to this point) in the universe. We have the dubious (because both positive and negative) capacity to do things that nature on its own could never accomplish. This autonomous freedom is possessed by birth. It is not a liberty that we have to establish by means of institutional/social structures. Its possession by birth establishes it as the species marker that determines the absolute worth and dignity of each and every human being regardless of physical or mental limits.

Furthermore, there can be moral agency only if there is a species (not just individuals) that possesses autonomous freedom above, but never separate from, nature . Otherwise, we are mere mechanical toys and automatons. Only a species, who can act absent mere instinct to do and create things that nature on its own cannot, remotely possesses the capacity to hold itself accountable for its creative agency. To ignore these transcendental conditions and capacities is to destroy our very humanity. That is, to ignore them is the ultimate form of misanthropy.

Nonetheless, this set of core, transcendental conditions and capacities is no reduction of either humanity or religion to mere morality. To be sure, morality is required by our core condition and capacities, but it can be ignored precisely because it is grounded in autonomous freedom, not physical determinism.

However, the transcendental conditions and capacities of creative agency involve far more than an appreciation of the intelligible conditions and capacities required for that agency. There is no agency without a physical world and, more specifically, a physical body. Agency requires physical well-being as much as it requires a moral culture that encourages us to exercise our agency according to self-legislated, internal moral principles. Both physical and sociological well-being impose responsibilities upon us to preserve the physical conditions of life (that is, proper husbandry of the natural world) and to preserve the sociological conditions that foster moral effort (that is, to respond to the suffering and needs of ourselves and others).

Critical Idealism, I propose, identifies these fundamental, transcendental elements and responsibilities at the core of all historical religions. We do our individual traditions the best service when we seek to illuminate these universal conditions and capacities and

to encourage responsible agency in the world rather than profile the distinct historical uniqueness of our respective traditions to constitute universal truths deserving recognition and respect by all. Nonetheless, every historical religion provides a segue into its own core. Properly understood, each segue not only provides the opportunity but in its own way offers short-cuts to foster the grasping of the profound significance of humanity's limitations and responsibilities.

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