

KANT AND KIERKEGAARD: THE SUBJECTIVIZATION OF FAITH

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Introduction

1 Writing in polemical opposition to Hegelian philosophy,⁽¹⁾ Soren Kierkegaard strenuously criticized the tendency of his age to elevate the results of objective reflection (scientific/historical research) and the categories of Absolute Idealism over the standpoint of the ethically-existing, finite individual. Evincing a deep distrust of the antinomous, self-transcending concepts of speculative reason, he insists that "a firmness with respect to logical distinctions" must constitute the foundation of genuine human reflection on such conceptual dualities as finite-infinite, temporal-eternal, human-divine. Underlying all theoretical enquiry, as its presupposition and condition of possibility, lies the concrete reality of the ethico-religiously "interested" individual, whose quest for the fulness of selfhood takes primacy over any possible objective knowledge. Only if this fundamental existential insight is acknowledged can metaphysical hubris be held in check and a place reserved for the proper apprehension of the ineluctable truth of finite human subjectivity.

2 Scholarly opinion is divided on the degree to which Kierkegaard's critique of speculative thinking presupposes a Kantian view of reason. For one recent commentator, Anthony Rudd, Kierkegaard's disavowal of universal philosophical reason in favour of the primacy of finite ethico-religious subjectivity places him in an antithetical relation not only to Hegel but also to Kant's transcendental idealist ethics.⁽²⁾ Any apparent similarity in their divergent views Rudd traces to Kant's roots in Protestant pietist Christianity, which make it "no surprise that Kant often sounds as much like a Christian moralist as Kierkegaard." [*Ibid.* 136] This veneer of Christian ethics notwithstanding, Kant's version of ethics, Rudd argues, "leaves out belief in God", since Kantian morality is based on the radical autonomy of the rational agent, while religious faith emerges solely as a logical consequence of moral self-consciousness. From Rudd's perspective, Kierkegaard's thought, by contrast, affirms the irreducible independence of faith -- particularly Christian faith -- as a standpoint in which the finite subject "leaps" beyond the limits of ethical striving to a paradoxical relationship with the divine.

3 Yet questions must be raised concerning the adequacy of this assessment. For although in Kant the movement from morality to faith is mediated by the demand for rational coherence, while in Kierkegaard the transition occurs via an unmediated leap, for both thinkers genuine religious consciousness presupposes a richly articulated ethical life and can arise only in response to the needs of the ethical agent. Those needs differ markedly -- for Kant, the moral life collapses into a rationally incoherent "*absurdum practicum*" when stripped of the practical/rational postulates of God and immortality, while for Kierkegaard, the ethical subject's need for God flows from the experienced impossibility of existential self-synthesis in the absence of divine intervention. In each case, however, the standpoint of the autonomous ethical subject is presupposed, the categories of faith functioning as vehicles for the completion of that subject's extra-religious goals. Despite the clear and proper distinction Rudd draws between Kant's rational transcendental idealism and Kierkegaard's anti-idealist Christian existentialism, I would argue that particularly in Kant's later thought, Christian categories figure largely in his efforts fully to characterize the structure of autonomous moral subjectivity, while

Kierkegaard's version of Christian faith owes much of its character to a reliance on Kant's dualist epistemology.

4 Another recent commentator, Ronald Green, admits a Kant/Kierkegaard link based on the shared principle of the "primacy of practical reason".⁽³⁾ He argues, however, that Kant's Enlightenment confidence in free, universal thought/action is supplanted in Kierkegaard by a vigorous defence of traditional Christianity. Green looks to Kant's concept of radical evil, developed in *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, to support the claim that "...Kant's powerful series of arguments in the *Religion* furnished Kierkegaard with much of the intellectual ammunition he needed for his project of defending Christian orthodoxy."⁽⁴⁾

5 My intention here is to consider Kant's and Kierkegaard's understanding of religious faith and its relationship to moral life. In Sections A and B, I argue that Kant's Enlightenment confidence in the autonomy of the rational moral subject does ultimately require him to subordinate religious faith to the demands of ethical autonomy, and in particular to reduce central doctrines of the Christian religion to means for resolving certain contradictions which inevitably arise within moral experience as manifest in the context of his transcendental dualism. Then in C, I argue that despite contemporary appeals to Kierkegaard as defender of authentic Christianity against the encroachments of Enlightenment humanism, shared epistemological assumptions ensure that the existential subject's paradoxical Christian faith offers no genuine alternative, but rather is an extension of Kant's demythologized version of orthodox Christian principles.

A. Kant's Practical Faith

i) The Moral Grounds of Belief in God

6 In Kant's concept of moral faith we see the emergence of a significant new strategy for justifying and comprehending religious experience. Traditionally, the Christian believer aspired to *know* the divine, both through conforming his consciousness to the revealed doctrines of the church, and through rational theological argument offering insight into God's being and nature. With the rise of Enlightenment methods of critical enquiry, however, the validity of both religious dogmas and rational theological doctrines was called into question. Empirical scientists joined forces with historical/biblical scholars to trace the natural roots of religious creeds, while appeals to absolute religious truths met with deepening scepticism, as rational understanding pursued its negative, critical deconstruction of both positive revelation and abstract, metaphysical claims to know God. Enlightenment thought challenged theological orthodoxy at every point, until in Kant's time there yawned a wide, antagonistic gulf between the claims of a free rational thought and those of a defensive, beleaguered religious faith.

7 Kant regarded the rescue of religious faith from the sceptical encroachments of Enlightenment as one of the chief accomplishments of his transcendental critique of pure reason. By bifurcating reality into a phenomenal and a noumenal aspect, finite understanding could be acknowledged as the sole source of truth regarding what appears to the perceiving intellect, while both empirical experience and metaphysical thought were denied access to noumenal, or supersensible reality. Reason, the faculty of the Unconditioned, remained free to think its essential Ideas -- God, freedom and immortality -- but since the proper content of religious concepts, Kant argued, transcends possible sensuous experience, their truth could be neither proven nor disproven by science or speculative metaphysics. They stand as "unavoidable problems set by Pure Reason for itself,"⁽⁵⁾ problems which find their solution through the vital role they can be shown to play in moral experience. Access to the noumenal sphere is possible only for reason in its practical employment; thus, if religious faith is to be

preserved, Kant argues, the ethical alone must become its foundation, or condition of possibility.

8 This claim entails however that religious thought no longer constitutes an independent sphere of inquiry but becomes a function of the autonomous rational subject's moral self-experience. Kant substitutes moral for rational theology, arguing that while the latter affords no insight into transcendent reality, the former affords practical proof of the necessity of a God-relationship for finite, rational agents. In exchange for knowledge of God, then, Kant offers a deeper understanding of what it means to be a moral person. Religious faith is thus liberated from the Enlightenment requirement to defend its truth-claims before the autonomous court of reason. Kant thereby establishes as a foundational principle Enlightenment's dogmatic confidence in the universality and autonomy of rational subjectivity, and acknowledges the theoretical inaccessibility of the Divine reality, while yet retaining rational belief in a stringently construed God-concept as an instrument of ethical self-realization. The faith/reason conflict is thus disarmed, but at the cost of any substantive content for traditional religious belief.

9 In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant elaborates the principle of the primacy of the autonomous rational subject, characterising consciousness of the moral law, or categorical imperative, as the "sole fact of pure reason", which "forces itself upon us as a synthetic proposition a priori based on no pure or empirical intuition."⁽⁶⁾ This law is immediately present to me -- I cannot explain my experience of myself as an agent in the world without recognizing it, yet the law itself cannot be phenomenally explained, since any such attempt would reduce it to a function of its causal antecedents, and so undermine its absolute character as law. The speculative ideas of reason -- freedom, God and immortality -- are not further immediate facts of pure reason, but take on practical urgency when I begin to reflect upon what must be the case if a rational being is fully to comprehend his status as an autonomous agent, obligated by the moral law.

10 The fundamental condition of the possibility of this irreducible moral self-consciousness is the idea of freedom. For speculative reason, this concept was "problematic but not impossible", i.e., it could be thought without contradiction, although no objective reality could be assigned to it. In the context of moral experience, however, we are justified in postulating the actuality of freedom, since without it the undeniable experience of moral obligation would be meaningless. If we are to think of ourselves as moral beings who ought to act on certain occasions from duty alone, then it must be possible for us to do so. "Ought implies can" -- morality implies freedom.

11 But how is it possible for the individual human will to fall under the deterministic laws of nature, as it necessarily must, while also being possessed of real freedom, which Kant defines as "... a power of self-determination, independently of any coercion through sensuous impulses ..."?[CPR B562] Reason's antinomy, or internal contradiction, must be avoided, and Kant's solution emerges in his doctrine of the two standpoints: as phenomenal appearance in space and time the self is indeed subject to mechanical determinism, but as noumenon it may, at the same time, regard itself as acting in accordance with the law of freedom. Noumenal freedom is neither the transcendent goal of the moral will, nor a regulative ideal toward which we progress through moral action. It is the unavoidable transcendental condition of the possibility of moral life itself -- the permanent capacity of the finite yet rational will for choosing between inclinations generated in nature, and maxims grounded in the imperative of practical reason.

12 By contrast with noumenal freedom, the moral postulation of the existence of God is not a condition of moral law itself, but rather a condition which makes possible the *realization* of the "necessary object of a will which is determined by this law"[CPrR 4]. That necessary object, or highest good, is the *summum bonum*, which Kant characterizes as a synthesis of the concepts of moral virtue and happiness. The autonomy of the moral

will entails that the "supreme good" for the moral individual is nothing but virtue, or the production of will which is good in itself. But virtue cannot be man's "entire and perfect good"[CPrR 117]. The moral agent is a natural being, a creature who desires happiness. He belongs to both the noumenal realm and the temporal world of sensuous nature -- hence, says Kant, practical reason has an inescapable responsibility to respect our empirically-grounded interests, forming practical maxims with a view to human happiness. Moral striving is not intended to produce happiness, but rather virtuous character, or worthiness to be happy; still, given an individual's devotion to virtuous action, it would be offensive to reason if he were destined forever to lack in proportional natural satisfaction. Therefore Kant maintains that in the highest good which is practical for us, virtue and happiness must be thought of as necessarily combined.

13 But how is this complete good to be made actual? Although able to conceive of an ideal world order, in which freedom brings about a happiness "bound up with and proportioned to morality", the moral agent is a finite being who, even if immortal, could not hope to be the cause adequate to the required effect. Accordingly, practical reason postulates the existence of God conceived as the "wise Ruler and Moral Author of the world", whose infinite power and will alone can effect the yearned-for ideal harmony of freedom and sensuous nature [CPR B837-8].

14 Kant's postulated divinity, unknowable to theoretical reason, seems tailor-made to meet the subjective requirements of the finite moral agent. He insists that this concept of a moral mediator is not simply conjured up to satisfy the intense but contingent personal desire of the moral individual that the object of his wishes should become actual. While the moral necessity which attaches to this postulate is "not objective, i.e., duty itself"[CPrR 132], still the "moral wish"[CPrR 137] is not *merely* subjective, a sensuously-determined need of inclination, but arises in response to a necessary problem which pure reason sets itself [*ibid.*]. So strong is this connection that if we cannot hope to realize the *summum bonum*, (happiness in proportion to moral worth), then "the moral law which commands that it be furthered must be fantastic, directed to empty, imaginary ends and consequently inherently false." [CPrR 120] Thus, it is an "absolutely necessary need" which inspires Kant's ethical self to affirm:

I *will* that there be a God ... I stand by this and will not give up this belief, for this is the only case where my interest inevitably determines my judgment because I will not yield anything of this interest ...⁽⁷⁾ (emphasis added)

ii) The Practical Necessity of Faith

15 This resolute posture of finite spirit Kant terms "pure practical faith" or "rational faith"[CPrR 132-3]: rational, because pure reason alone is its source, but faith because, while the moral individual can have no theoretical knowledge of God's existence, he is possessed of a moral belief which nothing can shake. In spite of being objectively uncertain of God's reality, the moral individual's belief is so inextricably connected with the a priori law of morality that its denial would bring in its wake the decline into absurdity of ethical ideals themselves:

Our moral faith is a practical postulate, in that anyone who denies it is brought *ad absurdum practicum*. An *absurdum logicum* is an absurdity in judgments; but there is an *absurdum practicum* when it is shown that anyone who denies this or that would have to be a scoundrel. And this is the case with moral faith.⁽⁸⁾

16 The contradiction confronting the moral agent who refuses to affirm the existence of a "moral Author of the world" is thus not primarily theoretical but rather "existential" - it has to do with the moral agent's situation and condition in the world. For if indeed the

final end of moral action is the unification of the opposing spheres of nature and freedom, of happiness and virtue, then how can one lead an authentic moral life if that ideal of harmony is dismissed as impossible? Surely, Kant asks, is there not a deep *practical* contradiction in trying to act morally, adopting the highest good as my end, if I am also certain that this good is beyond my reach? He maintains however that since we cannot know theoretically anything of God's nature or existence, reason is free to believe, and in this instance *must* believe what it cannot know -- i.e. that God exists and acts on our behalf to supplement the inadequacy of finite moral agency. Kant goes so far as to imply that loss of confidence in the moral ideal (*summum bonum*) undermines the very possibility of moral worthiness itself -- remarking that the agent who succumbs to the *absurdum practicum* by abandoning moral faith would have to be a scoundrel.

17 Kant carefully distinguishes "moral" from "doctrinal" belief in God, while making it clear that both forms of belief lack objective grounding. In the case of doctrinal belief -- i.e., the affirmation of God's existence which emerges in the course of understanding's pursuit of theoretical knowledge of nature -- this is so because no objective support for the existence of a transcendent reality is warranted. A belief in God resting upon natural theology is necessarily unstable, although of regulative use in the development of theoretical inquiry. Moral belief, however, despite its similar lack of objective grounding, is connected with an end (the *summum bonum*) which is "irrefragably established", so that " I inevitably believe in the existence of God ... and I am certain that nothing can shake this belief, since my moral principles would thereby be themselves overthrown, and I cannot disclaim them without becoming abhorrent in my own eyes."[CPR B856]

18 By describing moral belief -- or "pure practical faith" -- as "unavoidable", and "inevitable" Kant might seem nevertheless to confuse belief with the results of theoretical enquiry, with knowledge. There is however nothing theoretically compelling about the content of practical faith -- quite the contrary, since objective knowledge of transcendent being is impossible for us. The ethical agent's conviction is "not *logical* but *moral* certainty ... I must not even say, '*It is* morally certain that there is a God, etc.,' but '*I am* morally certain etc.'" [CPR B857] There can be no duty to assume God's existence -- "Faith that is commanded is an absurdity." [CPrR 151] Only the command to further the highest good is objectively grounded in practical reason. The manner in which this possibility is to be achieved remains theoretically open -- either by means of the laws of nature alone or through the action of a wise Author of the world. But since it is the duty of the moral individual not only to think but to *actualize* the harmony of virtue and happiness, this individual is confronted with a "voluntary decision of judgment" [CPrR 153]. Our moral interest compels a choice: either trust and hope in a mediating divine power, or an unhappy struggle freely to effect from within nature the ever-receding ethical ideal. Kant seems to hold that faced with such alternatives, the rational moral agent must "inevitably" embrace practical faith. But the standpoint from which the moral agent affirms this inevitable belief is not universal, but personal and existential in character, requiring assent solely of the individual moral subject who stands in need of divine support.

19 Kant's critical goal is the simultaneous preservation of finite empirical knowledge, the autonomy of the moral self and the validity of religious faith. He accomplishes it by enforcing a transcendental dualism, a radical distinction between finite, temporal phenomena on the one hand, and unknowable, non-temporal noumenal reality on the other. On the phenomenal side of the divide stand natural, empirical objects and subjects, on the other the noumenally free moral agent, for whom faith in an equally noumenal divine reality complements the otherwise hopeless ideality of his ethical striving within the phenomenal sphere. There can be for Kant no direct access to God, no religious duties or divine commands which do not arise from the rationally self-imposed moral law. True worship of God is reduced to committed moral activity, while any putative knowledge of God's inner reality Kant dismisses as an impediment to genuine human freedom and dignity:

Our faith is not scientific knowledge, and thank heaven it is not! For God's wisdom is apparent in the very fact that we do not *know* that God exists, but should *believe* that God exists. For suppose we could attain to scientific knowledge of God's existence, through our experience or in some other way ... Then in this case all our morality would break down ... The image would force itself involuntarily on [man's] soul, and his hope for reward and fear of punishment would take the place of moral motives. Man would be virtuous out of sensuous impulses. ⁽⁹⁾

20 For Kant the bifurcated vision of transcendental idealism is the solution to Enlightenment scepticism, the ultimate condition of the possibility of empirical knowledge, rational human action and authentic belief. The limits of this dualist vision of human knowing and acting will be severely tested however as Kant embarks on a fuller consideration of the meaning and structure of transcendental freedom and its relation to the finite ethical agent.

B. Radical Evil and the Limits of Ethical Autonomy

i) How is freedom for evil possible?

21 In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant incorporates an essay published a year earlier bearing the title "On the Radical Evil in Human Nature", wherein he asserts that

... there is in man a natural propensity to evil ... this evil is *radical*, because it corrupts the ground of all maxims; it is moreover, as a natural propensity, *inextirpable* by human powers....⁽¹⁰⁾

The essay provoked shock among the moral and religious humanists of the day, who had happily embraced Kant's project of developing an ethic grounded exclusively in human rational autonomy. For thinkers steeped in the values of Enlightenment, Kant's apparent resurrection of the Christian doctrine of original sin, and denial of the optimistic Rousseauian notion of an innate human goodness, which could be progressively fostered by culture and education, seemed deeply at odds with the spirit of the age, and indeed with the basic principles of his own philosophy.

22 For how can we be at once autonomous rational agents capable of acting solely out of respect for the self-given moral law, and beings who by nature are in bondage to radical evil? If Kant meant simply that *qua* noumenal agents we are free, while *qua* finite and phenomenal we are weighed down by sensuous nature (i.e., evil), then no great difficulties threaten transcendental idealism. However, Kant's startling point in the essay is that the ground of evil lies in free will itself -- i.e., not in sensuous nature, but in human nature *qua* noumenally free -- hence the outrage of Goethe, who in a letter to Herder, cynically dismisses Kant's new position as a concession to Christian orthodoxy, perhaps made to appease the Prussian censors, and concludes:

Kant required a long lifetime to purify his philosophical mantle of many impurities and prejudices. And now he has wantonly tainted it with the shameful stain of radical evil, in order that Christians might be attracted to kiss its hem.⁽¹¹⁾

If we refuse to concede that this apparent reversal is a failure of nerve on the part of the aging philosopher, then we must look within the structure of his earlier ethical works for insight into its ground and justification.

23 There is considerable equivocation throughout Kant's writings concerning the precise meaning and scope of transcendental freedom. It is at least clear, however, that free will for Kant never means an undetermined, arbitrary will. The difference between the free and unfree will lies in the ground of its determination -- the unfree will being determined by an empirical object, the free will by itself. Thus: "*heteronomy of the will*: the will does not give itself the law, but an alien impulsion does so through the medium of the subject's own nature as tuned for its reception."⁽¹²⁾ By contrast, the autonomous, or self-determining will rises above such sensuous determination. Kant characterises moral freedom thus:

What else then can freedom of will be but autonomy -- that is the property which will has of being a law to itself? 'Will is in all its actions a law to itself' expresses, however, only the principle of acting on no maxim other than one which can have for its object itself as at the same time a universal law. This is precisely the formula of the categorical imperative and the principle of morality. *Thus a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same thing ...*[*Groundwork* 114; emphasis added]

24 It appears here that *only* the good will is a free will, since it alone is self-determining. Yet, this clearly raises the question of how the moral agent can ever then be held responsible for acts performed in opposition to duty, since when he performs them he is governed by the "alien impulsion" of heteronomous, sensuous inclination. Is moral evil then reducible to a *lack* of moral autonomy? Is it merely the result of inadequate education, of social limitations, of ignorance? This would seem compatible with enlightenment accounts of the origins of evil, yet such a view eliminates any genuine power freely to negate the moral law.

25 Kant's ethics aims to establish the possibility and actuality of full moral responsibility despite universal phenomenal predeterminism. He insists that the source of morality is therefore the human will alone, or reason in its pure (noumenal) practical employment. If however his account, as indicated above, implies that there is no possibility of an evil free will -- that we are free only to the degree that we are positively determined by the moral principle -- then how can one make sense of human *responsibility* for moral failure? Surely freedom entails the spontaneous, noumenal capacity to choose either for *or against* the moral law?

26 Kant's controversial evocation of radical evil can be seen as a response to this internal dilemma. To his Enlightenment critics it appeared as a retreat into Christian orthodoxy; but it would be more consistent with his lifelong goals and long-standing views regarding Christian dogma to argue rather that in formulating the concept of a freely enacted choice of moral evil as a condition of the possibility of genuine moral responsibility, Kant continues his transcendental enquiry into the *complete* "conditions of the possibility" of actual moral experience.

27 This interpretation is consistent with the opening pages of the *Religion* where he reiterates his long-standing confidence that " ... for its own sake morality does not need religion at all; ... by virtue of pure practical reason it is self-sufficient."[*Rel.* 3] Throughout his writings, Kant consistently envisages moral life as an unremitting struggle of the free subject to obey a *self-given* moral imperative. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the problem of ethical ideality -- the finite rational subject's inability to fulfill the self-imposed end which the moral law absolutely commands -- is resolved by recourse to belief in God, conceived as a mediator and wise Moral Author, through whom the striving individual may rationally hope for ethical closure. In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant's sensitivity to the ethical agent's pervasive struggle against moral weakness and failure leads him to postulate radical evil as the only solution rationally consistent with both the absoluteness of moral freedom and the ubiquity of moral corruption. Yet the admission of this concept will require him to deepen the autonomous subject's need

to appeal to divine help, ultimately rendering problematic either the autonomy of the ethical agent, or the distinction between God and man which is central to Kant's transcendental dualism.

ii) Radical Evil's Challenge to Moral Regeneration

28 If reason does not command what the human will cannot accomplish, what is the explanation for the ubiquity of moral evil? In *Religion*, Kant attributes moral failure to a free, noumenal decision made by every finite rational being, which is the unknowable ground of all phenomenal choices throughout each individual's life. This originary character determination, Kant claims, is *radical*, in that it involves the agent's willing in principle to elevate -- at least on occasion -- the heteronomous interests of self-love over incentives consistent with the moral law; and it is *innate*, in the sense that it is attributable to universal human nature. While the concept 'nature' is ordinarily understood in opposition to freedom, Kant here intends by it nature as "the subjective ground of the exercise (under objective moral laws) of man's freedom in general." [Rel. 18] The source of evil, then, lies not in any natural, sensuously-determined impulse, but rather in "a rule made by the will for the use of its freedom." [Rel. 17] Man himself, in his essential, noumenal nature as free, is thus the author of his own character, whether for good or evil. That character is termed "innate ... only in *this* sense, that it is posited as the ground antecedent to every use of freedom in experience ... and is thus conceived of as present in man at birth -- though birth need not be the cause of it." [Rel. 17]

29 Not only does Kant insist that radical evil is innate in individual moral character -- his "ethical rigourism" dictates that, everyday experience of partial and shifting moral worth notwithstanding, all individuals are either radically good or evil [Rel. 17-21]. Ethical goodness requires *absolute* commitment to moral law as the sole basis for action -- it permits no defections, no moral holidays, to tarnish its purity. Even a single phenomenal instance of immorality is sufficient therefore to indicate that an agent's *underlying* supreme maxim is to allow for occasional exceptions to dutiful action and so supports only a conditional commitment to the moral law. But since every human being is aware of many such failures to exercise a good will, it follows for Kant that all of humanity is radically evil.

30 In the interest of making freedom for *either* good or evil intelligible, Kant has introduced into his transcendental analysis a concept which seems to many indistinguishable from the Christian dogma of original sin. For both Christian and Kantian, man's nature is, through his own agency, radically and inextirpably perverse. If in his earlier works, Kant faced the problem of explaining how moral freedom could be consistent with the choice of evil, here the introduction of radical evil as a solution to this problem raises the opposite dilemma. For since the possibility of moral evil is grounded in a universal, freely-enacted perversion of the moral will, Kant must now show -- within the bounds of reason alone -- how anyone can ever free himself from innate evil and turn toward moral virtue.

31 He acknowledges the dilemma in its full force:

This evil is *radical* because it corrupts the ground of all maxims; it is moreover, as a natural propensity, *inextirpable* by human powers, since extirpation could only occur through good maxims, and cannot take place when the ultimate subjective ground of all maxims is postulated as corrupt; yet at the same time it must be possible to *overcome* it, since it is found in man, a being whose actions are free. [Rel. 32]

Whereas Greek philosophy had understood evil as arising from the individual's ignorance of eternal moral truths, and progressive philosophical education as the ultimate solution to moral inadequacy, Kant here firmly rejects the ancient Greek and modern Enlightenment reliance upon thought as the vehicle of moral development. Moral transformation can occur only through a *free resolution of the will*, that very will, however, which is corrupted at its root by perversion of its grounding maxim. In keeping with his ethical rigourism, Kant maintains that if an evil man is to become morally good - that is, "a man endowed with virtue in its intelligible character (*virtus noumenon*)" -- no gradual temporal reformation, or piecemeal improvement in moral habits will be of help, unless they are the phenomenal manifestations of a radical revolution already achieved within his intelligible character. If an individual aspires to moral worth, he must confront his own radical sinfulness, and through an act of complete repentance, achieve a total transformation of his moral character, in effect becoming a "new man" [Rel.43].

32 Yet, Kant immediately asks: "Does not this restoration through one's own exertions directly contradict the postulate of the innate corruption of man, which unfits him for all good?"[Rel.46] On the one hand, Kant readily admits that it wholly surpasses our comprehension how such a restoration to moral rectitude can be effected through the individual's own radically corrupted powers; on the other he insists as always that what duty commands, we *must* be able to obey, however contradictory such a change of heart appears from a temporal perspective:

Man cannot attain naturally to assurance concerning such a revolution ... for the deeps of the heart (the subjective first ground of his maxim) are inscrutable to him. Yet he must be able to *hope* through his *own* efforts to reach the road which leads thither ...[Rel.46]

Just as the ultimate ground of the original lapse into evil is inscrutable in its freedom, so too must be the atemporal act of freedom whereby this condition is reversed. We can never know whether indeed we have chosen obedience to the moral law, and so moral life requires persistent striving, in the hope that such is the case.

33 In opposition to the orthodox Christian view that fallen, sinful man cannot redeem himself, but *must* rely on the redemptive grace of God, Kant firmly maintains his Enlightenment confidence in the absolute autonomy of the ethical subject -- in his power of self-conversion -- in spite of an equally strenuous insistence that the possibility of such an act is *philosophically inconceivable*. [Rel.46] Thus, the effort to deepen insight into the structure of moral freedom leads toward the limits of rational thought and moral autonomy themselves. Confronted with this fearful impasse Kant, as he did in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, turns to religious categories as a means to restore moral sanity.

iii) Divine Grace and Moral Faith

34 In the second Critique, Kant had already noted a relation between his moral philosophy and Christian ethics, which he saw as sharing his emphasis on the *summum bonum*, the unity of happiness and virtue, as the supreme end of moral life. He regards certain orthodox Christian doctrines as compatible with his own moral theology therefore, and able to offer support to the rational agent who aspires to a "holy will". To avoid moral self-contradiction, Kant's finite subject must be able to *hope* for "the Kingdom of God, in which nature and morality come into a harmony"[CPrR 135]: Christian doctrine, morally interpreted, offers a vehicle for this hope. Kant insists that Christian ethics is not illegitimately imported into his rational morality since it is

not theological and thus heteronomous, being rather the autonomy of pure practical reason itself, because it does not make the knowledge of God and his will the basis of these laws but makes such knowledge the basis only of succeeding to the highest good on condition of obedience to these laws.[CPrR 136]

Through the concept of the highest good as the necessary end of pure practical reason, then, the autonomous moral law leads to true religion, now defined as "the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions, i.e., arbitrary and contingent ordinances of a foreign [i.e., heteronomous] will, but as essential laws of any free will as such." [CPrR136]

35 Apart from moral self-consciousness, there can be no further insight into the will of God -- positive or revealed religion can offer us neither truths nor divine commands not already accessible to reason in its practical employment. Christianity is true religion for Kant, not because it gives access to doctrines otherwise hidden from human comprehension, but because alone among the "public religions" it is in essence a "moral religion" [Rel.47], which when stripped of its accidental historical and ritual features closely resembles the "one true religion" in which reside moral principles available to all rational beings. Knowledge of God and his will comes to us *only* through practical reason, wherein we grasp God not as he is in himself, but only through subjectively necessary concepts commensurate with reason's demand for moral self-coherence. [CPrR 140; Rel.79f, 95f] Kant's appeal to "Christianity" therefore does not imply a turning away from Enlightenment principles, but a translation of traditional Christian dogma so as to render it a suitable content for pure practical reason and the autonomous moral subject.

36 In the second Critique, belief in a mediating God had thus served as the solution to the incommensurability between virtue and happiness in moral life. In the *Religion* the question has become how the self can hope to realize even virtue, given its bondage to radical evil, or sin. The somewhat muted appeal of the second Critique to a God compatible with the Christian deity now becomes more robust, as Kant relies increasingly on such Christian terminology as "grace", "atonement" and "saviour" to counteract the difficulties raised by the subject's sinfulness, or free decision to reject the moral law. Again, the question arises whether this reliance constitutes an admission of the limits of ethical autonomy, and the independent validity of transcendent religious truths; and again Kant insists that morality founders if the ethical subject is driven to adopt a heteronomous, theonomous principle. If moral integrity is to be rescued by appeal to the doctrine of divine grace, therefore, the doctrine must somehow be construed as commensurable with the basic principle of autonomy.

37 Kant's urgent question is how moral *self-conversion* is possible for fallen man. His answer to that question seems equivocal, even paradoxical, since on the one hand he insists that we must "be able to *hope* through [our] *own* efforts" to attain the condition of "rebirth" [Rel.43-6], while in the immediately following pages he suggests that the Christian doctrine of grace offers hope for regeneration *through the will and action of the Divine*. Such hope for divine grace is a matter of the "reflective faith" to which "reason, conscious of her inability to satisfy her moral need" has recourse "as a complement to her moral insufficiency". [Rel.48]

38 Yet, while reflective faith in grace enables us to hope for God's assistance, it is a belief which, unlike the moral postulate of God in the second Critique, finds no necessary role within the economy of *either* theoretical or practical reason:

even the hypothesis of a *practical* application of this idea is wholly self-contradictory. For the employment of this idea would presuppose a rule concerning the good which we ourselves must *do* in order to accomplish something, whereas to await upon a work of grace means exactly the opposite, namely, that the good is not our deed but the deed of

another being, and that we therefore can *achieve* it only by *doing nothing*, which contradicts itself. Hence we can admit a work of grace as something incomprehensible, but we cannot adopt it into our maxims either for theoretical or for practical use.[*Rel.*48-9]

But if we cannot embrace belief in "a work of grace" without superceding the limits of even practical reason, while yet Kant says as moral agents we may need to do so, does he not direct us beyond the bounds of universal reason alone in his search for the conditions of the possibility of moral regeneration?

39 Kant seeks to circumvent this stark inference, but at the cost perhaps of further reducing the content of Christian doctrine not simply to its rationalist, moral dimension, (as in the second Critique) but to a mere psychological motivator, wholly subservient to the needs of the autonomous moral subject. He begins by classifying matters relating to works of grace as *parerga* to religion within the limits of pure reason: that is, "they do not belong within it but border upon it." [*Rel.*47] If the ethical agent were to assume that he can introduce these "*morally-transcendent ideas*" into religion as a means of gaining subjective assurance of divine assistance, he falls into *fanaticism*. [*Rel.*48] Thus, belief in the *parergon* of grace is not to be confused with rational faith in the necessary postulates of practical reason. Nevertheless, Kant sometimes speaks as if reason is entitled to the barest form of such a supra-rational belief, as when he cautiously suggests that:

To believe that there *may be* works of grace and that *perhaps* these *may even be necessary* to supplement the incompleteness of our struggle toward virtue -- that is all we can say on this subject; beyond this we are incapable of determining anything concerning their distinctive marks and still less are we able to do anything to produce them. [*Rel.*162, emphasis added.]

40 Kant never in the *Religion* offers any account of *how* the evil will could actually transform itself into a good will, although he asks the question repeatedly. In fact he maintains that there can be no rational explanation of how freedom enacts its decisions; the attempt to impose explanatory doctrines like divine grace are illegitimate infringements on the inscrutable freedom of the moral will. If Kant were to accept such a transcendent concept within the limits of the critical perspective, he would be confusing the noumenal and phenomenal spheres, while undermining the absolute autonomy of the moral law.

41 Nevertheless, here he tries to make room "at the borders" of practical reason for this utterly transcendent doctrine, by hinting that from the point of view of moral *motivation*, the agent's hope in the trans-rational, abstract possibility of supplementary divine grace "may be necessary". Its function seems to be to bolster the temporal subject's confidence that, despite his fall into evil, and his own faltering insight into his true (i.e., noumenal) ethical status, the life-long moral struggle is not in vain.

42 In accordance with his critical principles, Kant offers no insight into the speculative question of whether a transcendent Deity actually does or could intervene on behalf of the moral individual. Nor does he claim that belief in divine grace is essential to enable the moral agent to effect moral conversion. In fact, he claims that despite radical corruption, there must be in us an innate "seed of goodness" which duty proclaims it is within our power to restore. Man is not devilish -- he remains potentially open to virtue and self-conversion, despite his choice of an overriding evil maxim. What is necessary is that we accept the moral ought, and through strenuous effort "render ourselves susceptible of higher, and for us inscrutable, assistance." [*Rel.*41] The fallen individual must strive to realize the unreachable moral ideal, while at the same time cultivating in himself the humility to acknowledge the limits of his moral powers and the receptivity to allow their potential supplementation through grace, which Kant defines as " a decree

conferring a good for which the subordinate possesses nothing but the (moral) receptivity." [Rel. 70n.]

43 For the finite subject who must act to restore goodness on the basis of duty alone -- while yet recognizing both that his initial disposition is corrupt, and that his sincere assessment regarding his possible moral conversion may be faulty -- the cultivation of receptivity to divine support would be of obvious motivational value. Stripped of the vital encouragement of belief in the possibility of grace, the autonomous/fallen individual might well languish in a state of despair, of "moral passivity in which nothing great or good is undertaken." [Rel. 172] Yet it remains unclear how the independent *reality* of the object of that invigorating moral belief is compatible with the rational requirement of moral self-regeneration -- for if there really is a transcendent dispenser of grace, the ethical agent's claim to absolute moral autonomy is surely unstable.

iv) Religious Mystery and Moral Autonomy

44 Kant's resistance to the temptations of religious positivity -- i.e., the assertion of the objective truth of revealed religious doctrines -- continues throughout his entire argument in the *Religion*, as he struggles to formulate a coherent account of moral self-redemption. What duty commands must be possible; yet the power of radical evil seems to preclude its actuality. Appeal to transcendent help diminishes individual responsibility, and so cannot become a postulate of practical reason; yet belief in such supernatural assistance seems crucial as a stimulus to continued moral effort. This pattern of ambivalence persists as Kant deepens his analysis of what it means to be a free moral subject by introducing the notion of the "infinite guilt" which accompanies the fall into evil, and the problematic concept of "atonement by another" as its moral solution.

45 Kant opens Book II of the *Religion* by positing "*mankind in its complete moral perfection*" [Rel. 54] as the ideal toward which the rational moral agent strives. This moral archetype he says we know to be a genuine product of pure reason itself, and not the arbitrary fantasy of any individual or culture. Yet just because of its universality, and especially in view of the radical evil in which mankind lies, it is incomprehensible to us how this holy ideal should have established itself in us. Hence, it is easier to affirm that "this archetype has *come down* to us from heaven, and has assumed our humanity", than to acknowledge the ideal as implicit a priori in moral self-consciousness. [Rel. 54] The ideal of a humanity pleasing to God (morally perfect insofar as this is possible for a being subject to sensuous inclinations) is thus represented in Christian consciousness as an actual person, "the Son of God", who was willing

not merely to discharge all human duties himself and to spread about him goodness as widely as possible by precept and example, but even though tempted by the greatest allurements, to take upon himself every affliction, up to the most ignominious death. For Man can frame to himself no concept of the degree and strength of a force like that of a moral disposition except by picturing it as encompassed by obstacles, and yet in the face of the fiercest onslaughts, victorious. [Rel. 55]

Man may hope then to become morally pleasing to God (and so be saved) "*through practical faith in this Son of God*" [Rel. 55] i.e., by faithfully imitating this exemplar's moral perfection.

46 As to the objectivity of the moral archetype -- it is indeed objectively real *as an idea generated by our "morally-legislative reason"*. [Rel. 55] No empirico-historical, personal instantiation of this exemplar is however needed, since it is an idea already

imbedded in our reason. For Kant it is not the exemplar, Christ, but *virtue itself* in which we truly have faith, since no example in outer, phenomenal experience, however worthy, could ever unequivocally manifest perfect moral goodness. So while it is beneficial to have before us a concrete figure from whose life and teachings we can infer -- although not know with certainty -- that he is indeed the best possible phenomenal embodiment of the moral archetype, this is by no means necessary to moral salvation, since "according to the law, each man ought really to furnish an example of this idea in his own person." [Rel.56]

47 Certainly it would be in violation of the requirements of practical reason to suppose that any moral exemplar, however apparently godly, were in fact divine rather than -- or as well as -- wholly human, since a divine, or holy moral being could not serve as a meaningful ideal for finite man. If he is a genuine historical personage Christ, for Kant, is therefore a "godly-minded teacher" whose pronouncements and activities provided the occasion for his contemporaries, and through them all mankind, to seek moral self-conversion. [Rel.59] Our relation to Christ is therefore in no sense dependent, but rather invites simply the free "appropriation of his righteousness for the sake of our own." [Rel.60]

48 Kant next turns to the difficulties standing in the way of realizing this project of free moral appropriation. Three related difficulties arise as we contrast the paradigm of "divine" (paradigmatically human) holiness, goodness, and righteousness with our own fallen condition. In the first instance, we confront the realization that although there must be present in us the seed of a disposition to moral goodness, or holiness, such that "a change of heart must be possible because duty commands it", yet, *from the point of view of time*, every act is always already infected by the disposition to evil, and so cannot count as the required radical act of self-conversion. Kant addresses this predicament by invoking his critical distinction between phenomenal and noumenal reality, pointing out that while phenomenally any progress toward holiness will inevitably be deficient, from the point of view of the divine law-giver (i.e., practical reason as noumenal), if we sincerely strive for ethical perfection then our own noumenal disposition will be apprehended religiously as "*essentially well-pleasing to God.*" [Rel.61]

49 The second difficulty emerges when we contemplate the distance between "divine" goodness and our own inconstant temporal efforts to become morally good. It is addressed through similar reference to the phenomena/noumena distinction. The problem is that our moral disposition seems ever changeable, so that we feel no assurance that "moral happiness" is truly accessible for us. If we are to persevere with confidence, despite setbacks, we must believe that the noumenal moral disposition "which stands in the place of the totality of this series of approximations carried on without end" can make up for "the failure which is inseparable from the existence of a temporal being as such, the failure, namely, ever wholly to be what we have in mind to become." [Rel.61] Certainty regarding the underlying disposition is of course impossible, but observation of his temporal moral history can give the sincerely dutiful individual "reasonable hope", despite ethical ideality, of his ultimate moral worthiness.

50 The third and greatest difficulty besets every individual once he has embarked solidly on the path of moral improvement. For even if the individual hopes that he has indeed adopted a good disposition, and has steadfastly persevered in "conduct conformable to such a disposition", he must still confront the divine righteousness. For the fact remains that "*he nevertheless started from evil*, and this debt he can by no possibility wipe out." [Rel.66] The moral individual's duty to effect moral conversion arises *because* he begins with a radically evil disposition. Thus, even if he has achieved a "change of heart", he brings with him to his new moral condition an *infinite* burden of debt and of guilt. This is not because, as orthodoxy has it, in sinning the individual offends the "*infinitude* of the Supreme Lawgiver whose authority is violated" [Rel.66], since reason can know nothing of such a transcendent relationship between God and

man. Rather, guilt is infinite because radical evil perverts "the *disposition* and the maxims in general, the *universal basic principles* rather than particular transgressions." [Rel.66] Furthermore, Kant's moral principles dictate that the debt of sin is a *personal* one; unlike financial indebtedness, no one else can take over liability for an individual's sins, even if he should wish to do so. Thus, even the morally renewed subject seems to face the prospect of inexpiable personal debt requiring "*endless punishment* and exclusion from the kingdom of God." [Rel.66]

51 If the individual cannot *both* overcome his sinfulness *and* expiate his moral debt, Kant's entire moral theology is in jeopardy. He must defend the possibility of moral regeneration, since without it radical evil cannot be overcome, and moral life would be futile. Rational morality also demands that the infinite debt be satisfied; yet for a *finite* agent bearing *infinite* guilt, adequate personal atonement is rationally inconceivable.

52 Seeking to ground the possibility of both conversion and full atonement for sin, Kant recurs to his moral interpretation of Christ's life and death. Orthodox Christianity understood Jesus not as Kant's "personified idea of the good principle" but in a positive sense, as the God-man whose unique historical actuality effected human salvation from original sin by atoning vicariously for man's infinite moral debt. Kant wishes here to utilize this traditional Christian doctrine, but in such a way as to render it compatible with radical moral autonomy, since appeal to religious positivity would involve a heteronomous solution to the dilemma generated by the autonomous choice of radical evil. What Kant requires is that his rational christology, stripped of all necessary reference to historical events, should nevertheless provide the basis for such moral atonement.

53 Kant has already argued that the ideal of a person -- the "son of God", who embodies moral virtue -- i.e., who always acts from duty, and who views such moral duties as divine commands -- *is present in reason itself*. He maintains that in the historical Jesus that moral archetype happens to be best empirically manifest, and that therefore the sinful individual can be "saved" through faith in him as the Christ in whose life radical evil has been overcome. This is not because Christ is uniquely able to accomplish a vicarious atonement for all sinners. Rather, the history of his life, suffering and death is meaningful to each sinful moral subject only because it awakens in himself an awareness of the latent moral archetype, the "self morally pleasing to God". Through a subjective appropriation of the relevant moral features of Christ's actions, any rational individual can repeat that act of atonement within his own moral consciousness. In other words, Christ is the occasion for the emergence of the moral individual's faith in *himself* as a potential embodiment of human moral perfection, in his *own* power to overcome the burden of sin.

54 Kant presents Christ as a teacher who, announcing himself as an ambassador from heaven, declared an end to all vain, servile faith in doctrinal confessions and practices, and "revealed", by word and example, a "saving faith" in the ideal of a humanity dedicated to moral self-perfection. [Rel.119-20] Thus Christ's role is not actually to break the hold of sin over finite individuals paralysed by radical evil, but rather to remind them of their own innate disposition to goodness, and capacity to restore themselves to virtue. Christ is thus the herald of the "pure faith of reason" which has always lain implicit in all human hearts and minds. For that faith to emerge, no historical events or documentation are essential, although the historical Christ's "revelation" has helped many to awaken to their own ethical reality. [Rel.132]

55 Yet this accommodation of Christ to the requirements of the morally autonomous agent fails to confront the very problem for whose solution Kant had turned to Christian doctrine. The difficulty for the finite agent is how to recover a lost goodness, given the infinite corruptive power of radical evil. Despite the introduction of Christ as exemplar of

the moral archetype, that "how" remains a mystery. Kant insists we must both preserve moral spontaneity "according to which a good cannot come from another but must arise from man himself"[*Rel.*134], and recognize that man is corrupt and so cannot redeem himself: yet reason cannot comprehend how vicarious atonement for radical evil could be compatible with human freedom. Kant concludes that from the moral point of view the possibility of such atonement can therefore be accepted only as a "holy mystery".

56 "Mystery" for Kant does not mean that which radically transcends all possible knowledge. He defines mystery in a peculiar fashion as "that which we can know, but which is incapable of being communicated publically."<[*Rel.*129] Neither the reality of freedom, as affirmed in the first and second Critiques, nor the moral postulation of God qua moral Ruler of the world, falls into this category of incommunicable yet *knowable* holy mystery. The ground of human freedom is inscrutable to theoretical reason; nevertheless practical knowledge of it, and of morality, is universally shared by all. However, when practical freedom seeks to *realize* virtue, its moral end, it is led inevitably to the holy mysteries. Likewise, practical faith in God as "moral Governor of the world" contains no mystery, since it presents itself spontaneously to human reason everywhere, supplementing the moral law of which it is the practically necessary completion. But when we go beyond rational moral belief -- which expresses the moral relation of God to the human race -- to consider what God freely might do to offset our ethical inadequacies, we approach the sphere of mystery.

57 The mystery of atonement is inaccessible to theoretical reason, and so cannot be "shared universally". The mystery stands beyond the reach also of practical reason, as a private matter for only the isolated, fallen individual to affirm as a deeply *personal* ground of confidence in the possibility of moral virtue. Kant maintains that it may "be *known* by each single individual ... each individual will have to search for it (if ever there is such a thing) solely in his own reason ... in the inner, subjective part of our moral disposition."<[*Rel.*129] Yet he offers no account of what it could be for the individual moral subject to "know" in a fashion inaccessible to other rational thinkers and agents.⁽¹³⁾ Notwithstanding his insistence that the relation between human freedom and divine grace is both theoretically and practically unfathomable [*Rel.*48-9], for Kant the finite moral agent's hope for ethical self-realization fuels the need to embrace this transcendent mystery through an act of inner, subjective appropriation.

C. Kierkegaard's Appropriation of Kantian Dilemmas

i) Kierkegaard's Critique of "Immanentist" Philosophies

58 Thus far I have argued that despite his adherence to the principle of radical moral autonomy Kant, precisely through his efforts to secure the full freedom and responsibility of the ethical agent, exposes the limits of his transcendental dualist starting point. The moral subject is confronted with the difficulty that while duty commands moral regeneration -- i.e., the will's self-overcoming of its free choice of radical evil -- from the point of view of practical reason such self-transformation on the part of a finite, infinitely guilty agent is impossible. Kant's recourse to the figure of Christ, and to the *parergon* of divine grace, does not resolve the dilemma so much as underscore its intransigency, since any appeal to a transcendent source of moral salvation highlights the failure of autonomy to achieve its self-imposed demand for regeneration. The distinctions between nature and freedom, between finite man and the infinite but unknowable God -- so fundamental to Kant's critical project of saving both knowledge and faith from Enlightenment skepticism -- are revealed here as foci for new perplexities.

59 In presenting the Christian faith as paradoxical, and the Christian believer as a despairing existential subject who "leaps" to faith in the Absurd, Kierkegaard's thought appears in sharp contrast to Kant's account of faith as rational belief. Kierkegaard's critique of all "philosophies of immanence", from Plato to Hegel (among which he clearly includes Kant's transcendental idealism), his stress on the discontinuity between moral and religious consciousness, and upon "passion", not reason, as the mediator between ethical striving and religious faith, should not however obscure some fundamental lines of agreement between his position and Kant's.

60 Following Kant's dualist epistemology, Kierkegaard denies to science and speculative philosophy all knowledge of reality as it is in itself; following Kant's stress upon the primacy of free moral subjectivity, he insists that the restriction of the powers of theoretical reason to the phenomenal in no way invalidates human aspirations toward the supersensible, since such aspirations are most properly accommodated within the sphere of the practical. As for Kant, so for Kierkegaard, the ethical is not a self-contained sphere of life. In the quest to satisfy its deepest needs qua moral agent, ethical consciousness is ineluctably drawn beyond its own self-created boundaries toward faith in a transcendent reality. Religion, for both, is thus understood as the necessary solution to practical problems which emerge within the very structure of the ethical, so that one who has not first fully grasped the implications of what it means to be an ethical subject is incapable of experiencing the profound need for religious faith which the life of moral striving ultimately evokes. For Kierkegaard as much as for Kant, however, it may be argued that the moral standpoint is unsurpassable, since for both, religious faith's primary significance lies in its capacity to address problems raised within ethical inwardness, rather than in its capacity to elevate the individual beyond abstractly subjective, dualist modes of modes of experience.

61 These common principles notwithstanding, Kierkegaard strenuously opposes Kant's efforts to characterize faith, and in particular Christian faith, as continuous with rational (albeit practical) thinking, arguing that in its highest expressions, the religious constitutes a sphere utterly independent of the demands of ethical universality. For Kant the autonomy of the ethical agent, manifest in the rationally self-imposed categorical imperative, means that not even the will of God can contradict the dictates of pure practical reason. Kant insists that revealed religious truths must be subordinated to principles accessible to universal human reason, i.e., I must first know that something is my duty before I accept it as a divine command:

When a politico-civil law, itself not immoral, is opposed to what is held to be a divine statutory law, there are grounds for regarding the latter as spurious, since it contradicts a plain duty, and since [the notion] that it is a divine command can never, by any empirical token, be accredited adequately enough to allow an otherwise established duty to be rejected on its account.. (*Rel.* p.90-91, note]

Revealed religious truths, or ostensible divine commands, must be compatible with the autonomy of the rational will or be dismissed as products of ignorance, superstition or fanaticism.

62 Criticising the Biblical account of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at the command of God, Kant remarks that no such direct duty to God is possible for a rational human subject. Religion he narrowly defines as "the recognition of all duties as divine commands" (*Rel.* p.142]; but the reverse claim, that divine commands might positively enjoin the "teleological suspension" ⁽¹⁴⁾ of ethical duty is utterly incompatible with our status as rational believers. Such direct divine intervention as sometimes is proclaimed by "historical and visionary religions" necessarily has a contingent historical aspect, and so can never be apodictically certain. Thus, Abraham could not know with certainty that it was indeed God's voice which ordered him to "slaughter his own son like

a sheep" [Rel. p.175]; his defiance of ethical law would therefore be "unconscientious", since he would risk thereby disobedience to a human duty "which is certain in and of itself." [Rel. p.175] For Kant, any insight finite man possesses into the will of God must be mediated by and compatible with ethical reason, or be dismissed as spurious.

63 Kierkegaard's rejection of "immanentist" thought, including Kant's transcendental idealism, is based on the view that such philosophies illegitimately assume an underlying prior unity between the finite and infinite, between man and the divine, which can somehow be expressed and comprehended by human thought. This philosophical immanentism he traces as far back as Socrates and Plato, for whom finite man stands in an essential relation to the Truth, needing only to be "reminded" by a teacher of his intrinsic oneness with the Absolute:

Can the truth be learned?...Socrates thinks through the difficulty by means of the principle that all learning and seeking are but recollecting. Thus the ignorant person merely needs to be reminded in order, by himself, to call to mind what he knows. The truth is not introduced to him but was in him....If this is the case with regard to learning the truth, then the fact that I have learned from Socrates or from Prodicus or from a maidservant can concern me only historically...Neither can the fact that the teaching of Socrates or Prodicus was this or that have anything but historical interest for me, because the truth in which I rest was in me and emerged from me. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Socrates represents for Kierkegaard an exemplary model of such a teacher, who serves as the occasion for reminding the learner of his own rational capacity for activating this implicit relation to eternal Truth. Kierkegaard's deep admiration for Socrates stems from his view that Socrates, unlike Plato and his idealist successors, modestly refused to step beyond the bounds of his own subjective existence to claim adequate knowledge of the infinite and eternal. From the Socratic standpoint, truth is subjectivity; Socratic faith consists in the confidence that authentic human thinking and acting, despite being embedded in finitude, nevertheless maintains an essential, if existentially unrealizable, intellectual relation to the infinite. Socratic ignorance is therefore the acknowledgment that although the eternal truth is not in itself a paradox, in relation to the finite human thinker it must inevitably appear as such.

64 In contrast to Socrates, Kierkegaard suggests, modern thought takes up Plato's metaphysical project of achieving full rational insight into the underlying unity of man and God. Its efforts culminate in Hegel's Absolute Idealism, wherein it is announced that man has "gone beyond" the need for mere Socratic faith now that speculative reason has at last comprehended the immanent oneness of the divine and human. Although Kant clearly belongs in this modern tradition, his modest disclaimers of knowledge of the absolute, together with his insistence that only rational belief in the divine-human relation is compatible with our temporal status, point toward a more Socratic vision of the status of finite subjectivity than is characteristic of later metaphysical systems.

65 As for Socrates, so for Kant authentic human thinking and acting remain always in a dualist, oppositional relation to the transcendent Absolute. Kant is Socratic too in his rational faith in the ultimate relation between the finite moral subject and the transcendent Moral Author of the world, and in his insistence that the truth of this relation lies beyond the capacity of mere temporal understanding to comprehend. Kierkegaard concurs in the Socratic/Kantian thesis that finite understanding cannot grasp the infinite. He reiterates Kant's sceptical claim that not even pure reason offers speculative insight into absolute reality; but he questions the legitimacy of the Socratic/Kantian rational faith which holds that the finite individual nevertheless may assume an intrinsic, albeit speculatively inaccessible bond with the eternal.

66 Kierkegaard's existentialist opposition to Kantian (Socratic) faith rests on the recognition of the contradiction into which Kant's dualist immanentism falls when it seeks to preserve the radical, self-grounding freedom of the moral self, while at the same time acknowledging the rational incapacity of the finite self to overcome its own freely chosen lapse into radical evil. In *Religion*, Kant is driven to postulate the *parergon* of divine grace, while yet accepting that such external assistance is utterly incompatible with human autonomy and beyond the power of finite thought, whether theoretical or practical, to understand. Kant's astonishing recourse to supernatural intervention seems to entail either that the concept of divine grace is being employed merely as a stimulus to sustain the autonomous agent's continued efforts at self-regeneration, but that no genuinely transcendent reality is being posited to limit or supplement the self-grounding freedom of the subject; or that he is genuinely acknowledging the need for a transcendent support for human freedom, which clearly contradicts his efforts throughout the *Religion* to employ only a demythologized version of Christian doctrine, symbolizing immanent aspects of human ethical rationality, as a vehicle of moral transformation.

67 Kant is well aware that his arguments bring us to the borders of reason itself, since he introduces the *parergon* of grace not as a postulate of practical reason, but simply as a "holy mystery", privately "knowable" only by each individual in the depths of his moral subjectivity. It is inconceivable to reason, says Kant, how it is possible for any being, even the divine being, to atone vicariously for the infinite guilt incurred by another -- yet as finite subjects steeped in radical evil, we "have to assume it", even though "for ratiocination it is an unfathomable mystery". [Rel.134]

68 That Kant's moral philosophy is vulnerable to internal contradiction, and points beyond reason toward religious mystery as a possible resolution to that contradiction, signifies to Kierkegaard the impotence of both philosophical thought and moral activity to unify those poles of phenomenal and noumenal, finite and infinite, temporal and eternal which constitute the very foundations of Kant's vision of reality. Kierkegaard's complaint against Kant is not, however, that he retains these problematically opposed polarities, but rather that he, as do earlier immanentist thinkers, erroneously assumes that human reason, theoretical or practical, must somehow be able to bridge the gulf separating them. Kierkegaard's response to the Kantian impasse, his solution to the problem of how the finite subject may achieve moral regeneration, will not involve a negation of Kantian dualisms, therefore, but rather the restoration of faith in the historical core of the Christian religion as the unique means for transcending the dualist impasse. He will maintain that only through passionate faith -- that "crucifixion of the understanding"⁽¹⁶⁾ suffered by the despairing ethical individual who embraces Christianity's paradoxical "existence communication" and the "breach with immanence" it portends -- can the aporia generated by Kant's immanentism be resolved.

ii) Paradoxical Faith: Faith by Virtue of the Absurd

69 On Kierkegaard's view genuine faith directs the individual beyond Kant's ethical universalism first to a full acknowledgment of the absolute otherness of the human to the divine, and thence to their paradoxical unification. This is vividly conveyed in the voice of Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling* (hereafter cited as *FT*). The work makes no explicit mention of Christian faith, but concerns itself with the question of why the Jewish patriarch Abraham, who on God's command was prepared to sacrifice (kill) his only son Isaac, is considered the "father of faith" within the Judeo-Christian tradition. De Silentio stresses that from the standpoint of morality Abraham's action is entirely incomprehensible; indeed his obedience to God's will, in defiance of the universal moral law enjoining respect for life and love for family, appears both sinful and

criminal. How then can this utterly egregious commitment to a seemingly idiosyncratic interpretation of religious obligation be construed as a model for faith?

70 Certainly from the Kantian perspective, Abrahamic faith exemplifies the danger of confusing the universal requirements of an autonomous ethic with the dictates of a heteronomous particular, a historically and existentially conditioned religious conscience. Yet for de Silentio Abraham's predicament, as he faces the contradiction between the law of man and the command of God, offers the purest possible distillation of the tension between an idealist (Kantian) "reduction" of faith to a mere epiphenomenon of the ethical, and faith conceived as a paradoxical, anguished response to the self-generated impasse of ethical understanding:

The ethical is the universal and as such it is also the divine. Thus it is proper to say that every duty is a duty to God, but if no more can be said than this, then it is also said that I have no duty to God. The duty becomes duty by being traced back to God, but in the duty itself I do not enter into relation to God ... If in this connection I then say that it is my duty to love God, I am actually pronouncing only a tautology, inasmuch as 'God' in a totally abstract sense is here understood as the divine -- that is, the universal, that is duty. The whole existence of the human race rounds itself off as a perfect, self-contained sphere, and then the ethical is that which limits and fills at one and the same time. God comes to be an invisible vanishing point, an impotent thought; his power is only in the ethical, which fills all existence.[FT 68]

Here de Silentio formulates and then questions the Kantian claim that religion is nothing but the recognition of all duties as divine commands. He maintains that this rational mediation of the ethical and the religious effectively absolutizes finite ethical existence and reduces divine transcendence to a function of human rational willing, stripping God of any independent reality or concrete role in human existence, except as an instrument of ethical self-realization. By contrast, Abraham's anguished situation embodies a direct, radically individuating relation to God, such that reliance upon his own ethical judgment now becomes for him a temptation, or "spiritual trial":

The paradox of faith then is this: that the single individual is higher than the universal, that the single individual ... determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal. In this connection, to say that it is a duty to love God means something different from the above, for if this duty is absolute, then the ethical is reduced to the relative. From this it does not follow that the ethical should be invalidated; rather the ethical receives a completely different expression, a paradoxical expression... [FT 70]

71 Abraham's radical intention isolates him from his society and its norms in a way comparable to no mere "tragic hero" confronted with equally compelling ethical alternatives. His choice is between rational action in accordance with universal ethical values, a choice expressible therefore in conceptual language and justifiable before others, and an unspeakable adherence to the incomprehensible will of God, conceived as the "absolutely Other". His dilemma is profound, since this "knight of faith" remains fully alive to the truth of the ethical, while yet commanded to exclude himself *qua* particular individual from obligation to its universal requirements. Ethical existence calls upon each individual to subordinate his particularity and immediate desires to the mediation of universal moral law; yet Abraham freely casts aside the security of the universal in favour of a renewed individualism, a move which to the hard-won ethical consciousness surely must appear as nothing but sinful. The terrifying aspect of Abrahamic faith is that it stands outside rational justification, since precisely those universal ethical standards by which all human action is evaluated have been "teleologically suspended". Abraham embodies a higher, yet for that reason incomprehensible particularity; in his anguished inwardness he stands in an "absolute relation to the Absolute".

72 Despite the clear opposition between their assessments of Abrahamic faith, it is evident that for both Kant and Kierkegaard the standpoint of religious belief presupposes and completes the ethical. For Kant, faith emerges as the guarantor of the rational coherence of ethical life in the face of its apparent internal contradictions; for Kierkegaard, faith arises as a paradoxical possibility for the individual who affirms the ethical but for whom the limits of ethical universalism have become manifest. But Kierkegaard is not content with Kant's appropriation of religious categories as a means of ethical self-completion; he insists that Kant's own ethical enquiry into radical evil points beyond a "perfect, self-contained sphere" [FT 68] within which God functions as "an invisible vanishing point" (ibid.), and that the Abrahamic model of faith more truly delineates how faith enters only when the impossibility of rational mediation has been fully acknowledged.

73 Kierkegaard presses beyond the borders of Kantian moral faith by means of a concept apparently quite foreign to Kant's analysis. Unlike the Kantian rational believer, Abraham believes and acts, de Silentio says, "by virtue of the absurd". [FT 56] His faith involves a "double movement" -- the first being the "movement of infinity", whereby he "gives up himself for the universal". (FT. 76) Here Abraham, resigning himself to God's inscrutable will, goes no further than Socrates, (or Kant) whose "ignorance" expresses a resigned acquiescence in the infinite wisdom and power of the divine, an abandonment of the claims of mere finitude in light of the superior claims of the infinite. The "knight of infinite resignation" is fully cognizant of the unbridgeable gulf between his finite conditionedness and the Absolute. His virtue consists in stoically accepting that radical divide and the suffering within existence it entails; his dignity as a finite individual consists in expressing in all his actions a rational (Socratic/Kantian) confidence in himself in his "eternal validity" as an ethico-religious being. [FT 46] He acts conscientiously and suffers the trials of existence patiently, humbly affirming the limits of his own finite powers of understanding, and trusting in the will and wisdom of God. In such infinite resignation there is a kind of peace and security for the moral individual, even when adherence to the divine will requires considerable personal renunciation:

...for one who has resigned infinitely is sufficient to oneself...In infinite resignation there is peace and rest; every person who wills it ...can discipline himself to make this movement, which in its pain reconciles one to existence." [FT 44-45]

74 But the dignity conferred through infinite resignation is not to be confused with faith. Abraham would not be remembered as the father of faith if, when commanded to sacrifice Isaac, he had simply acknowledged the limits of his finite understanding and bowed to the inscrutable divine will. "It takes strength and energy and spiritual freedom to make the infinite movement of resignation" [FT 47], but it requires no break with immanence, no denial of the autonomy of one's own rational judgment. The Socratic philosopher confronting the vicissitudes of temporal becoming and the Kantian moralist faced with the challenge of radical evil are alike in maintaining the autonomy of ethical selfhood, and in preserving rational confidence in the intrinsic relation of man and God.

75 For Kierkegaard, the clarity of vision and ethical autonomy evinced by the infinitely resigned individual are not faith, but necessary conditions of the possibility of genuine faith, faith "by virtue of the absurd". The movement to faith presupposes a deep rational certainty that the synthesis sought by the ethical self is a genuine logical and existential impossibility. It requires that the individual resign himself to this impossibility and refuse to be seduced by a naive, romantic/aesthetic hope that the difficulty is not as great as it seems. Only then, having fully comprehended the limits set by finitude, and accepted the painful consolations of infinite resignation, is the individual prepared to embrace the paradox of faith:

Faith is preceded by a movement of infinity; only then does faith commence ... only when the individual has emptied himself in the infinite, only then has the point been reached where faith can break through." [FT 69]

The "knight of faith" stands beyond rational comprehension, for in his act of faith, "by virtue of the absurd" he recovers that finite content previously resigned in the interest of affirming his "eternal consciousness". De Silentio is careful to distinguish the absurd from those deviations from the norm which still lie within the domain of the understanding. The absurd is not to be identified with the unexpected, the improbable or the unforeseen; from the standpoint of human reason, the knight is certain of the absolute impossibility, the absurdity of any hope for salvation. Yet, embracing this impossibility, making the move of infinite resignation, in the very same moment Abraham believes that Isaac, who God has promised will be the father of a nation, will be restored to him "by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible". [FT 46]

76 Faith by virtue of the absurd is paradoxical because it defies all mediation. It brings into direct conjunction the self-divided, finite inwardness of the infinitely resigned existing individual and the absolute reality of the infinite, and proclaims that in a passionate moment of faith, the isolated individual, by virtue of belief in the absurd, stands higher than the ethical universal, stands in immediate unity with the divine. Through careful partitioning of the spheres of finite, empirical individuality and noumenal moral selfhood, Kant had sought to avoid extreme confrontation between these opposing poles of human self-experience. Kierkegaard, reacting against the logic of despair he perceives as implicit in this immanentist dualism, here refuses to admit any mediating principle (church, society, universal ethical reason) which could bridge the abyss separating these dualities. He rejects the Kantian effort to preserve rational continuity between ethical and religious categories because he sees in Kant's category of rational belief a fatal blurring of the distinction between finite, ethical inwardness and the Absolute Otherness of God. He insists that only an absolute distinction with respect to these two poles preserves both human autonomy and divine transcendence, so that while human finite temporality is not reduced to a vanishing aspect of the infinite, (as in infinite resignation) neither is divine transcendence recast as a mere function of immanent humanist ideals (as in philosophical idealism).

77 Kierkegaard's position is thus intransigently dualist. He posits the ontological distinction of man and God in uncompromising terms, and finds no comfort in the Socratic-Kantian confidence in their inner *a priori* connection. For Kant faith arises in the course of the ethical subject's reflective exploration of himself in his relation to the "holy will", the divine universal immanent in all rational consciousness. As for Socrates, so for Kant divine truth is thus not really outside the moral individual, but is grasped ever more adequately as the subject gains insight into his own ethically autonomous being. Human ignorance regarding the ground of ethical existence is for Kant not an ultimate state of being, but a condition to be remedied through ever-advancing practical understanding of the logic of ethical agency.

78 Kierkegaard rejects this idealist project, maintaining that the irreducible truth of subjectivity is incompatible even with a rational mediation of the Kantian type. The category of paradox is designed to announce, in the firmest possible terms, that any point of coincidence between man's natural, temporal conditionedness and the Absolute cannot be understood, but only asserts itself by virtue of the absurd. Thus the knight of faith, of whom Abraham is paradigmatic, experiences this paradoxical coincidence, but is unable to articulate his faith, or to justify actions taken in its name. [FT. 114-15] His action is grounded in a profound, supra-rational trust in divine integrity, a trust concealed in the inchoate depths of an isolated inwardness responsive and responsible only to the absolute authority and subjectivity of the hidden God. In the end, De Silentio stands in awe before "... the prodigious paradox of faith, a paradox that makes a murder

into a holy, God-pleasing act, a paradox that gives Isaac back to Abraham again, which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops." [FT. 53]

79 In several journal entries Kierkegaard draws a clear distinction between the paradoxical faith *by virtue of the absurd* described by de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and faith *in the Absurd*, or in the Absolute Paradox, as portrayed by Johannes Climacus, pseudonymous author of a later work, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846). Abraham's "belief by virtue of the absurd", that with God all things are possible, he characterizes as "the formal definition of faith"⁽¹⁷⁾ or again as a "purely personal definition of existential faith." [JP #11] The account presupposes an absolute difference between man and God which is both affirmed and paradoxically annulled in the act of faith. Such existential faith arises only on the far side of the ethical understanding's infinitely resigned posture toward finitude and its limitations.

80 Although the concept of the absurd, or the paradox, cannot be understood, it does not follow however that it is simply nonsense. Kierkegaard calls the absurd a "negatively determined concept" which, generated by the understanding itself, constitutes a "negative criterion of that which is higher than human understanding and knowledge". [JP #11] Its function may thus be compared to the concepts of Kant's dialectic, which clarify the limits of knowledge although they cannot carry thought beyond those boundaries. In Kant the effect of the dialectic is to reinforce transcendental dualism, and consequently the knower's reliance upon the categories of understanding and the finite, phenomenal knowledge they make possible. For Kierkegaard, the concept of the absurd rather thrusts the finite subject forward, beyond the limits of ethical self-understanding toward paradoxical faith:

When, for example, I believe this or that because everything is possible for God, where then is the absurd? The absurd is the negative determinant which assures, for example, that I have not overlooked one or another possibility which still lies within the human arena. The absurd is the expression of despair: that humanly it is not possible -- but despair is the negative sign of faith".[JP #9]

81 Kant's concept of 'holy mystery', invoked when confronting the inadequacy of practical reason to resolve the antinomous conflict between the concepts of ethical autonomy and divine grace, is to some degree analogous to the Kierkegaardian category of the absurd, insofar as the absurd is a "purely personal definition of existential faith". [JP #11] For Kant it is inconceivable to reason, either theoretical or practical, how God could assist the finite sinner in overcoming radical evil while at the same time respecting the agent's self-originative ethical autonomy. Yet Kant counsels the subject, enmeshed in the conflict between temporal guilt and noumenal freedom, not to succumb to passivity or moral despair, since he may hope for divine assistance, even though he can in no way understand the possibility of this holy mystery. At this stage in the development of ethical consciousness, the Kantian subject seems impelled beyond purely immanent, rational faith in God as moral manager of the ethical order, toward trust in a radically transcendent God "for whom all things are possible". The mystery of divine grace is "knowable", Kant says, but only by the individual moral subject who "will have to search for it ...in the inner, subjective part of our moral disposition"; this knowledge however is "incapable of being communicated publically" [Rel. 129]. In this respect, the Kantian moral subject appears as the forerunner of Kierkegaard's knight of faith, Abraham who stands outside the universal and is hence unable publically to communicate his inner confidence in divine consistency, power and goodness.

82 The Kantian moral individual who believes in the mystery of grace nevertheless remains a knower, albeit in a highly attenuated and obscure sense. He continues to believe that between finite man and the eternal there is an intrinsic bond, which the moral agent's hopeful persistence in ethical striving presupposes and expresses. For

Kierkegaard, however, the category of faith transcends any form of knowledge; its opposite is not doubt, which is still an epistemological stance, but despair. Only the subject who has experienced the "crucifixion of the understanding"[CUP, 500], and has acknowledged that as a sinner he must abandon all hope of rational reconciliation with the Absolute, is receptive to the fulness of faith.

iii) The Absolute Paradox: Faith in the Absurd

83 Beyond the immanent, philosophically comprehensible stance which Johannes Climacus, pseudonymous author of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* entitles "Religion A", lies therefore Religion B, the "paradoxical religiousness" which "breaks with immanence and makes the fact of existing the absolute contradiction, not within immanence, but against immanence" [CUP 507] From the standpoint of Religion B -- or Christianity -- there is no longer presupposed, says Climacus, any fundamental kinship between the temporal and the eternal. Yet the path to Religion B leads inevitably through Religion A, "which is not speculative philosophy, but yet is speculative." [CUP, 505] In order to be susceptible to the Christian "existence-communication" the individual must undergo a dialectic of inward transformation whereby he encounters the limits of immanence, the limits of the claim that between temporal man and the eternal God there obtains a relation of inner connectedness. This mode of religious consciousness is compatible with paganism, and with modern philosophical understanding, since "it has only human nature in general as its assumption" [CUP 496]. The dialectic of Religion A therefore comprises an ever-deepening awareness of what it means to exist as a finite subject in relation to the eternal. The individual discovers in time that he "must assume that he is eternal", [CUP 508] yet ultimately recognizes that this necessary relation to the eternal must always remain unrealized in time.

84 Kant's autonomous moral agent, whose faith emerges in response to deepening tensions between his noumenal freedom and his finite, phenomenal character and conditions, clearly belongs within the sphere of philosophical religion, or Religion A. The faith of Religion A has no essential relation to any particular historical starting-point. The fact of individual existence is rather a "a moment within my eternal consciousness ... and is thus a lowlier thing which prevents me from being the infinitely higher thing I am." [CUP 508] Kant's unhappy, self-divided moral believer thus finds support for his ethical striving through faith in the paradigmatic figure of Christ, whose pure exemplification of the universal human ideal of goodness serves as an occasion, a stimulus to the believer's efforts at retrieval of his own dormant "eternal consciousness". The infinitely guilty ethical subject views Christ as a model of healing atonement. Yet the resources of Kantian philosophy are not such, as we have seen, to explain *how* it is possible for the sinful moral agent freely to accomplish this atonement and self-transformation in his own life. From the Kierkegaardian perspective Kantian faith is a response within immanence of the repentant ethical subject burdened with infinite, unassuageable guilt. Such a faith brings into clear focus the limit of what is possible for a humanist self-understanding:

In the totality of guilt-consciousness, existence asserts itself as strongly as it can within immanence In guilt-consciousness the identity of the subject with himself is preserved, and guilt-consciousness is an alteration of the subject within the subject himself ... [therefore] even the decisive definition of guilt-consciousness is within the sphere of immanence after all." [CUP 505]

85 Neither the historical reality of Christ, nor the objective validity of Christianity's doctrinal claims, is a relevant feature of this Kantian faith. Kant's infinitely guilty moral believer cannot acknowledge Christ himself as the external source of atonement, without

calling into question his own understanding of himself as spontaneous freedom. Recognizing that there can be no final rational mediation, he is an unhappy consciousness, forever caught up in the futile oscillation between the demand for autonomy and the longing for mysterious union with an infinite reality, a resolution which however must inevitably elude him. The turn to Religion B, or authentic Christianity, constitutes an acknowledgment for Kierkegaard that the dialectic of subjective inwardness characteristic of Religion A has reached its most extreme point of development, but cannot accomplish what is required for the individual's moral self-realization.

86 The premise whose acceptance grounds the possibility of the move beyond immanence to paradoxical Christian faith is, Kierkegaard claims, that "subjectivity is untruth" [CUP 185]: i.e., that the finite subject, far from being, as Kant would insist, the autonomous source of the moral law who stands in a necessary relation to the eternal truth, must recognize that he is in fact a sinner, a radically temporal being for whom Socratic escape "back into the eternal" by way of either speculative thought or moral virtue is forever barred. The epistemological distinction between noumenal and phenomenal reality, between man and God, fundamental to Kantian moral theology, here is recast as an absolute ontological difference. The finite moral subject is marooned in time; salvation must therefore be possible in time, or not at all.

87 Only at this juncture, Kierkegaard maintains, does the Absolute Paradox at the core of Christianity present itself as the sole available option for the sinful individual. As Kant has argued, for one who has freely chosen radical evil moral regeneration seems beyond reach. On the one hand, the noumenally free subject must retain his moral autonomy and self-responsibility; on the other, qua finite, he is utterly unable to atone for the infinite guilt incurred by his lapse into sin. Kant acknowledges the value of the Christian concept of vicarious atonement through a divine Saviour, but struggles unsuccessfully to translate the Christian doctrine into a principle compatible with a purely humanist ethic. His ultimate recourse to the notion of 'holy mystery' as a source of moral sustenance merely underlines the failure of transcendental dualism to resolve the impasse it has created. Kierkegaard appropriates Kant's account of the dilemma faced by the sinful moral subject, but proposes as its solution faith in the redemptive power of Christ, the God-man whose paradoxical historical actuality alone makes available to temporal sinners the benefit of infinite divine grace, or vicarious atonement.

88 Christian faith for Kierkegaard is thus not merely the formal, existential/Socratic faith that "with God all things are possible" -- i.e., faith *by virtue of* the absurd. It postulates a complete "breach with immanence", a denial of the power of the finite moral subject to effect self-regeneration, and an insistence on the salvific power of faith in the Absolute Paradox, *in* the absurd:

What now is the absurd? The absurd is -- that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, precisely like any other individual human being, quite indistinguishable from other individuals." [CUP 188]

In contradistinction to the Kantian project of interpreting the story of Christ's life and death as a moral archetype accessible to all rational beings, an event whose historical facticity is a matter of indifference, Kierkegaard insists that it is precisely this tendency to intellectualize Christian truth, to drain it of its sheer historical immediacy, or facticity, which must be set aside as inauthentic:

The object of faith is not a doctrine ... the object of faith is not a teacher with a doctrine ... the object of faith is the reality of the teacher, that the teacher really exists ... the

object of faith is hence the reality of the God-man in the sense of his existence ... God's reality in existence as a particular individual ..." [CUP 290]

Nothing could be plainer than that for Kierkegaard the absurd *fact* of God's being in the world constitutes the core of Christian faith. Here he seems to be at the furthest remove possible from Kant, for whom the purported "fact" of the Incarnation, in common with every other historical datum, cannot assume decisive moral significance.

89 But Christ's reality, as God existing in time, is for Kierkegaard essential to the finite subject's hope for moral regeneration. His actuality as teacher -- and not any doctrine concerning the intellectual or moral substance of his message -- is the saving content of Christian faith. The individual who believes in the absurd trusts, paradoxically, that despite his own hard-won understanding of himself as a morally autonomous agent responsible for his own salvation, this individual teacher is the sole possible vehicle of his salvation, uniquely capable of atonement for the infinite burden of sinfulness and guilt accruing to all finite subjects. The Christian existence-communication thus entails a significant risk for the sinful individual, since it invites him to affirm, against all ethical self-understanding of the Socratic-Kantian type, that moral salvation is possible only through the agency of Another. Furthermore, this Other is not the mysterious, transcendent God, for whom "all things are possible", but an existing, historically-conditioned individual who nevertheless claims to be divine.

90 Kierkegaard seems here to offer a robust defence of orthodox Christian faith, designed to counter the reduction of the Christ story to a mere epiphenomenon of rational self-understanding. Although the real synthesis of eternity and temporality in one individual contradicts Kant's distinction between phenomenal and noumenal spheres, the appropriation of this Absolute Paradox by the existing subject is, Kierkegaard maintains, the sole path beyond the Kantian moral aporia. Kant's God, conceived as moral Author of the world, and his conception of Christ as moral paradigm, are for Kierkegaard compatible with the religion of immanence, Religion A. This means that they do not move beyond an explication of the finite subject's immanent relationship with the eternal, a relationship which the deepening "dialectic of inward transformation" [CUP 494] characteristic of Religion A struggles to specify ever more precisely. But Christian faith is not satisfied simply to acquiesce in the humanist, immanentist vision of the moral individual as the final ground and terminus of religious ideals and concepts. For Christianity, the "untruth of subjectivity" (the finite individual as sinner) stands in paradoxical conjunction with the Absolute Paradox of the God-man, affirmed as an external source of justification and redemption. It is the eternal itself, and not an immanent *relationship* to the eternal, which preoccupies the authentic Christian believer: "Christianity is not content to be an evolution within the total definition of human nature." [CUP 496]

iv) The Limits of Kierkegaard's Appeal to Religious Positivity

91 Yet I would suggest that this Kierkegaardian focus on the historical actuality of Christ -- his stress on the importance of the divine itself, rather than on a mere relationship to the divine -- constitutes neither an unequivocal break with Kantian humanist ideals, nor a clear defence of orthodox Christianity, but a transposition of central Kantian principles into an existential idiom. Kierkegaard's Christology has little in common with early opponents of Enlightenment, who countered the rationalist critique of revealed religion with efforts to establish the historico-empirical actuality of Christian events. Indeed he is adamant that genuine Christian faith is inaccessible to those whose interest and focus is on objective truth, and insists that only from within the passionately

interested standpoint of ethico-religious consciousness does the absurd fact of Christ's existence emerge as a meaningful possibility for the despairing moral individual. He criticizes historical investigators and speculative philosophers alike for seeking knowledge of the Christian Paradox, when by their very nature faith and its counterpart, the Absolute Paradox, repel all possible rational comprehension. Kierkegaard, like Kant, views faith as a category quite distinct from empirical and theoretical knowledge; but unlike Kant, for whom the claims of Christian faith retain a tenuous link with pure practical reason, he places faith beyond the bounds of thought itself, since the reality affirmed by faith repels all possible modes of rational comprehension. "That which in accordance with its nature is eternal comes into existence in time, is born, grows up and dies -- this is a breach with all thinking." [CUP 513]

92 Kierkegaard dismisses philosophical efforts to "explain the Paradox away" by conceiving of the Incarnation as an "eternal historical fact". Speculative thought cannot approach the paradoxical reality of the God-man, since it lacks the prerequisite standpoint of existential inwardness. The speculative thinker illegitimately conflates the ontologically distinct spheres of the eternal and historical when he argues that the eternal-historical fact of Christ's existence can best be appreciated as a myth embodying eternal truths.

93 Religion A does not attempt in this fashion to transform the paradox into a thought-content; but since its point of departure is not historical, there again the Christian message cannot have a decisive relation to the despairing temporal believer. From the perspective of Religion A, no particular moment is decisive for the recollection within time of one's eternal consciousness, and all so called religious revelation must be understood simply as pedagogically helpful, illustrative packaging for non-temporal truths.

94 Finally, it is impossible to construe the Incarnation simply as another historical datum, whose reality can ideally be authenticated through diligent scholarly research, since even "... conceding that the historical account of Christianity is true -- though all the historians in the world were to unite in investigating for the sake of attaining certainty -- it would be impossible nevertheless to attain more than an approximation." [CUP 511] All historical investigation, Kierkegaard argues, yields at best approximation-knowledge, since by its very nature it deals with what is past, what therefore "has the ideality of recollection " about it. [CUP 509]. Thus the temporal knower is never in an immediate relation with historical data -- indeed is not even in immediate relation with his own objective being in the empirical world -- and so can never be apodictically certain of the truth or significance of any phenomenal content. [CUP 509] Not even a historical contemporary of Christ, an eye-witness to the events of his life, could therefore claim immediate, hence genuine, insight into the significance of that life, nor into the truth of Christ's claim to divinity.

95 In light of this clear insistence upon faith's separation from all modes of theoretical knowing -- speculative, natural religious, historical -- and upon the central role of subjective inwardness in matters of religious belief, Kierkegaard seems thoroughly Kantian in his approach. Yet he opposes Kant's effort to draw the rational, universally valid core of Christian religion from its historical shell and into immanent relation with moral self-consciousness, stressing instead the irreducible positivity at the heart of the Christian faith. Despite his Kantian determination to defend faith from attack by objectivist critics, Kierkegaard maintains that the unique content of that faith is neither a universal thought-content, nor a simple historical datum, but an absolute fact which offers an existential solution to dilemmas raised but not resolved by Kantian immanentist ethics. It therefore seems vital to Kierkegaard's project that a singular, historical revelation be retained as the focus of Christian faith, and that he preserve that positive content from appropriation by either speculative philosophy or objective scholarship.

96 Redemption, the creation of a new man, cannot be comprehended through reflective mediation, whether historical or speculative, but occurs, he maintains, in a unique temporal Moment in which the isolated individual freely accomplishes "contemporaneity" with the paradoxical God-in-time. For this reason, Kierkegaard describes Christianity as a "discriminative, selective and polemical" religion [CUP 517], since the salvation of each particular individual is contingent upon his unique relation with Christ's temporal reality. Both the fact of Christ's existence, and the believer's temporal relation to it, are reciprocally paradoxical because in Christ "the fact of existing [is] the absolute contradiction, not within immanence, but against immanence. There is no longer any immanent fundamental kinship between the temporal and the eternal, because the eternal itself has entered time and would constitute there the kinship." [CUP 508]

97 For Kierkegaard then, in contrast to Kant, religious positivity seems crucial: although religious faith represents the apotheosis of subjective inwardness and passion, the *essential* stimulus to the achievement of ethico-religious selfhood lies utterly outside the finite subject, in the historical reality of another, who moreover claims to be the God-in-time:

The contradiction first emerges in the fact that the subject in the extremity of such subjective passion (in the concern for an eternal happiness) has to base this upon an historical knowledge which at its maximum remains an approximation" [CUP 510]

The truth of Christ's historical existence is not reducible to a necessary, or paradigmatic moral proposition. It is a contingent event which defies all rational comprehension, but which nevertheless invites appropriation as the paradoxical source of moral regeneration. Whereas for Kant any appeal to religious positivity is heteronomous and so a scandal to ethical selfhood, for Kierkegaard it is precisely the unique historical content of Christianity which enables the morally autonomous but temporally bound individual to achieve absolute self-validation through the paradoxical leap of faith.

98 But precisely at this point where Kierkegaard's existential account of Christian faith seems at its greatest remove from Kant's a-historical religious immanentism, one discerns the limits of his interpretation of the Incarnation as paradoxical externality. Kierkegaard has argued that faith is distinguished from all forms of knowledge, including objective historical knowing. He describes ordinary historical truth as necessarily approximative, because no temporal subject has anything but indirect access to the past. Thus, even eyewitnesses to a temporal event are in no position to pronounce definitively on its meaning or truth-content, since even they must add, to the immediate sensing and cognition of the event, an interpretative appropriation of its "coming to be". The mode of consciousness which, Kierkegaard says, is "the organ for the historical" [PF 81] is therefore belief, which as the opposite of doubt is an "act of freedom, an expression of will" [PF 83] whereby the objective uncertainty attaching to all historical enquiry is halted by a resolute choice.

99 This category of belief necessarily mediates between the historical investigator and the event : "The conclusion of belief is no conclusion but a resolution and thus doubt is excluded." [PF 84] In a most general sense, then, Kierkegaard holds that we are cut off from genuine knowledge of *any* historical actuality, since finite, temporal coming to be is necessarily mediated by the subjective will of the aspiring knower. Kierkegaard explicitly links this notion of belief in historical actualities with the term faith, distinguishing however between two modes of belief/faith:

Faith is first taken in its direct and ordinary meaning [belief] as the relationship to the historical; but secondly, faith must be taken in the wholly eminent sense, such that this word can appear but once, that is, many times but in only one relationship" [PF 87]

Faith in the eminent sense is thus a sub-species of ordinary faith in historical events. It is therefore a category whose essential structure is resolute belief in actualities of temporal experience, rather than intellectual assent to eternal truths of reason.

100 The relevance of this analysis of faith to his interpretation of the Christian Incarnation as an historical actuality is plain. For if no historical event acquires genuine significance for an individual except through belief, or a resolute act of will, then how much more strongly must this be the case when the historical fact in question is the "absolute fact" of the God-in-time? If even an eyewitness cannot truly know contemporaneous historical events, but must subjectively appropriate and interpret for himself their always vanishing immediacy, then *a fortiori* neither is the eyewitness to the absurd Christian event in a privileged position to report on its veracity. The "immediacy of sense and cognition" characteristic of the experience of the eyewitness does not provide for him a superior epistemological vantage point, since the "uncertainty of coming into existence" [PF 85] infects his standpoint as surely as it does the efforts of latecomers who rely on the contemporary's reports for their second-hand access to the event.

101 Thus when Kierkegaard refers to all Christian believers as equally contemporaneous with Christ, he means by this that whether one is a historical eyewitness or a member of modern Danish society, the challenge is the same for an existing subject who would affirm the truth of the Incarnation. In fact, Kierkegaard speaks of the historically contemporaneous believer as being at somewhat of a disadvantage, since he can be distracted from the absolute facticity of the event by a preoccupation with its historical facticity in the ordinary sense, and so fail to realize that genuine contemporaneity has nothing to do with a relative, privileged access to the concrete details of the God's existence in time. [PF. 66-71] For "faith in the eminent sense" to be realized, the individual, whether a historical contemporary or a disciple at a chronological remove, must *subjectively appropriate the central message* of the Teacher, Christ, who unlike the Socratic teacher is not a "midwife" helping the believer to awaken his own dormant self-knowledge, but the paradoxically concrete unity of individuality and eternity, who offers vicarious atonement to the sinful moral subject.

102 Yet what now seems crucial to this enterprise is the temporal facticity and subjective activity of each aspirant to faith, rather than the historical content of that faith. The "reality" of Christ, Kierkegaard holds, must be capable of becoming contemporaneous with all existential believers regardless of their historical situations. This appears to parallel Kant's claim that the Christian message is essentially a timeless truth, whose particular historical facticity is irrelevant.

103 Yet Kierkegaard maintains that while the Incarnation is not a mere relative historical fact, since it is uniquely open to contemporaneity with any individual, neither is it the idealist philosopher's "eternal fact", to which historical actuality is inessential. The dimension of historical facticity *must* not be lost, since this would be to slip back into immanence and its internal contradictions:

b) If that fact is an eternal fact, then every age is equally close to it -- but please note, not in faith, for faith and the historical are entirely commensurate, and thus it is only an accommodation to a less correct use of language for me to use the word 'fact' which is taken from the historical. c) If that fact is an absolute fact ... then it is a contradiction for time to be able to apportion the relations of people to it, for whatever can be apportioned essentially by time is *eo ipso* not the absolute ... *but the absolute fact is indeed also historical* [emphasis added]... The absolute fact is an historical fact and as such is the object of faith. The historical aspect must indeed be accentuated, but not in such a way that it becomes absolutely decisive for the individual... [PF 99-100]

For Kierkegaard the Incarnational event must be accessible to all, hence absolute; at the same it must be irreducibly temporal, and so only accessible through faith -- i.e., "faith in the eminent sense", a unique mode of consciousness radically to be distinguished from both pure speculative knowledge and ordinary historical belief. The object of Christian belief is contingently rooted in history, in having come to be; its historicity is essential to its meaning. Thus every time some believer at a historical distance makes this event the object of faith, he must "make it historical for himself, he repeats the dialectical qualifications of coming into existence." [PF 88] He does not then simply elicit the timeless truth of the doctrine from within its historical shell but appropriates an externally presented reality for himself, precisely qua historical.

104 There are therefore no contemporaries, in the sense of immediate eyewitnesses, to the Incarnational event. To see with the "eyes of faith" [PF 70] requires an act of subjective appropriation in which the believer reenacts and recreates the reality of the original event within his own life. Thus all believers are equally at a remove from the actuality of this event; the chronological contemporaries of Christ might even be said to be at a disadvantage, since they would first have to lay aside their immediate access to the historical reality -- their enthusiasm to "see with physical eyes and hear with mortal ears" [PF 106] -- in order to accomplish the mediation, or subjective appropriation, necessary for the true "autopsy of faith" [PF 70]

105 But if the act of faith demands that the believer distance himself from concern for the immediate historicity of the event, in order to *make the object of faith historical for himself*, as Kierkegaard insists, then what necessity remains that an original, historical referent for such reenactments should really have occurred? For Kierkegaard an absolute distinction between time and eternity, and their paradoxical conjunction in the actuality of the God-man, seems conceptually the sole solution to the problem of moral atonement raised by Kant's immanentist dualism. He wants to stress the unavoidable need for an historical dimension to faith, while insisting that the merely historical cannot be decisive for the individual -- i.e., that empirical research into the facticity, the details of Christ's life must not be allowed to substitute for the passionate act of appropriation through which the subject comes to believe in the authenticity of that life. Yet Kierkegaard's extreme emphasis upon the "how" of belief, upon the free activity of the subject who must existentially appropriate the Christian paradox if it is to become true for him, makes it unclear whether this paradox, paralleling Kant's immanentist usage of the concept of "holy mystery", functions as anything more than a provocative thought-content, a radical stimulus for encouraging and enabling the individual finally to achieve authentic inwardness, the absolutization of passionate, temporal subjectivity. On the other side, in arguing for the irrelevance of empirical access to the paradoxically historical moment, Kierkegaard seems in danger of reproducing, albeit in an existential idiom now, Kant's Enlightenment idealist vision of an essential, trans-temporal core at the heart of positive Christian revelation.

106 Kierkegaard would no doubt dismiss these suggestions as inimical to a genuine understanding of Christian faith. In opposition to Kantian humanism, he proposes to reclaim the central Christian message that salvation cannot be had except through the actual life and death of the God-man. Christ's historical appearance is significant not because it illustrates a timeless theologico-philosophical truth, but because it is itself constitutive of salvation. Yet in seeking to accommodate that orthodox declaration to the requirements of his radicalized existential dualisms of time/eternity and particular individual/Absolute God -- themselves posited to address the problems inherent in Kant's phenomena/noumena distinction -- Kierkegaard reduces what for traditional Christian thought is the profound mystery of Incarnation to nothing but an "absolute fact". He maintains that instead of a mere God-relationship, such as is possible within the subjective immanence of Kantian faith, Christianity offers access to God himself. Yet the existential appropriation of the concept of Incarnation -- its focus on the primacy of the individual and his act of faith, of trust in Christ's sheer absurd reality -- justifies the

complete negation of the rich speculative, historical and cultural elaboration of the Christian consciousness of the divine, such that Kierkegaard can confidently state:

Even if the contemporary generation had not left anything behind except these words, 'We have believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us and then died,' -- this is more than enough. The contemporary generation would have done what is needful, for this little announcement, this world-historical *note bene*, is enough to become an occasion for someone who comes later, and the most prolix report can never in all eternity become more for the person who comes later." [PF 104].

107 The chief lesson of Kantian transcendental dualism, for Kierkegaard, is that it reveals in the strongest possible terms the limits of reason's attempts, theoretical and practical, to comprehend the divine/human relationship. On the far side of Kantian reason, however, the disillusioned temporal subject is confronted with the possibility of an encounter with the transcendent divine itself, through its paradoxical conjunction with finite human reality. Kierkegaard's existential believer necessarily resists all efforts further to comprehend this paradox which makes possible his salvation, since his very authenticity -- his absolute being-for-self as free finite subjectivity -- precisely depends upon maintaining himself in paradoxical oneness with the radical otherness of the Absolute Paradox. Thus is the independent being of the God of Christianity reduced, Kierkegaard's intentions notwithstanding, to a mere epiphenomenon, a stimulus toward realizing the passionate inwardness of faith.

NOTES

1. Kierkegaard's familiarity with Hegel's writings was largely indirect, mediated through the work of a Danish disciple, Hans Lassen Martensen, whose theological writings attempted to resolve the current impasse between Christian orthodoxy and Enlightenment rationalism through an apparently Hegelian speculative mediation between these mutually contradictory poles. Yet Danish Hegelianism was by no means a mere application of Hegelian principles to local concerns, and studying Martensen's theology therefore offered no adequate substitute for familiarity with Hegel's own texts. Robert L. Horn, in his dissertation, "Positivity and Dialectic: A Study of the Theological Method of Hans Lassen Martensen" (Ph.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1969) argues strongly for the distinctness of Danish Hegelianism, as developed by Martensen.

2. Anthony Rudd , *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, Oxford, 1993. Rudd comments:

"It is quite frequently claimed that Kierkegaard's ethics is largely Kantian, but this seems to me about as radical an error as it is possible to make in the interpretation of Kierkegaard. Nowhere does he say anything about morality being a condition of rationally consistent action; his mockery of the 'pure subject' and his insistence on the need for passionate existential choice are diametrically opposed to the Kantian idea that morality can be proved to be a condition of action for any rational agent."(71)

Rudd reminds us that, far from seeing ethical choice in the Kantian manner as a subordination of individual interests to the requirements of universal law or consistency in action, Kierkegaard understands "the universal disciplines" of ethics and religious faith primarily as means to achieving the goal of individual self-realization (135). In light of

these existential preoccupations it would be perverse in Rudd's view to link Kierkegaard in any but the most superficial way to Kantian thought.

3. Ronald Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: the Hidden Debt*, Albany, New York, 1992.

4. Green, 175. Kant's chief deviation from Christian orthodoxy lies, for Green, in his insistence that man must be able to effect his own moral regeneration. Kant's Enlightenment principles cannot accommodate admission of the powerlessness of the moral individual before sin -- whereas Kierkegaard's orthodoxy lies in his assertion that the problem of sin constitutes an absolute barrier between man and God, such that no "immanent" solution to our moral failure is possible. I would argue that Kierkegaard's appeal to the historical Christ as mediator between sinful man and the divine is, however, no return to an orthodox Christology, since, like Kant, Kierkegaard ultimately accomplishes a subjective re-appropriation of the historical reality of the God-man, rather than a revival of the orthodox notion of the mystery of divine incarnation.

5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, London, 1990, B7. Hereafter CPR.

6. Immanuel Kant *Critique of Practical Reason* trans. L. Beck, New York, 1993, 31. Hereafter CPrR.

7. *Ibid* p. 150-51; while the ideas of reason are simply regulative for speculative thinking, when reason commands action they become objects of practical *interest*. The interest which motivates ethical action is in no sense merely natural, contingent or psychological, but is rather pure respect for the moral law as such. Kant speaks of interest as "the principle which contains the condition under which alone the power of the mind is put into practice" (CPrR 119). Free non-sensuous interest takes us beyond natural inclination, but also beyond the pursuit of mere theoretical knowledge as a worthy human goal. In this sense, Kant's notion of interest lays the foundation for Kierkegaard's concept of "essential knowledge" (see *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David Swenson, Princeton, 1971, 176-7, where he characterises the standpoint of the authentic individual as a "knowing which is also a doing", and which has as its sole proper content the subject's ethico-religious interest.)

8. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, trans. Allen Wood and Gertrude Clark, New York, 1978, 123.

9. *Ibid.*, 123. For Kierkegaard, as for Kant, it is precisely the lack of objective certainty regarding God's existence which fuels the movement toward faith; and as for Kant, Kierkegaard insists that we undermine the authentic worth of the finite subject if we aspire to replace the "grave strenuousness of faith" with objective or speculative knowledge of divine being. For Hegel, by contrast, the notion that man stands in a relation of essential otherness to God, and can have no knowledge of the divine as such, is incompatible with a genuine theism, or indeed with a genuine estimation of the dignity of finite subjectivity.

10. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore Greene & Hoyt H. Hudson, New York, 1960, 32; hereafter *Rel*.

11. This citation from Goethe appears in Emil Fackenheim's article "Kant and Radical Evil", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol.23 (1954), 340

12. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J.Paton, New York, 1964, 112. Henceforth *Groundwork*.

13. Elsewhere in *Religion* Kant opposes mysticism, and any other means of achieving private knowledge of God, as a form of fanaticism, utterly incompatible with true religion. See *Rel.* 111f, 162f.

14. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, ed. & trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, Princeton, N.J. , 1983, 54-67; hereafter, FT. Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes de Silentio, asks the question "Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical?" when he considers how faith can justifiably suspend the universal telos of ethical obligation in the interest of an absolute obligation to God. For Kant, clearly, the answer to this question is unequivocally negative.

15. Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, translated and edited by Howard Hong and Edna Hong, Princeton, N.J., 1985, 7-12; hereafter PF. For Kant the status of Christ would parallel that of Socrates, since Christ's moral teaching and death are precisely an "occasion" through which any rational subject can gain access to the rational moral faith which has always lain implicit in human hearts. Christ's actual existence is no more essential to the individual's discovery of this truth than is Socrates' teaching necessary for knowledge of the moral forms to be possible.

16. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, hereafter CUP.

17. Soren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, , eds. Edna Hong and Howard Hong, Bloomington and London, 1967, Vol 1, #12, 500.