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**Kant and Merit**

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**Introduction**

The traditional interpretation of Immanuel Kant’s philosophy presents it as antireligious. In the series, *Inquiring about God*, a volume is dedicated to Nicholas Wolterstorff. The editor Terence Cuneo includes several of Wolterstorff’s articles on the subject as the chapters in the book. Two of these articles center on Kant’s philosophy. They depend on the traditional interpretation which Wolterstorff writes that he is not sure is correct (Wolterstorff, 43). The first chapter on Kant is entitled, “Is it possible and desirable for theologians to recover from Kant?” The chapter argued that because of the influence of Kant, “we [modern theologians] are not to say

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about God what we want to say without first establishing that it is possible to say such things about God” (Wolterstorff, 37).

In chapter 3, the second chapter on Kant—“Conundrums in Kant’s rational religion,”—Wolterstorff focuses on Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Wolterstorff concludes his discussion in these words:

In short, when Kant’s discussion of the “antinomy” is scrutinized, it proves not to upset our interpretation but to confirm it. *God, in the Kantian system, wipes out the guilt of our wrongdoing if we present God with a good character; God is, in fact, morally required to do so.* We have seen that such wiping out, if it were possible, would, in its indiscriminateness, raise a serious issue of justice. Further, we have seen that the claim that God can alter our moral status conflicts with Kant’s repeated insistence that only we ourselves can do so. But in fact such wiping out is not possible. Forgiveness is not the declaration that the guilty are no longer guilty but the declaration that the guilty will no longer be treated as guilty. Forgiveness, in that sense, is eminently possible. When that occurs, morality is transcended. The forgiven have no moral claim on forgiveness; it comes to them as grace.

What Kant affirms is that only the worthy are saved – and that God, so as to bring it about that some are saved in spite of the wrongdoing of all, makes those of worthy character worthy in action as well. Kant affirms this without ever surrendering the affirmation that each can make only himself or herself worthy. What Christianity affirms is that the unworthy are saved – saved by the grace of divine forgiveness (Wolterstorff, 67).

The above quote makes it evident that Wolterstorff interprets Kant as holding the view that a person is saved by his own good works—moral worth.

Kant’s belief concerning how we are found worthy in the sight of God is the subject of this paper. Does Kant reject the Christian view that man is saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ? In this essay, I do not quibble with Wolterstorff’s understanding of the particulars of Kant’s philosophy. He is spot on when he explains that Kant argues that intuition and concepts are necessary to human understanding, that the understanding cannot go beyond the boundaries set by these, that space and time are categories of mind not of the world around us, that

we must show why we are justified in saying what we would say of God, and that our esteem of the moral law will determine our worth in the sight of God. Despite my admission that Wolterstorff is not wrong in attributing these to Kant, what I dispute in this paper is whether these express Kant's personal views<sup>2</sup> or the view of religion Kant attributes to the limits of the unaided human intellect. I intend to argue that that there is a sense in which Wolterstorff, in accepting the traditional interpretation, has fundamentally misunderstood Kant with respect to merit. I will first call attention to Kant's project and argue that the project itself has a long history in Christian intellectual tradition. I will then show that while Wolterstorff and some others accept this tradition they are not as consistent as Kant in applying it to human knowledge. Next, I will apply Kant's project to the problem of merit in Kant's religion of reason. Last, I will attempt to distinguish Kant's personal views from the views of his rational religion.

#### **A. Kant's Project**

The question as to whether Kant holds that a person is saved by his own personal worth in the sight of God or by grace cannot be answered without an understanding of the context of Kant's writing and his own project. In his preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason (CPR)* Kant wrote, "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith" (*CPR*, 117). Many quote the statement disapprovingly. This statement is not self-evidently ridiculous, as I will argue, in spite of the fact that Wolterstorff implies such when he quotes it without comments (Wolterstorff, 47). After

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<sup>2</sup> This may have been one of the things that Hume aroused within Kant. In discussing Hume and his critics, Kant argued that the critics misunderstood Hume and as a result responded to things that Hume never thought of doubting. For example, Hume argued that observation could not confirm our beliefs concerning cause and effect being in the world. A point Kant agreed with. He writes, "The question was not whether the concept of cause was right, useful, and even indispensable for our knowledge of nature, for this Hume had never doubted; but whether that concept could be thought by reason a priori, and consequently whether it possessed an inner truth, independent of experience, implying a wider application than merely to objects of experience. This was Hume's problem. It was a question concerning the *origin*, not concerning the indispensable *need* of the concept" (*Prolegomena*, 301). Could this also be true of Kant's philosophy? Has he been understood to doubt positions which he himself does not doubt?

all, no one can deny knowledge and it makes no sense to do so at all. Usually philosophy is immediately dismissed on the reading of such a statement. However, I will argue, in this section, that the falsity of this statement is based on a misunderstanding of Kant and his context, that many of Kant's Reformed critics hold the statement to be true but do not apply it consistently, when applied to the Kant's view of merit the statement can be empirically defended.

Every human being believes that he knows something. We are all aware of the fact that any denial of the possibility of knowledge commits intellectual suicide. When someone says that we cannot know anything, the immediate retort is "Do you know that?" Yet, given certain presuppositions, human knowledge can be coherently denied.<sup>3</sup> This appears to be what Kant set as his project.

Let us begin with Kant's context. Many philosophers have held that there is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses; consequently, all knowledge comes from experience. Among these are such preeminent philosophers as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and John Locke. These philosophers taught that knowledge comes through sense experience. In fact, Locke argues against any innate knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> Yet Kant believed that humans had knowledge. For having argued that skepticism cannot rest on this by appealing to the limits of pure reason, Kant writes, "I find it necessary to exhibit this manner of thought in its true light" (*CPR*, 652). He does not hesitate to articulate his purpose, "The first step in matters of pure reason, which characterizes its childhood, is **dogmatic**. The just mentioned second step is **skeptical**, and gives evidence of the caution of the power of judgment sharpened by experience. Now, however, a third step is still necessary, which pertains only to the mature and adult power of judgment, which has at its basis firm maxims of proven universality, that, namely, which subjects to evaluation not the *facta* of reason but reason itself, as concerns its entire capacity and suitability for pure *a priori* cognitions; this is not the censorship but the **critique** of pure reason, whereby not merely **limits** but rather the determinate **boundaries** of it—not merely ignorance in one part or another but ignorance in regard to all possible questions of a certain sort—are not merely suspected but are proved from principles. Thus skepticism is a resting place for human reason, which can reflect upon its dogmatic peregrination and make a survey of the region in which it finds itself in order to be able to choose its path in the future with greater certainty, but it is not a dwelling-place for permanent residence; for the latter can only be found in a complete certainty, whether it be one of the cognition of the objects themselves or of the boundaries within which all of our cognition of objects is enclosed" (*CPR*, 654; see also 627, 649, 652).

and that the lover of truth does not go beyond what the evidence allows. Human knowledge then is derived from evidence gathered from experience. The new science, which was successful, operated on this concept of knowledge. But this concept was dangerous for religious and moral knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Hence, there was no place in it for values. Kant saw this danger and attempted to remedy it by evaluating the reach of human knowledge based on this concept of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Thus, when assessing Kant's statement we cannot take knowledge in the ordinary human understanding of its possibility.<sup>6</sup> To grasp what Kant is saying we must first look at the definition of knowledge he is analyzing. To say we know something is to hold that we have good and solid reasons for believing it. Since these reasons are grounded in experience and experience can only tell us about particular instances, how is it possible that we can infer from particular instances to general principles? These general principles are not given in our experiences. Since human reasoning depends on deduction from these general principles. These general principles are necessary for human knowledge. But these principles are not given in experience. Therefore, principles necessary for knowledge are not given in experience. Kant calls such principles supersensible principles. For example, "Simba is a lion. Therefore, Simba is carnivorous." The inference requires the statement "All lions are carnivorous." The problem we face is with this proposition. That principle is needed by the human understanding, there is no experience in which it is given.

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<sup>4</sup> Allan Bloom writes of Kant, "He developed a new epistemology that makes freedom possible when the science of nature is deterministic, a new morality that makes the dignity of man possible when human nature is understood to be composed of selfish natural appetites, and a new esthetics that saves the beautiful and the sublime from mere subjectivity" (Bloom, 162).

<sup>5</sup> Brian Appleyard writes concerning Kant's system that it "represented the most comprehensive and direct assault on the epistemological crisis of the modern world" (64). He hails both Hume and Kant as challenging the modern form of the crisis of knowledge and that they were the first to perceive the bankruptcy of the new science (Appleyard, 64, 67, 88, 182)

<sup>6</sup> Kant writes, "One can regard the critique of pure reason as the true court of justice for all controversies of pure reason; for the critique is not involved in these disputes, which pertain immediately to objects, but is rather set the task of determining and judging what is lawful in reason in general in accordance with the principles of its primary institution" (*CPR*, 649).

Thus, if knowledge is from experience and there is no experience in which such necessary principle is given how then can our conclusion itself be knowledge. The question arose for Aristotle who had argued that undeniable and infallible first principles were necessary for his logic. When asked how we know such first principles, Aristotle's response was by induction. The problem is obvious. We are inferring from general principles we have no way of knowing by experience are true.

Since all human experience is sensible experience of particular things, no supersensible principles are objects of human experience. Such supersensible conceptions Kant referred to as *a priori* cognitions. He defines the *a priori* as “[cognitions] that occur independently of this or that experience, but rather those that occur *absolutely* independently of all experience” (*CPR*, 137). Thus they are supersensible principles. And since all supersensible principles are not objects of knowledge and yet are necessary for knowledge of all transcendental reality, it follows that, we do not have knowledge of what is outside of our understanding.

A cognition is called absolutely pure...in which no experience or sensation is mixed in, and that is thus fully *a priori*. Now reason is the faculty that provided the principles of cognition *a priori*. Hence pure reason is that which contains the principles for cognizing something absolutely *a priori* (*CPR*, 132).

Causality is a supersensible principle. It is required by the understanding but the understanding has no way of knowing that it is in the world outside of us. This is where Hume went wrong. He was searching for cause and effect by observation.

To claim that we know these supersensible principles are true would be a claim to omniscience. Furthermore, if the human understanding is such that it needs principles that it has no way of substantiating experientially then it is seriously crippled by the requirements of this concept of knowledge. There is a constant refrain in Kant's critical writings that the intellect requires that we postulate the reality of things outside of our experience. Given the limits of the intellect, we postulate these as *regulative or reflecting* not as *constitutive or determining* principles, that is, they belong to the way

we think—what is required by the understanding—not to the way the world is.<sup>7</sup>

These are not the shortcomings of human beliefs but of reason itself. That Kant's project was an analysis of reason in which he limited himself to what reason could give, that is, to only those conclusions that we could derive from reason as defined not to those of the dogmatists, is evident from his original preface to the *CPR*.

Yet by this I do not understand a critique of books and systems, but a *critique of the faculty of reason* in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles.

...I have not avoided reason's questions by pleading the incapacity of human reason as an excuse; rather I have completely specified these questions according to principles and after discovering the point where reason has misunderstood itself, *I have resolved them to reason's full satisfaction*. To be sure, the answer to these questions has not turned out just as dogmatically enthusiastic lust for knowledge have expected; for the latter could not be satisfied except through magical powers in which I am not an expert (*CPR*, 101).

Going on experience, we have intuitions of sensory objects. The intuitions are necessary though not sufficient for knowledge. These intuitions are of objects but not of objects as they are in themselves. Thus while we intuit these things the understanding processes them through concepts. Through these concepts, we are able to think by means of the categories. What we then have access to are the concepts. The understanding then, which uses concepts, can only process these concepts through a causal relation. Thus, the understanding must assume a cause and effect relation as operational between concepts. But this we cannot know to be a *constitutive*

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<sup>7</sup> See *CPR* for the many times that Kant speaks of the limits of human capacity: "We can accordingly speak of space, extended beings, and so on, only from the human standpoint.... This predicate is attributed to things only in so far as they appear to us, i.e., are objects of sensibility.... Since we cannot make the special conditions of sensibility into conditions of the possibility of things, but only of their appearances, we can well say that space comprehends all things that may appear to us externally but not things in themselves..." (159-60, see also 177 where he repeats "from the human standpoint").

element of reality but only as a *regulative* principle of the human understanding.<sup>8</sup> To say that we cannot think otherwise is not to say that things are the way we think. Hence, human understanding as defined can never assure us that we know the way the world is.<sup>9</sup> Hence, for Kant, abstraction from experience cannot give rise to a conclusion that is an objective reality—whether in religion or in empirical matters:

Now if one infers from the existence of **things** in the world to their cause, this does not belong to the **natural** but to the **speculative** use of reason; for the former does not relate the things themselves (substances) to any cause, but relates to a cause only what **happens**, thus their **states**, as empirically contingent.

He continues in the next paragraph to apply this to theology:

...all attempts of a merely speculative use of reason in regard to theology are entirely fruitless and by their internal constitution null and nugatory, but that the principles of reason's natural use do not lead at all to any theology; and consequently, if one did not ground it on moral laws or use them as guides, there could be no theology of reason at all (*CPR*, 586).<sup>10</sup>

As the *Critique of pure reason* comes to a close Kant draws on a distinction made by St. Augustine between knowledge, opinion and faith.<sup>11</sup> One knows something when the reasons for taking it to be true

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<sup>8</sup> Kant writes, "Combination does not lie in the objects, however, and cannot as it were be borrowed from them through perception and by that means first taken up into the understanding, but is rather only an operation of the understanding, which is itself nothing further than the faculty of combining a priori and bringing the manifold of given representations under unity of apperception, which principle is the supreme one in the whole of human cognition" (*CPR*, 248).

<sup>9</sup> In a section entitled "On experience as a system for the power of judgment" Kant writes, "But it does not follow from this [nature as the totality of all objects of experience constitutes a system in accordance with transcendental laws] that nature even in accordance with empirical laws is a system that *can be grasped by the human faculty of cognition*, and that the thoroughgoing systematic interconnection of its appearances in one experience, hence the latter as a system, is possible *for human beings*" (*CPJ*, 13).

<sup>10</sup> Kant concludes, "...it is not suited to the nature of philosophy, especially in the field of pure reason, to strut about with a dogmatic gait and to decorate itself with the title and ribbons of mathematics, to whose rank philosophy does not belong, although it has every cause to hope for a sisterly union with it" (*CPR*, 641).

<sup>11</sup> Augustine wrote, "...we must hold that what we understand [know] as coming from reason, what we believe as coming from authority, and what we are [*Footnote continued on next page ...*]



is “both subjectively and objectively sufficient.” One has an opinion of something when taking it to be true is neither subjectively nor objectively sufficient. Whereas one has faith or one believes when one takes something to be true which is subjectively sufficient but is not objectively so (*CPR*, 686). This does not mean that faith is irrational. In fact, the Kantian scholar Stephen Palmquist defines faith according to Kant as, “a rational attitude towards a potential *object of knowledge* which arises when we are *subjectively* certain it is true even though we are unable to gain *theoretical* or *objective* certainty (Palmquist, www). What is more to the point is that Kant’s denial of knowledge to make way for faith is not necessarily opposed to Christianity. In fact, it is more consistent with Christianity than the evidentialism of John Locke who argued that the lover of truth is one who does not assent to any belief beyond what the evidence permits. In particular, Augustine argued against the very same belief in a short essay entitled, *The Advantage of Believing*. The Manicheans had taught Augustine that the church was wrong in telling him to have faith but that he should not believe anything except what he had good reasons to believe. Augustine argued that those who denigrate faith in favor of knowledge are mistaken at best or profane and rash in such behavior and that the call to faith is not a liability but an asset to Christianity:

My object is to prove to you, if I can, that, when the Manicheans attack those who, before they are capable of gazing on that truth that is perceived by a pure mind, accept the authority of the Catholic faith and by believing are strengthened and prepared for the God who will bestow light, they are acting irrationally (Augustine, 116).

Augustine recounts from his own experience with Manichaeism that the promises of reason has appeal to those who seek truth but that he had not gone beyond a hearer because he found they were critical but not constructive. If reason was such as they say, why did it lead to so much disagreement.<sup>12</sup> Beginning in section 25, Augustine argues

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opinionated about as coming from error. Anyone who understands also believes, and anyone who is opinionated also believes, but someone who believes does not always understand, and someone who is opinionated never understands” (Augustine, 137).

<sup>12</sup> This calls to mind Kant’s antinomies of pure reason.

(1) that it is not true that the people who propose the certainty of reason should be praised not blamed (136-7). (2) That if only knowledge were required and no belief human life would be impossible (138). His illustrations are quite instructive on this point. For, he writes, how would children be expected to obey their parents and love them when they cannot know who their parents are and believing is inadequate. (3) That it is better to follow those who put believing over reason because it is wise to follow the wise and those who believe are wise given the human situation. (4) That believing is the only impetus to inquiry for no one searches for what he does not believe exists. Thus, one must believe that reason can give truth in order to pursue it, but this means that reason itself has an ignoble beginning since faith is held in low esteem by those who prize reason. (5) That forbidding belief is self-refuting, for the heretic wants me to believe in Jesus but to do that I have to accept the heretic's word (138-41).

Consequently, Kant is here drawing on a very old Christian intellectual position. This position elevates the priority of faith and shows that God in requiring faith of us rather than knowledge marks "duty at its proper finite figure" (CSP, 1.675). Now while Augustine goes on to say that faith is based on the authority of another's word, Kant uses faith but while it implies revelation, he is too concerned with the limits of reason to make this explicit. However, the case for the necessity of revelation is not lost on Kant<sup>13</sup> but on Christians who hold the position inconsistently. If we hold that God is epistemologically necessary and that the eternal truths and first principles are believed because we are created in the image of God, it is not reason that is responsible but general revelation. Charles Sanders Pierce, A very astute 19<sup>th</sup> Century student of Kant, who claimed to have read the *critique of Pure reason* so much that he could recite it, wrote that reason takes credit for what instinct has given.

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<sup>13</sup> Kant sets up a disjunction between reason and revelation. "For neither in speculative nor in natural theology, as far as reason may lead us, do we find even a single significant ground for assuming a single being to set before all natural causes...(CPR, 682). This disjunction stated on 649 has reached its conclusion. Revelation is the only alternative left. The implication seems obvious.

Reason is of its very essence egotistical. In many matters it acts the fly on the wheel. Do not doubt that the bee thinks it has a good reason for making the end of its cell as it does. But I should be very much surprised to learn that its reason had solved that problem of isoperimetry that its instinct has solved. *Men many times fancy that they act from reason when, in point of fact, the reasons they attribute to themselves are nothing but excuses which unconscious instinct invents to satisfy the teasing “whys” of the ego.* The extent of this self-delusion is such as to render philosophical rationalism a farce (Peirce, 32; emphasis mine).

Replacing Peircean instinct with the Christian view of general revelation we see readily the implications for the epistemological necessity of God. Reason arises later than the instinct by which the human child negotiates the world in which she lives. By the time, we begin to reason we have already formed a view of the world and of the objects in it.<sup>14</sup> Yet it seems that we are quite ready to attribute our knowledge of these things to reason. Kant denies the knowledge that is said to be derived from experience for that which is derived from faith by arguing that knowledge which origin is experience cannot get us to the beliefs we have of the world around us. Unless we hold that faith is a valid source of human knowledge we are left with skepticism about all knowledge. When I was about 11 years old I lived with my father. He had a neighbor who was from Ghana, West Africa. We called him Oldman Kojo. One day this neighbor was sitting when someone asked me, “Is oldman Mason your father.” I responded “yes.” Oldman Kojo then called me to him and said to me, “Boy when someone asks you that question, do not say “yes,” say “that is what my mom says.”” The old man was right but I never grasped the wisdom of that statement until I read St. Augustine’s *On the profit of believing*. I knew my father on the authority of my mother’s word. The lack of objective sufficiency required by reason does not change anything. If reason were the basis of our decisions we would stop believing when reason cannot give us sufficient grounds. Yet, as Augustine writes our lives are not based on logical possibilities. A man who refuses to support his children due to the

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<sup>14</sup> James Kellenberger in an article criticizes Christian philosophers of the same. He argued that both Alvin Plantinga and William Alston in the description of their faith in Christianity in *Philosophers who Believe* give a different account of how they came to faith from the way they argue in their philosophy (Kellenberger, 102-103).

logical possibility that they could be someone else's would not be held in high esteem by his neighbors. Simone Weil makes the point more clearly:

When we are eating bread, and even when we have eaten it, we know that it is real. We can nevertheless raise doubts about the reality of bread. Philosophers raise doubts about the reality of the world of the senses. Such doubts are however purely verbal, they leave the certainty intact and actually serve only to make it more obvious to a well-balanced mind. In the same way, he to whom God has revealed his reality can raise doubts about this reality without any harm. They are purely verbal doubts, a form of exercise to keep his intelligence in good health (Weil, 24.)

With the above explanation it will be helpful to go back to the statement of Kant we began this section with. I like to quote the whole sentence in which the statement occurs. Given the above explanation it will become evident the statement is not necessarily false:

Thus I had to deny **knowledge** in order to make room for **faith**; and the dogmatism of metaphysics,<sup>15</sup> i.e., the prejudice that without criticism reason can make progress in metaphysics, is the true source of all unbelief conflicting with morality, which unbelief is always very dogmatic (*CPR*, 117).

When reason fails to establish God or morality, some, who do not understand the limits of reason as defined, will reject both God and morality. But if they knew the limits they would know that the shortcomings is not in their beliefs but in the nature of reason itself. This is where Wolterstorff and Kant divide. But Kant's project is not to limit religion but to demonstrate the limits of reason when pitted against our cherished beliefs in every sphere of life. This he did so consistently that those who hate religion appeal to him while those who love religion find it necessary to respond to the seeming negative views he seems to have of religion and yet these who love religion have no qualm appealing to him against the empiricists and naturalists who exalt experience over religion. However, both sides are distracted by the details of what Kant says rather than the context which controls what is said.

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<sup>15</sup> The dogmatist is one who gives credit to reason for his transcendent beliefs. But as soon as one like David Hume comes along he finds he has no leg to stand on. This is why Kant credits Hume with arousing him from his dogmatic slumber. For one either gives up dogmatism or live in unbelief.

**B. Kant’s Reform Critics Hold the Limits of Human Reason but Apply It Inconsistently,**

In fact, philosophers outside the reform tradition, trying to get around this have tried all sorts of contraptions. Some have divided knowledge into strong and weak senses of knowledge (Adler, *Six* 39-55; Hosper, 80-88). The strong sense is knowledge that is unimpeachable and the weak sense is practically everything else—whatever we believe in science and history. The weak sense is really not knowledge as classically defined. It fails to provide sufficiently objective grounds for holding something to be true. This they do acknowledge. However, they keep the term. It flatters human pride to say that we know more than to say that we believe. In addition, it forces us to answer the question who do we believe. For, as Augustine writes, belief requires the word of some authority. Examples of the strong sense are similar to Kant’s supersensible principles, referred to by others as eternal truths, such as, “the whole is greater than its parts.” But Kant has already shown that these are not given in our experience and cannot be objects of such knowledge.

For our purposes, I like to focus on philosophers who may be classified as reformed epistemologists and who hold to the necessity of revelation in both its general and special aspects as opposed to natural theologians.<sup>16</sup> For either one holds that revelation is absolutely necessary for the possibility of human knowledge or it is not. There is no third something. Consequently, to apply it consistently one must apply the human limits to religious beliefs as well. One cannot object when human reason due to its inherent limits denigrates some tenet of one’s religious faith.

Let’s begin with Wolterstorff. When Wolterstorff comes to the end of his first chapter on Kant’s philosophy. He recommends that theologians go beyond Kant by removing Kant’s account of intuitions and concepts and as a result the “whole structure” of Kant’s

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<sup>16</sup> The same inconsistency is true of Carl F.H. Henry and Gordon Clark’s treatment of Kant’s philosophy. Because of the limitation of space, I will not treat their arguments here. These Reformed scholars reject the limits that Kant puts on reason that are concerned with religion but accept the limits that concern science. Whereas secular philosophers love the limits put on the knowledge of God by reason while rejecting those put on secular subjects. Those who use Kant to foster a thorough going skepticism do not seem to note that Kant was not himself a skeptic.

philosophy will collapse (Wolterstorff, 53). To do this we must reject “the assumption that awareness always represents input” and “replace it with the thesis that perception of an object consists of awareness of that object” whether it be eagle or dog. So far so good (Wolterstorff, 54). However, Wolterstorff writes, “But do we have compelling arguments? What are they? We have a picture that has held us in its grip. But do we have compelling arguments? Many, myself included, have concluded that we do not” (Wolterstorff, 54). If Wolterstorff is rejecting Kant on the basis of knowledge then he needs to have sufficient objective and subjective grounds. If, on the basis of faith, then his beef is not with Kant. Kant is concern with the conclusions derived from reason. Thus Wolterstorff is criticizing Kant for not giving the credit that belongs to revelation to reason.<sup>17</sup> As I will later argue, there is a similar problem with his view of Kant and merit.

Wolterstorff also believes in the primacy of revelation. In an earlier article entitled, “Is Reason Enough,” he argued against Clark Pinnock’s evidentialism, which is a similar position to Locke’s, and for the reformed view of giving arguments for the Christian faith. He argues that since what Pinnock allows as evidence is perceptual knowledge as the starting point and all such is limited by the system such that a perceptual claim is strong given certain systems (Wolterstorff, Reason, 144). To say that they are system dependent is really to say that they rest on assumptions which are not only unjustified but unjustifiable, i.e., they are objects of faith rather than of knowledge. In addition, such evidentialism cannot give full faith but tentative acceptance. Wolterstorff writes, “Pinnock never explicates the relation between believing with some tentativity that Christianity is the best explanation of various phenomena and adopting the trustful certitude of faith” (Wolterstorff, Reason, 144). It seems clear that Wolterstorff believes that the full “certitude of faith” required by the gospel goes beyond the deliverances of reason.<sup>18</sup> Wolterstorff concludes,

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<sup>17</sup> See Augustine on John 1:5—”In Him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of everyman.”

<sup>18</sup> It is generally agreed that every system has ultimate beliefs that are unjustifiable (see Normal Malcolm, 92-103).

Deeply embedded in the Reformed Tradition is the conviction that a person's belief that God exists may be a justified belief even though that person has not inferred that belief from others of his beliefs which provide good evidence for it. After all, not all the things which we are justified in believing have been inferred from other beliefs. We have to start somewhere! And the reformed tradition has insisted that the belief that God exists, that God is creator, etc., may justifiably be found there in the foundation of our system of beliefs. In that sense, the Reformed tradition has been fideist, not evidentialist, in its impulse. It seems to me that that impulse is correct. It is not in general true that to be justified in believing in God one has to believe this on the basis of evidence provided by one's other beliefs. We are entitled to reason *from* our belief in God without first having reasoned *to* it (Wolterstorff, "Reason," 149).

Earlier in the article Wolterstorff had questioned the idea of God as the object of reason. Here he says that the Reform tradition is correct. Yet he seems in other parts of the article to leave open the possibility that one can reason to God. It is not because he thinks that reason can be trusted outside of the starting point of an intelligent cause of the universe. If reason can stand independent of God, an intelligent cause would be unnecessary. The confidence we have in our minds is derived from our being made in the image of a personal God. In this vein, C.S. Lewis writes,

If all that exists is Nature, the great mindless interlocking event, if our own deepest convictions are merely the bye-products of an irrational process, then clearly there is not the slightest ground for supposing that our sense of fitness and our consequent faith in uniformity tell us anything about a reality external to ourselves...If Naturalism is true we have no reason to trust our conviction that Nature is uniform. It can be trusted only if quite a different Metaphysic is true. If the deepest thing in reality, the Fact which is the source of all other facthood, is a thing in some degree like ourselves—if it is a Rational Spirit and we derive our rational spirituality from it—then indeed our conviction can be trusted. Our repugnance to disorder is derived from Nature's Creator and ours. The disorderly world which we cannot endure to believe in is the disorderly world He would not have endured to create (Lewis, *Miracles*, 108).

Gordon Clark also seems to apply this position inconsistently. This inconsistency is related to his interpretation of Kant. Clark interprets Kant's *a priori* along similar lines. However, he does not see the limits of reason as Kant's paradigm. Clark even goes on to write that Kant's "initial disjunction is that either experience makes the categories possible or the categories make experience possible (Clark, *Thales*, 410). He argues that Kant rejected the first disjuncts because it leads to a kind of Humean skepticism. But here Kant poses

a third alternative that a middle way between the two was that our creator preformed us with such thoughts. He rejects it on the same grounds that he has rejected the other first—the ground of experience for if knowledge of this is based on experience it will not be possible to know it is true. He writes, “I would not be able to say that the effect is combined with the cause in the object (i.e., necessarily), but only that I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than so connected” and this would lead to skepticism (*CPR*, 265). Nevertheless, Clark considers this as objections to theistic epistemology. Clark avers that “if our Creator has implanted in us certain categories or aptitudes for thought contemporaneously with our existence, Kant is hardly justified in denying that they are *a priori*” (Clark, *Thales*, 410). But all Kant has argued is that we cannot know this from experience because of our constitution. Clark’s assumption here is that Kant attempted to overcome Hume: “At any rate the brave attempt to avoid the skepticism of Hume and to show that knowledge is possible has not been an altogether unqualified success” (Clark, *Thales*, 413, 433). But this assumption is misleading. Kant and Hume may have disagreed about particular details but not end.<sup>19</sup> Take cause and effect as an example: Kant does not disagree with Hume when it came to whether cause and effect were in the world. Like Hume he denied that they were in the world. But he argued that Hume’s mistake was trying to derive them from observation. If they are in the mind but not in the world then they are not given by experience but are *a priori* constructs of the reflecting reason. Hume is wrong in trying to derive causality from observation since observation depends on causality (*CPR*, 308).<sup>20</sup> In addition,

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<sup>19</sup> It is evident from the introduction to the *Prolegomena* that Kant wants to demonstrate that “there is, as yet, no such thing as metaphysics” (*Prolegomena*, 299). He praises David Hume as the one who initiated this task. Kant writes that since the inception of metaphysics, “nothing has ever happened which was more decisive to its fate than the attack made upon it by David Hume” (*Prolegomena*, 299). For Kant Hume, though he through no light on the subject, “struck a spark” for which Kant himself is the full light of day.

<sup>20</sup> “If, therefore, we experience that something happens, then we always presuppose that something else precedes it, which it follows in accordance with a rule. For without this I would not say of the object that it follows, since the mere sequence in my apprehension, if it is not, by means of a rule, determined in relation to something preceding, does not justify any sequence in the object. Therefore, I [Footnote continued on next page ... ]



Kant acknowledges that Hume “demonstrated irrefutably that it was perfectly impossible for reason to think *a priori* and by means of concepts a combination involving necessity” (*Prolegomena*, 300). He also accused Hume’s critics of misunderstanding him.

While Clark recognizes that the subjective character of Kant’s thought includes space, time, sensible object, when he comes to the end of his section on Kant, he writes that Kant holds a different view of the material and spiritual worlds (Clark, *Thales*, 417 & 432). Christians should not reject Kant’s insights merely because he reaches conclusions that fall short of those of our revealed religion. If we agree with Kant that reason has serious metaphysical handicaps, we cannot reject him when he consistently shows that some of those handicaps have to do with our Christian beliefs. For example, that Kant argues that reason cannot establish the objective existence of God is no ground for holding that Kant is rejecting Christianity because Kant also holds that reason cannot establish the objective existence of the material world. Had he said that the objective existence of the material world was real but God was not because reason cannot establish God it would be grounds to hold that Kant was prejudiced against religion. More and more philosophers are coming to the conclusion that Kant’s thought is not religiously negative but affirmative. These philosophers have held argued that Kant must be read holistically. What we have had in the traditional interpretation is a bifurcation of Kant’s philosophy. Secular and naturalistic philosophers tend to argue that Kant is wrong with respect to his views of the objectivity of the material world but right in his limited views of religion. Reform epistemologist as we have seen tend to the opposite conclusion. So they respond to what they consider Kant’s attack on Christianity. A more holistic interpretation will hold

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always make my subjective synthesis (of apprehension) objective with respect to a rule in accordance with which the appearances in their sequence, i.e., as they occur, are determined through the preceding state, and only under this presupposition along is the experience of something that happens even possible (CPR, 308). He later writes, “On such a footing this concept would be merely empirical, and the rule that it supplies, that everything that happens has a cause, would be just as contingent as the experience itself: its universality and necessity would then be merely feigned, and would have no true universal validity, since they would not be grounded *a priori* but only on induction” (CPR, 308).

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that Kant systematically and consistently demonstrated that the flaw was in reason itself—reason, as defined by the empiricists, could never account for our beliefs and reason as defined by the rationalist could not account for the objective existence of objects outside of us as well.

Yet no man believes more firmly than Clark in the insufficiency of unaided human reason. He argued in his work on historiography that no history except Biblical history can be accepted as true since all history but revealed history lack God's perspective and "no historical event is subject to absolute verification (Clark, *Historiography*, 335). He himself rejected empiricism and induction. In the foreword to Clark's history of philosophy, John W. Robbins writes, "...the book you hold in your hands is the only such history in English that has escaped the corroding influence of secular philosophy, especially the philosophy of empiricism" (Clark, *Thales*, v). The book lives up to this but had Clark perceived Kant as an ally rather than an enemy his view of the necessity of revelation would have been more consistently applied.

Carl F.H. Henry argues that the earlier Medievals emphasize a religious *a priori* in a revelational sense in contrast to the "antiaprioristic bias imparted to philosophy by later Thomistic empiricism" (Henry, 1:287). He complains that "The historic Christian emphasis that man's created finitude requires the dependence on transcendent revelation, and that the consequences of the fall for man's ways of thinking make the dependence all the more imperative, is swept aside" by this empiricism (Henry, 1:88). He also hails Hume's argument against the Thomist case for Christian theism as successful and that even Kant failed to refute it for Hume shows that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated "through empirical considerations independent of divine revelation (Henry, 1:79-80). But Henry does not see Kant as challenging this tradition. In fact, he sees Kant as religiously negative. He writes that Kant "who had no quarrel with a merely regulative and antimetaphysical faith," disliked Anselm's ontological argument because it set forth "a metaphysical proof of the reality of God" (Henry, 1:292). He sees a different motive as operational in Kant. He distinguishes the Platonic *a priori* from that of Kant's and concludes: "The Platonic construction thus shares with Christian theology an interest in connecting the *a priori*

with the ontic constitution of the metaphysical order, and therefore in man's constitutive relationship to that order" (Henry, 1:286). This fails to see that despite the apparent resemblances, Plato does not have a Judeo-Christian God and that if the connection can be retained without the presupposition of God then God is not an epistemological necessity, which position Henry adequately refutes in the six volumes of *God Revelation and Authority*. It is by now clear that this assessment does not take into consideration Kant's project and context. Surprisingly, he writes, "In considering the Critical [Kant's] view, it is important to remember that the dogmatic expositions to which Kant explicitly objects are conjectural rather than revelational in nature....But Kant betrays little or no awareness of the Augustinian view, or the emphases of the Protestant Reformers" (Henry, 1:354).

There are various ways of defending Christianity. These ways are not independent of each other. One is a clear articulation of the adequacy of the Christian worldview. Another is to show the inadequacy of the plausible claimants that are contrary to the Christian view. Whereas Wolterstorff, Clark and Henry do both explicitly. Kant chose to do the latter explicitly. The rest of this paper will highlight this choice with respect to Kant's view of merit.<sup>21</sup>

### **C. Kant's View of Merit and the Limits of the Understanding**

That Kant's overall project is in view when he produces his essay on religion is evident from many passages in his *Religion Within the*

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<sup>21</sup> I have focused on reform theologians because they are closer to Kant's thought not because I think that natural theologians would fare any better under Kant's scalpel. Kant did argue that reason cannot ground the arguments from natural theology to establish the objective existence of God. However, reason especially in its practical aspect, needs the regulative principle of God but not as a constitutive principle of reality. To have any validity reason itself needs God as the Lewis quote above shows. But before we become hasty in asserting that Kant dismisses natural theology, we must take into consideration the following passage: "If [metaphysicians] on the other hand desire to carry on their business, not as a science but as an art of wholesome oratory suited to the common sense of man, they cannot in justice be prevented. They will then speak the modest language of a rational belief, they will grant that they are not allowed even to conjecture, far less to know, anything which lies beyond the bounds of all possible experience, but only to assume (not for speculative use, which they must abandon, but for practical purposes only) the existence of something that is possible and even indispensable for the guidance of the understanding and of the will in life (*Prolegomena*, 315-16).

*Limits of Reason Alone* but the following passage captures it in the language of the critical works:<sup>22</sup>

In general, if we limited our judgment to regulative principles, which content themselves with their own possible application to the moral life, instead of aiming at constitutive principles of a knowledge of supersensible objects, insight into which, after all, is forever impossible to us, human wisdom would be better off in a great many ways, and there would be no breeding of a presumptive knowledge of that about which, in the last analysis, we know nothing at all—a groundless sophistry that glitters indeed for a time but only, as in the end becomes apparent, to the detriment of morality (*Religion*, 65n).

Given Kant's project was concerned with the limits of the understanding, is it surprising then that a book, which serves as an illustration of the deliverances of human reason, would fall far short of what we know by way of special revelation. If reason were to come up with a religion without the aid of God what would it be like? Is Wolterstorff arguing that reason, without the aid of God, could get us to Christianity? There are many empirical examples of this to which we could appeal. To evaluate we could compare the conclusions Kant deduces from religion, the religion derived from reason to religions that are devoid of Christian revelation, since those religions would have human reason for their guide. Every Christian who reads this book should come to Kant's conclusion that the consolation which we have in the grace of God could not have been derived from unassisted human reason.<sup>23</sup> Kant writes, "...the calling to our assistance of *works of grace* is one of these aberrations and cannot be adopted into the *maxims* of reason, if she is to remain within her limits; as indeed can nothing of the supernatural, simply because in this realm all use of

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<sup>22</sup> Merit is not left out of CPR but developed and illustrated here. But the goal here is not merit but showing that the moral requirement connected to happiness which without God cannot be realized. "I say, accordingly, that just as the moral principles are necessary in accordance with reason in its practical use, it is equally necessary to assume in accordance with reason in its theoretical use that everyone has cause to hope for happiness in the same measure as he has made himself worthy of it in his conduct, and that the system of morality is therefore inseparably combined with the system of happiness, though only in the idea of pure reason" (*CPR*, 679).

<sup>23</sup> One of the early translators of the work translated the title "Religion within the limits of unassisted reason."

reason ceases” (*Religion*, 48).<sup>24</sup> But Wolterstorff finds this lack of consolation a weakness in what he calls “Kant’s rational religion” He writes, “Given that no one can be certain whether she has a good will, the Kantian system gives no actual consolation to any actual human being” (Wolterstorff, “Conundrums” 66). That is Kant’s point.

That what in our earthly life (and possibly at all future times and in all worlds) is ever only a becoming (namely, becoming a man well-pleasing to God) should be credited to us exactly as if we were already in full possession of it--to this we really have no legal claim, that is, *so far as we know* ourselves (through that empirical self-knowledge which yields no immediate insight into the disposition but merely permits of an estimate based upon our actions); and so the accuser within us would be more likely to propose a judgment of condemnation. Thus the decree is always one of grace alone, although fully in accord with eternal justice, when we come to be cleared of all liability by dint of our faith in such goodness; for the decree is based upon a giving of satisfaction (a satisfaction which consists for us only in the idea of an improved disposition, *known only to God*) (*Religion*, 70, emphasis mine).

Here Wolterstorff takes a look at the phrase, “so far as we know ourselves”<sup>25</sup> as crucial for understanding the passage. But he does not connect it to the limits of reason. Kant has just destroyed all hope in salvation by works and Wolterstorff acknowledges in the same passage that Kant earlier argued that no one can know he has a good character. Yet he completely changes the questions and asks, “why, in Kant’s scheme, would God ever do such a thing as forgive” (Wolterstorff, 62). But he admits disapprovingly that Kant is not sure God would do such a thing (Wolterstorff, 66).

Kant reaches this position through intricate and very insightful arguments. Kant argued that the religion of reason would begin from practical reason. For practical reason requires that we live moral lives. Beginning with the idea that no man is capable of holiness: “...the perfect accordance of the will with the moral law is holiness, a

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<sup>24</sup> Throughout this book, when Kant reaches a conclusion he is quick to point out that this is the result of the proceedings of reason itself which is limited. This quote is not an isolated in Kant’s works. For the many times in which it appears in this work (see, 47-48, 56, 58, 82-4, 95, 101, 107-8, 111, 119, 123, 127, 142-3, 144, 159). It is hard to see from these pages that Kant could be any more clearer.

<sup>25</sup> A parallel construction appears in *CPJ* 36. This cannot be taken in any other way than that the human reason is limited in such a manner that we are not capable of determining judgment but of reflecting ones.

perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence. Since, nevertheless, it is required as practically necessary, it can only be found in a progress in infinitum towards that perfect accordance, and on the principles of pure practical reason it is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our will” (*CPrR*, 97). “Thus to regard ourselves as in the realm of grace, where every happiness awaits us as long as we do not ourselves limit our share of it through the unworthiness to be happy, is a practically necessary idea of reason” (*CPR*, 680-81). But even here reason is limited:

For how it is possible that the bare idea of conformity to law, as such, should be a stronger incentive for the will than all the incentives conceivable whose source is personal gain, *can neither be understood by reason nor yet proved by examples from experience* (*Religion*, 56; Emphasis mine).

But given this requirement of practical reason that we live morally, what hope of salvation do we have? First, with regard to past deeds every human being has already fallen short of the requirements of the law. Even if she reforms her life how are her past sins dealt with? The conclusion of reason is unclear such that Kant calls it an antinomy.

Saving faith involves two elements, upon which hope of salvation is conditioned, the one having reference to what man himself cannot accomplish, namely, *undoing lawfully (before a divine judge) actions which he has performed*, the other to what he himself can and ought to do, that is, leading a new life conformable to his duty. The first is the faith in an atonement (reparation for his debt, redemption, reconciliation with God); the second, the faith that we can become well-pleasing to God through a good course of life in the future. Both conditions constitute but one faith and necessarily belong together. Yet we can comprehend the necessity of their union only by assuming that one can be derived from the other, that is, either that the faith in the absolution from the debt resting upon us will bring forth good life-conduct, or else that the genuine and active disposition ever to pursue a good course of life will engender the faith in such absolution according to the law of morally operating causes. Here now appears a remarkable antinomy of human reason with itself, whose solution, or, were this not possible, at least whose adjustment can alone determine whether an historical (ecclesiastical) faith must always be present as an essential element of saving faith, over and above pure religious faith, or whether it is only a vehicle which finally--however distant this future event may be--can pass over into pure religious faith (*Religion*, 106-7; emphasis mine).

Moreover, that those who live morally would belong to the kingdom of God. But he writes, “Here a kingdom of God is

represented not according to a particular covenant (i.e., not Messianic) but moral (knowable through unassisted reason)” (*Religion*, 127n). To be a part of this kingdom reason would demand that one live according to some standard. It will also hold that the standard cannot exist outside of our ability to meet the standard.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Kant points out we have already violated the standard by our past sins.<sup>27</sup> In addition, tomorrow’s good deeds cannot wipe away yesterday’s evil deeds; moreover, tomorrow’s good is tainted with its own share of evil deeds, we are left with a choice between despair and hope. This past creates a serious problem for reason.

Whatever a man may have done in the way of adopting a good disposition, and, indeed, however steadfastly he may have persevered in conduct conformable to such a disposition, he nevertheless started from evil, and *this debt he can by no possibility wipe out*. For he cannot regard the fact that he incurs no new debts subsequent to his change of heart as equivalent to having discharged his old ones. Neither can he, through future good conduct, produce a surplus over and above what he is under obligation to perform at every instant, for it is always his duty to do all the good that lies in his power (*Religion*, 66).

Reason assumes<sup>28</sup> there is a hope (*Religion*, 46) because without it there is no sense in trying. Yet the seriousness of the problem does not go away:

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<sup>26</sup> The Calvinist in me cringes. However, this is the conclusion of an unassisted reason.

<sup>27</sup> For Kant’s very perceptive discussion of the past see pages 42, 48, 56, 60-1, 66, 106.

<sup>28</sup> The word “assumes” and its cognates occur several times in this text. However, one thing we must note about the Kant’s use. It is always used where reason lacks sufficient objectivity to hold that that something is true. Kant raises this question, “Does this deduction of the idea of a justification of an individual who is indeed guilty but who has changed his disposition into one well-pleasing to God possess any practical use whatever, and what may this use be?” and responds, “One does not perceive what positive use could be made of it for religion or for the conduct of life, because the condition underlying the enquiry just conducted is that the individual in question is already in actual possession of the required good disposition toward the development and encouragement of which all practical employment of ethical concepts properly aims; and as regards comfort, a good disposition already carries with it, for him who is conscious of possessing it, both comfort and hope (though not certainty). Thus the deduction of the idea has done no more than answer a speculative question, which, however, should not be passed over in silence just because it is speculative. Otherwise reason could be accused of [Footnote continued on next page ... ]

After his change of heart, however, the penalty cannot be considered appropriate to his new quality (of a man well-pleasing to God), for he is now leading a new life and is morally another person; and yet satisfaction must be rendered to Supreme Justice, in whose sight no one who is blameworthy can ever be guiltless (*Religion*, 67).

Self evaluation does not flatter a person in this situation:

What, I ask the reader, will be a man's verdict when someone tells him no more than that he has reason to believe that he will one day stand before a judge--and this thought will bring back to his recollection (even though he is not of the worst) much that he has long since light-heartedly forgotten--what verdict, based on the way of life he has hitherto led, will this thought lead him to pronounce upon his future destiny? If this question is addressed to the judge within a man he will, pronounce a severe verdict upon himself; for a man cannot bribe his own reason (*Religion*, 71-2).

Even when Kant discusses the mystery of atonement Kant argues that reason would opt for the hope that God must have some "means of supplementing, out of the fullness of his own holiness, man's lack of requisite qualifications therefor" (*Religion*, 134). Kant sees a contradiction here between this hope and the requirement of reason that man himself supplies what is lacking and concludes, "Therefore, *so far as reason can see*, no one can, by virtue of the superabundance of his own good conduct and through his own merit, take another's place..." (*Religion*, 134; emphasis mine). Yet there is some consolation from reason here but without certainty:

Reason says this, however, without presuming to determine the manner in which this aid will be given or to know wherein it will consist; it may be so mysterious that God can reveal it to us at best in a symbolic representation in which only what is practical is comprehensible to us, and that we, meanwhile, can not at all grasp theoretically what this relation of God to man might be, or apply concepts to it, even did He desire to reveal such a mystery to us (*Religion*, 159).

This lack of consolation and knowledge of how God accomplishes salvation bothers Wolterstorff. He writes accusingly, "Given that no one can be certain whether she has a good will, the Kantian system give no actual consolation to any actual human being" (Wolterstorff, 66).

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being wholly unable to reconcile with divine justice man's hope of absolution from his guilt--a reproach which might be damaging to reason in many ways, but most of all morally (*Religion*, 70).

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Nevertheless he argues throughout the paper that Kant thinks that reason can lead to salvation:

“Reason says Kant, may conclude that “in the inscrutable realm of the supernatural there is something more than she can explain to herself, which may yet be necessary as a component to her moral insufficiency,” and may further conclude that this is “available to her good will” (Wolterstorff, 65).

Wolterstorff acknowledges that

There is one passage that appears to say something quite different from what I have just interpreted Kant as holding. It appears to say that even those of good character *do not* have a moral claim on God’s forgiveness of the guilt of their incidental wrongdoings (Wolterstorff, 61).

He quotes a passage from page 70 of Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, and responds “The language of this passage is scarcely lucid” (Wolterstorff, 61). But where can Kant be accused of lucidity? Wolterstorff goes on to write, “Kant has failed in his own project of grounding faith in salvation in the domain of morality” (Wolterstorff, 61).

As one who grew up in West Africa, I would side with Kant that unrevealed religion shows the marks of Kantian rational religion. It hopes, in the weak sense of the term, that God is good and would judge the world. It seeks atonement through rituals that are symbolic; however, it does not have confidence that its morality is sufficient for acceptance in the kingdom of God even though when someone is wronged without the ability to retaliate he sues to God for upholding his cause against his enemies. God must be good enough to punish evil but where God draws the line is uncertain. But all of this is deduced from unaided reason. Human kind needs more than such reason if it would be confident that God would “out of his holiness” provide what is lacking in us. Wolterstorff is right when he writes that “Kant’s religion, so far from being entirely rational, is riddled with irrationalities” (Wolterstorff, 64). These are the irrationalities of religion derived from reason. Clark in his defense of Christianity argues that all non-Christian systems are incoherent. If Clark is right and Kant has faithfully presented the conclusions reason would come to, it should not be surprising that there are irrationalities. Kant’s view of the antinomies of reason is a good place to start to see this.

#### **D. Empirically Defending Kant's Conclusions of the Religion of Reason Alone**

Can we defend Kant's conclusion that there is no consolation or certainty of a hope in religion based on reason alone? Yes it can be defended both biblically and extra-biblically. Let's begin first with a Biblical defense from the book of Jonah. God had sent Jonah to preach to the city of Nineveh and warn them of their wickedness. This warning was to incorporate a message of salvation for repentance. But Jonah did not want God to have compassion on the Ninevites. The Bible tells us that Jonah went through the city and proclaimed, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (Jon. 3:4). This is all that Jonah give the Ninevites. The message had not element of a promise from God that if they met a condition of repentance (their duty) they would be forgiven. When the news reached the king of Nineveh he sent out this decree:

Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. *Who knows?*<sup>29</sup> God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." (Jon. 3:7b-9)

Had Jonah revealed God's will in the matter there would be certainty but outside of revealed religion we may be able to hope but without assurance and certainty. Thus, Kant is right when he argues that man will not be able to know his duty and consequently, not be able to know that he is in good standing before God.

Another illustration in support of Kant's conclusion may be seen from the an extra-biblical incident. We know from the Bible that in Athens there were altars with the inscription, "To an unknown god." The story is told that a plague had overrun the city. All the gods had been placated but the plague lingered. So Epimenes, a Greek wiseman

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<sup>29</sup> King David used this very same phrase when the Prophet Nathan told him that the child born of his adulterous affair will die. David pleaded with God, fasted and mourned but the child died. When this happened he got up and started to eat. His servants who were puzzled by the behavior and questioned him. He responded, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, "Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live." The word of Nathan like that of Jonah revealed the punishment but not the possible mercy of God. In this case the result was different.

was called upon to advise the city. His advice was that this must be the doing of some god who is not in the Greek pantheon of gods and therefore was not placated. So the Greeks should make an altar to an unknown god. A god great enough to be responsible for such a plague would be good enough to recognize their ignorance. The plague was lifted. The Apostle Paul using this statue as his point of departure when he spoke to the philosophers on Mars Hill. Paul said that God winked at such ignorance in the past but now he has appointed one through whom he will judge the world. Paul does not give any consolation that ignorance outside of revealed religion is a guaranteed condition for God's mercy. Neither does Kant.

Even within revealed religion those who place their hope in the deliverances of the moral law are not going to have such assurance. In his, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris discusses the Rabbinic view of justification right after the New Testament times (about 90 A.D.). He writes, "Judaism of that time took it as an axiom that man is able to acquire merit in God's eyes, the only question being how it was done" (Morris, 242). The Rabbis give many answers to the question but the basic answer was that it rested on the keeping of the law of God. One's good deeds must outweigh one's bad ones. "The final judgment represented a weighting up of the merits and demerits acquired by a man during the course of his lifetime..." Morris then goes on to evaluate such a system by its consequences. The first consequence he lists is that "there is no place for assurance" in the Jewish system. For "no matter how well a man may have lived, it is always possible for him to slip into some bad sin which will outweigh all his merits. Hence the dictum of Hillel: "Trust not in thyself until the day of thy death"" (Morris, 242). In addition, a man could not know the precise amount of merit attached to each good deed. How is it that it is a flaw in Kant that he thinks a religion derived from reason will lack assurance even though it hopes that God has some means by which he will absolve man of his sin?

In the first place, reason does not leave us wholly without consolation with respect to our lack of righteousness valid before God. It says that whoever, with a disposition genuinely devoted to duty, does as much as lies in his power to satisfy his obligation (at least in a continual approximation to complete harmony with the law), may hope that what is not in his power will be supplied by the supreme Wisdom in some way or other (which can make permanent the disposition to this unceasing approximation). Reason says this, however, without

presuming to determine the manner in which this aid will be given or to know wherein it will consist; it may be so mysterious that God can reveal it to us at best in a symbolic representation in which only what is practical is comprehensible to us, and that we, meanwhile, can not at all grasp theoretically what this relation of God to man might be, or apply concepts to it, even did He desire to reveal such a mystery to us (*Religion*, 159).

In one place, Wolterstorff argues against Gordon Kaufman who argued that the term God was the problem because nothing in our experience can be identified with it. So God must always remain unknown. Kaufman then concludes that we cannot genuinely think of God. Here Wolterstorff writes, “Kant, as already mentioned, resists that concession. In that respect, I regard Kant’s proposal as more satisfactory. What’s questionable is whether it is internally coherent” (Wolterstorff, 52).

#### **E. Kant’s Actual Views Versus the Views of Human Reason**

Now that we have seen that Kant’s project is not to denigrate religion but to highlight the conclusions of the religion of reason and that the conclusions he reached are empirically defensible, we will now address the very relevant question of whether we are justified in holding that Kant himself believed in this religion derived from reason or in the revealed religion of Christianity. I will base my conclusions strictly on his critical writings.<sup>30</sup> I do not contend that my position here is true but that it is not absurd. For if we hold that it “was Kant’s intention to determine, once for all, the precise limits of human knowledge, by means of a critique of the powers of the human mind,” then we must hold that these limits do not merely pertain to

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<sup>30</sup> This is because I have read very little of Kant’s correspondences. Yet there is no reason to think that they are opposed to the views I hold concerning his writings. Christopher McGammon quotes this from Kant’s letter to C.F. Staudlin: “With the enclosed work, *Religion*, I have tried to complete the third part of my plan. In this book I have proceeded conscientiously and with genuine respect for the Christian religion but also with a befitting candor, concealing nothing but rather presenting openly the way in which I believe that a possible union of Christianity with the purest practical reason is possible” (C 11:429). Kant anticipates this argument in the *CPR*: “Thus without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization, because they would not fulfill the whole end that is natural for every rational being and determined *a priori* and necessarily through the very same pure reason” (*CPR*, 681).

the material world of space and time but also to our cherished religious beliefs (Wolff, 296).

Wolterstorff argues that when theologians use such philosophies as Kant's to understand the religious terms, the terms are given meanings that they do not have in their Biblical settings. However, it seems difficult to take these words at face value because Wolterstorff is not certain that the interpretation on which they are based is correct. He writes, "My interpretation will be relatively traditional. I have doubts whether this relatively traditional interpretation is correct; more relevant to the purposes at hand, however is the fact that the traditional interpretation is the one that influenced the theological tradition" (Wolterstorff, 43). Yet Wolterstorff does not attribute the position he takes on Kant throughout both essays to the interpretation but to Kant himself. Later he writes that if theologians had taken instead of Kant's *Prolegomena*, his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, his influence on them would have been "less productive of skepticism concerning our ability to speak about God" (Wolterstorff, 43). He does not tell us why that would be the case but implies that there is a lack of consistency between the two works.<sup>31</sup> In the second chapter on Kant's philosophy—"Conundrums in Kant's Rational Religion"—this accusation of incompatibility becomes explicit as he discusses *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*: "Here, then we have not just implausibility or tension, but internal contradiction" (Wolterstorff, 64) How can Kant be blamed for the manner in which theologians have been influenced if they have misinterpreted his work. It is not easy in Wolterstorff to distinguish whether he means by "Kant's view" Kant's personally held view or that of the traditional interpretation.

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Paul Wolff has written that the reason Kant wrote the *Prolegomena* was to offer a simpler version of the transcendental philosophy: "The doctrines of the first *Critique* were so original and difficult that Kant decided to write a short, popular essay as a guide for students and teachers of philosophy. He called it *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, indicating by the title that it was only an introduction, not a complete proof of the transcendental philosophy" (Wolff, 296). This implies that the *Prolegomena* should not be taken by itself and those who so do are not properly interpreting Kant's thought.

In Kant, it is rather our supposed *inability* to gain knowledge of God that is menacing to the religious life and to the understanding of God embedded therein (Wolterstorff, 52)

This does not take into consideration that among the reasons Kant gives for rejecting the theoretical arguments for God's existence and opting for the moral are that the moral has negative implications for atheism<sup>32</sup> and that the moral implies that God be just, all powerful and all knowing.<sup>33</sup> A person may coherently reject the possibility of knowledge on the condition that it originates from experience without holding categorically that knowledge is impossible on all grounds, since it can be shown that experience is not capable of meeting the requirements for knowledge. This, I think, is what Kant has done. What he did not bet on but was aware of, is that philosophers, who have the uncanny ability to take the obviously false as gospel,<sup>34</sup> would take these conclusions from reason as something to live by. If Kant is arguing that experience cannot be the basis of knowledge, he is not arguing that knowledge is impossible but that it is impossible on the grounds of the capacity human reason, however, on the

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<sup>32</sup> John E. Hare has argued that Kant held on the basis of the moral law that atheism is rationally unstable. He writes that Kant holds that "to be a good person and disbelieve in God is not impossible, but presents a dilemma" (Hare, 64).

<sup>33</sup> He writes that theoretical arguments "produce only rudimentary and vague concepts of the deity, and...leave a remarkable indifference with regard to this question in general. A greater refinement of moral ideas, which was made necessary by the extremely pure moral law of our religion, made reason attend more sharply to its object by means of the interest that it required reason to take in this object" (CPR, 683). This highlights the superiority of Christianity's emphasis on the moral law as the starting point of preaching.

<sup>34</sup> Kant wrote that common understanding gives people truth but only in philosophy are such things denied. For reason has a "detrimental influence" on the judgment of common sense (CJ, 173-74). But common sense should be taken as a gift of God (Prolegomena, 301). In another place Kant writes, "But if it is asked: "What, then, is really pure morality, by which as a touchstone we must test the moral significance of every action," then I must admit that it is only philosophers that can make the decision of this question doubtful, for to common sense it has been decided long ago, not indeed by abstract general formulae, but by habitual use, like the distinction between the right and the left hand" (CPrR, 120). Thus, Kant held that what could not be denied in life could be denied in philosophy. Yet within the boundaries of reason to appeal to common sense is to appeal to a rumor as justification (Prolegomena, 314).

grounds of faith human beings do have knowledge. The moment a person claims to know that the supersensible exists outside of him on the basis of experience, the battle lines are drawn. Thus, Kant used the inadequacies of the religion of reason to show the necessity of revelation<sup>35</sup> and the superiority of that revealed religion which must rest upon the authority of God's word.

Yet were this faith [that a man "through his holiness and merit" made available "an inexhaustible fund...for the payment of debts incurred or still to be incurred"] to be portrayed as having so peculiar a power and so mystical (or magical) an influence, that although merely historical, so far as we can see, it is yet competent to better the whole man from the ground up (to make a new man of him) if he yields himself to it and to the feelings bound up with it, *such a faith would have to be regarded as imparted and inspired directly by heaven*<sup>36</sup> (together with, and in, the historical faith), and everything connected even with the moral constitution of man would resolve itself into an unconditioned decree of God: "He hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth," which, taken according to the letter, is the *salto mortale* [fatal leap] of human reason (*Religion*, 110-111).

It is evident from our discussion that Kant holds that that religion which appeals to faith rather than to knowledge is superior to that which appeals to reason. He writes in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, "I make no appraisal of Christianity, I cannot be guilty of disparaging it. In fact, it is only natural religion that I appraise (*CF*, 15). Consequently, one cannot use this appraisal to determine Kant's view of Christianity. In fact, he goes on to argue that if reason were capable of providing adequate answers revelation would be unnecessary."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> This sense of the necessity of revelation is not absent from the critique of pure reason: (*CPR*, 583, 649, 690)

<sup>36</sup> For other statements on the Kant's view that revelation can yield more to religion than reason see *Religion*, 9, 95-97, and 120. Yet from the standpoint of reason, claims to revelation must be treated with modesty (122-3). Yet reason cannot expect a new revelation but must do the most intelligent and reasonable thing which is "from how on to use the book already at hand as the basis for ecclesiastical instruction and not to lessen its value through useless or mischievous attacks, yet meanwhile not forcing belief in it, as requisite to salvation, upon any man" (*Religion*, 123). Hence, a rational religion cannot hold to exclusivity.

<sup>37</sup> Kantian scholar, Chris L. Firestone, writes, "Theology rightly understood, according to Kant, is rooted in the faith that God has spoken and the conviction that what God has said and done, as it is written, provides a trustworthy perspective on reality" (Firestone, 145).

“But when reason speaks, in these matters, as if it were sufficient to itself and as if revealed and as if revealed teachings were superfluous (an assertion which, were it to be taken objectively, would have to be considered a real disparagement of Christianity), it is merely expressing its appraisal of itself” (*CF*, 15). He distinguishes between rational and revealed religion. Revealed religion is that religion which demands that I must “know in advance that something is a divine command in order to recognize it as my duty” (*Religion*, 142) whereas rational religion must know that something is its duty “before it can accept it as a divine injunction” (*Religion*, 143). He goes on to say “The rationalist, by virtue of his very title, must of his own accord restrict himself within the limits of human insight” (*Religion*, 43). The fact that Kant restricts himself in such a fashion does not mean that he believes that man is locked in to the consequences of a religion derived from reason. In the preface to the second edition of the religion Kant writes, “The philosopher, as a teacher of pure reason (from unassisted principles *a priori*), must confine himself within the narrower circle, and, in so doing, must waive consideration of all experience” (*Religion*, 10).

Kant also seems to hold that the universal aspects of this rational religion conforms to Christianity; hence, Christianity is superior to other religions in what is essential to the practical concepts of reason: “in every type of public belief man has devised for himself certain practices, as means of grace, though, to be sure, in all these types the practices are not, as they are in the Christian, related to practical concepts of reason and to dispositions conformable to them” (*Religion*, 182).

Kant gives an interesting disclaimer in a footnote at the end of his discussion of evil in human nature: “What is written here must not be read as though intended for Scriptural exegesis, which lies beyond the limits of the domain of bare reason” (*Religion*, 39). It is only Christianity that meets the criterion of a moral religion<sup>38</sup> (*Religion*, 150).

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<sup>38</sup> One may want to object to the classification that Christianity is a purely moral religion. But it is good to remind ourselves that Christianity is essentially about the forgiveness of sins and power to live righteously that comes through the redeeming work of Christ. This is Kant’s concern in his text on religion. Other religions may be more concerned with rituals rather than righteousness. In addition, J. [Footnote continued on next page ...]



All religions, however, can be divided into those which are endeavors to win favor (mere worship) and moral religions, i.e., religions of good life-conduct. In the first, man flatters himself by believing either that God can make him eternally happy (through remission of his sins) without his having to become a better man, or else, if this seems to him impossible, that God can certainly make him a better man without his having to do anything more than to ask for it. Yet since, in the eyes of a Being who sees all, to ask is no more than to wish, this would really involve doing nothing at all; for were improvement to be achieved simply by a wish, every man would be good. But in the moral religion (and of all the public religions which have ever existed, the Christian alone is moral) it is a basic principle that each must do as much as lies in his power to become a better man, and that only when he has not buried his inborn talent (Luke XIX, 12-16) but has made use of his original predisposition to good in order to become a better man, can he hope that what is not within his power will be supplied through cooperation from above (*Religion*, 47).

Hope of divine aid is required but is it necessary to know wherein it consists. We acknowledge the claim of the good principle over us. Yet that we fall short and cannot live up to it but reason cannot lead us to a redeemer (*Religion*, 54).

Moreover, reason cannot uphold an ultimate destiny as heaven or hell: “powerful enough to serve as incentives without our having to presume to lay down dogmatically the objective doctrine that man’s destiny is an eternity of good or evil. *In making such assertions and pretensions to knowledge, reason simply passes beyond the limits of its own insight*” (*Religion*, 63-4). Rather than a denigration of Christianity, Kant appears to sound a warning that cherished Christian ideas like the virgin birth are shown to be lost on this religion of reason (*Religion*, 74n). Miracles also would be lost in this fashion: “it is impossible for us to count on miracles or to take them into consideration at all in our use of reason (and reason must be used in every incident of life)” (*Religion*, 82).

The issue to him is one of defending a just cause with injustice. Those who would not honor such a defense have “already decided

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Gresham Machen distinguishes between Christianity and liberalism in this manner: In Christianity consciousness of sin is “the starting point of all preaching” (Machen, 64). This is not to say that Christianity does not have a cosmology, an ontology and an epistemology. While all of these are present the preaching of the gospel takes these for granted and begins with the declaration of the moral law. Even Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill does not attempt to establish the ontological status of God but to clarify the nature of God.

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that, in accordance with our principles of critique, if one looks not to what happens but to what properly should happen, then there really must not be any polemic of pure reason. For how can two people conduct a dispute about a matter the reality of which neither of them can exhibit in an actual or even in a merely possible experience...(CPR, 649).

For Kant it seems that philosophy does not have the role of producing our beliefs but the very negative role of confirming it or disconfirming it. He seems to appeal to the Christian idea of general revelation as basic to our common understanding and rejects the idea that philosophers should be the arbiters of revelation:

But do you demand then that a cognition that pertains to all human beings should surpass common understanding and be revealed to you only by philosophers? The very thing that you criticize is the best confirmation of the correctness of the assertions that have been made hitherto, that is, that it reveals what one could not have foreseen in the beginning, namely that in what concerns all human beings without exception nature is not to be blamed for any partiality in the distribution of its gifts, and in regard to the essential ends of human nature even the highest philosophy cannot advance further than the guidance that nature has also conferred on the most common understand (CPR, 690).

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