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Kant, Religion, and the Psychology of Reason

ABSTRACT: The paper reproduces the text of the plenary lecture given on February 12, 2024 in Halle at the international conference “Forms of Rationality – Kant and Modernity”, organized by the Christian-Wolff-Gesellschaft für die Philosophie der Aufklärung and the Immanuel-Kant-Forum. The paper suggests to read Kant’s critical philosophy as a *Bildungsroman* of reason that gradually succeeds in legitimizing its claims in the various domains to which its interest is directed. In particular, the private space of faith is considered in order to show that the rational and a priori structure underlying the various historical religions provides reason with a particular way of finding a satisfactory answer to its own need. Kant’s idea of pure rational faith rethinks the attempts made in modernity to reconcile faith and reason on radically new grounds. This is another expression of Kant’s understanding idea of Enlightenment.

KEYWORDS: Psychology of Reason; Need of Reason; Pure Rational Faith; Moral and Historical Religion; Enlightenment

1. A PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS FOR TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Kant’s philosophy represents the culmination of the Enlightenment culture against school philosophy, i.e. against that form of sclerotized knowledge that conceives philosophical work as a sectional skill reserved for the ‘artists of reason’ who, blinded by the virtuosity of a technical reason, lose sight of the proper task of philosophical reflection. Kant counters this pejorative conceive of philosophy with the conviction that the task of philosophy is to promote the moral destination of mankind. This is, as Kant’s readers know, the conception of philosophy in a *cosmic or cosmopolitan sense*: “From this point of view philosophy is the science of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*), and the philosopher is not an artist of reason but the legislator of human reason” (*KrV*, A 838/B 866). Conceived in accordance to its proper concept, philosophy looks first and foremost at the essential ends of humanity, it concerns that which necessarily interests everyone and which no rational being can be indifferent to (*KrV*, A 839/B 867).

Looking at those essential ends enables us to conduct our existence in a way that is worthy of our nature as rational beings, to make us ‘worthy’ of our humanity. This idea does not concern exclusively and primarily our speculative ends: Philosophy, in its most proper sense, does not aim primarily to extend the boundaries of our knowledge, but subordinates this task, however important it may be, to the realization of our practical destination, which is fulfilled at the level of morality and in the immanent realm



of history. It is therefore required to make the transition from the speculative realm of knowledge to the practical realm of morality. The path of philosophy understood in its cosmic sense thus requires that the actual realm of knowledge be defined, but in order to enable an equally secure path in the practical realm. Against the recurring attempts to reduce Kant's enterprise to the formulation of a rigorous and extremely architectural epistemology, it therefore seems rather to be the case that Kant, with that part of his philosophy, pays off in an unheard-of way the debt he incurred towards his epoch – the foundation of scientific knowledge, which was and would still remain one of his central concerns – in order to be able to turn with new legitimacy to the urgent interests of practical reason, which look irretrievably towards the field of metaphysics. “I had to lay aside knowledge in order to make room for faith”, says the famous Kantian adage (*KrV*, B XXX); a duty, one might add, that arises from the need to appease a reason that – as in the very first famous lines of the *Critique of Pure Reason* – “is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason” (*KrV*, A VII).

My remarks on Kant's ‘Psychology of Reason’ take their point of departure precisely from the way in which he introduces the protagonist of his philosophical enterprise and presents it to his readers. For Kant, *Reason*, in the broader sense it has in the titles of the *Critiques*, is the basic structure of every individual; it undoubtedly belongs to every human beyond his historical condition, his identity, gender, epoch, nationality. Kant's reason goes far beyond the logical, deductive and discursive capacity of modern philosophical reason. And it is also something different from the inferential ability, the technique of correct reasoning, to which a conspicuous part of philosophy still seems to reduce it today, thereby robbing philosophy of its original nature as humanistic knowledge, as a kind of knowledge that focuses on the human being in the complexity of existence.

In his own work, Kant follows reason on the winding path that leads to its self-realization. The *Critiques* can be read as a progressive confrontation with the aspirations, capacities and limits of reason. Therefore, I think it is beneficial to look at Kant's philosophy in a way that is perhaps unusual, but which has the undeniable advantage of making this impressive philosophical enterprise accessible in its overall meaning without getting lost in the folds of the elaborate theoretical mechanism that underlies it. That is, I would suggest viewing Kant's philosophy as the *Bildungsroman* of reason – a genre that was just developing in Germany in those years – whose protagonist is a gifted but unrestrained heroine. Kant tells us of her vicissitudes, accompanying her through the many adventures and misadventures she experiences due to her passionate and untamed nature, her aspirations, weaknesses and limitations. Kant himself presents his philosophy as the “history of the aberrations of human reason” – a reason that deceives itself, that “slumbers on the pillow of its supposed knowledge” and then flinches at the discovery of its own inability to offer solutions to problems it has created for itself (AA XX, 319). The Reason whose exploits Kant recounts and to which he points the way to the realization of its aspirations is a reason that has desires, inclinations, needs,

interests, torments, and movements of pride; it is a reason that advances step by step, runs aground, sometimes suffers humiliating defeats, and sometimes reacts with arrogance. Kant's reason falls in love with its own convictions without being reciprocated, wanders restlessly in search of fulfillment, settles down, seems to give up, starts again. These are all images and expressions taken from Kant, who draws an almost anthropomorphic profile of reason precisely through this way of describing its attitudes and behavior, a true 'psychology', understood as a description of the structural characters of a subject, which, I believe, can be considered the starting point for the whole system of transcendental philosophy. Reason has an undisciplined character, therefore it must be subjected to critique, which means that it must be forced – as Kant puts it – to take upon itself the most difficult of its tasks, which, in the famous metaphor, is to be both judge and defendant in the trial that must decide the legitimacy of its claims.

This way of claiming a 'psychology' of reason as the basis of Kant's enterprise has, of course, nothing to do with the usual ways in which scholars have repeatedly tried to read Kant's philosophy in psychological terms. I do not want to recall here, not even implicitly, what was understood by 'psychology' in Kant's time, neither in its rational-deductive nor in its empirical form – both of which, as is well known, were rejected by Kant because of their unfounded claim to say something objective, universal and necessary about the object of thought. Even less do I wish to recall the attempts to justify the transcendental feature of Kant's philosophy in psychological terms, to trace it back to the natural processes of the mind, be it in the wake of the tradition from Reinhold to Fries to Bona Meyer, be it in the more recent accusations or defenses of a 'transcendental psychology' à la Strawson, à la Waxmann or à la Kitcher.

Rather, the 'psychology of reason' I refer to concerns the way in which Kant portrays the intrinsic qualities, attitudes, and features of the protagonist of transcendental philosophy, who, pushed by a need and a specific interest, moves in and beyond the world in search of its own fulfillment. The thesis I would like to put forward is that reason's insatiable need, to which Kant returns again and again, is actually a 'psychological' notion and identifies the starting point of Kant's entire philosophical work. Kant speaks of it as "the feeling of reason's own need", a "feeling" that emerges when reason perceives its own inadequacy to know through objective grounds (AA VIII, 136-137). However, it has a transcendental character: it is in fact rooted in reason completely *a priori*, as one of its fundamental structures, and determines *a priori* as its condition the path that reason walks in order to reach its satisfaction. The need is not revealed through an introspective investigation, through the description of an empirical trait of the soul: the drive of reason to satisfy its own needs is the transcendental basic structure of the transcendental subject.

2. REASON AND ITS *FERNWEH*

The ‘need’ underlies all undertakings and endeavors of reason. It is a transcendental subjective principle that reason has at its disposal in order to determine itself to assent with regard to matters for which it has no objective principles. When reason feels overwhelmed, defeated, “there enters the right of reason’s need, as a subjective ground for presupposing and assuming something which reason may not presume to know through objective grounds; and consequently for orienting itself in thinking, solely through reason’s own need, in that immeasurable space of the supersensible, which for us is filled with dark or night” (AA VIII, 137). In 1777, almost at the turn of the silent decade, Kant uses a very significant metaphor to describe this dynamic of reason’s need, around which the whole life of reason is built.

The critique of pure reason is a prophylactic against a sickness of reason that has its germ in our nature. It is the opposite of the inclination that chains us to our fatherland (homesickness, *Heimweh*): a longing to leave our circle and to relate to other worlds (*Refl.* 5073, AA XVIII, 79-80).

Reason has, so to speak, an endogenous tendency to move away from this world, from the albeit fertile lowlands (*das fruchtbare Bathos*) of experience mentioned in the *Prolegomena* (AA IV, 373). It is a tendency to escape phenomenal reality, the world of nature, and to turn to other worlds. It is the opposite of the *Heimweh*, the feeling of longing that binds us closely to the world of our certainties; it is a sort of *Fernweh*, a longing for elsewhere, for a world different from the natural one that gives voice to another component of human nature, which does not feel satisfied by the certainties it achieves in the secure knowledge of natural science.

This is the outline of the Kantian *Bildungsroman*, the stages of which – stages in which the ‘endogenous tendency’ of reason manifests itself – are spelled out in the notorious list of questions of critical philosophy: *What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for?* Wonderfully summarized in the last question: *What is human being?* The order of questions shows that the tendency of reason is not necessarily and exclusively a pathological one, although it can become so if it entangles us in dialectical illusions – and at this point the critique of pure reason serves as a preventive measure, as in the *Reflection* just mentioned. We owe the achievements of reason in the realm of knowledge precisely to this endogenous tendency: In the theoretical use of reason, the need to move beyond experience in the search for first principles (which give rise to the unconditioned totality of ideas) plays a crucial role and makes the formulation of science as a system possible. There is no science without an idea, says Kant, referring to the impossibility of organizing empirical knowledge into an organic totality unless there is a *focus imaginarius* conceived by reason and located beyond phenomena (*KrV*, A 644/B 672).

But alongside this expression of reason’s need in the speculative realm, Kant recognizes another one that he considers “far more important”, namely the expression of need in the practical use of reason; on the basis of this need we are forced to accept the truths of metaphysics (the existence of God and the immortality of the soul) “not only

if we want to judge [as in the speculative realm], but because we have to judge (*weil wir urtheilen müssen*)” (AA VIII, 139). By recognizing the necessity (*müssen*) to judge, Kant emphasizes the inescapable nature of this tendency of reason to go beyond the meticulous description of phenomena – a task that is not sufficient to do justice to its demands. “A need for an absolutely necessary aim,” Kant would reply to Wizenmann in the *Critique of practical reason*: “I will that there be a God, that my existence in this world be even apart from the natural connection also an existence in a pure world of understanding, and finally that my duration be endless; I abide by this, and shall not let this faith be taken from me; for, this is the only [case] where my interest, because I *must not* remit anything of it, unavoidably determines my judgment, without paying attention to subtle reasonings, however little I may be able to answer them or oppose them with more plausible ones” (*KpV*, 143).

Incidentally, the conviction that reason ultimately follows its own aspirations by paying little heed to the results of the intellect appears early on in Kant’s work, i.e. long before the formulation of the genetic distinction between the two faculties in the first *Critique*. Already in *Dreams of a Spirit-seer* Kant recognized – at that time *malgré lui* – that precisely in questions of metaphysics there is what he addresses as the only inaccuracy that one *cannot* easily remove and that, in fact, one *never wants* to remove: “The scale of reason is not, however, wholly impartial, and one of its arms, which bears the inscription ‘Hope for the Future,’ has a mechanical advantage that causes even weak arguments that fall into the pan belonging to it to lift up the speculations that have a greater weight on the other side” (AA II, 349-350). Hope’ trumps ‘certainty’ and thus gives expression to that striving of reason which Kant would shortly afterwards place at the center of his own ‘revolution in the way of thinking’.

Morality (the question concerning what I should do) and religion (the question concerning of what I can hope for) are the horizon towards which Kantian reason moves, since it senses the possibility of its own fulfillment only there. Morality is the room of freedom, of a duty that is not that of natural necessity but allows the possibility of disregarding it. Freedom, which reason does not find among the things of nature, but which it can only recognize as its own fundamental trait, is the idea that authorizes reason to think of itself as belonging to a world that is not only that of natural things. The subject comprehends himself as the citizen of two worlds, the world of nature, which is subject to the necessity of physical laws, and the moral world, a world in which it can act according to freedom, that is, determining himself for goals that are not imposed by nature. Reason grasps in itself a command by means of which it is allowed to think of itself as a free being.

3. AN ORGANON FOR RELIGION

Reason, dissatisfied with what it discovers and knows in the world of nature, sets out in search of those essential ends science itself can give no account of. “The mathematician”, according to Kant, “would gladly give up his entire science for that science cannot give him any satisfaction in regard to the highest and most important ends of

humanity” (*KrV*, A 463/B 491). He would give up his certain knowledge in return for reassurance about the legitimacy to regard himself as a free being whose existence is not confined within the limits of earthly life and is not subject to its necessary laws; that is, to regard himself as a being who will one day come to terms with his morality and be rewarded for his virtuous actions.

Human reason withdraws from the natural world by yielding to its own need, i.e. by following its own practical interest, and ‘creates’ its own world from that experience of freedom, that enables it to recognize its own fundamental moral nature. If critical philosophy should serve as a medicament, a preventive measure or as a *discipline* for reason when it has to deal with its dialectic illusion, in the practical use of reason it offers reason a set of norms, a *canon*, to which it can adhere in order to approach the moral world.

The Canon of pure reason – “the sum total of the a priori principles of the correct use of certain cognitive faculties in general” (A 796/B 824) – is the right place to find the norms for the use of reason in the practical realm. This means that there are references in the Canon to the correct orientation of the need of reason conceived as its natural inclination. It is no coincidence that the chapter on the Canon uses distinctly psychological terminology from the outset: “It is humiliating for human reason that it accomplishes nothing in its pure use, and even requires a discipline to check its extravagances and avoid the deceptions that come from them” (A 795/B 823); reason has “the unquenchable desire to find a firm footing beyond all bounds of experience”; “has a presentiment of objects of great interest to it. It takes the path of mere speculation in order to come closer to these; but they flee before it” (A 796/B 824); “Reason is driven by a propensity of its nature to go beyond its use in experience, to venture to the outermost bounds of all cognition by means of mere ideas in a pure use, and to find peace only in the completion of its circle in a self-subsisting systematic whole” (A 797/B 825). Notoriously, the a priori principles provided for in the Canon are the moral laws, starting from which reason faces ‘another world’ in which find place the actions that constitute the history of human beings and in which, beside the necessity of the natural connections of phenomena, there are subjects who act (also) in accordance with another legislation (A 807/B 835). Reason creates this other world for itself since it is moved by the urgency of satisfying its own need. In this way, the canon of reason in its practical use also assumes the function of an *organ* that enables reason to produce new and certain, albeit obviously practical, knowledge.

According to the Canon, the moral world has certain specific properties (A 808/B 836): It is a product of reason conceived as conforming to moral laws; it is conceived as an intelligible world; it is a mere idea, albeit a practical one; it has its own objective (practical) reality (it is understood as the *corpus mysticum* of rational beings as free beings). In this world brought forth by reason, God and eternal life find their own objective, albeit practical, reality, as inescapable correlates of a morality that is autonomous in itself but that cannot be directed towards vain chimeras (*KrV*, A 811/B 839).

The two questions “Is there a God? Is there a future life?” (*KrV*, A 803/B 831), which in the speculative use of reason were reduced to nothing more than “idle conati”,

become, in the practical use directed by the canon, the *highest ends* to which “that interest of humanity, which is subordinate to no higher interest” (*KrV*, A 798/B 826) is directed. The moral world is thus populated with rational entities (God and immortal souls), which are thus to be understood as responses of reason to its own practical need or interest. Just as the moral world springs from an idea (the highest good), the entities that populate it also have a purely ideal, i.e. subjective reality. They become the object of a *belief*, a subjective principle of assent, that leads us to believe them to be true precisely because of the urgency of reason’s need. In Kant’s words, “I will inexorably believe in the existence of God and a future life, and I am sure that nothing can make these beliefs unstable, since my moral principles themselves, which I cannot renounce without becoming contemptible in my own eyes, would thereby be subverted” (*KrV*, A 828/B 856).

In this sense, Kant speaks of religion “from the subjective point of view”, as an expression of the need (i.e. the subjective principle of determination) of reason. Thus understood, from the speculative standpoint, religion requires only “a problematic assumption (hypothesis)” concerning the highest cause of things, whereas from the moral standpoint, i.e. “with respect to the object toward which our morally legislative reason bids us work, what is presupposed is an assertoric faith, practical and hence free, that promises a result for the final aim of religion” (AA VI, 154). This means that religion and its contents (God and eternal life) spring from reason and are resolved within reason as ‘means’ for the fulfillment of the need that arises from its practical use; “this faith needs only *the idea of God* which must occur to every morally earnest (and therefore religious) pursuit of the good, without pretending to be able to secure objective reality for it through theoretical cognition” (*ibid.*). We are entitled to understand the need for reason as a principle from which the contents of religion emerge and receive an actual reality as contents of reason. The need compels us to think and act not *as if* God exists, but *insofar as* God exists. However, God exists for reason and within the limits of reason alone, since God is nothing more than an idea. There is no need apart from the “idea of God,” which reason procures for itself in response to its own inestimable need, and there is no need to assume its existence outside the idea.

Religion, unlike morality, is not based on certain and objective knowledge; it is enclosed in the absolutely subjective and private room of faith, that opens up at the boundaries of morality. As human beings, we cannot live with dignity independently of our nature as moral agents, that is, without recognizing the imperative of duty. But there is neither an imperative nor a commandment underlying faith, which is an incidental and by no means necessary element for a life worthy of our human nature. But the room of faith and religion is in itself the expression of the same ‘endogenous tendency’ of a reason that goes beyond the empirical world and yet manages to find for itself an answer to its need.

4. RELIGION AND THE INSTINCTS OF REASON

As Kant had already argued in his essay on *Orientation in thought*, “The concept of God and even the conviction of his existence”, as well as that of the immortality of the soul, “is to be found only in reason as its exclusive source, and it cannot first enter our minds either through inspiration or through any external communication, however great the authority from which the latter may come” (AA VIII, 142). This means that in reason lies what Kant calls the *Credo* of pure reason, understood as free affirmation of the only three articles of confession of pure practical reason: “I believe in one God, as the original source of all good in the world, that being its final end; – I believe in the possibility of conforming to this final end, to the highest good in the world, so far as it is in man’s power; – I believe in a future eternal life, as the condition for an everlasting approximation of the world to the highest good possible therein”; a *Credo* that permits of no imperative, but leads us to act on the basis of a subjective principle “as though we knew that these objects were real” (AA XX, 298). We act as if we know that such objects are real, although we know that they are not. This means that while the reality of those “quasi-objects” (de Boer), which one might prefer to call ‘contents of reason’, is practical (in the sense that they serve as inescapable correlates of our existence as moral agents), it is accompanied by the firm realization that nothing outside reason corresponds to such beliefs of ours. Whether there is a God who really exists in some part of the world or outside the world or there is room for an indefinite duration of our existence are questions that not only have no relevance to the moral character of our actions, but above all cannot find a solution in the speculative realm. Reason is not interested in attaining speculative certainty in this sense; rather, an unshakeable belief in its practical validity is sufficient to satisfy its need. This means that those contents cannot be ascribed existence as an absolute position in space and time, which can only happen in the world of phenomena. But existence in the intelligible world is of a different kind and can be recognized by contents the unshakeable faith of reason is directed to. God exists and exists only in the idea, neither chimerically nor arbitrarily, but subjectively claimed by the transcendental need of reason.

The three articles of faith mentioned in the *Credo* thus form the transcendental skeleton of (moral) religion, understood as a rational faith which prevents religious illusions, i.e. a false profession in which a mere idea of something is confused with its existence (AA VI, 168).

This conception of religion as a response to a subjective principle of determination prevents erroneous interpretations as the one expressed in some historical religions (AA VI, 153-154). According to Kant, the history of human reason shows that before the sufficient determination and purification of moral concepts, i.e. before the ‘discovery’ of the moral source of our idea of God, only rough and vague ideas of the deity emerged (*KrV*, A 663/B 661 n.). Kant, however, is of the opinion that “of all the public religions so far known, the Christian alone” is a *moral* religion (AA VI, 51). For the Christian religion commands man to work on his inner perfection, to make himself worthy of happiness, i.e. worthy of being pleasing to God. It is, in Kant’s words, a “re-

ligion of good life-conduct" (*ibid.*), of the restoration of the rule of the good principle over the evil one, of obedience to the moral law and not to the perversity of the heart, a religion based on the free nature of the subject as the highest expression of the dignity of human nature. The Christian religion is the one that best expresses this *Credo* of pure faith in reason, in which the self-fulfilling efforts of pure reason are condensed.

Kant, however, seems to take the assertion that Christianity is an exceptional historical phenomenon one step further. Whether this is due to historical conditions, which forced greater caution in the face of heightened censorship practices, or to authentic belief, it does not change the meaning of the maneuver Kant carries out to explain the emergence of the beliefs of historical Christianity. He almost seems to suggest that the images, liturgies and dogmas of this historical religion itself, even if in their fundamental speculative inadequacy, reveal a particular procedure of reason which, in its attempt to represent what by its nature cannot be exhibited in sensible representations, has developed conceptions that nourish the historical tradition better than in other religious contexts. Indeed, in historical religion, images are formulated that express a limitation inherent in reason when it attempts to represent supersensible modes of being. When it comes to making us understand "certain ways of being" (not objects or things) that are supersensible, reason proceeds with a scheme of analogy "which we cannot do without": that is, something supersensible is made understandable by analogy with something sensible. This is actually – as claimed in the *Progresses* – the path of metaphysics. "The Scriptures too, to make the extent of God's love for the human race comprehensible to us, adapt themselves to this manner of representation" (AA VI, 65) – a manner of representation that makes things comprehensible to us that we could not otherwise comprehend. The examples Kant cites are manifold and range from the depiction of the distinction between moral good and evil to that between heaven and hell, of Christ as a moral example, of the evils in the world as punishments for transgressions committed, of the virginal conception of Jesus.

According to Kant, all of these cases are "figurative representation[s] [...] yet not any the less philosophically correct in meaning" (AA VI, 60), in the sense that reason cannot help but resort to sensual images to represent something that cannot be shown in intuition, but which corresponds perfectly to the content it needs to think. Human reason tends to connect the course of nature with the laws of morality, and it draws from nature the images required to represent something that is not natural. These are "idea[s] of reason consistent with, as it were, a moral instinct difficult to explain and yet undeniable" (AA VI, 80).

But as soon as this in itself legitimate procedure of schematism by analogy (the *symbolic hypotyposis* of the *Critique of Judgement*) is turned into a schematism for the determination of an object (*schematic hypotyposis*), reason loses sight of the meaning of analogy and ascribes to the second concept the properties of the first, claiming to extend its own concept. In doing so, it falls into the captivity of a religious anthropomorphism that has harmful consequences for morality (AA VI, 65). By confusing, as it were, the conditions of our capacity to conceive something with the properties attributed to that something, reason falls victim to religious illusion, to false worship, to an inversion of the basic order between religion and morality.

5. A PLAIDOYER FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

Given this accordance between moral religion and the historical form of Christianity, we can see how pure reason, starting from the subjective principle of need, produces its own world (the world of grace), whose contents (the highest good, God and the immortal soul) constitute the transcendental structure of (pure) religion, which is the foundation of all historical religion. It seems to me that with due distinctions we can identify a correspondence between the way in which the intellect, by means of the principles of its pure (speculative) use, produces a (natural) world whose fundamental structure obeys the a priori laws of the self (the *natura formaliter spectata* recalled in the *Prolegomena*, the skeleton of every applied physics, AA IV, 318), with the way in which reason, by means of the principles of its pure but practical use, creates a world that serves as the scaffolding of every historical religion and for which it claims the same legitimacy and objective reality (albeit practical) as for the natural one. In the natural world, of course, one starts from an irreducible *datum* for the subject and ends up with knowledge; in the moral world, the only *datum* one can rest on is the immanent *Factum* of reason, which leads to the establishment of a (practical) reality that, in order to exist, does not require to move away from the boundaries of reason and from its urgency to satisfy its own need. “From the practical point of view this idea [*scil.*: the idea of Christ and of every object of faith] has complete reality within itself. For it resides in our morally-legislative reason. [...] There is no need, therefore, of any example from experience to make the idea of a human being morally pleasing to God a model to us; the idea is present as model already in our reason” (AA VI, 62).

In Kant’s words, we must “create a God” whose actual existence as a transcendent being is not only not demonstrable but is not even required by reason with regard to the fulfillment of its moral purpose. It suffices to believe in the existence of God as an idea of reason, in that conception of God which, in its purity, is the answer to the need of reason and the “touchstone” of all historical religion.

As claimed in the first *Critique*: “Moral theology is therefore only of immanent use, namely for fulfilling our vocation here in the world by fitting into the system of all ends, not for fanatically or even impiously abandoning the guidance of a morally legislative reason in the good course of life in order to connect it immediately to the idea of the highest being, which would provide a transcendental use but which even so, like the use of mere speculation, must pervert and frustrate the ultimate ends of reason” (A 819/B 847). The same content of religion itself is only immanent and exhausts its reality in reason alone.

This conception of faith as an inner and private disposition, based on principles that are only subjective but at the same time rational and common to every human being, is the foundation of moral religion. It is an expression of the courageous ‘revolution in the way of thinking’ that Kant inaugurates in the realm of faith. It is, in fact, a revolution that irretrievably breaks with the horizon in which the numerous attempts to affirm the rational and moral content of any religious belief, undertaken since the end of the 17th century and throughout the following century, were conceived. With

Kant, it is no longer a question – to paraphrase the title of Locke’s work from 1695 – of affirming the *reasonableness* of religion, i.e. to establish the possibility of reason’s access to the fundamental doctrines of religion, or the correspondence of the doctrines of faith with the truths of reason. Moreover, it is no longer an attempt to use reason as a criterion of what can or should be accepted of religion, as deists like Toland, Collins, or Reimarus wanted to do. According to Kant, the point is rather to consider religion *within the boundaries* of mere reason, i.e. to turn the terms of the question on their head: no longer to look for a correspondence between reason and faith, but precisely to identify in the basic structure of (human) reason the origin of the content of religion and the principles underlying the assent to its beliefs. This would lead Kant to the claim that faith (as subjective assent) and the contents to which it is directed have their origin in reason itself; we must start from this profoundly rational nature of religious contents in order to recover the true meaning of religion and the (very private) role it can play in the life of every human being.

In this way, Kant affirmed a clear priority of morality over religion, of virtue over piety. This is properly “Enlightenment” (AA VI, 179), for it too affirms the urgency of finding the courage to make use of one’s own reason, to free oneself from a self-imposed yoke; it’s a resolute call to focus on “the dignity of the humanity which the human being must respect in his own person and personal vocation” (AA VI, 183). By recognizing the inestimable need reason has to form an idea of God and eternal life and to believe firmly in their practical reality, Kant’s philosophy once again expresses its boundless admiration for human nature and gives an important teaching about how one should stand by one’s religious convictions. Religion is a response to the need for reason; it does not imply a reference to a transcendent reality, but dissolves into the immanent sphere of our rationality. A rationality that goes far beyond being a mere means in the service of scientific knowledge.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA = I. Kant, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by the Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (und Nachfolgern), Berlin, de Gruyter, 1900ff.

KrV = I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (A=1781, B=1787), ed. by P. Guyer and A. Wood, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1998.

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