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Sacred Alliance? The Critical Assessment of Revelation in Fichte and Kant

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Religion encountered a host of problems in the eighteenth century: the decline of Biblical authority, the rise of scientific skepticism, and an emerging spirit of human autonomy. Each of these developments diminished the function of religious institutions in public life, but this is not to say that religion lost its importance. Western modernity has not been able to ignore or replace Christianity—even if modernity generally cannot incorporate it. As Jonathan Sheehan observes, "secularization always is and always must be incomplete. Even as religion seems to vanish from politics and public culture, it never ceases to define the project of modernity."

But for eighteenth-century thinkers, religion was not merely an unavoidable, negative reference point in the story of progress. On the one hand, it remained invaluable for morality, such that even Voltaire displays a deep reluctance to abandon belief in divine justice, which he

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feels is necessary for social stability. Immanuel Kant, who holds that moral rectitude does not require religion, nevertheless feels that a belief in God’s justice meets a “natural need, which would otherwise be a hindrance to moral resolve, to think for all our doings and nondoings taken as a whole some sort of final end which reason can justify.” On the other hand, religion provided a counterbalance to the cognitive epistemology of the Enlightenment. Martin Jay comments that “the reduction of experience [after Hume and Kant] to a question of cognition . . . left a gnawing sense that something important in human life had been sacrificed,” and this feeling gave rise to the modern experiential theory of religion. Although their challenges to religion were often serious and fundamental, very few intellectuals of the eighteenth century sought its demise. On the contrary, there was a widespread attempt to re-legitimize religion, or some version of it, within the critical-scientific idiom of the day.

In this article, I investigate one very specific instance of this religious accommodation: Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s and Immanuel Kant’s assessment of revelation in the early 1790s. Like many of their contemporaries, these thinkers were committed to disentangling religion from “superstition” and to reorienting it toward morality. Critical philosophy provided a rich, a priori account of the constitution and limits of knowledge as well as a powerful practical philosophy—and this would seem to leave little room for a philosophical discourse on divine intervention. But like many of their contemporaries, they also felt the need to consider the rights of revelation. In this respect, they can be included in a specifically German


tradition of rational-religious conciliation beginning with Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz. According to religious historian Johannes Wallmann, Leibniz demonstrates the "theoretical possibility (Denkmöglichkeit) and reasonableness" of miracles and ecclesiastical dogma, and this opens a German "alliance...between philosophy and theology, which is based on the idea of a harmony between revelation and reason." Classic examples of this alliance are Johann Joachim Spalding's extremely popular The Vocation of Man (1748), which merges the Enlightenment ideal of progressive perfection into the Christian vision of the afterlife, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's profoundly influential view of the Old and New Testaments as "primers" (Elementarbücher) assisting humanity along its path to moral autonomy. Fichte's Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation

6. Johannes Wallmann, Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands seit der Reformation, 6th ed. (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 152. I acknowledge, however, that not all of the German enlightened are of a piece. Thomas Saine and Jonathan Israel have identified an early "radical" Enlightenment in Germany that offers no olive branch to religious orthodoxy. See Thomas Saine, The Problem of Being Modern, or, The German Pursuit of Enlightenment from Leibniz to the French Revolution (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997); and Jonathan Israel, Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 628–63. Saine in particular bemoans the gradual dissolution of this rigorously secular Enlightenment as German intellectuals struggled to keep "as much as possible of the old while embracing the new" (16). The secularist view has been recently challenged by David Sorkin, who believes that "the Enlightenment could be reverent as well as irreverent, and that such reverence was at its very core"; The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), xiv. Of course, the secular/religious question is a perennial one for any general characterization of the Enlightenment.

7. A similar spirit of "alliance" between reason and revelation can, I believe, be found in the combination of philological brilliance and verbal literalism in the Biblical scholarship of Johann Albrecht Bengel, the most prominent of the Württemberg Pietists, or in the combination of historical biblical criticism and religious establishmentarianism in Johann Salamo Semler and the German "neologists." See Johannes Wallmann, Der Pietismus (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 213–25; Wallmann, Kirchengeschichte, 56–160; Frei, Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 175–79; and B. A. Gerrish, "Natural and Revealed Religion," in The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 659. Lessing is admittedly a double-edged sword in this context, because his publication of Reimarus's infamous Biblical criticism (which unleashed the so-called Fragmentenstreit) and his own posthumously exposed Spinozism were major affronts to orthodox piety. Hermann Timm even views Lessing as a counter to Leibniz: "Leibniz hatte noch davon ausgehen können, daß die christliche Tradition sich selbst trägt... Die Beweislast liegt auf Seiten des Gegners... Durch den Fragmentenstreit ist die Beweislast auf die Gegenseite..."
(1792) fits into this story of a German philosophical-theological alliance insofar as it attempts to reconcile revelation and the new Kantian philosophy, and Kant, in his own cautious way, continues Fichte’s initiative in *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone* (1793).

My investigation begins with Fichte’s view, as evidenced in *Attempt*, that some historical peoples might lose their sensitivity to the moral law and might require God’s empirical intervention if they are to overcome evil and embrace their moral destiny. This is similar to Lessing’s position, but Fichte’s position is novel insofar as he presents it as a consequence of purely Kantian or “critical” principles, which in turn forces Kant to decide whether Fichte’s argument is indeed critically viable. Kant expressed mild public praise for Fichte’s work in 1792, yet Kant’s real verdict—and the main focus of my argument—comes one year later in *Religion*. If we read this work with Fichte in mind, we can see Kant agreeing that evil is a central problem for the philosophy of religion but strongly resisting Fichte’s idea that an individual’s moral or “practical” reason might lack self-sufficiency and require divine intervention. I show that, although Kant clearly champions the self-sufficiency of practical reason, the necessity of a nonempirical divine intervention as an antidote to radical evil nonetheless remains a serious possibility in *Religion*, if only for the power of reflective judgment.

I should say that the point of my reading of *Religion* is not to expose its various weaknesses as a philosophical text because these have been well noted and thus require no repetition. Rather, by

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8. Fichte meant the work to be purely Kantian, since he wished to ingratiate himself with Kant and thereby open the door to an academic career beyond that of a private tutor. In this regard, it proved very successful, becoming the principle cause for his appointment to a professorship at the University of Jena in 1794.


reading Fichte and Kant side by side, I wish to show that Kant's Religion responds to the challenge to the Kantian system posed by Fichte's Attempt. More specifically, when I demonstrate that the necessity of divine intervention remains a serious possibility in Kant's work, I am saying that Kant did not entirely succeed in deflecting Fichte's challenge to the self-sufficiency of practical reason. The nature of my own argument is thus ultimately historical, although my method is largely analytical.

As a preliminary matter, I must point out that I use terms such as revelation, miracle, and divine intervention interchangeably in this essay. Unless evident otherwise, the notion behind these terms is a supernatural interference in the natural order, whether through the empirical transmission of scripture, the inward gift of grace, or some more obscure manipulation of history itself. On this view, genuine revelation cannot be the imaginative grasp of rational truth, as it is for Spinoza, nor can it be a pronounced moment of self-discovery in the dialectic of Spirit, as Hegel would have it. Spinoza and Hegel immanen-tize the divine in a way that leaves little or no room for transcendence, whereas the God-talk of Fichte and Kant often implies a Beyond from which God operates (or could, in principle, operate). In other words, Fichte and Kant retain the central Christian notion that revelation, like all miracles, is a "free manifestation by God of that which lies beyond the normal reach of human inquiry."

Fichte and the Conditional Necessity of Revelation

Johann Gottlieb Fichte is the founder of what became German Idealism, a philosophical movement characterized in part by an abandonment of the transcendent as the ground of being. Reality, in Fichte's view, is the production of the self-positing self (i.e., the "I") as it passes through an endless series of negations (i.e., encounters with the "not-I"), which are overcome in two ways: through a reflective reconstruction of the original unity of consciousness as "I," and through a practical subjection of nature to the rationality of the "I."

Because Idealism is not my focus here, I do not unpack or critique this position; it is enough to observe that, in this worldview, any notion of religion based on supernatural revelation does not fare terribly well. Fichte implies, long before Ludwig Feuerbach overtly argues, that God is the externalization of human spirit. This being the case, it is ironic that Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation, the work announcing Fichte's appearance on the intellectual scene, revolves entirely around a religious question: "Is the concept of revelation possible *a priori*, or does it have a merely empirical origin?" To answer this question, Attempt begins with a general "deduction of religion" (chap. 2), followed by a treatise on the distinction between natural and revealed religion (chap. 3), then a "deduction" of revelation and its rational possibility (chap. 4–7), and finally a discussion of the "criteria" for judging revelations (chap. 8–12). In chapter 2, Fichte reaffirms the Kantian postulate of a divine, moral Lawgiver, albeit through a somewhat different line of reasoning than Kant's. The chapter's opening sentence announces the a priori imperative of reason to achieve the highest good, which consists of moral perfection united with perfect happiness. Because our happiness depends on our well-being as sensual creatures, however, we are unable to bring about the highest good, for natural laws are, from the human perspective, completely insensitive to moral commands. Therefore, in order to avoid a contradiction within reason—namely, to avoid reason making a practical demand that it knows theoretically is impossible to fulfill, thus compromising the authority of the moral law within the economy of reason as a whole—we must assume, "as assuredly as we must assume that the promotion of the end goal of the moral law within us is possible," that there is a God.


13. Fichte, *Versuch*, 33. Translations throughout are based on Green’s translation, but I have modified them in many instances. Because the chronological priority of Fichte’s text over Kant’s is important here, I cite from the first edition in 1792 as published by the Meiner Verlag rather than the more frequently cited second edition of 1793 as published in the fifth volume of the de Gruyter edition.
who rules over the domains of both freedom and nature. This conclusion is particularly important for our “lower faculty of desire” (unteres Begehungsvermögen), which looks after our material happiness. Our “upper” faculty is content with the disinterested pleasure (Lust) of achieving an aesthetic conformity between our actions and the moral law. We can successfully subordinate our “lower” faculty of desire to our “upper” one partly out of fear or admiration for the divine Lawgiver’s power and partly because the Lawgiver promises an ultimate satisfaction to our “lower” faculty should it conform to virtue. We can, furthermore, trust God’s promise because reason requires us to attribute moral goals not only to the divine mind but also to the omnipotent will of the Creator.

The indirect consequences of the concept of the divine will are, however, what really drive the argument of Attempt. Should it be possible for our respect for the moral law as such to grow weak, then representing morality as the will of God—a representation that revelation actuates—might serve as a secondary moral incentive to lead us back to moral health. Fichte is quite explicit about this:

We can imagine individual cases of the application of the [moral] law, in which reason alone would not have enough strength to determine the will; rather, to reinforce its efficacy, it

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14. Fichte, Versuch, 8–10, cf. 17. Fichte is adopting here Kant’s philosophical motives for including the ideas of freedom (agency), God, and immortality within the project of moral philosophy. Without these, practical reason would, on reflection, find itself irreconcilably at odds with nature. Despite the novelties he introduces into Kant’s argument, Fichte perceives himself to be proceeding in a rigorously Kantian fashion.

15. Ibid., 13.


17. Ibid., 20. There are two main differences from Kant’s argument. First, Fichte does not follow the order in which Kant’s practical concepts unfold. Skipping the postulate of immortality, Fichte begins with the highest good and then jumps to God as the Guarantor of the highest good. (None of this is developed as carefully as we might wish.) Hansjiirgen Verweyen notes that the order of these concepts may reflect the influence of Pezold, introduction to Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung (1792), by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, ed. Hansjiirgen Verweyen (Hamburg, Germany: Felix Meiner, 1983), x. Second, Fichte presents the God of revelation, in Allen Wood’s terms, as “intimately connected to moral motivation and the authority of the moral law, which requires that we be able to think of morality as legislated both by our own will and by the will of God which is external to us” (introduction to Attempt, xv).
additionally requires the representation that a certain action be commanded by God.\textsuperscript{18}

We might well doubt whether an incentive other than the moral law itself can be considered "moral," but Fichte's text provides two interrelated ways of defending this proposition. First, although the representation of a moral Lawgiver outside of ourselves cannot "in the strict sense strengthen our respect for the moral law at all," it can "increase our respect for the decisions of the moral law in specific cases, where a strong counterweight of inclination is present."\textsuperscript{19} In other words, revelation, because it directly evokes the representation of God, can promote moral sensitivity and thereby empower the moral will. As Hansjürgen Verweyen puts it, "[w]hen people are brought to at least temporarily listen to God, their moral feeling can develop."\textsuperscript{20} In providing this service, revelation belongs to the category of moral "helps and hindrances" that recent scholarship has identified and defended in the context of Kantian anthropology.\textsuperscript{21} Second, revealed commandments can be moral incentives in the sense that they invoke our relationship to a being "in regard to whom it is not up to us whether we respect [achten] him or deny him due respect . . . a being the mere thought of whom must impress the deepest reverence upon us, and whom it would be the greatest absurdity not to honor."\textsuperscript{22} Revelations are thus not only a moral "help" in fostering moral sensitivity but also directly invoke the moral law via their practical-dialectical unity with the idea of God.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{18} Fichte, \textit{Versuch}, 23.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{20} Verweyen, introduction to \textit{Versuch}, xxxi.
\textsuperscript{21} See, for instance, Patrick Frierson, \textit{Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 48–67. It would be good to see Kant scholars eventually acknowledge Fichte as a representative of this "Kantian" moral anthropology.
\textsuperscript{22} Fichte, \textit{Versuch}, 24.
\textsuperscript{23} It should be noted that the practical-dialectical unity of God and revelation could not be spelled out in Kantian terms in 1792 because Kant had not yet provided such terms. Fichte therefore provides his own: "The only purely moral stimulus is the inward holiness of right," he says, and "by a postulate of pure practical reason this is in God \textit{in concreto} (and consequently available to sensibility); \textit{Versuch}, 40. Although an elaboration of this dense argument would be helpful, it is clear that, for Fichte, we must think of God's inward holiness as "available to sensibility," which means that the mere experience of
Whichever way we explain the possibility of a secondary moral incentive, the bottom line is that the senses, usually seen as a source of temptation, can, in fact, facilitate morality by receiving revelation:

Should beings . . . become entirely incapable of morality, their sensuous nature must itself be determined by sensuous stimuli to allow itself to be determined by the moral law. . . . This can only be taken to mean that purely moral stimuli are to be brought to these beings via the path of the senses.24

“Purely moral stimuli” can be none other than the commands of moral reason, and to present them “via the path of the senses” can only be to receive them from the mouth of God. To be sure, we have no general duty to regard the moral law as sensuously revealed, because that would be an a priori challenge to the autonomy of reason. Fichte merely speculates that, in some cases, it might be crucial for the law to be represented as coming immediately from God, who “personally would have to announce himself and his will as lawful for [finite moral beings] in the sensuous world.”25 In any case, this sensuous reinforcement marks, for Fichte, the divide between sterile “theology” and living “religion.”26

But could the weakening of the moral law, on which all this is predicated, actually occur? Despite protestations of doubt in chapter 2, Fichte defends this possibility. “It can certainly be conceived a priori,” he argues, that a primitive or indigent society might “come into a situation . . . such

(131)

(perceived) revelation already has a priori resonance with the moral law. Kant, by contrast, will never say that we must assume God’s holiness is “available to sensibility” because he is afraid it could lead to non-moral forms of religion, or “counterfeit service” (Afterdienst); Religion, 6.151.

24. Fichte, Versuch, 40.
25. Ibid., 41.
26. Scholars typically classify this distinction between “theology” and “religion” as Fichte’s innovation on Kant’s philosophy of religion, although Fichte may have acquired the idea, as Marco Olivetti points out, from the conclusion of Kant’s third Critique; “Zum Religions- und Offenbarungsverständnis beim jungen Fichte und bei Kant,” Fichte-Studien 23 (2003): 193–94. “Theology” concerns merely those ideas that arise from reflection on the moral law, while “religion” concerns the total relation, including the sensuous relation, between the subject and the divine. See Xavier Léon, Fichte et son temps, vol. 1 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954), 104–5; for the complex development of Fichte’s Religionsbegriff, see Verweyen, introduction to Versuch, xxiv–xxviii.
that it was compelled . . . to hear no other law than that of need," in which case God would have to intervene to awaken their beleaguered moral sense. 27 Or, if primitive humans should, as is likely, gradually emerge from the thoughtlessness of indigence by making practical rules for themselves based on their experience, it is likely that these rules would "contradict possible moral rules," and such rules passed down as tradition could conceivably "destroy the possibility of morality" altogether. 28 Finally, certain individuals can exhibit deficiencies to "a degree of intensity at which the moral law loses its causal force on their sensuous nature entirely, either permanently or only in certain cases." 29 In any of these cases, humans remain moral beings, but the sensuous obstacles preventing them from properly harkening to the moral law are too great. Assuming Fichte has correctly described the human predicament, the argument for a secondary moral incentive in the form of revelation becomes urgent.

Fichte sums up his argument as follows:

Mankind can fall so deep into moral corruption [through indigence, culture, or personal defect] that it can be brought back to morality in no other way than by religion, and to religion in no other way than by the senses. A religion that is to affect such men can be based on nothing but direct divine authority. Since God cannot will that any moral being should fabricate such an authority, he must himself be the one who confers it on such a religion. 30

In short, the moral Lawgiver must intervene to alleviate such moral incapacitation. Additionally, we must be able to represent this intervention to ourselves as fully real. It is not symbolic or metaphorical. If it is to convince the lower faculty of desire, and thereby rehabilitate the higher faculty, revelation must quite literally be an "appearance in the world of sense and must be given (cannot be constructed)." 31 Can we expect such an extraordinary thing? On a priori grounds, Fichte says yes, because

27. Fichte, Versuch, 74.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 40.
30. Ibid., 79–80.
31. Ibid., 132.
the a priori logic of the moral law dictates that God must "promote the greatest possible morality in all rational beings by all moral means."\(^{32}\) We can therefore anticipate that if moral incapacitation "really should exist, [God] will use [sensuous] means" to recover us for the good.\(^{33}\)

Such, in brief, is Fichte's a priori argument for what Verweyen calls the "conditional necessity of revelation" (bedingte Notwendigkeit der Offenbarung).\(^{34}\) Even if we grant its Kantian premises, Fichte's theory is not without its problems. For instance, by arguing from a priori principles for the conditional necessity of historical revelation, Fichte makes what appears to be an "ontological" argument. If he can antecedently deduce that (a) reason must believe in a God guaranteeing the moral law and the highest good and (b) moral incapacitation, as previously discussed, is possible, then reason must also believe that God, in cases of such incapacitation, will cross over into the empirical domain to promote his own moral ends. By insisting on this as a real possibility, we must also assume that God is, or could at any time become, real.

Of course, this argument differs from classic ontological argumentation in a couple ways. First, the logical necessity for the idea of revelation is not "original" to practical reason in the way that the necessity for God and immortality are; no "datum of pure reason" requires us to embrace the concept of revelation, as, for instance, the a priori principle of causation requires us to posit the existence of a First Cause and an "absolute world-whole."\(^{35}\) Rather, the idea of revelation becomes necessary only after reflecting on experience. But does this diminish the force or legitimacy of the argument? It does not, because experience may create new practical needs, and from these needs, new practical ideas (such as conditionally necessary revelation) may flow and potentially receive a priori justification.\(^{36}\) Such ideas do not arise on their own, but their possibility, their "lawful origin in abstracto," can be demonstrated once the matter has been raised.\(^{37}\)

32. Ibid., 41.
33. Ibid.
34. Verweyen, introduction to Versuch, xxix.
35. Fichte, Versuch, 35–36.
36. Ibid., 35.
37. Ibid., 36.
Second, Fichte's argument differs from classic ontological reasoning because it rests on practical a priori principles, which means its conclusions do not have theoretical status. But, again, this does not diminish the argument for revelation, because the ideas of practical reason must be given theoretical import in order to do their job. A rational belief is rational precisely inasmuch as we have no good reason to doubt it. In the words of Kant's third Critique (published two years before Fichte's own text), rational faith is "not like an opinion, without sufficient ground," but rather is "adequately grounded in reason," albeit "only in regard to its practical use."

The Kantian qualification of "only in regard to its practical use" is not meant to diminish the authority of rational faith, only to clarify its source. Fichte takes this source seriously enough—and I find this very serious—to warrant anticipation of "something outside [the idea of revelation] that corresponds to itself" when "an empirical need should arise."

He plainly states that theoretical propositions can be derived from a practical commandment which is absolutely a priori and which is not based on any theoretical propositions as its premises, because to practical reason, a power certainly is to be ascribed over the theoretical, though suitable to its own laws.

Here, Fichte is merely a disciple of Kant, who never felt that rational self-coherence required, at some level, the subjugation of practical to theoretical reason, as scientific-materialists might. Rather, the ideas of practical reason—immortality, God, the highest good—derive immense authority from the factual status of moral law itself. Thinking along these lines, Frederick Beiser observes that Kant's account of the highest good must be taken as serious metaphysics. As the dialectic of practical reason unfolds, says Beiser,

the underlying problem... and the postulate [Kant] proposes to solve it, are metaphysical. If we were to purge metaphysics from the argument of the "Antinomy [of Pure Practical Reason],”

40. Ibid., 18.
Kant would have no basis to connect the realms of freedom and nature... In the end, then, to read the metaphysics out of Kant's concept of the highest good is only to beg the question of its possibility.\(^{41}\)

If the practical argument for Kant's highest good is to have any meaning, it must be telling us something authoritative about divine reality. The same insight holds for Fichte's argument for revelation. If it has any force at all, then we really should expect discrete, empirical divine intervention, given certain historical contingencies, because the God of a priori reason is just this kind of interventionist being. To be sure, identifying specific moments (if any) in actual human history that satisfy these criteria for revelation is probably impossible and may always involve an act of faith.\(^{42}\) For his part, Fichte offers only a single, tentative historical example, and that in a footnote.\(^{43}\) This epistemological difficulty in verifying an actual instance of divine intervention does not, however, invalidate the point made here, which is that a priori practical reason entitles us to expect that God will intervene empirically under certain plausible circumstances. This expectation distinguishes revelation from the practical ideas of God and immortality, which do not entail any empirical consequences (at least not in this life), and it is precisely this "impurity" in Fichte's a priori reasoning that Kant does not like, as we shall now see.

**Kant's Radicalization of Fichtean Evil**

We do not know what Kant thought of Fichte's conditional necessity argument for revelation (however much of it he read) after the younger

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42. Wolfgang Ritzel remarks emphatically, "It can never be categorically declared that in this or that instance or in any instance whatsoever God has announced himself"; *Fichtes Religionsphilosophie* (Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer, 1956), 45.

43. Fichte, *Versuch*, 75n. The example is ancient Israel's stubborn moral backwardness, which apparently elicited supernatural threats and admonitions.
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man sent him a copy of the *Attempt* manuscript in August 1791. But at the least, he must have had in mind a critical defense of revelation as he wrote the first section of *Religion*, which was submitted to the *Berlinerische Monatsschrift* in February 1792, with the full text available to the public by the Easter book fair of 1793. Although he seems to have at least approved of Fichte's project, in the end, he resists the conditional necessity argument (how knowingly is hard to say) for two reasons. The more obvious reason is that historical revelations of the type Fichte postulates can lead to scriptural idolatry and generally distract from the moral law, which alone has intrinsic authority. A more fundamental reason, the one discussed here, is that an argument for the conditional necessity of revelation calls into question the self-sufficiency of the moral law, to which Kant is deeply committed. Nevertheless, I argue that Kant does not fully reject the necessity of revelation in *Religion*, despite his antipathy toward the idea, because the problem of evil ultimately calls into question, at the level of reflective judgment, the self-sufficiency of the moral law.

As a first step it is necessary to identify the obstacle to such a reading. In the preface for *Religion's* first edition, Kant immediately makes the point that the moral law is to be regarded as self-sufficient. This is an up-front challenge to Fichte—and to any moral argument for the necessity of divine aid—in forceful and unambiguous terms:

So far as morality is based on the conception of the human being as one who is free but who also, just because of that, binds himself through his reason to unconditional laws, it is in need neither of the idea of another being above him in order that he recognize his duty, nor, that he observe it, of an incentive other

44. Kant met with Fichte to discuss the manuscript on August 23, 1791, and in a letter to Ludwig Ernst Borowski dated September 16, 1791, Kant admits to having read only to “page eight.” In a communication to Friedrich August Weißhuhn, Fichte calls it “about up to ch. 3.” If this is true, Kant would not have encountered Fichte’s specific argument for the conditional necessity of revelation. See Verweyen, introduction to *Versuch*, xv–xvii; and Fuchs, *Fichte*, 34.

45. Kant’s general support of Fichte’s work is most evident in his letter to Borowski recommending its publication; Fuchs, *Fichte*, 34.

46. A thorough treatment of the dangers of miracles and revelation for moral life is provided by the “Remarks” that Kant appends to each of the four parts of *Religion*. 
than the law itself. At least it is the human being's own fault if such a need is found in him; but in this case too the need could not be relieved through anything else: for whatever does not originate from himself and his own freedom provides no remedy for a lack in his morality. Hence on its own behalf morality in no way needs religion (whether objectively, as regards willing, or subjectively, as regards capability) but is rather self-sufficient by virtue of pure practical reason.\footnote{Kant, \textit{Religion}, 6.3.}

In describing morality based on the conception of freedom as both "objectively" and "subjectively" sufficient for a moral life, Kant seems to be responding to Fichte's distinction between theology and religion in chapter 2 of \textit{Attempt} (a part that Kant likely read). Religion, for Fichte, is born from the influence (\textit{Zurückwirkung}) of the theological ideas of pure practical reason on our lower faculty of desire. For example, when the moral law is represented sensuously as a command that God reveals—a religious idea—it may help the more sensual part of our will go along with it. In making this distinction, Fichte is opening a space, as we have seen, for the possibility that, without religious \textit{Zurückwirkung} onto the lower faculty of desire, the "higher" desire of our rational will might be unable to determine our total will. This is also the scenario that Kant seems to reject by arguing that morality "in no way needs religion . . . but is rather self-sufficient." It is not, then, the idea of revelation that Kant rejects but the notion that revelation might actually be necessary.

At this point, Kant could fall in with the Deists, for whom revelation is at best a dispensable "republication of the religion of nature."\footnote{Matthew Tindal, \textit{Christianity as Old as the Creation: Or, The Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature} (London, 1730). Lorenz Schmidt translated it into German in 1741.} In this case, he would disagree with Fichte, and Fichte's \textit{Attempt} would simply be a failed Kantian imitation. But Kant does take to heart a central tenet of Fichte's argument. Although Kant insists that practical reason must be regarded as self-sufficient, he recognizes from an empirical perspective that it can fail to determine moral choice. Even more serious, Kant believes it \textit{always} and \textit{universally} fails, a stunning insight that leads him to posit a "radical" or "innate" evil in humanity. Within the
Kantian system, this idea is a bit mysterious, since moral behavior is, by definition, that which adopts the primacy of rational incentives only to disobey them for no discernable reason. Why a moral subject—indeed all moral subjects—might behave this way is, as Kant repeatedly admits, impossible for him to explain, especially because he rejects the notion of a diabolical will, which actually desires to choose evil.\(^5^9\)

Fichte might have been somewhat surprised at Kant's perplexing radicalization of his concept of moral incapacitation, even though Fichte, according to Verweyen, is the first to identify "a freedom [i.e., to choose evil] radically distinct from morality" as a central part of the critical philosophy of religion.\(^5^0\) In any case, Kant cannot simply dispense with the necessity of revelation a priori because he is confronted with what appears to be a catastrophic, empirical failure of the very rational self-sufficiency he so rigidly defends. This is a philosophical problem that Kant obviously needs to address.

This problem can be further illuminated in two ways, which correspond to the two stories that Kant tells about the source of evil in *Religion*. In part I, he attributes radical evil to our original moral disposition (*Gesinnung*) as human beings, while in part III, he portrays it as a corrupting power springing directly from human sociality. One challenge of Kant scholarship is to decide whether or not these are two different evils or merely two faces of the same evil. But for the present, I treat them as coordinated yet separate problems.\(^5^1\)

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49. Note that Kant’s "radical evil" does not necessarily correspond to the egregiously bad behavior that we might associate with this term. Rather, it denotes an unwillingness to act *purely* out of moral motives, and from an external perspective a radically evil person can accomplish a great deal of good. However, one can argue that horrendous evil is not *essentially* any different from outwardly harmless evil. On this "banality" of all evil within a Kantian framework, see Henry Allison, "Reflections on the Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis," in *Rethinking Evil: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Maria Pia Lara (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 86–100.

50. Verweyen, introduction to *Versuch*, xxxi. Marco Olivetti finds that Fichte's anticipation of Kant's use of "the subject of evil as a prerequisite for a religious-philosophical analysis" is "astounding" (198–99).

51. Allen Wood (following Sharon Anderson-Gold) seems to view the dispositional story of evil as a partial lens on the grander story of man's "unsocial sociability." More precisely, he sees the "nature and source" of evil as purely social, although "responsibility" still lies with the individual, since no collective subject can experience this responsibility; Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University
sections, I demonstrate how Kant's empirical assessment of human evil leads him, in both stories, to the threshold of divine intervention. I do not suggest that he actually argues for the necessity of revelation—he clearly does not—but I do suggest that he is unable or unwilling to foreclose such an argument. This detail turns out to be rather significant given Kant's dour assessment of humanity's moral condition.

The Private Story of Radical Evil: The Moral Disposition

One of the most important contributions in Religion to Kant's moral philosophy is his introduction of the moral disposition. This term designates our general attitude toward the moral law, that is, the inner command of reason to "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." This disposition alone really determines whether or not we are moral beings, since it sets the standard for how all other maxims are to be made. Without a moral disposition, furthermore, it would be impossible to speak of moral responsibility, because no principle of continuity would underlie our various moral actions.

The great dilemma of Religion—the insight that puts the whole text in motion—is Kant's assertion that every human being is born with an evil moral disposition, which means that, although they hear the voice and recognize the authority of the moral law, they choose not to incorporate it into their supreme moral maxim. Humanity, Kant posits, is
“radically evil” or “evil by nature” because, from the earliest glimmer of a moral conscience—“antecedent to every use of freedom given in experience (from earliest youth as far back as birth)”—every human exhibits a willingness to deviate from moral law. For the purposes of this article, I do not evaluate the evidence for this dramatic claim; instead, I will simply accept, as most Kantian scholars do, that it is a certainty acquired at least partly through empirical means.

What is most troubling about this claim is its universality. Kant clearly insists that pure practical reason must consider our original moral disposition to be the product of a free, albeit hidden choice. Yet, the fact that all people without exception choose the same moral disposition—and we can safely assume they will continue to do so—hardly rests easy with this assumption of an original freedom. One cannot appeal in this case to the physical constitution of the species as an explanation of our evil disposition, because (a) Kant believes that our natural predisposition (Anlage) is to moral goodness and (b) the presence of material incentives in whatever degree is ultimately irrelevant to our moral character. Moral action is strictly a matter of how we prioritize moral and material incentives, and no material incentive can determine this, for then we would be dealing with natural causation and leaving the realm of freedom altogether. The universality of evil, therefore, does not flow from physical nature, yet reason cannot shake the sense that it flows from something other than sheer spontaneity or

54. Kant, Religion, 6.22.
55. This reading of radical evil as an empirical doctrine can be found, for instance, in Robert Louden, Kant’s Impure Ethics: From Rational Beings to Human Beings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Pablo Muchnik, “An Alternative Proof of the Universal Propensity to Evil,” in Kant’s Anatomy of Evil, ed. Sharon Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Patrick Frierson, Freedom and Anthropology in Kant’s Moral Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Although Allen Wood has rejected his “own naïve conjecture long ago that the doctrine of radical evil is intended simply as an empirical generalization” (see Kant’s Ethical Thought, 287) and Henry Allison has insisted on the importance to Kant of a “conceptual” understanding of radical evil, both of these major Kant scholars still concede that experience plays an indispensable role confirming the reality of this doctrine (see “Ethics, Evil, and Anthropology in Kant: Remarks on Allen Wood’s Kant’s Ethical Thought,” Ethics 111, no.3 (2001): 605–10).
56. On the first point, see Kant, Religion, 6.26–28.
at least not from any personal spontaneity. What is the likelihood that an effectively endless number of rational agents would, without exception, make the same choice of moral disposition, if they were not in some sense compelled to do so?

One answer could be that humans possess an overwhelming rational incentive for evil, which would explain our consistent rejection of the moral law without, however, necessitating it. Such a solution is merely verbal, however, because there is in fact no immoral law thundering in our consciousness alongside the moral law. Because the moral law is the only nonnatural incentive we know—and for Kant this is simply a fact of experience—morally worthy action is the only kind of true freedom we can conceive. Evil is thus a kind of freedom beyond freedom, or a freedom to pervert freedom, for which we cannot indentify any positive incentive. Once this freedom has been exercised, critical philosophy encounters one of its absolute limits. When it comes to evil, we can only make (a) the negative, conceptual point that it involves a knowing refusal to incorporate the moral law into our supreme moral maxim and (b) the positive, empirical point that it afflicts us universally as if it were a natural law.

More important for our purposes, the question, “Why evil?” prompts another question: “Why a return to moral goodness?” The seemingly obvious answer is that the moral law never stops commanding us with intrinsic authority. But is this really an answer? The law,

57. In a persuasive interpretation, Seiriol Morgan argues that radical evil is precisely to be identified with the spontaneity of will, albeit as a fetish. Evil results from the desire to exercise freedom, a "primal self-enticement to license" without realizing that any nonmoral use of freedom is ultimately self-defeating since it draws its incentives from natural self-interest; Seiriol Morgan, "The Missing Formal Proof of Humanity's Radical Evil in Kant's Religion," The Philosophical Review 114, no. 1 (January 2005): 94. We should note, however, that in order for this argument to work, Morgan must reject a rather major claim in Religion, namely, that "the propensity to evil amounts to the adoption of an evil disposition" (95). In other words, Morgan rejects the idea that evil flows from an evil meta-maxim, contrary to Kant's explicit claim to the contrary. I am not sure that the imputability of a maxim-less choice and a maxim-guided choice can have the same moral meaning, however, because they arise from different subjective moments or processes and are thus not "personal" in the same way. In any case, for the purposes of this historically oriented article, I simply accept Kant's text as it stands, which means that evil is to be seen, oddly, as the result of perverse maxim-making that is imputable to me, even though I am not conscious of ever having performed this maxim making.
without doubt, remains an incentive to morally worthy action, but radical evil is the categorical rejection of this incentive as our exclusive, supreme standard of action. The choice of an evil disposition may be too "knowing" to be corrected by the same moral law that it rejects. This seems to be an implication of moral "rigorism," which is Kant's doctrine that we are either entirely good or entirely bad, since we either do or do not embrace the absolute authority of the law. There is no third option. 58 An eventual deliverance from the "rigor" of our personal evil cannot be explained by a sudden adequacy of the same moral law that previously was inadequate. 59 (Or does Kant think that the moral law "wears down" our evil resistance to it? Would that not be a naturalistic reduction of freedom?)

A better answer, it would seem, is the appeal to our noumenally free power of choice (Willkür), which accompanies the rational will and freely incorporates or rejects rational incentives. To be sure, as an "explanation" of moral conversion, the appeal to the power of choice is very weak, because it is really, on the theoretical level, just an appeal to spontaneity. However, reason could never make sense of radical evil in the first place, so perhaps it is a wash. If that is so, then the "explanation" of conversion is best presented as a question: Given so many free, rational individuals with a naturalistically undetermined power of choice, what are the chances that none of them would undergo a reversal in their disposition?

This appeal to the spontaneous change of heart is not, however, an innocent hypothesis for the reason with which we are now familiar: radical evil bears the form of a necessary law. That being the case, one can counter the appeal to the power of choice with another question:

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59. Philip Quinn has made essentially this same point: "There is no possible world in which (i) the thesis of rigorism is true, (ii) every human adopts a morally evil supreme maxim, and (iii) some human adopts a morally good supreme maxim"; "Original Sin, Radical Evil and Moral Identity," Faith and Philosophy 1, no. 2 (1984): 199. The upshot, for Quinn, is that we should not consider ourselves responsible for conversion. "We ought not to effect a moral revolution in our characters...because we cannot" (199). If this means becoming cynical about responsibility, then I think it would be a wrong way to read Kant (and I do not think Quinn wants to read him this way). But Quinn is right, I think, that we cannot imagine our own conversion flowing from our own strength.
Why should we think of moral conversion through the figure of spontaneity when we must think of corruption through the figure of necessity? It would make more rational sense to expect spontaneity in both cases, but the empirical data do not permit this. An asymmetry emerges that reason cannot ignore. At this point, the idea subjects itself to reflective judgment (i.e., the power to revise or complicate a priori judgments based on experience) that, in moral conversion, something must come to the assistance of freedom in order to counteract the law-like principle of evil in our original constitution—perhaps universally, perhaps only in certain cases. This counteractive force, completely indescribable in its particulars, is the basis of the reflective argument for revelation that I am proposing. Below, we will see that Kant does leave open the theoretical possibility of such aid, even if he is somewhat reluctant to develop this idea. Before discussing that, however, let us see how the struggle between a priori and empirical perspectives plays out in Kant's second story about evil.

The Social Story of Radical Evil: Mutual Corruption

Unlike the private story, in which the problem of evil (but not the solution to it) is very specific and clear, the social story struggles to identify the problem of evil in a consistent way. Indeed, it is this very absence of a consistent account of evil that suggests Kant's inability to rule out a possible need for divine aid. Such, at least, will be my argument in this section.

At the center of the social story is the rise of the ethical community, a society "solely designed for the preservation of morality by counteracting evil with united forces."60 On the face of it, we should have no reason to deliberately construct such a community; because humanity's predisposition (Anlage) is to the good, a just society should naturally emerge over time through human interaction.61 In fact, this is not the case. According to Kant, finite, rational beings have a natural tendency toward mutual corruption.

60. Kant, Religion, 6.94.
Envy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these, assail man's nature, which on its own is undemanding, as soon as he is among human beings. Nor is it necessary to assume that these are sunk into evil and are examples to lead him astray: it suffices that they are there, that they surround him, and that they are human beings, and they will mutually corrupt each other's moral predisposition [moralische Anlage] and make one another evil [sich einander böse machen].

Needless to say, this language is very strong, even to the point of paradox. How can you corrupt another person or "make" him evil when evil is precisely an act of moral freedom? As disturbing as this claim is, Kant does not immediately backtrack or qualify it. For him, it is an empirical fact, however difficult it may be to make sense of this fact practically or theoretically. Instead of dwelling on the a priori problems that arise in attributing an absolutely corrupting power to human sociality, Kant hurries to name the ethical community as the antidote to it:

The dominion of the good principle is not otherwise attainable... than through the setting up and the diffusion of a society in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue. . . . For only in this way can we hope for a victory of the good principle over the evil one.

The way Kant sets this up prompts an important question: Can the same rational individuals who are inevitably corrupted by social life have the moral strength, without some addition of grace, to produce the antidote to this corruption? It is by no means obvious that they would, and it indeed sounds hopeless in light of Kant's assurance that human beings

62. Ibid., 6.94; emphasis added. I have altered Allen Wood's translation here to read "moral predisposition" instead of "moral disposition," because "predisposition" is Wood's usual rendering of Anlage, with "disposition" being reserved for Gesinnung. Admittedly, Gesinnung might be the more accurate term here in light of Kant's usage in part I of Religion and elsewhere. But in part III, he seems to use Anlage as a blanket term for both our moral capacity (the specific sense of Anlage) and the fundamental orientation of that capacity (Gesinnung).

63. Kant, Religion, 6.94.
inevitably corrupt one another. Once social contact corrupts them, they are “rigorously” evil, and any rationally self-sufficient ethical community building becomes difficult to imagine.

Perhaps it is for this reason that Kant modifies his language in other passages, suggesting that, in the ethical state of nature (i.e., before any ethical community is attempted), we would not necessarily be morally doomed but only be in serious, constant danger: “However much the individual human being might do to escape from the dominion of this evil, he would still be held in incessant danger of relapsing into it.” Heroically, it might be possible, although unlikely, to stay morally afloat long enough to found the ethical community without divine aid; although, even then, we would have no guarantee that the community would maintain its integrity for long.

A few pages later, we see another description of the ethical state of nature, in which we again see Kant trying to allow just enough room for reason to save itself. He begins with the same language about radical social corruption but soon shifts to the milder language of moral endangerment.

The ethical state of nature [is] one in which the good principle, which resides in each human being, is incessantly attacked by the evil which is found in him and every other as well. Human beings . . . mutually corrupt one another’s moral predisposition [sich einander wechselseitig ihre moralische Anlage verderben] and, even with the good will [guten Willen] of each individual, because of the lack of a principle which unites them, they deviate through their dissensions from the common goal of goodness, as though they were instruments of evil, and expose one another to the danger of falling once again under its dominion. 65

Here, my earlier objection—that rational agents necessarily corrupted by social interaction may not have the strength to be their own antidote—is not addressed, even though Kant is clearly suggesting that we might have this strength. It would seem that all we have to do is

64. Ibid.; emphasis added.
65. Ibid., 6.97.
hit on the appropriate uniting principle (i.e., the idea of the ethical community), and we are in the clear of both moral endangerment and direct moral corruption. Pursuing this hopeful line, Kant argues that there is . . . reason to assume that it is God's will that we should ourselves carry out the idea of [the ethical] community. And though human beings might have indeed tried out many a form of church with unhappy result, yet they ought not to cease striving after this end, if need be through renewed attempts which as much as possible avoid the mistakes of previous ones.66

Kant suggests that, through trial and error, we could, in principle, devise an adequate approximation to the ethical community, or "church", which would save us from endangerment or corruption and rescue our rational self-sufficiency.

The problem is this: a few paragraphs earlier, Kant established that people are, in fact, not good enough to pull this off, at least not directly. "Due to a peculiar weakness of human nature, pure faith can never be relied on as much as it deserves, [enough] to found a Church on it alone."67 This means that "ecclesiastical faith," or a church based on a historical revelation, is ultimately required as a vehicle for the ethical community.68 Such a concession seems like a victory of revelation over rational self-sufficiency. But, in yet another twist, we must remember that Kant does not accept every "revelation" at face value. Society generates plenty of "alleged revelations" (angebliche Offenbarungen), as Kant puts it, on which an ecclesiastical faith can be based, perhaps even to good effect.69 Does this mean that we can defend the self-sufficiency of reason by demonstrating how a morally successful, historical faith can be grounded in a false revelation constructed by scheming or delusional people?

Understandably, Kant does not want to speak in such terms. However, his concession that "pure [rational] faith can never be relied on as much as it deserves" puts him in the precarious position of requiring ecclesiastical faith on the one hand and denying the need for revelation

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66. Ibid., 6.105.
67. Ibid., 6.103.
68. Ibid., 6.102–7.
69. Ibid., 6.111.
on the other. When we think of how rare—or in Kant's European context, nonexistent—these non-revelation-based religions are, we see what a difficult bind he has put himself in. He tries to minimize the problem by speaking in conciliatory language about the general possibility (but not the necessity) of revelation-based religion:

It would be . . . arrogant peremptorily to deny that the way a church is organized may perhaps also be a special divine dispensation, if, so far as we can see, the church is in perfect harmony with moral religion, and if, in addition, we cannot see how it could ever have made its appearance all at once without the requisite preparatory advances of the public in religious concepts.70

Kant admits that rapid advances in the religious development of a society may be too striking for any explanation but a supernatural one, but this very claim implies that human societies generally may still be capable, albeit slowly, of "advances . . . in religious concepts" on their own, thus preserving the self-sufficiency of reason. This, however, once again purchases rational self-sufficiency at the cost of a false revelation promulgated by scheming or delusional people, unless we adopt a third way in which ecclesiastical faith does not require even the appearance of revelation. In favor of this latter possibility, Kant speaks, as we have seen, of "trying out" churches and "avoiding the mistakes" of previous ones, which sounds like a deliberately artificial endeavor. But ultimately, Kant is not eager to adopt this way, because nothing is more valuable in ecclesiastical faith (ironically) than a revelation, an "object of the highest respect" transmitted through a sacred text that can be continually reinterpreted in the direction of pure, moral faith.71 A man-made "tradition" is simply not a match for the "knockdown pronouncement, Thus it is written."72 It seems, then, that Kant nearly forces himself into a choice between a necessary revelation and a necessary deception.

In a final twist, we find the following statement on the need for divine assistance—one that I believe best captures Kant's peculiar view on the matter—in the introduction to part IV:

70. Ibid., 6.105–6.
71. Ibid., 6.107.
72. Ibid.
To erect a church as a community under religious laws ... seems to require more wisdom (of insight as well as of good disposition) than human beings can be thought capable of; it seems that the moral goodness especially, which is aimed at through such an organization, must for this purpose be presupposed in them already. Nonsensical is in fact even the expression that human beings should found a Kingdom of God (as we might well say of them that they can establish the kingdom of a human monarch); God must himself be the author of his Kingdom. On the one hand, Kant tells us unambiguously that humans cannot found an ethical community on their own. One can defend this proposition on the a priori level (“nonsensical is ... even the expression”) as well as the empirical (“to erect a church ... seems to require more wisdom ... than human beings can be thought capable of”). This leaves little room to reduce “God” to a metonymy for “practical reason,” especially when we consider that the function of God here is to save practical reason by founding the ethical community, which God could hardly do if he were no more than reason’s self-projection or an unreal postulate of reason. On the other hand, Kant seems to equate God’s authorship of the ethical community with the moral goodness “presupposed” in humanity. To modern ears, this sounds very much like an anthropological reduction of the divine; God is something that has always already been part of us, just like our reason or our senses. Can these two positions coexist?

I have quoted at length from Kant’s own words concerning the social narrative of evil in order to demonstrate the restlessness of Kant’s analysis. I do not conclude that Kant is forced to concede the necessity of divine aid; rather, I argue that he seems genuinely unable to state simply and unequivocally that ethical progress is possible without the representation of divine aid. I do not deny the existence of passages in Religion where Kant clearly asserts the self-sufficiency of reason, but I do insist that, taken as a whole, the text does not permit us to embrace the self-sufficiency postulate without ambivalence. The empirical data do not permit it. The corrupting power of sociality and the challenge
of the ethical community both seem to overtax human strength. Or, at least, Kant repeatedly speaks this way without adequately assuaging the doubts raised by such language.

**Reflective Judgment and the Miracle of Grace**

Having illuminated the problems in both the private and the social story of radical evil, I want to say more about the kinds of divine assistance that would be involved in the solution to evil in either story. If, after reading Kant's puzzling social story of evil, we (a) understand revelation to be a requirement of a successful ecclesiastical faith and (b) find it incompatible for the dignity of reason to rely on phony revelation, then a historical-empirical intervention of the type that Fichte suggests—a supernatural deliverance of scripture—is necessary. And yet, in both stories Kant is primarily interested in divine aid of a different sort. Breaking away from the law-like grip of the evil disposition or summoning the strength to resist societal corruption (with or without the help of a church) may require an inward dispensation of grace rather than, or in addition to, the deliverance of scripture.

To get a handle on this type of revelation, we can take as our starting point the moral law itself, which Kant finds so different from nature in that it "proclaims a divine origin." 74 One might read the word *origin* here in a deistic spirit, imagining that God built the moral law into our original human nature, after which it should perform its function perfectly and without mishap, like clockwork. We have seen, however, that the moral law fails despite its absolute, intrinsic authority and that humans have no easy way to remedy this without calling on divine aid. Fortunately, we can read the "divine origin" of the law in another way that is friendly to the possibility of such aid. Because freedom issues from the noumenal, where the categories of time and space do not apply, it is permissible to imagine (because we can only deal with metaphors here) that God continually dispenses the moral law in an "occasionalist" manner. It continually "originates." The disadvantage to thinking this way is that we can never represent the moral subject as fully self-responsible,

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74. Ibid., 6.49–50.
since the law, in this view, cannot be defined as part of our autonomous rational nature; the advantage is that we can more easily imagine God "adjusting" his influence on our will to address contingencies like our fall into radical evil. This assistance will necessarily be of a kind that does not alter the immediate existence of free will, which is hardly possible, but will nonetheless assist reflective faith in making sense of humanity's total situation. A "hidden" miracle of this kind may be suggested in Kant's description of "the basis for the transition to the new order of things" lying in the "principle of the pure religion of reason, as a revelation (though not an empirical one) permanently taking place within all human beings." On this account, something about the persistence of the law itself can be understood, on reflection, as a form of divine intervention, and, indeed, as part of the same intervention that gives us the moral law in the first place.

The notion of a nonempirical, inward miracle may be what underlies the supernaturalist language in Kant's account of the "prototype [Urbild] of the Son of God" in part II of Religion. Kant speaks of this prototype as a rational ideal enabling us to believe in the possibility of moral progress. Because we cannot consider ourselves the authors of this idea or comprehend how it came to us (a religiously loaded premise similar to ones found in Plato, Augustine, Descartes, and Jacobi), reason finds it best to say that "the prototype has come down to us from heaven, that it has taken up humanity (for it is not just as possible to conceive how the human being, evil by nature, would renounce evil on his own and raise himself up to the ideal of holiness, as it is that the latter take up humanity—which is not evil in itself—by descending to it)."

In other words, it is more rational to actually think of the prototype as a divine gift than as a natural endowment that merely seems like a divine gift. In a compact phrase, Firestone and Jacobs call this prototype a "transcendentally chastened form of Platonic idealism"—"transcendental" because it resides in reason and "Platonic" because it is, in some sense, beyond what finite rationality could itself produce or expect.

75. Ibid., 6.122.
76. Ibid., 6.60–62.
77. Ibid., 6.61.
78. Firestone and Jacobs, In Defense, 155.
case, one can make the case that the prototype represents an addition or supplement to our human nature.

Whether or not we associate revelation with the prototype, I suggest we label the elusive Kantian theology that has emerged here as "moral occasionalism." This would be the doctrine that God occasionally supplies, or at least supplements, the causal force of certain moral ideas (e.g., the prototype of the Son of God or the vision of the ethical community), which would otherwise be empty or inadequate incentives because of our preexisting "rigorous" evil and the overwhelming corrupting power of society. Such divine supplementation is truly miraculous, but since it is eternally active—and here is the crucial difference from Fichte—we can never phenomenally distinguish it from reason's natural drives. It thus fits Kant's requirement that "either miracles are to be admitted as daily [events] (though hidden under the appearance of natural occurrences), or never." 79

Let me emphasize, however, that I do not argue for this inward miracle, be it moral occasionalism or some other form, as a necessary component of Kant's practical philosophy. It is quite clear that the authority of the moral law and its corollary doctrine of freedom are entirely sufficient, in Kant's view, for moral life. The need for divine intervention arises only negatively in the dialectic between a priori and empirical reason. Such intervention is not absurd in principle, and Kant concedes that a "certain moral strength perceivable to us" can rationally be considered evidence of "supernatural assistance," even when theoretical insight into this act of supplementation "totally escapes us." 80 His objections to such moral grace are only that (a) it is a "transcendent" concept of which no experience can make us certain and that (b) it is

79. Kant, Religion, 6.89n. My use of this passage is admittedly ironic, because Kant goes on to say that the idea of miracles as everyday realities "hidden under the appearance of natural occurrences... is in no way compatible with reason," and therefore "nothing remains but to accept the latter maxim [i.e., that miracles never occur]; Religion, 6.89n. I would argue, however, that this conclusion only holds—and Kant would agree—from a purely rational perspective. For "reflective faith" (Kant, Religion, 6.52) and "moral discipline" (Kant, Religion, 6.51), Kant's idea of a "daily miracle hidden under the appearance of natural occurrences" is both possible and helpful, as the conclusion of my discussion of Kant demonstrates.

morally "very risky" and "hard to reconcile with [practical] reason." A response to both objections is, in fact, provided by reflective judgment, to which we must now turn our attention.

I have invoked the power of reflective judgment at a few key moments in my reading of Kant and have defined it as a power to revise or complicate a priori judgments on the basis of experience. I wish now to explain that a little more fully. Judgment in general is the power to "think the particular as contained under the universal." If the universal is something already given a priori, judgment is "determinative"; if the universal is not given and instead must be found, then the judgment is "reflective." In other words, reflective judgment is the process of finding concepts to cover contingent facts and, more specifically, to cover those facts exhibiting some kind of formal regularity or "purposiveness" that calls for interpretation. This distinction between determinative and reflective judgment is required because "there is such a manifold of forms in nature, as it were so many modifications of the universal transcendental concepts of nature that are left undetermined by those laws," that we must invent new concepts to cover the creative diversity of nature. In short, science needs imagination as well as logic. It requires an aesthetic skill of anticipating or sensing how contingent things might fit together. Just as importantly, reflective judgment requires, for the sake of rational self-coherence, that the principles it uncovers "must be considered in terms of the sort of unity they would have if an understanding (even if not ours) had likewise given them for the sake of our faculty of cognition, in order to make possible a system of experience in accordance with particular laws of nature." In other words, in trying to make sense of the contingent world, we must assume that laws can exist beyond the ones that human reason can deduce a priori, but laws that nonetheless fit into a rational system. These are the laws, also called "regulative" concepts, that reflective judgment can intuit. Most important, regulative concepts can

81. Ibid.
82. Kant, CPJ, 5.179.
83. Ibid., 5.179.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 5.180.
depart from the types of narratives that the a priori categories of the understanding would lead us to expect. In other words, reason, in its fullest form, does not demand exclusive naturalism.

Let us apply this more fleshed-out notion of reflective judgment to Kant’s two objections to inner grace mentioned earlier. His first objection is that experience can never make us certain of this grace. This, however, is only a problem for theoretical understanding, not for reason as a whole. Earlier, we saw that, for both Fichte and Kant, the moral law bears theoretical import, even if it produces no theoretical certainty. Something like this can apply to the representations of reflective judgment as well. For instance, in the third Critique, Kant uses the reflective notion of the “supersensible” to deal with the paradox of organic form (among other things) and to thereby help reason obtain its broader goal of self-coherence. Reflective judgment patches the holes, as it were, that experience places in our a priori picture of the world. For this reason, the productions of reflective judgment deserve rational respect, even though they do not produce certain knowledge. My argument here is that the same respect Kant gives to the supersensible is due, or could be due, to the postulate of inner grace, which deals reflectively with the equally paradoxical problem of radical evil. Although we cannot be certain of inner grace, we can hardly use this uncertainty as an argument against its rational value as a reflective judgment. Radical evil is, after all, just as serious a problem for reason as organic form.

This brings us to the response of reflective judgment to Kant’s second objection about the “riskiness” and “irreconcilability” of inward grace. The point I would make here is that experience requires us to entertain notions that are, from some rational perspective, incomprehensible and unsettling. Therefore, “riskiness” and “irreconcilability” are decidedly not a problem if we have broader rational reasons for entertaining a notion. Quantum mechanics has made this truth very easy for us to perceive today. In Kant’s work, we see it play out, once again, in his analysis of organic form. The a priori concept of nature only permits phenomena to have external causes, while organic form seems internally purposive. To address this logical impasse, reflective reason adopts the “risky” notion of a supersensible substrate that, in
some incomprehensible way, "transitions" between freedom and nature at the site of organic form. 86 Reason justifies this theoretically suspect move inasmuch as the supersensible "brings reason into harmony with itself." 87 In the present case, I simply argue that the reflective notion of inner grace performs a similar kind of damage control or "transitioning" within the broader economy of reason, this time to address the paradox of radical evil. Labeling it "irreconcilable" and "risky" is thus a bit disingenuous on Kant's part, whose third Critique provides a strong defense for such regulative ideas.

Conclusion

I have shown that Fichte and, in a more limited and reluctant way, Kant, participate in the "alliance" between reason and revelation that characterizes the German Enlightenment. In this spirit, Fichte argues for the possible necessity of revelation based on the potential failure of the moral law under certain circumstances. More precisely, he argues that historical and other contingent factors could diminish the appeal of the moral law to the point that moral development is out of the question without divine intervention. Kant, in contrast, defends the self-sufficiency of the moral law against all contingencies, but he takes Fichte's notion of moral failure even more seriously than Fichte does. Specifically, he argues—using an "inner" dispositional story and an "outer" social story—that human beings are innately and universally evil, such that one need not look for historical causes of their moral failure. Kant tells us we must think of the innate evil as a free choice, but he neither adequately explains how, in this case, freedom and the strict universality of evil can coexist. He also does not tell us how deliverance from this quasi-deterministic scenario is possible. Therefore, I have argued that reflective judgment may require us to postulate divine intervention in some form if we are to avoid terminal moral

86. Kant specifically says that the supersensible makes "possible the transition from the manner of thinking in accordance with the principles of [nature] to that in accordance with the principles of [freedom]"; CPJ, 5.176.
87. Ibid., 5.341.
discouragement. In the broader framework of reason, this “risky” idea is not only permissible, but valuable.

Recovering the Rhetorical Tradition: George Campbell’s Sympathy and its Augustinian Roots

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The year 1776 saw the production of two important documents of the Enlightenment: the US Constitution and George Campbell’s The Philosophy of History. Both documents were products of Enlightenment thought, and both demonstrate the conflicting attitudes in the era toward the rhetorical use of emotional appeals. Recent scholarship by John White examines the religious roots of the anti-emotionalist rhetoric expressed by Federalist politicians in the Constitutional era and in particular the influence of the Calvinist clergy of New England, with their Puritan covenantal theory of ordered liberty and orderly pluralism. Like the Federalists who were in charge of the new US government, the Calvinists of New England not only celebrated the victory achieved in the Revolution but also worked to ensure that the new American republic did not descend into the kind of chaos that been contained revolutionary France. The Federalist politicians and the Calvinist clergy shared a suspicion of majority rule of mobs, enforced by violent POLITICIANS such as John Adams and James Madison were careful to acknowledge that the US Constitution was not too easily subjected to the whims of the mob, what Adams famously called “the tyranny of the majority” and what