Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 7 | Issue 4

Article 3

10-1-1990

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Recommended Citation

Quinn, Philip L. (1990) "Saving Faith from Kant's Remarkable Antimony," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 4 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil19907436

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol7/iss4/3>

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SAVING FAITH FROM KANT'S REMARKABLE ANTINOMY

Philip L. Quinn

This paper is a critical study of Kant's antinomy of saving faith. In the first section, I sketch aspects of Kant's philosophical account of sin and atonement that help explain why he finds saving faith problematic from the moral point of view. I proceed in the next section to give a detailed exposition of Kant's remarkable antinomy and of his proposal for resolving it theoretically. In the third and final section, I argue that alternative ways of resolving the antinomy both respond to the deepest of Kant's moral concerns and comport better with the traditional Christian conviction that saving faith can have for its object the historical individual Jesus Christ.

Christians profess that Jesus Christ is their Savior, their Redeemer. This is a distinctive element of Christian faith that differentiates it from other actual theistic faiths as well as from the generic theism philosophers have been fond of discussing. This profession of Christian faith has two presuppositions. The first is that all mere humans, with the possible exception of Christ's mother, bear a burden of guilt for sin which makes them unworthy of perfect happiness and that they cannot rid themselves of this burden and so make themselves worthy of happiness by their own unaided efforts. The second is that vicarious atonement for human sin is possible and that God can justly contribute something to making human sinners worthy of happiness. Christians have through the ages had faith that Christ has by his Passion and Death in fact atoned sufficiently for all actual and possible human sin. Moreover, they have typically believed that their faith in Christ as Savior is itself a saving faith; they have supposed that the fruits of Christ's Passion and Death are applied to them because they have faith in Christ as their Savior.

In *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant argues that the concept of saving faith is the source of a remarkable antinomy. The theoretical resolution of the antinomy he proposes rests on the assumption that the object of saving faith is not the historical individual Jesus Christ. Since this is an assumption many Christians are sure to find unacceptable, it would be good to have a resolution of the antinomy that does not rely on it. In this paper, I shall argue that there is such a resolution available to Christians.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first, I sketch briefly relevant

aspects of Kant's philosophical account of sin and atonement.¹ My aim in this section of the paper is to show that this account includes the two presuppositions of saving faith in Christ noted above. Then I give a detailed exposition of the antinomy and of Kant's proposal for resolving it. In this section of the paper I hope to show that the antinomy articulates philosophically a genuine theoretical problem for Christian thought about saving faith and so deserves to be taken seriously. I set forth in the third and final section of the paper an alternative solution to this problem. My purpose here is to make it clear how the antinomy can be resolved without departing from the traditional Christian view that saving faith can have for its object Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate.

Sin, Guilt, and Atonement

For Kant, there is radical evil in human nature. It is not inherited evil. Kant regards the Augustinian explanation of the transmission of original sin by biological causation as the most inept of all the explanations that have been proposed for the spread of evil through all members and generations of our race.² But it is adequately represented from a temporal point of view as innate. This is puzzling. How is it possible for a characteristic to be innate without being inherited?

Kant's answer to this question is apt to seem a bit fantastic because it invokes his conviction that we must postulate an atemporal source for human freedom if it is to be rendered compatible with the complete determinism of the temporal realm of phenomena. Since the evil represented as innate in us is moral evil, we must be accountable for it, and it must be imputable to us. Hence it must be rooted in free action. Kant insists that we make ourselves into whatever, morally speaking, we are or are to become, whether good or evil. In man, he says, "either condition must be an effect of his free choice; for otherwise he could not be held responsible for it and could therefore be *morally* neither good nor evil" (p. 40).³ So it follows that the moral evil represented as innate in us must result from actions of our own that are "cognizable by means of pure reason alone, apart from every temporal condition" (p. 27). The task, then, is to specify a kind of free action that will produce an innate characteristic in the individual who performs it. There is, at the very least, an air of paradox about the enterprise.

Kant thinks of the effect of such a free choice as a character trait. It is a propensity to perform particular morally evil actions in time, which is itself something morally evil. Just because it is morally evil it has the peculiarity that "although it can indeed be innate, it *ought* not to be represented merely thus" (p. 24). In order to capture its moral significance, it ought also to be thought of as something an individual who possesses it brings on himself or herself by free choice. Thus Kant is committed to the view that dispositional

character traits of a certain sort are both products of freedom when viewed atemporally and innate in their possessors when viewed from a temporal perspective.

Technical details apart, this is Kant's general picture of the origins of moral evil in the human agent. Particular evil actions freely performed are rooted in an antecedently present and freely adopted evil disposition. A typical history of evildoing stretches far back into the agent's youth, and so the evil disposition must be represented as present at least that early in the agent's life. Strictly speaking, a Kantian need not suppose that the evil propensity is literally present in the agent at birth; it would suffice to postulate its presence from some time between birth and the agent's first evil action onwards. But fixing on any particular time in that interval would seem to be wholly arbitrary, and besides the length of the interval is apt to vary from one agent to another. So postulating that the evil disposition is present from birth, if present at all, and thus is innate yields a gain in simplicity without an offsetting loss in explanatory power.

The presence of the morally evil propensity to perform particular morally evil actions is nothing short of a calamity for the human race. In the first place, Kant takes us to be inductively warranted in generalizing the postulate of an innate yet freely adopted evil propensity to the whole human species without exception and predicating evil of man as a species. It is not, he says, "that such a quality can be inferred from the concept of his species (that is, of man in general)—for then it would be necessary; but rather that from what we know of man through experience we cannot judge otherwise of him, or, that we may presuppose evil to be subjectively necessary to every man, even to the best" (p. 27). Worse still, it is radical, because it corrupts the ground of all maxims of actions, and also ineradicable, because it cannot be uprooted by human powers. The evil propensity is, Kant tells us, "as a natural propensity, *inextirpable* by human powers, since extirpation could occur only through good maxims, and cannot take place when the ultimate subjective ground of all maxims is postulated as corrupt" (p. 32). And, to complete the dreadful litany, it is also a source of guilt and thus of desert of punishment precisely because it is morally evil. Kant explicitly describes the evil propensity as bringing with it "*innate* guilt (*reatus*), which is so denominated because it may be discerned in man as early as the first manifestations of the exercise of freedom, but which, nonetheless, must have originated in freedom and hence can be imputed" (p. 33). So there is a sense in which the Kantian evil propensity is even more odious than the Augustinian original sin it is meant to replace. Being a product of biological causes, Augustinian inherited sin is not voluntary, and so it can be held that original sin is not as bad, morally speaking, as actual sins of the worst kind, mortal sins that are fully voluntary. But because it is every bit as much a product of freedom as any

actual sin, the evil propensity cannot be less than fully voluntary, and so it must be held that it is as bad as the worst actual sins, if not worse, since it corrupts the whole moral character. It seems, then, that Kant has paid a high price for excluding the admittedly problematic notion of inherited guilt from the conceptual scheme of his rational religion. What he has put in its place is the idea of an intensified guilt that is both innate in all humans, as far as we know, and inextirpable by human powers.

Yet Kant would not have us succumb to despair over the human moral condition. "For despite the fall," he says, "the injunction that we *ought* to become better men resounds unabatedly in our souls" (p. 40). Unless we assume for practical purposes the principle that *ought* implies *can* our moral lives will be absurd because the injunctions of the moral law of which we are aware will be quixotic. So practical reason requires us to suppose that becoming better persons is to some extent within our power, "even though what we are able to do is in itself inadequate and though we thereby only render ourselves susceptible of higher, and for us inscrutable, assistance" (p. 40-41). According to Kant, we must take the initiative here and act to make ourselves morally worthy of such assistance. Even if supernatural cooperation is a necessary condition of becoming morally better, "man must first make himself worthy to receive it, and must *lay hold* of this aid (which is no small matter)" (p. 40). Thus, for Kant, we can become morally better persons only if we receive divine assistance, and we will receive divine assistance only if we make ourselves worthy of it. As we shall soon see, both conjuncts of this claim give rise to difficulties.

If receiving divine assistance is a necessary condition of becoming a morally better person, then there are some Kantian reasons for thinking that no one can become a morally better person after all. For Kant, moral worth is deeply individualistic. It seems that whatever moral worth an agent has must be wholly a product of the exercise of that agent's freedom, and so the very idea of divine assistance with the task of becoming morally better persons is problematic. This idea is, Kant himself admits, "hard to reconcile with reason, since that which is to be accredited to us as morally good conduct must take place not through foreign influence but solely through the best possible use of our own powers" (p. 179). Yet he goes on to insist that the impossibility of such a thing cannot be proved for the same reason the impossibility of atemporal freedom cannot be proved. In both cases we are dealing with things that transcend the realm of possible experience to which knowledge is restricted. The principle that *ought* implies *can* thus licences only the rather thin general assumption that grace will effect in us what we cannot accomplish by our own powers provided we have first made the best use we can of those powers. We cannot, Kant holds, have any knowledge of the mechanics

of the operations of grace or of the occasions on which and the conditions under which it may be expected.

When the general notion of divine gracious aid is made more specific by spelling it out in traditional theological language, the result is what Kant describes as the mystery of atonement. Man is corrupt, morally speaking, in virtue of having brought upon himself through the exercise of freedom the evil propensity to evil-doing. And yet, Kant assures us, "if the goodness of God has called him, as it were, into being, i.e., to exist in a particular manner (as a member of the kingdom of Heaven), He must also have a means of supplementing out of the fullness of His own holiness, man's lack of requisite qualifications therefor" (p. 134). But grave difficulties stand in the way of assuming that human efforts to become worthy of membership in the kingdom are susceptible of such supplementation, for the assumption appears to contradict Kant's view that moral worth derives entirely from the kind of free action that is in no way influenced by external determinants. From Kant's perspective, such an assumption "contradicts spontaneity (which is assumed in all the moral good or evil which a man can have within himself), according to which such a good cannot come from another but must arise from man himself, if it is to be imputable to him" (p. 134). So because moral goodness is requisite for worthiness of inclusion in the kingdom but apparently cannot, even in part, come from another, reason cannot see how it is possible for the moral merits of one person, even if that person be God himself, to have any effect at all on the moral status and worth of another. Vicarious atonement must, then, be an unfathomable mystery to reason. If we postulate it from the practical point of view in order to help us understand how what we ought to do by way of becoming morally better persons can be successful, this is completely a matter of moral faith for practical use and not at all a matter of knowledge for theoretical use, since reason is powerless to comprehend or see into the possibility of vicarious atonement. But neither can reason prove the impossibility of vicarious atonement, and so a moral faith that postulates it need not include anything reason has demonstratively ruled out by means of such a proof.

A divine supplement to our own efforts to make ourselves better persons will be forthcoming, however, only if we make ourselves worthy to receive it. How is it possible for us to accomplish this formidable task? Kant's answer is that each of us must carry out a revolution in his or her moral disposition that produces a radical change in character from evil to good. "But if a man is corrupt in the very ground of his maxims," Kant wonders, "how can he possibly bring about this revolution by his own powers and of himself become a good man?" (p. 43). A regress appears to be in the offing. It would seem that bringing about such a revolution is no easier than becoming a better person if one has brought upon oneself an evil propensity that corrupts the

very ground of one's maxims, and so the former task would seem to require divine assistance if the latter does. But then, on Kantian assumptions, it appears that divine aid with carrying out a revolution in disposition will be forthcoming only if one first does something else on one's own to make oneself worthy of receiving such aid. No matter how this other deed that must be done is specified, the question of how it is possible for an agent in whom the ground of maxims is corrupt to perform it will arise. If this deed in turn is only possible for such an agent with divine assistance, then yet another deed must first be performed to render the agent worthy of that assistance.

The logic of Kant's position dictates that the regress be terminated by postulating that there is something each agent can do without divine aid that renders him or her worthy of divine aid in performing other actions. Considerations of simplicity favor stopping the regress at the earliest opportunity. So it is not surprising that Kant holds we can bring about the requisite moral revolution in disposition by our own powers. Duty requires this of us, Kant supposes, and duty demands nothing of us that we cannot do. Thus Kant thinks we must say that "man is under the necessity of, and is therefore capable of, a revolution in his cast of mind, but only of a gradual reform in his sensuous nature (which places obstacles in the way of the former)" (p. 43). Alternatively formulated, Kant's claim is that "if a man reverses, by a single unchangeable decision, that highest ground of his maxims whereby he was an evil man (and thus puts on the new man), he is, so far as his principle and cast of mind are concerned, a subject susceptible of goodness, but only in continuous labor and growth is he a good man" (p. 43). So we must make ourselves subjects susceptible of goodness by our own powers in order to render ourselves worthy of divine assistance in becoming morally better persons in the course of a life of labor and growth. And, according to Kant, we may think of the progress in becoming a better person of one who has carried out such a revolution "as being judged by Him who knows the heart, through a purely intellectual intuition, as a completed whole, because of the *disposition*, supersensible in its nature, from which this progress itself is derived" (pp. 60-61). Those whose moral progress is thus derived are essentially well-pleasing to God. As we shall see, it is part of saving faith for Kant to believe that we can become well-pleasing to God through a good course of life in the future.

We shall also see that another part of saving faith is belief in an atonement that makes satisfaction for past evil-doing. Kant supposes that it is legitimate to represent the moral law as a divine command and thus to think of transgressing it as sin. The guilt that is associated with sin is conceived legalistically as a kind of debt the sinner owes, and Kant finds it very difficult to understand how this debt can be paid even if one has managed to bring about a revolution in one's moral character. There is in all of us an inextirpable

evil propensity; we are guilty in virtue of possessing it because we are accountable for having freely brought it upon ourselves. "Whatever a man may have done," Kant asserts, "in the way of adopting a good disposition, and, indeed, however steadfastly he may have persevered in conduct conformable to such a disposition, *he nevertheless started from evil*, and this debt he can by no possibility wipe out" (p. 66). Even if a person never sins again after the moral revolution that reverses the highest ground of maxims, old debts from before the revolution still demand payment. And one cannot through future good conduct produce a surplus of merit, so to speak, that could be applied to discharging past debts, for the moral law obliges us always to do all the good that lies within our power. According to Kant, this debt "can never be discharged by another person, *so far as we can judge according to the justice of our human reason*" (p. 66, my emphasis). Unlike pecuniary indebtedness, it is no transmissible liability. It is instead, Kant insists, "*the most personal of all debts*, namely, a debt of sins, which only the culprit can bear and which no innocent person can assume even though he be magnanimous enough to wish to take it upon himself for the sake of another" (p. 66). So human reason, as Kant understands it, appears to preclude the very possibility of vicarious satisfaction for the debt of sin. But Kant also maintains that satisfaction for the debt of sin must be rendered to divine justice if the sinner is to be freed from liability to punishment and to be worthy of happiness. How is this possible?

Kant's answer to the question deserves high marks for ingenuity if not for plausibility. He distinguishes, in effect, between the physical identities of persons and the moral identities of persons, and he then goes on to claim that the moral revolution duty bids the sinner to carry out is such a radical change that, though a physical person persists through it, prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary moral persons are diverse from the point of view of divine justice. After the revolution, "although the man (regarded from the point of view of his empirical nature as a sentient being) is *physically* the self-same guilty person as before and must be judged as such before a moral tribunal and hence by himself; yet, because of his new disposition, he is (regarded as an intelligible being) *morally* another in the eyes of a divine judge for whom this disposition takes the place of action" (p. 68). And, remarkably, the new, postrevolutionary moral person, who is essentially well-pleasing to God, can do something to satisfy for the sins of the old, prerevolutionary moral person. The revolution itself involves sacrifice and voluntary entry into a long train of life's ills. And these, Kant tells us, "the new man undertakes in the disposition of the Son of God, that is, merely for the sake of the good, though really they are due as *punishment* to another, namely to the old man (for the old man is indeed morally another)" (p. 68). Thus the new, postrevolutionary moral person satisfies vicariously, as it were, for the sins of the old, pre-

revolutionary moral person. The morally good disposition that a man makes his own by carrying out a revolution in character "bears as *vicarious substitute* the guilt of sin for him" (p. 69).

But even one who has brought about the moral revolution duty demands cannot afford to be complacent. Because we start from evil, the extent to which a good disposition is manifested temporally in conduct will always be deficient by the standard of perfect obedience to the moral law. So moral life will always be a struggle to overcome interior evil; at best it will display progress from bad to better. Yet "because this disposition contains the basis for continual progress in the reparation of this deficiency," Kant tells us, "it does, as an intellectual unity of the whole, take *the place of action* carried to its perfect consummation" (p. 69). Thus a just God, judging from an atemporal perspective, may take the good disposition produced by moral revolution together with the progress in becoming better based on it to be grounds for judging a person worthy to be happy. We sinners, of course, because we fall far short of compliance with the moral law's demand for perfect obedience, have no legal grounds for claiming that "what in our earthly life (and possibly at all future times and in all worlds) is ever only a *becoming* (namely, becoming a man well-pleasing to God) should be credited to us exactly as if we were already in full possession of it" (p. 70). It is, however, a part of Kant's moral faith to believe that God will graciously do so if our faith in his goodness includes believing that he will. Therefore, according to Kant, those of us who are guilty but have acquired dispositions well-pleasing to God are justified by a divine decree that "is always one of grace alone, although fully in accord with eternal justice, when we come to be cleared of all liability by dint of our faith in such goodness" (p. 70). We sinners can, then, be absolved of guilt and forgiven the debt associated with it by a just God, if we have the right sort of faith in divine goodness, provided we take the initiative and first acquire by a moral revolution in character the good disposition needed to make us essentially well-pleasing to God. In a word, justification is conditional upon self-transformation.

So the idea of a free moral revolution that reverses the highest ground of one's maxims, reorienting moral character at the deepest level, is the hinge on which Kant's soteriology turns. Carrying out such a moral revolution is, for agents who have brought upon themselves an evil propensity to evil-doing, a prerequisite of both forgiveness of the debt of past sin and worthiness of whatever divine assistance may be forthcoming in the struggle to become morally better in the future.

The Antinomy and its Resolution

There are obviously all sorts of tensions internal to the Kantian account of sin and atonement. It is to Kant's credit that he does not try to hide them. On

the contrary, the antinomy of saving faith he formulates forces him to confront some of them head on and to propose a theoretical resolution of them. I now turn to an examination of the problem that antinomy expresses.

We may, Kant supposes, "call the faith of every individual who possesses moral capacity (worthiness) for eternal happiness a *saving* faith" (p. 106). Saving faith has two components: one has to do with what we ourselves cannot accomplish; the other has to do with what we ourselves can and should achieve. Of the two elements on which man's hope of salvation is conditioned, "the first is the faith in an atonement (reparation for his debt, redemption, reconciliation with God); the second, the faith that we can become well-pleasing to God through a good course of life in the future" (p. 106). The two components are not a merely accidental conjunction; for Kant, their union is in some sense necessary. We can, he thinks, comprehend the necessity of this union only by assuming "either that the faith in the absolution from the debt resting upon us will bring forth good life-conduct, or else that the genuine and active disposition ever to pursue a good course of life will engender the faith in such absolution according to the law of morally operating causes" (pp. 106-07). But both assumptions appear to confront insurmountable difficulties that give rise to what Kant calls "a remarkable antinomy of human reason with itself" (p. 107).

Consider first the assumption that faith in absolution from guilt will bring forth good life-conduct. Kant considers it "quite impossible to see how a reasonable man, who knows himself to merit punishment, can in all seriousness believe that he needs only to credit the news of an atonement rendered for him, and to accept this atonement *utiliter* (as the lawyers say), in order to regard his guilt as annihilated" (p. 107). And it is equally difficult, if not more so, to see how a reasonable person could believe that good life-conduct will be the inevitable future consequence of such faith alone or of the mere acceptance of the proffered favor. So even if divine aid, a transcendent atonement, is a prerequisite of future good life-conduct or of becoming morally better, a reasonable man "must believe that he must first improve his way of life, so far as improvement lies in his power, if he is to have even the slightest ground for hope of such a higher gain" (p. 107).

But then consider the alternative, the assumption that it is within one's power to become essentially well-pleasing to God by carrying out a moral revolution in one's disposition that will engender faith in absolution from guilt. Is this assumption any more reasonable than the other? Committed to the supposition that an evil propensity corrupts the very ground of all his maxims of action and conscious of the moral transgressions of which he has in the past been guilty, a reasonable man would seem to be able to find no grounds for belief in a capacity in himself for becoming well-pleasing to God or even for future improvement. Kant asks: "If he cannot regard justice, which

he has provoked against himself, as satisfied through atonement by another, and cannot regard himself reborn, so to speak, through this faith and so for the first time able to enter upon a new course of life—and this would follow from his union with the good principle—upon what is he to base his hope of becoming a man pleasing to God?” (p. 108). So it seems that a reasonable man must assume that faith which empowers him in virtue of merits not his own must precede his every effort to perform good acts.

The antinomy, then, consists of an argument for the conclusion that faith in divine atonement must precede good works and another argument, which is supposed to be equally strong, for the conclusion that good works must precede faith in divine atonement. It is a venerable theological dilemma. Which of the two conclusions shall we accept if we are forced to choose between them?

Considered practically, the question has an easy answer for Kant, and it is just the answer one would expect in view of his account of atonement. From the point of view of practical reason, the question we face is this: “Where shall we start, i.e., with a faith in what God has done on our behalf, or with what we are to do to become worthy of God’s assistance (whatever this may be)?” (p. 108). We must, Kant thinks, opt for the second alternative. Because the moral law commands us unconditionally to do what we can to become better persons, we have to assume for practical purposes that “the *good course of life*, as the highest condition of grace, is unconditioned *duty*, whereas atonement from on high is purely a *matter of grace*” (p. 109). And thus, Kant insists, we may “hope to partake in the appropriation of another’s atoning merit, and so of salvation, only by qualifying for it through our own efforts to fulfil every human duty—and this obedience must be the effect of own action and not, once again, of a foreign influence in the presence of which we are passive” (pp. 108-09). In short, practical reason dictates the conclusion that works must precede faith. As Kant puts it, this disposes of the antinomy by “cutting the knot (by means of a practical maxim) instead of disentangling it (theoretically)” (p. 109).

It would, of course, also be nice to have a theoretical resolution of the antinomy that disentangles it by explaining what is wrong with the argument to the conclusion that faith must precede works. Kant obligingly tries to provide such a resolution.

The key to Kant’s proposal for disentanglement is his distinction between the Son of God as archetype of reason and the Son of God as historical phenomenon. The Son of God as archetype is merely the ideal of a humanity pleasing to God and so of the moral perfection possible for an earthly being subject to wants and inclinations. “From the practical point of view,” Kant tells us, “this idea is completely real in its own right, for it resides in our morally-legislative reason” (p. 55). It sets the moral standard by which we

are to judge ourselves and others. By the principle that *ought* implies *can*, we must be able to live up to this high standard because practical reason tells us we ought to do so. Since this ideal is, as it were, built into moral reason, we require, Kant supposes, "no empirical example to make the idea of a person morally well-pleasing to God our archetype" (p. 56). And he goes on to claim that only faith in the practical validity of this idea of reason has moral worth.

The content of this ideal is a morally good course of life grounded in a good disposition. We can represent this content to ourselves, Kant thinks, "as the idea of a person who would be willing not merely to discharge all human duties himself and to spread about him goodness as widely as possible by precept and example, but even, though tempted by the greatest allurements, to take upon himself every affliction, up to the most ignominious death, for the good of the world and even for his enemies" (p. 55). So it is a Christlike ideal. What is crucial, according to Kant, is that we realize that the archetype of a humanity well-pleasing to God and the principle of a good course of life-conduct are equivalent and interchangeable objects of faith because they have the same moral content and differ only in the way they represent it. Thus when faith in the Son of God is construed merely as commitment to doing our best to live up to the standard set by this archetype, there are, Kant says, "not two principles which in themselves so differ that to begin with the one, or the other, would be to enter upon opposing paths, but only one and the same practical idea from which we take our start, this idea representing the archetype now as found in God and proceeding from Him, and now, as found in us, but in both instances as the gauge for our course of life" (p. 110). Hence the antinomy is merely apparent because the true object of saving faith is this archetype rather than some historical person.

It would be otherwise if saving faith had to be historical. Kant's view is that "faith in the self-same archetype *in its [phenomenal] appearance* (faith in the God-Man), as an *empirical* (historical) faith, is not interchangeable with the principle of the good course of life (which must be wholly rational)" (p. 109). Kant sets forth two objections to the supposition that saving faith must be faith in the historical and empirical reality of the God-Man, that is, faith in the incarnate God. The first applies to historical faiths generally: they lack the universal rational appeal of a pure religious faith that can be believed in and shared by everyone. "An historical faith, grounded solely on facts," Kant insists, "can extend its influence no further than tidings of it can reach, subject to circumstances of time and place and dependent upon the capacity [of men] to judge the credibility of such tidings" (p. 94). The rationality of any historical faith seems, in other words, to be hostage to such contingencies as the state of empirical communications and the status of historical scholarship. So historical faith appears not to be the sort of thing that could legiti-

mately be demanded of everyone as a precondition of worthiness to be happy and so of salvation at the hands of a just God. The second applies specifically to some traditional interpretations of Christian faith: they attribute to it a magical influence on the moral lives of people who yield themselves to it and the feeling associated with it. Kant considers it contrary to reason to imagine that good life-conduct, which is a condition of worthiness to be happy, will be brought about by belief that "there was once a man (of whom reason tells us nothing) who through his holiness and merit rendered satisfaction both for himself (with reference to his duty) and for all others (with their shortcomings, in the light of their duty)" (p. 110). Saving faith thus portrayed as by itself capable of producing moral improvement in human sinners mistakenly attributes to divine causation what reason tells us must be the product of free moral agency. Such faith, Kant says, "would have to be regarded as imparted and inspired directly by heaven (together with, and in, the historical faith), and everything connected even with the moral constitution of man would resolve itself into an unconditional decree of God: 'He hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he *hardeneth*,' which, taken according to the letter, is the *salto mortale* of human reason" (p. 111).

Thus Kant is prepared to deny that saving faith is faith in the efficacy of the satisfaction made by the Passion and Death of the historical Jesus Christ in order to comply with what he takes to be the demand of practical reason that human moral agents be accountable for the moral worth of their characters and lives. The object of saving faith, the archetype of a humanity pleasing to God, is no more than an abstract ideal, paradigm or exemplar that practical reason can discover within itself. Kant's touching but improbable hope is that this ideal will be a sufficient basis for a pure moral religion of reason. Quoting scripture, he expresses confidence that "in the end religion will gradually be freed from all empirical determining grounds and from all statutes which rest on history and which through the agency of ecclesiastical faith provisionally unite men for the requirements of the good; and thus at last the pure religion of reason will rule over all, 'so that God may be all in all'" (p. 112). This is a profoundly optimistic view of human capacities for progressively rationalizing and moralizing religion.

Those whose loyalties remain with traditional forms of Christianity are not apt to be enthusiastic about the prospect of the withering away of ecclesiastical faith. Nor are they likely to put much stock in the idea that the object of saving faith is nothing more than the abstract rational archetype of a humanity well-pleasing to God. They will hope that there is some other way in which Kant's antinomy of saving faith can be theoretically disentangled. I think there is. So I conclude this paper by sketching an alternative resolution I find more consonant with traditional Christian thought.

Another Disentanglement of the Antinomy

Kant is not in a position to claim that his proposal for a theoretical resolution of the remarkable antinomy is the only satisfactory one. Even if it is granted that his proposal coheres better than any other with the constraints imposed by the architecture of his philosophical system, it is open to an alternative proposal to challenge some of the assumptions that are building blocks of that imposing theoretical construction. One of the shakiest of them seems to me to be the supposition that the appeal of a rational religious faith must be universal. It is the basis for his general objection to historical faiths, but I shall try to show that it does not provide a firm foundation for such an objection.

The supposition is, of course, motivated by moral concerns that have to be respected. If saving faith is a necessary condition of worthiness to be happy and so salvation, then in a universe governed by a perfectly just divine sovereign it should be equally accessible to all moral agents who stand in need of it. So it is natural to assume that it is a deliverance of some faculty or power common to all moral agents, and for Kant practical reason is just such a power because all normal finite moral agents are equally endowed with it. It would, after all, appear to be capricious and unfair for access to saving faith to be restricted to those born in certain times and places and aware of contingent historical facts that others, through no fault of their own, are in no position to come to know.

But the attempt to limit what it is reasonable to believe about moral or soteriological matters to those propositions that it is rational for everyone who considers them to believe seems, upon even superficial reflection, misguided. There simply are not enough such propositions to constitute anything more than a very abstract and almost vacuous picture of the human vocation. Serious students of Kant's own moral and religious views serve to prove the point; they are critics as often as they are defenders of both the details and the underlying assumptions of the Kantian philosophy. And even if there is some very abstract conception of human moral perfection that is, actually or potentially, universally shared, reasonable people soon begin to disagree when it comes to fleshing out the portrait by filling in concrete details. Apparently rational people who are familiar with the lives of both Christ and Buddha disagree about which of them is supremely worthy of imitation.

If the assumption that all rational religious beliefs must be universally accessible is given up, Kant's general objection to historical faiths loses much of its force. No doubt there will be variations from one person to another in exactly which historical beliefs are rational. I submit that for most of us some historical beliefs are every bit as rational as the best scientific beliefs of our culture. For example, I am convinced that my belief in the existence of

George Washington is no less reasonable than my belief in the existence of DNA molecules. I consider myself well within my epistemic rights in having both beliefs, for both of them rest for me in the first instance on what I take to be highly reliable testimony. To imagine that such beliefs are not rational for me is, I suggest, to concede far too much to skepticism. And I know of no good reason for supposing that beliefs in the existence of the historical Jesus and in the occurrence of at least some of the incidents involving him that are narrated in scripture cannot be equally rational for some people in some circumstances. Thus it seems plain enough to me that some beliefs about the life and death of Jesus can be part of the content of a rational historical faith, even though pure reason alone yields no *a priori* knowledge of such a person. In short, Kant's first objection to Christian faith with an historical component being a saving faith fails.

To my mind, the claims of Christian faith become morally objectionable only if they turn exclusive and insist that Christian faith is the only path to salvation. But there is no need to appeal to a universally shareable faith of pure reason in order to block such parochial impulses. An alternative is to acknowledge a plurality of paths to salvation. A rather grudging way of making such a concession would be to say, as Christians have often done, that pagans are saved by virtue of implicit faith in Christ. A tack I find more consonant with the positive values in the variety of human religions is to affirm the existence of a plurality of saving faiths and to trust that all who would profit thereby have access to at least one of them. We can, I believe, accommodate Kant's legitimate concern that no one should be excluded from the opportunity of becoming worthy of happiness and so from salvation through no fault of his or her own if we allow that faith in Christ is an insufficient but necessary part of an unnecessary but sufficient condition for salvation.⁴

Kant's second objection has, in my opinion, more bite because it is directed against a line of thought fairly deeply embedded in Christianity. The *sola fide* motto has sometimes been taken to say that saving faith is implanted in the human breast by direct divine causation, and then produces good life-conduct and whatever else may be necessary for worthiness of salvation by a process that bypasses the human subject's apparatus of voluntary choice altogether, this apparatus being so corrupt in consequence of Adam's fall that it is incapable of making a positive contribution to the process. Kant seems to me right on target in rejecting the extreme theological determinism built into this picture of the causal antecedents and consequences of Christian faith. There is, perhaps, a bit of rhetorical exaggeration in his claim that this view is the *salto mortale* of human reason, since it can be incorporated into a coherent theology. Nevertheless, Kant is surely correct to think it morally repugnant. If God implants faith in the human breast independent of the free

cooperation of its subject, faith has no moral worth. If such faith automatically generates works by a determinism that precludes a contribution from the freedom of the person of faith, then those works have no moral worth. And if God decrees salvation on the basis of faith or works without moral worth, then happiness is not grounded in moral worthiness to be happy in any way. Kant would consider such a state of affairs a moral scandal, and so would I. So if God really were to exercise mercy and harden hearts in a manner entirely independent of moral worth in those whom he judges, he would not be morally perfect and so would not be worthy of worship. So the argument goes.

Morality requires, therefore, that at some point the iron chains of determinism, theological or natural, be broken to make room for a contribution to worthiness to be happy from free and imputable human action. But it does not require that those chains be broken in precisely the way Kant envisages. Kant's view is that the moral agent must, as a first step, produce a good disposition by a moral revolution within his or her own power; this disposition can, perhaps with divine assistance, subsequently produce good conduct; and finally a life of good conduct will, it is hoped, engender faith in divine atonement. Alternative models of the cooperation of freedom and grace are possible and permit alternative theoretical resolutions of Kant's antinomy.

According to one such model, God offers the gift of saving faith but humans are free either to accept or to reject it. Saving faith itself, on this view, is imputable and so has positive moral worth. Having acquired saving faith, a person is eligible for further divine assistance in performing good works, including both improvements in character and good deeds. But God makes no offer of such assistance that literally cannot be refused, and thus such good works are also imputable and have positive moral worth. In this model, freedom and grace cooperate all along the line, so to speak, and so both faith and works contribute to worthiness to be happy.

A model in which saving faith is, when offered, irresistible can also be constructed. On this view, saving faith is not imputable and so has no moral worth, but neither is it deterministically sufficient for subsequent good works. Though it or other divine gifts may be necessary conditions of such good works, free human cooperation in response to such gifts is also a necessary condition of those works, and hence they are imputable and have positive moral worth. In this model, then, works but not faith contribute to worthiness of happiness.

Either model allows us to offer an alternative to Kant's explanation of why the antinomy is merely apparent. Without arguing for this assumption, Kant supposes we must choose between holding that faith is causally sufficient for works or holding that works are causally sufficient for faith. He rejects the first option because, as he sees it, allowing faith to precede works is tanta-

mount to having faith bring forth by some sort deterministic causation life-conduct, which would deprive works of their moral worth. But, as our two models show, the options Kant recognizes do not exhaust the possibilities. Even if it is thought that Christian faith does typically precede good works and contributes causally to their being performed, it need not be supposed that it is causally sufficient for them and that they can on that account contribute nothing to worthiness of being happy. So we may deny Kant's assumption that giving temporal precedence to faith would commit us to the view that faith in the power of the atoning works of Christ to free us from guilt will of itself bring forth good life-conduct. We may say instead such faith is a saving faith because it contributes causally to engendering good works without causally necessitating them in accordance with some wholly deterministic law and quite apart from the spontaneity of moral freedom. And, I believe, we may even affirm that God has given this peculiar power to faith in Christ precisely because Christ suffered and died for our sakes. Though such affirmations clearly do go contrary to the letter of Kant's attempt to resolve the remarkable antinomy, I think they disentangle it in a way that respects his legitimate concern that salvation at the hands of a morally perfect God must be conceived to be based in some way on a worthiness to be happy that is in some measure a product of moral freedom.

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NOTES

1. I have criticized this account in "Original Sin, Radical Evil and Moral Identity," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), pp. 188-202, "Christian Atonement and Kantian Justification," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986), pp. 440-62, and "'In Adam's Fall, We Sinned All,'" *Philosophical Topics* 16(2) (1988), pp. 89-118. In order to make the present paper more or less self-contained, I have covered some of the same expository ground again, this time highlighting aspects of the account that help explain why Kant finds saving faith problematic.

2. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 35. Hereafter I shall identify quotations from this work by means of parenthetical page references in the body of my text.

3. In blending paraphrase and quotation, I have on occasion found it expedient for grammatical reasons to use language that is not gender-inclusive outside quotation marks. This seems to me a lesser sin than tampering with text inside quotation marks.

4. What Mackie dubs an 'INUS condition.' See J. L. Mackie, *The Cement of the Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).