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Philosophy of religion after Kant and Kierkegaard

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Philosophy of Religion After Kant and Kierkegaard

I. What Does It Mean To Be *after* Kant and Kierkegaard?

At first sight the scope of this conference's sixth and final topic seems clear enough: it calls for an examination of major developments in the philosophy of religion during the 150-200 years since Kant and Kierkegaard. Two ambiguities, however, must be clarified before the topic's scope can be properly determined. The first ambiguity concerns the role of the word "after" in the title. For this little word conveys an interesting dual meaning: "after" can mean either "along the lines of" (as in "Kant takes *after* his mother") or "subsequent to" (as in "Kierkegaard was born *after* Kant died"). For reasons that will become apparent as we proceed, I shall take the word to have *both* meanings, dealing specifically with the implications of the former in §II and with those of the latter in §III.

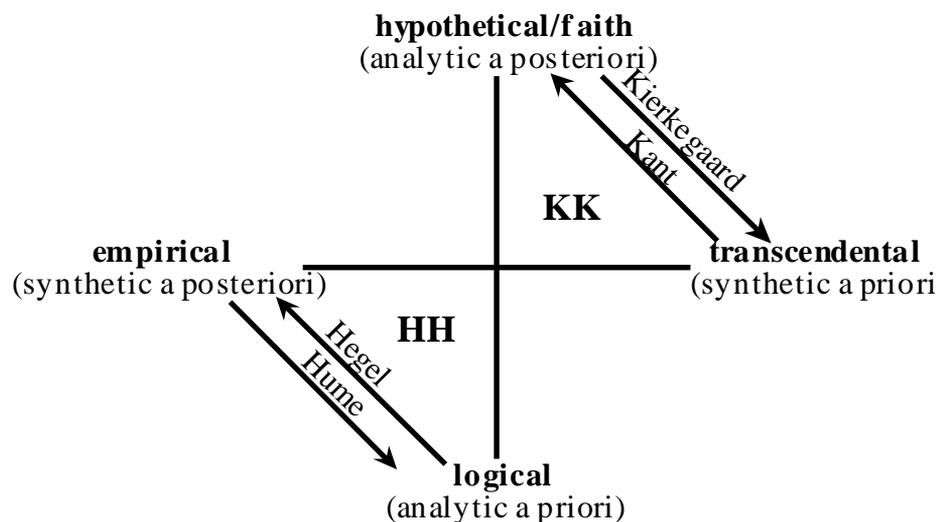
The title's second ambiguity concerns the meaning of the still smaller word, "and". In order to determine how best to interpret this word, let us distinguish between four logically possible combinations of influence, where the first "K" refers to Kantian ideas and the second "K" to Kierkegaardian ideas, while a "0" in place of either "K" refers to ideas that are *not* found in the writings of that philosopher:

- KK = Kantian ideas supported/developed by Kierkegaard.
- K0 = Kantian ideas that Kierkegaard did not support/develop.
- 0K = Ideas developed by Kierkegaard that were not Kantian in origin.
- 00 = Ideas supported/developed by neither Kant nor Kierkegaard.

The "and" in the title of this essay could be taken to include any or all of these categories, depending on how "after" is interpreted. In order to limit its scope, I shall therefore interpret "and" more strictly, as referring only to the "KK" category. In other words, this essay will focus on identifying some *common ground* in the philosophies of religion developed by Kant and Kierkegaard (though without ignoring their differences). We shall then sample the ideas of two philosophers who, while living during the 140 years *after* KK (i.e., subsequent to 1855),¹ have developed that common ground *after* (i.e., along the lines of) KK.

Before attempting to identify the “common ground” shared by Kant and Kierkegaard, let us take a step back and contrast them with another important pair of philosophers who in some respects parallel the relationship between Kant and Kierkegaard. One of the chief *alternatives* to our topic as a way of surveying the early roots of contemporary philosophy of religion would be to sketch a “Philosophy of Religion After Hume and Hegel”. Just as Kant developed certain key aspects of his philosophy in response to Hume’s overly skeptical empiricism, Kierkegaard developed certain key aspects of his philosophy in response to Hegel’s overly logical historicism. Indeed, these four thinkers—Hume and Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard—form a neat quaternity of basic perspectives that can serve as a useful starting-point for sketching subsequent trends. In terms of Kant’s well-known analytic-synthetic and a priori-a posteriori distinctions, we can suggest the following (admittedly oversimplified) set of correlations: Hume focused his attention on the synthetic a posteriori perspective, with a secondary emphasis on the analytic a priori,² Hegel, by contrast, focused on the latter (logical) perspective, with a secondary emphasis on the former (empirical/historical) perspective; Kant focused his attention on the synthetic a priori perspective, with a secondary emphasis on what (as we shall see) can be called the analytic a posteriori; Kierkegaard, by contrast, focussed his attention on the latter (hypothetical/faith) perspective, with a secondary emphasis on the former (transcendental) perspective.³

These tendencies can be pictured graphically (with each arrow pointing from a philosopher’s primary focus to his secondary focus) as follows:



Whereas Hume and Hegel represent two very different types of empirical-logical thinking,

Kant and Kierkegaard, writing largely in *response* to these two, represent two very different types of transcendental-hypothetical thinking. Transcendental-hypothetical thinking in general is, as we shall see, the prime characteristic of the “KK” interpretation of “and”. In the following section, we shall therefore examine in detail how the (in many ways opposite) philosophical methods adopted by Kant and Kierkegaard actually *complement* each other to produce a single tradition in the philosophy of religion—a tradition whose influence can be traced (see §§III-IV) down to the present day and beyond.

II. Philosophy of Religion *along the lines of Kant and Kierkegaard*

The claim that Kant’s Critical philosophy is rooted in a concern for establishing various types of *synthetic a priori* conditions is not open to serious doubt. For the “transcendental reflection” that is the hallmark of Critical philosophy is designed to establish a type of knowledge that is synthetic (i.e., factual, informative, appealing to intuition) even though it is established entirely a priori (i.e., without requiring reference to any particular experiences). The primary goal of Kant’s three *Critiques* is to determine the transcendental conditions for the possibility of empirical knowledge, moral action, and “contemplative” (aesthetic/teleological) judgment,⁴ respectively. Space, time, and the categories are to the first *Critique* what freedom and the moral law are to the second: the necessary and universal boundaries within which all meaningful epistemological/moral discourse must fall. In the third *Critique* purposiveness plays a similar boundary-setting role in relation to our experiences of beauty and natural organisms.

Kant’s approach to religion has often been set apart from the transcendental mainstream of his Critical System and interpreted as a mere “appendix to Ethics”.⁵ In opposition to this trend, some recent scholars portray Kant’s *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*⁶ as an extension of the *third Critique*, sharing both its Critical aim and its judicial/contemplative standpoint.⁷ The first three “Books” of *RBBR*, for example, can be viewed as establishing radical evil, practical faith, and an historical “church”, respectively, as the necessary and universal conditions of all true religion. These conditions are transcendental in the sense that they are both synthetic (providing information about what must be *factually true* if religion is to be genuine) and yet *a priori* (determined without being based on any

particular religious sentiments or traditions).

What is not so commonly recognized is that, in addition to Kant's primary emphasis on establishing transcendental boundaries, a very significant *secondary* emphasis comes into play towards the end of each *Critique*, where Kant examines the *purpose* or *goal* of whatever lies within each boundary. This secondary emphasis always manifests itself in a similar way, though Kant calls it by a number of different names. In the first *Critique*, for example, after establishing the basic elements of empirical knowledge, Kant launches into a lengthy attack on traditional metaphysics. His purpose in doing so is not to destroy metaphysics but to pave the way for a *new way of reflecting upon* the theological ideas of God, freedom, and immortality: they are to be treated as *regulating* rather than constituting our empirical knowledge. In a much-neglected section of the Doctrine of Method Kant further defines this new approach in terms of the proper role of *hypotheses* in philosophical thinking.⁸

Without delving here into the details of Kant's arguments, we can note that Kant himself fails to assign any special epistemological status to his new (regulative/hypothetical) form of metaphysical reflection. Instead, he nonchalantly identifies it with the synthetic a priori status assigned to the propositions of traditional speculative metaphysics, in spite of having devoted the bulk of the Dialectic to the task of proving these to be based on illusory reasoning. A better option, as I have argued elsewhere,⁹ would have been for him to recognize that classifying the propositions of regulative/hypothetical (or "as if") thinking requires us to introduce a quite distinct epistemological status: in thinking hypothetically (e.g., by letting the idea of God regulate our attempts to unify empirical knowledge), our focus is by definition entirely conceptual (i.e., analytic);¹⁰ yet we are seeking to *impose* a concept *directly onto our particular experiences* (i.e., a posteriori). Instead of seriously considering such a possibility, Kant normally assumes all analytic knowledge must be logical (and hence a priori).¹¹ But this assumption is no different, in principle, from that of the pre-Kantian philosophers who assumed all synthetic knowledge must be a posteriori. Extending Kant's own epistemological classifications to *include* the analytic a posteriori enables us to shed new light on some of his more obscure (yet important) theories.

That this (dimly recognized) analytic a posteriori mode of reflection is more than just an appendix to Kant's "official" epistemological methods, but constitutes a genuine (though

secondary) emphasis that is essential to the nature and function of Critical philosophy, is evidenced by the fact that the second and third *Critiques* also include key arguments that can be reinterpreted (and better understood) in terms of this analytic a posteriori status. The whole theory of the postulates of practical reason in the Dialectic of the second *Critique* is easy to misconstrue if interpreted as concepts that play a determinative role, rather than as a set of ideas that *encompass* our moral reasoning *analytically*, regulatively guiding us to explain the *purpose* of morality; yet the postulates of God and immortality are also intended to be *imposed* upon the realities of our moral life (a posteriori), just *as if* they were theoretically verifiable. Likewise, the third *Critique's* concluding appeal to mankind as the only organism with the ability (in virtue of our moral nature) to provide a concrete link between nature and freedom must also have an analytic a posteriori status, if it is to carry the weight of conviction that Kant himself clearly believed it had.

An even more important point for our purposes is that *RBBR* also lends itself at certain key points to an interpretation in analytic a posteriori terms. One of the most obvious instances of this comes at the beginning of the first part of Book Four, where Kant finally gives his definition of religion as “the recognition of all duties as divine commands” (*RBBR* 142). If taken as a synthetic a priori proposition marking out the transcendental boundary lines of religion, this claim would indeed support a reductionistic interpretation of Kant’s philosophy of religion. But this cannot be Kant’s intention, if for no other reason, because he always establishes such boundary lines in the *first* half of his Critical inquiries, leaving regulative/hypothetical (“as if”) issues for the closing sections. Since Kant’s definition comes in the final Book of *RBBR*, we should expect it to provide us with an analytic a posteriori means of *uniting* what has gone before into one regulative whole. Properly interpreted, his definition can be seen to do just that: the *idea* of “divine commands” (an analytic, non-intuited concept [see note 9]) is to be imposed hypothetically upon the material given (a posteriori) by our day-to-day “duties”, not in such a way as to imply that the two can be scientifically proven to coincide, but rather in a tentative and ever-evolving (“as if”) way that befits the mystery of religion.

Had Kant been more explicit in identifying the analytic a posteriori status of any objects viewed from this regulative/hypothetical perspective, the close affinity between Kant’s

and Kierkegaard's philosophies of religion would have been far more evident from the beginning. Turning now to Kierkegaard's writings with this more precise understanding of Kant's approach in mind, we can easily recognize numerous themes that turn out to be an elaboration and extension of the Critical (regulative/hypothetical) approach to metaphysics. Whereas Kant found it necessary to put his primary emphasis on the task of "deny[ing] *knowledge*" (through synthetic a priori Critique) and was able to develop only a partial explanation of how this denial "make[s] room for *faith*" [Bxxx] (through various forms of analytic a posteriori reflection), Kierkegaard felt constrained to emphasize and elaborate on the latter, while upholding the former as but a secondary emphasis. Kierkegaard's thought ranges over such a wide variety of subjects that we can do no more here than merely sketch a few examples of how his philosophy stands in this complementary relationship with Kant's.

When Kierkegaard boldly proclaims in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (hereafter *CUP*) that "truth is subjectivity",¹² some readers might assume he is waging war against the Kantian view of scientific knowledge as being *objectively valid* due to the necessity and universality of the categories. But this apparent conflict would be real only if Kierkegaard were adopting the theoretical (epistemological/scientific) standpoint Kant assumed in the first *Critique*. The very title of *CUP*, however, belies Kierkegaard's fundamentally different standpoint. Interpreted as the explanation and defense of what a specifically *religious* standpoint entails, this and other equally peculiar claims can be rendered fully compatible with the first *Critique's* theoretical standpoint.

One of the ways Kierkegaard protects himself against an overly-relativist interpretation whereby *all* kinds of truth are based on nothing but one's own subjective beliefs is by contrasting religious (subjective) truth with "world-historical" (objective) truth. Phillips points out the importance of recognizing *both* standpoints as aspects of Kierkegaard's broader view of truth.¹³ In contrasting the attitudes these standpoints encourage towards the empirical exigencies of daily life, Phillips points out (*FPE* 208) that, for a person adopting the "truth is subjectivity" standpoint, "what they are to become is not determined by the prospects which come their way, but rather the prospects that come their way are judged by what they have vowed to be." The former attitude towards "prospects", belonging to the "world-historical" standpoint, is properly based on synthetic a priori propositions, just as Kant argued.¹⁴ The

latter, by contrast, can be classified in terms of an analytic a posteriori approach: it is analytic inasmuch as religious people's "vows" are predetermined conceptual structures; it is a posteriori inasmuch as such vows are imposed upon *particular experiences* in order to shape their "prospects".

Recognizing Kierkegaard's *acceptance* of objectivity, as a lower but legitimate standpoint for discovering truth,¹⁵ enables us better to appreciate his complementary relationship with Kant in forming the KK tradition. For both thinkers there is a different, though equally intriguing, *interplay* between objective and subjective functions. Kant demonstrates that the objectivity of scientific (and all world-historical) truth begins in a subjective imposition of synthetic a priori (factual, but pre-experiential) judgment-forms onto the material given to us in experience. Kierkegaard accepts this basic insight, but goes on to demonstrate that the subjectivity of religious truth begins, paradoxically, *in history*, through an objective imposition of analytic a posteriori (conceptual, but experience-bound) judgment-contents onto the very form of our thinking. Whereas Kant's method of proof is logical and transcendental, Kierkegaard's is psychological and existential. The two are not incompatible, but *depend* on each other for a complete picture of the human situation.

That Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion depends in many respects on a largely implicit acceptance of Kant's philosophy has been argued recently by a number of interpreters.¹⁶ But this dependence is not entirely hidden; rather, it is *secondary*, much like Kant's emphasis on hypothetical reflection as the proper theoretical response to the problems caused by our discovery of transcendental limitations. Thus, for instance, Kierkegaard's subtle distinction between God's "existence" and that of ordinary individuals¹⁷ *assumes* Kant's categorial scheme as an epistemological framework. His point is not to deny the existence of God, but to shock us into realizing that an *experience* of God is possible only when we step outside the exclusively objective standpoint defined by the existence *or non-existence* of things and enter instead into the subjective realm of "inwardness", where the distinction between existence and non-existence becomes irrelevant. In so doing, we enter the paradoxical realm of analytic a posteriori faith.

A similarly implicit Kantianism in the moral and aesthetic realms can be seen in Kierkegaard's theory of the three "stages of life", where the chief difference once again is one

of *emphasis*. Whereas Kant is normally taken as being most at home with the moral standpoint (or stage), Kierkegaard insists that a pursuit of subjectivity will draw us further, into a more authentic *religious* stage. Actually, a judicious interpretation of Kant reveals that he too regards the religious standpoint as ultimately superior to the moral and aesthetic—*RBBR*, after all, was written *after*, and perhaps in some respects as an *improvement* on, the second and third *Critiques*. Only in *RBBR* (and to some extent in the third *Critique*), therefore, should we expect to find testimonies of the analytic a posteriori that come close to matching the power and depth of Kierkegaard's expositions of the religious stage of life.

Limitations of space preclude us from dwelling on such examples, but it is worth noting that Kierkegaard's writings are packed with interpretations of religious concepts and actions that can best be classified in analytic a posteriori terms. From his early philosophical analyses of sin, *angst*, and the "leap of faith", where a psychological approach overshadows its transcendental ground, to his later writings on more explicitly Christian themes, Kierkegaard always tends to focus on those aspects of human life wherein we allow our idea(s) of the infinite to *shape* our historically-bound experiences of the finite. My argument has been that all such aspects can best be classified in terms of the paradoxical epistemological category of the analytic a posteriori. One final example should help to clarify this claim.

That Kierkegaard's book on love contains the word "*Works*" in its title is no accident. A "work" of love, in this context, is more than just some external activity we perform; it is a very special, *internal* kind of "doing" that molds and predetermines our external behavior. Ordinary types of love manifest themselves as mere responses to external stimuli; but a *work* of love (as the Christian notion of *agape* always implies) must be proactive. In order for (true Christian) love to *be* love, we must purposefully impose it onto our experiences as an inward principle of interpretation. This is why giving love cannot be contingent on the lover's response: as Phillips puts it, "to abide in love is love's own reward."¹⁸ Such a deliberate, unconditional *choice* is not epistemologically equivalent to judging (synthetic a posteriori) that "this paper is white" or (analytic a priori) that "white is a color", nor can it even be identified with (synthetic a priori) judgments such as "every event has a cause". Love, with all its paradoxes, deserves its own special status. What could be more appropriate than the equally enigmatic status of the analytic a posteriori? Had Kierkegaard himself seen fit to introduce

such a classification at this (and many other) point(s) in his writings, I believe the nature of his contribution to the philosophy of religion would have been significantly clarified.

III. Philosophy of Religion *subsequent to Kant and Kierkegaard*

In the 140+ years since Kierkegaard's death numerous schools of philosophy have developed their own unique approaches to the philosophy of religion. Of these, perhaps the most influential have been phenomenology (including certain trends in the psychology of religion), existentialism (particularly among Christian theologians), analytic philosophy (with insights drawn especially from Wittgenstein), and the whole domain commonly referred to as "postmodern" philosophy (including hermeneutic and deconstructionist wings). There is no space here to trace the influence of Kant and Kierkegaard through *all* these trends. Instead, I shall take one example from each of the first two traditions—these exhibiting, in my opinion, more obvious KK influences than the latter two—in order to examine the connections in a bit more detail. Two influential scholars, who were born in the half-century after Kierkegaard's death and did most of their writing during the first half of this century, can serve as typical representatives of the phenomenological and existentialist ways of developing the KK tradition: Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) and Paul Tillich (1886-1965).¹⁹

Rudolf Otto develops a philosophy of religion on explicitly Kantian grounds, but seeks to extend its religious application through a method of psychological introspection that is in some respects reminiscent of Kierkegaard. Otto's phenomenological insights into the basic ingredients of a religious experience, as expounded in *The Idea of the Holy*,²⁰ are sufficiently well known so as not to require a detailed account here. In short, he describes religious experience in terms of a "creature-feeling" (a "*mysterium tremendum*") consisting of five basic "elements": awe, majesty, urgency, mystery, and fascination. Such experiences, he argues, must be regarded as *responses* to a reality that is essentially holy and unknown (the "numen"); as such they are fundamentally nonrational and nonmoral and so cannot be expected to conform to the theoretical and moral boundaries established by Kant's *Critiques*.

Otto presents his theories as resting on a Kantian foundation, not only in *IH*, but even more explicitly in his earlier, less-known book, *The Philosophy of Religion based on Kant and Fries*.²¹ Seeking to offset what he perceives as Kant's failure to account for the depth of meaning in a genuine religious experience, Otto (like Kierkegaard) accepts the basic transcen-

dental boundaries established in the three *Critiques*, but tries to construct a distinct new *religious* standpoint that can show how the profoundest of human experiences take us beyond a strictly Kantian worldview (see e.g., *IH* 113-114). Replacing Kant's transcendental deduction with a method of psychological introspection derived from Fries and Nelson (see *RPM* 181, 203), Otto regards "the holy" as a numinous "category" constituting the essential ingredient of the "religious a priori".²²

Without delving into the intricacies of Otto's theories, we can pause here to question, in light of our analysis of the KK tradition in §II, any such attempt to classify religious experience in synthetic a priori terms. For if this "creature-feeling" were *transcendental* in the way Otto requires, then it would obtain a form of necessity that simply does not fit the facts. Is the experience of God's presence in the Eucharist, for instance, really epistemologically equivalent to the experience of any (or every) event having a *cause*, or of any (or every) moral action being *free*? The principles grounding knowledge and morality are "synthetic" because they relate to factual/intuitive content, and "a priori" because we impose them on all our experience *before* any particular events/actions take place. Yet the numinous experiences Otto describes so forcefully do not fit either of these requirements. Rather, they are experiences wherein a predetermined *concept* of something that *cannot* be intuited (e.g., "the holy") is *analytically* imposed upon particular experienced objects, *a posteriori*.

Rather than invalidating Otto's theory, revising it along these lines highlights its ability to *complement* Kant's transcendental boundaries, yet without transgressing any of them. For religious judgments can then be seen to have their own unique epistemological status, and to *participate* in the autonomous systems of natural, moral, and aesthetic/teleological science. As we have seen, Kant himself hinted at this participation of the religious in all realms of human thought by concluding each of his Critical systems with a discussion of their (analytic a posteriori) purpose in terms of regulative ideas, practical postulates, and contemplative judgments, respectively—with each pointing us beyond knowledge, morality, and purposiveness to their underlying religious foundation.²³ This subtle but significant revision of Otto's theory also highlights its affinity with Kierkegaard's psychological extension of Kant's transcendental Critique, thus confirming Otto's place in the KK tradition.

That Otto's phenomenology of religion has a quasi-existential aim is evident not only

from its psychological methodology, but also from his efforts to show how the numinous feeling paradoxically “provides a genuine cognition of the ultimate meaning and purpose of the world” even though it does so without yielding any direct theoretical knowledge.²⁴ Because the numen is always experienced as “a mysterious X”, its “positive content”, as Davidovich explains, “can only be expressed symbolically” (*RPM* 213,195; s.a. 188). Otto develops a complex theory of religious symbolism and its “schematization” of the numinous (*IH* 45-49; see also *RPM* 220), whereby the numinous feeling enables us to “become aware of the manifestation of the infinite in the [finite] object of religious experience” (157; see also 186). Such views reveal a definite (though only implicit) Kierkegaardian slant to Otto’s position; but their thoroughly Kantian roots must not be neglected. For Kant himself not only sketched a theory of symbolism in the third *Critique*, but applied it explicitly to religious issues on several occasions in *RBBR*.²⁵ This confirms the suggestion that Otto epitomizes a classic response to the KK tradition: one that moves from explicit Kantian (transcendental) grounds to a (mainly implicit) Kierkegaardian conclusion.

In contrast to Otto, Tillich bases his philosophy of religion on explicitly Kierkegaardian grounds, but moves his existentialism in the direction of a more philosophically sophisticated, quasi-transcendental approach reminiscent of Kant. Tillich covers a vast array of topics in his many writings. Of these, we shall limit our attention to only two. Rather than choosing areas of obviously Kierkegaardian influence, such as his views on anxiety, courage, and faith,²⁶ let us look briefly at Tillich’s theories of “theonomy” and the nature of religious symbolism.

Tillich uses the term “theonomy” to describe the essential characteristic of all religiosity, as “the directedness of the spirit towards the meaning of its constructs.”²⁷ The theologian’s task, according to Tillich, is primarily one of laying bare the systematic relation between the sciences and this natural theonomous impulse of the human spirit (*RPM* 238,242,249n,280)—a task consistent with Kant’s conviction that the architectonic unity of each Critical system demands a concluding hypothetical reflection on the system’s own purpose. Whereas Kant’s theoretical, practical, and judicial standpoints each direct our attention ultimately beyond themselves to a religious end, Tillich begins (like Kierkegaard) with religion as “the dimension of depth” that directs our attention outwards, to “all functions

of man's spiritual life".²⁸

That "theonomy" is Tillich's term for the disclosure of the analytic a posteriori in the otherwise ordinary realms of human life (i.e., science, morality, aesthetics) is evident not only in his descriptions of the religious awareness it produces,²⁹ but also in his sophisticated theory of religious *symbolism*. In *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich provides a detailed account of the crucial role symbols play in all genuine religious experience: as "the language of faith", symbols paradoxically communicate the ultimate to us in a form we can experience.³⁰ Symbols are otherwise ordinary, intuitable objects that we spontaneously *invest* with meaning, enabling them to "point beyond themselves" to new "levels of reality"; yet a symbol "participates in that to which it points" (*DF* 41-54). Understanding how this "language" operates clearly requires that symbolism be given its own distinct epistemological status (cf. *TP* 170-172). Without delving into the details of Tillich's theory and its relation to religious faith, it is enough merely to acknowledge its roots in the KK tradition (see note 25 above). A thoroughgoing study of the theories of symbolism proposed by Kant, Kierkegaard, Otto, and Tillich would, I believe, overwhelmingly confirm that the epistemological status of symbols, as well as of faith itself, is best described in terms of the analytic a posteriori.

IV. The Power of Belief: Reflections on the Road Ahead

The foregoing discussion of the views of Otto and Tillich barely scratches the surface of the many developments in the philosophy of religion that have taken place subsequent to Kant and Kierkegaard. A more exhaustive study would include numerous other scholars who fall into the schools represented by Otto and Tillich: phenomenology (e.g., James,³¹ Husserl, Merleau-Ponty) and existentialism (e.g., Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre), respectively. Moreover, we would need to consider the relationship between these schools and other, quite different schools, such as analytic philosophy (e.g., Wittgenstein and his many followers) and post-modernism (e.g., Gadamer, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida). We have virtually ignored the latter schools not because they lack significance, but because their proponents tend to have a closer relationship to the HH tradition mentioned in §I than to the KK tradition. Where the influence of Kant or Kierkegaard on philosophers in such schools becomes evident, it often has more of an "either/or" than a "both/and" character.³²

Having offered a suggestion as to how best to characterize the philosophy of religion that operates along the lines of *both* Kant and Kierkegaard, and having looked briefly at two examples of twentieth-century scholars whose theories exhibit a clear KK influence, let us close by considering our topic in terms of a *third* sense of “after”. In addition to “along the lines of” and “subsequent to”, this little word can mean “[arising] *out* of” or “as a new creation due to the influence of”, as in “popcorn pops *after* sufficient heat is applied for several minutes”. This suggests questions such as: Where do we go from here? What lies ahead for the philosophy of religion as we approach the twenty-first century? Will the philosophies of Kant and Kierkegaard exercise as much influence after the dawn of a new millennium as they have in these final years of the old? Without presuming to be prophetic, let us reflect briefly on what we can expect to “arise out of” KK, now that the “heat” of history has been applied for over 140 years.

Philosophy of religion in the twentieth century has been characterized, perhaps more than anything else, by a deep concern for understanding the belief-structures of religious people. The renewed interest we have seen in discussing theoretical proofs for the existence of God, after a century when Kant’s criticisms of these proofs were widely regarded as having laid them to rest once and for all, is but one manifestation of this trend. A new scholasticism has developed in many circles, whereby religion and religious issues are discussed at a level of such abstraction from *real* religious beliefs as to render them virtually meaningless to the average layperson. Ironically, the very thing that endows religion with its great *power* in human life—namely, the *beliefs* it engenders—is often rendered impotent by well-meaning philosophers trying to understand it through logical analysis of its constituent parts. The danger here is that, by failing to reflect the potentially immense power of the philosophy of religion—a power that can still be felt by readers of many religious writings in the KK tradition—contemporary philosophy could end up doing more harm than good to the religious spirit of humanity.

Recognizing that the *power* of religious belief is an expression of its fundamentally analytic a posteriori status can put us well on the way towards solving this problem. Just as this classification has enabled us more fully to appreciate the legacy passed on to us by Kant and Kierkegaard, so also can it elucidate and empower numerous other topics of interest to philosophers of religion.³³ The emphasis philosophers have placed in this century on aspects

of religion ranging from the anthropological (e.g., myth as a form of thinking that is inevitably present in all human cultures) to the epistemological (e.g., “justified true belief” as a purported definition of the nature of knowledge) can all benefit from a careful reinterpretation in analytic a posteriori terms. One result of such an intentional application of the KK understanding of religious belief will be the raising of “contemplative” issues to a level of import that surpasses that of both theoretical and practical issues. This is because from the theoretical standpoint the analytic a posteriori can give us nothing but dry hypotheses that we can at best treat “as if” they are true, while the practical standpoint can do no more than prompt us to regard our hypotheses as having a moral reality; only by contemplating our religious and quasi-religious experiences does the intuitive power of belief come fully into view.³⁴

An advantage of this approach to future philosophy of religion is that it will enable us to account for the *power* religion exercises in human life. To attempt an explanation of religion on any other epistemological terms is to risk giving an explanation that is a mere shadow of the reality we are investigating. The synthetic a posteriori and analytic a priori are virtually powerless, for they convey to us only the drab “facts” of empirical science on the one hand and the uninformative banalities of formal logic on the other. This is not to say that these perspectives have *no role* to play in the philosophy of religion; my point is simply that the science of religion and the logic of religion on their own cannot tap into the source of the *power* of religion that makes it such a fascinating object of study, nor can they explain the powerful impact those philosophers who fall into the KK tradition continue to have on their readers. The synthetic a priori offers us something akin to this power: by showing us the boundary between power and the powerless, it sets the stage for an investigation that can penetrate into the heart of religion. In that heart, as classified in the paradoxical terms of the analytic a posteriori, lies the power and the future of the philosophy of religion as we approach the twenty-first century.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ The decision to limit the scope of this discussion to KK enables us to begin with Kierkegaard's death in 1855, thus avoiding numerous difficult issues relating to the development of philosophy of religion *between* Kant and Kierkegaard. For instance, the question of whether Hegel or Schopenhauer represents a more authentically Kantian tradition can be sidestepped, along with issues relating to Kant's influence on philosophers and theologians in the Romantic tradition, such as Schleiermacher.

² These are the two criteria of knowledge commonly referred to as "Hume's Fork": matters of fact are synthetic a posteriori, while matters of reason are analytic a priori. See e.g., *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. C.W. Hendel (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), p.173.

³ I have explained the relationship between these four epistemological classifications and the "perspectives" they define in "Knowledge and Experience—An Examination of the Four Reflective 'Perspectives' in Kant's Critical Philosophy", *Kant-Studien* 78:2 (1987), pp.170-200—hereafter *KE*—and in "A Priori Knowledge in Perspective: (II) Naming, Necessity and the Analytic A Posteriori", *The Review of Metaphysics* 41:2 (December 1987), pp.255-282—hereafter *NNAAP*. (A revised version of the former essay was subsequently included as Chapter IV in *Kant's System of Perspectives* [Lanham: University Press of America, 1993]—hereafter *KSP*.) Kant himself almost entirely ignores the "analytic a posteriori" as a meaningful epistemological classification (but see note 11, below); in these essays, however, I have argued that this expression is nevertheless a highly appropriate way of representing Kant's hypothetical perspective, as well as various other (usually paradoxical) types of philosophical reasoning. As we shall see in §II, many of Kierkegaard's key concepts also fit well into this classification.

⁴ The word "contemplative" as a description of the reflective judgment expounded in the third *Critique* is suggested by Adina Davidovich, in her book, *Religion as a Province of Meaning: The Kantian Foundations of Modern Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), Chapter IV and *passim*—hereafter *RPM*. Her use of this term in interpreting the third *Critique* enables her to argue persuasively for the religious significance of the forms of judgment analyzed therein. While admitting that Kant's awareness of this contemplative standpoint is "embryonic" (231), she claims (307) it enables us to interpret his "philosophy of religion ... so that religious experience is essentially the highest possible insight of reason."

⁵ C.C.J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926), p.62. See also Rem B. Edwards, *Reason and Religion* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), p.46, and John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*² (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966[1957]). Hick typifies the tendency to equate Kant's "philosophy of religion" with the doctrine of God propounded in the first two *Critiques*; ignoring *RBBR* altogether, he thus

concludes (not surprisingly) that Kant “leaves no room for any acquaintance with or experience of the divine, such as religious persons claim” (p.62). I have argued against such reductionist interpretations in “Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?”, *Kant-Studien* 83.2 (1992), pp.129-148—hereafter *DKRRM*. A revised version of this article is included as Chapter VI in my book, *Kant’s Critical Religion* (forthcoming, 1997)—hereafter *KCR*—where I argue at length that, far from *excluding* the possibility of genuine religious experience, Kant’s whole System can be regarded as a philosophical foundation for a refined “Critical mysticism”.

⁶ Tr. T.M. Greene and H.H. Hudson as *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960)—hereafter *RBBR*. For an explanation of why the standard translation of this book’s title ought to be replaced by the one given in the main text, see *DKRRM* 131-135 and *KCR* VI.2.

⁷ Davidovich keeps a foot in both camps by distinguishing between Kant’s “official” interpretation of religion (see e.g., *RPM* 44-49) and the new (and more profound) contemplative view introduced in the third *Critique*. In *KCR* I argue that the latter (which I call the “judicial” standpoint) is not incompatible with the former: the two are different standpoints for interpreting one and the same reality (i.e., our idea of God and its implications).

⁸ A769/B797-A782/B810. References to Kant’s first *Critique* will cite the A and/or B pagination in the traditional way, without any other abbreviation, as here.

⁹ See *KE* 190-196, *NNAAP* 255-282, and *KSP* 129-137, 237-239, 251-251, 367-368.

¹⁰ I say “by definition” because Kant defines an idea as a concept that can have no intuitive content, since it “transcend[s] the possibility of experience” (e.g., A310/B367-A311/B368, A320/B377). That the intuitive-conceptual distinction corresponds closely to the synthetic-analytic distinction is argued persuasively by Henry Allison in *The Kant-Eberhard Controversy* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). The analytic status of hypothetical reflection is further suggested by the fact that the use of hypotheses in science is often referred to (e.g., by Karl Popper) as the “hypothetico-*deductive* method”.

¹¹ Numerous of Kant’s statements imply such a view. One of the most decisive comes in B11, where he states (tr. Kemp Smith, *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* [London: Macmillan, 1929]): “Judgments of experience, as such, are one and all synthetic. For it would be absurd to found an analytic judgment on experience.” In one tantalizing passage, however, Kant does utilize the epistemological classification in question. In the course of explaining the three factors that determine the value of (rather significantly) an *hypothesis* (B115), he says: “the criterion of an hypothesis consists ... [thirdly,] in the *completeness* of the ground of explanation of these consequences, which carry us back to ... the hypothesis, and so in an *a posteriori* analytic manner give us back and accord with what has previously been thought in a

synthetic *a priori* manner.” Unfortunately, this sentence comes just before the end of a chapter, and the reader is left wondering what (if any) role the analytic *a posteriori* can play in Kant’s epistemology.

¹² See Book Two, Part Two, Chapter II of *CUP*, and *passim*.

¹³ See *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp.204-221—hereafter *FPE*. Phillips points out in *FPE* 211 that for Kierkegaard “subjectivity” does *not* mean “there are no criteria of truth and falsity”.

¹⁴ Phillips explains in *FPE* 213 that “Kierkegaard is well aware that the world-historical perspective keeps breaking in on the subjective which the Christian struggles to attain.” Later (214), he again emphasizes their perspectival relationship: “all the barriers belong to the sphere of the world-historical, while worship belongs to the sphere of subjectivity”; the difference “is not a matter of degree, but of kind.”

¹⁵ As Kierkegaard puts it in *CUP* 146: “The task of becoming subjective ... may be presumed to be the highest task, and one that is proposed to every human being” (David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie translation [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941]).

¹⁶ See e.g., Ronald M. Green, “The Leap of Faith: Kierkegaard’s Debt to Kant”, *Philosophy & Theology* III.4 (1989), pp.385-411. Green argues persuasively that, despite common assumptions to the contrary, “Kierkegaard ... was actually steeped in Kantian philosophy” (pp.385-386), and “was perhaps Kant’s best nineteenth century reader and the genuine heir to Kant’s mature thinking about ethics and religion.”

¹⁷ See e.g., *CUP* 178-180, 187-188. In discussing this issue (see e.g., *Systematic Theology*, vol.1 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951], pp.204-208), Tillich goes so far as to say: “God does not exist.” But he immediately clarifies (205) that by this he means: “He is being-itself beyond essence and existence.”

¹⁸ *FPE* 216. Phillips expresses a similar point in his discussion of the religious maxim that we should give thanks for all things: we do not thank God as a response to things going well; we are to thank God *no matter what* (219). Phillips explains that “the ability to thank God, to love Him, is only given when man has died to the objective world-historical view of things.” True thankfulness, like love, requires us to adopt the subjective (analytic *a posteriori*) standpoint of inwardness.

¹⁹ For further discussion of the insights of Otto and Tillich (alongside those of Kant and Kierkegaard), see Part Four of my book, *The Tree of Philosophy*³ (Hong Kong: Philopsychy Press, 1995)—hereafter *TP*. Davidovich selects these same two scholars to exhibit Kant’s influence on modern theology and philosophy of religion (see *RPM* 149-303). For this reason I shall make significant use of her often helpful interpretations in this section. However, I am

treating these scholars as exemplifying two *different* responses to the KK tradition, whereas she focuses on their common extension of the “contemplative” view of religion suggested in Kant’s third *Critique*.

²⁰ Tr. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950)—hereafter *IH*.

²¹ Tr. E.B. Dicker (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd, 1931)—hereafter *PRKF*. Otto particularly emphasizes the importance of the third *Critique* (see 17-24) and of Fries’ qualified dependence on Kant (105-106).

²² See *IH* 50-59,112-116,136-142; cf. *PRKF* 91-102 and *RPM* 152-153. As Davidovich points out (*RPM* 154; see also 160), Otto was careful “to stress that ... numinous consciousness remains strictly within the limits of a critical philosophy.”

²³ Similarly, Davidovich repeatedly stresses Tillich’s efforts to depict religiosity as permeating all the sciences (e.g., natural, moral, aesthetic); unfortunately, she never clearly acknowledges Kant’s own profound recognition of the same point (see e.g., *RPM* 230). In *KCR* I have argued that *RBBR* can be interpreted as establishing a synthetic a priori boundary defining the necessary conditions for religion. But this boundary does not set up a distinct “religious a priori” that transcends the limits of the three *Critiques*, as Otto’s seems at certain points to do. Rather, religious concepts *manifest* themselves within each autonomous realm (i.e., within what I call [in *KSP*] the “fourth stage” of the argument in each *Critique*) as ideas, postulates, and contemplative judgments.

²⁴ *RPM* 187. Otto expresses such sentiments throughout *IH*; but see especially pp.50-59.

²⁵ That Kant regards beauty as symbolizing the morally good in the third *Critique* is well known—though not often appreciated. However, his awareness of the nature and function of *religious* symbolism is rarely acknowledged. The word “symbol” and its derivatives occur 14 times in *RBBR*, and numerous times in the third *Critique*. In these passages he speaks of symbols as conveying the true “intellectual [i.e., moral/practical] meaning” of a belief, ritual, or object; they make the unknowable “comprehensible” to us (159) and thereby give expression “to the whole of pure moral religion” (132-133).

²⁶ See for example, Tillich’s book, *The Courage to Be*. Interestingly, Davidovich entirely ignores these obviously Kierkegaardian aspects of Tillich’s philosophy in her (only partially successful) attempt in *RPM* to portray Tillich as thoroughly Kantian.

²⁷ *RPM* 232. Davidovich focuses mainly on Tillich’s book, *The System of the Sciences*, in seeking to portray his “theory of religion as a theonomous consciousness [wherein] we can find an extension of Kant’s contemplative conception of religion” (*RPM* 228).

²⁸ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.7. See also *RPM* 225,282. For a discussion of Tillich's application of the concept of theonomy to political theology, see my book, *Biblical Theocracy* (Hong Kong: Philopsychy Press, 1993), pp.59-65.

²⁹ Davidovich describes this as “an awareness of the unconditioned [hence, nonintuitive, analytic] ground of our cultural [hence *a posteriori*] constructions” (*RPM* 278). She further hints at the analytic *a posteriori* status of religious (theonomous) experience when she points out (234) that for Tillich (as for Kant!) a *need of reason* “is satisfied ... in a reflective evaluation of the relation between the [analytic] constructs of thought and our [*a posteriori*] intuitive experience.”

³⁰ *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p.45—hereafter *DF*.

³¹ Though not usually regarded as a phenomenologist, William James is included here because of his numerous philosophical insights into the psychology of religion (especially in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*).

³² For instance, the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* adopts an approach that has close affinities with certain aspects of both Hume and Kant, but hardly a trace of influence from Hegel or Kierkegaard; the Wittgenstein of *Investigations*, by contrast, seems to filter Hume more through a Kierkegaardian way of thinking than through Kant. In neither case is a clear “Kant and Kierkegaard” influence evident. In her own prognosis for the future of philosophy of religion, Davidovich also contrasts the “contemporary Wittgensteinian and empiricist accounts of religion” with those of more Kantian philosophers (*RPM* 308), viewing the tendency of the “Kantian school” to identify “religious consciousness with a reflective awareness” that “reunit[es] cognition and affectivity” (306) as more promising than the tendency of the former school to focus “exclusively on either religious affectivity or religious knowledge.”

³³ In so doing the old divisions between analytic and existential schools of philosophy will fall away once and for all. Indeed, philosophers with an awareness of analytic *a posteriori* issues (by whatever name they may be called) tend to view such old divisions as complementary opposites that are already in the process of merging.

³⁴ *RPM* 283 mentions the superiority of contemplation over any merely “as if” approach to issues in the philosophy of religion. Recognizing the role of the analytic *a posteriori* in *both* these approaches (the theoretical and the contemplative) confirms Davidovich's point while saving the role of theoretical hypotheses from being merely superfluous nonessentials.