

# Kant, Augustine, and Room for Faith

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**ABSTRACT** In this paper I argue for a notion of conversion in Kant's critical philosophy by drawing a connection between the conversions to be found in Kant and the intellectual, moral, and religious conversions of Augustine. I liken Augustine's Platonic metaphysics of God to Kant's antinomy of Pure Reason as an intellectual conversion. I link Augustine's moral conversion with Kant's meta-maxim to commit to a use of reason that is free from the influence of inclination. I connect Augustine's religious conversion with Kant's recognition of God as the postulated condition for the highest good. There are advantages to understanding the conversions in Kant for understanding how his critical philosophy views faith more generally. The conversions in Kant point to the practical necessity of faith as Kant understands it. Such an interpretation also unifies Kant's contribution to the conversation on the relationship between faith and reason. For Kant faith, much like knowledge, is a form of holding true and as such is reasonable.

**KEYWORDS** Augustine, saint; conversion; faith and reason; Kant, Immanuel

Kant's critical philosophy in its commitment to the impossibility of proofs and knowledge of God is often seen as being in conflict with faith and religious traditions. Kant, however, suggests that genuine moments of faith are only possible if one has rejected the transcendental illusion that purports to offer content to the notions of God, freedom, and immortality. He holds that his critical project has "therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for faith."<sup>1</sup> Still this move to make room for faith is seen by many as one that undercuts faith rather than pro-

1. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), Bxxx (hereafter cited as *CPuR*).

vide a ground for it. But while Kant's language might suggest an effort to put faith aside in a realm altogether distinct from knowledge, his critical project ultimately integrates them in reason. In this paper I argue for important and often underappreciated moments of conversion in Kant's critical philosophy. I do this by drawing a connection between the intellectual, moral, and religious conversions of Augustine<sup>2</sup> on the one hand and analogous critical moments in Kant. On my view, these moments of conversion are only possible if knowledge as Kant has characterized it is eliminated. Making such a connection in Kant allows us to see two larger points about how Kant sees the relationship between reason and faith. In the first case, it points to Kant's insistence on the practical necessity of faith in God. Second, it allows Kant and religious traditions to engage in a kind of autocritique that strengthens the ground for understanding the relationship between faith and reason. In the first section I explore the similarities between Augustine's Platonic metaphysics of God and Kant's Copernican Revolution as intellectual conversions. In the second section I link Augustine's moral conversion with Kant's meta-maxim to commit to a use of reason that is free from the influence of inclination. In the third section I connect Augustine's religious conversion with Kant's recognition of God as the postulated condition for the highest good. In the fourth section I briefly discuss the advantages of understanding Kant's conversions for the practical necessity of religion, the relationship of faith and reason, and religion's concern with freedom.

This paper is meant to shed light on elements of Kant's critical philosophy and its usefulness for conversations on faith and reason. As such, it is not a paper with much exegesis on Augustine. I do not purport to unearth anything new about Augustine. Quite the contrary, I am using Augustine as a framework that I consider to be generally accepted as friendly to and consistent with religious—particularly Christian—perspectives on conversion and the relationship between faith and reason. While there are undoubtedly relevant polemics in Augustinian interpretation today, whether or not his philosophy is ultimately friendly to faith, does not seem to be one of them. Certainly there is more to the details of Augustine's account of conversion than is laid out in this paper, but in my view those details are not necessary for making the claim that a similar underlying framework of conversion can be found in Kant's critical philosophy.

2. I consider it a given that Augustine is an important figure for the Catholic intellectual tradition and that he has much to say about faith. Certainly, there is room to challenge some of Augustine's claims.

From the outset, there certainly are some important features that distinguish the two thinkers and their projects. Augustine, of course, in his *Confessions* is putting together a spiritual autobiography, and to whatever extent the people and events are accurate or real, the spiritual moments presented in the work are ones that are presented as being particular to Augustine. Kant on the other hand is in his critical philosophy looking to move through the particulars of data and experience to underlying transcendental principles. As such Kant is moving towards the other extreme on the spectrum of particularity and universality. While Augustine's conversions come to us as elements of a narrative particular to him, Kant's discussions of these moments of conversion come to us as elements of an examination of human knowing. Certainly this divide is not one that cannot be bridged. Augustine can and has been interpreted as offering certain elements that must be a part of all spiritual journeys, and if Kant's claims apply to the structure of human knowing, his own knowing is certainly no exception. This distinction extends to the methods used in the two projects. While both reach philosophical conclusions, Augustine begins his *Confessions* by dedicating it to God reminding Him (and himself) that "our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."<sup>3</sup> In retelling the moments of his spiritual journey, God for Augustine is a given and confessing is a matter of relating those moments to the divine he now has begun to understand. Kant does not make the same assumption, and while many interpreters of Kant—myself among them—in the final analysis hold Kant to be a theist, few see him as assuming God from the outset. Rather than an analytic approach that begins with the divine and works to investigate it, Kant uses a synthetic approach that begins with the most basic a priori principles of our knowing, and builds up to its most complete conclusions, of which God in my view turns out to be a part. In line with this distinction is the characterization of what moves or motivates the conversion. In Augustine conversions are characterized as moments of insight, as eureka's following an impasse. As such, Augustine is often just as much (if not more) receptive to conversion as he is an author or creator of it. He regularly thanks God or gives God credit for the conversion, "[f]or you converted me to Yourself."<sup>4</sup> Kant, on the other hand, presents conversion as a resolution of serious critique of human knowing and while the conversion may (and for Kant should) result in motivating us to act in a certain way, the credit of such conversion belongs to reason. These major differences keep

3. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 1.1.1.

4. *Ibid.*, 8.12.30.

us from merely equating the two thinkers on the role of conversion and should remain in the background of our analysis, but they do not prevent an insightful engagement between the two.

# I

In Book VII of *Confessions*, Augustine tells us of his intellectual conversion. Augustine had progressed a great deal in his philosophical investigations and had rejected the dualism of the Manichees in which good and evil have their separate divine sources. Nonetheless, he remained trapped in a kind of anthropomorphizing of God:

Now my evil sinful youth was over and I had come on into young manhood; but the older in years, the baser was my vanity, in that I could not conceive any other kind of substance than what these eyes are accustomed to see. I did not indeed, O God, think of You under the figure of a human body. From the moment I began to know anything of philosophy, I had rejected that idea; and I rejoiced to find the same rejection in the faith of our spiritual mother, Your Catholic Church. But what else to think You I did not know.<sup>5</sup>

Augustine's difficulty was that he continued to picture think God. This view was difficult to reconcile with the various other claims we ascribe to God—omnipresent, omnipotent, omnibenevolent—but also difficult to let go because of the kind of activity and personality that is so regularly ascribed to God in the New and Old Testaments. Scripture and the subsequent intellectual tradition so regularly speak of God's activity on human terms: He loves; He gives; He forgives; He says. Early notions of the Judeo-Christian God even go as far as to say that man was made in God's image, and so Augustine has in mind an image of God that looks much like man. So much like man that this image becomes a hindrance to grasping the fundamental nature of the divine.

Eventually Augustine moves beyond his picture-thinking of God as an old man on a throne through a realization that results from an engagement with the metaphysics of the Platonists. Within the words of the Platonists, Augustine finds that those things with an eternal and spiritual nature do not require substance and extension for their existence:

I entered, and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, I saw Your unchange-

5. Ibid., 7.1.1.

able Light shining over that same eye of my soul, over my mind. It was not the light of everyday that the eye of flesh can see, nor some greater light of the same order, such as might be the brightness of our daily light should be seen shining with a more intense brightness and filling all things with its greatness. Your Light was not that, but other, altogether other, than all such lights.<sup>6</sup>

As the light of his mind Augustine recognizes that God makes possible Augustine's knowing. God makes possible all things. It is in this sense that we can ascribe such activity to God, for God conditions, makes possible the activities of the world. That conditioning, however, is not one that can be seen or imagined. This conversion for Augustine moves him to a deeper understanding of God and of Christ's divinity, "[n]ow that I have read the books of the Platonists and had been set by them towards the search for truth that is incorporeal, I came to see Your invisible things which are understood by the things that are made."<sup>7</sup>

Kant's intellectual conversion addresses a similar kind of anthropomorphism. Kant acknowledges that reason brings us to ask questions about that which lies beyond our experience.

[W]e also discern that a certain connection and unity is evident among the transcendental ideas themselves and that by means of them pure reason combines all its modes of knowledge into a system. The advance from the knowledge of oneself (the soul) to the knowledge of the world, and by means of this to the original being, is so natural that it seems to resemble the logical advance of reason from premises to conclusions.<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty, Kant acknowledges, is that our modes of investigating are so tied to us that we are unable to say anything about things independent of our investigating them. Put another way, we are unable to move beyond our way of knowing to say that we know anything with certainty other than how we come to know them. While the urge and desire to know and understand the traditional objects of metaphysics is strong, the access to those objects is limited.

6. Ibid., 7.10.16.

7. Ibid., 7.20.26.

8. Kant, *CPuR*, B394–5.

[C]ertain modes of knowledge leave the field of all possible experiences and have the appearance of extending the scope of our judgments beyond all limits of experience, and this by means of concepts to which no corresponding object can ever be given in experience.

It is precisely by means of the latter modes of knowledge, in a realm beyond the world of the senses, where experience can yield neither guidance nor correction, that our reason carries on those enquiries which owing to their importance we consider to be far more excellent, and in their purpose far more lofty, than all that the understanding can learn in the field of appearances. Indeed we prefer to run every risk of error rather than desist from such urgent enquiries, on the ground of their dubious character, or from disdain and indifference. These unavoidable problems set by pure reason itself are God, freedom, and immortality.<sup>9</sup>

And so the difficulty is that reason brings us to the pressing nature of our investigations into God, but reason does not have access to that which would allow us to confirm or refute our claims about God. At the core of this is a distinction between objects as they are for us, phenomena, and as they are in themselves, noumena. Kant suggests that we can have knowledge of phenomena and of our way of knowing phenomena but not knowledge of noumena, of things in themselves. The progression of our investigations brings reason to ask about noumena. This natural product of our inquiry Kant calls transcendental illusion and is unavoidable. We cannot be true to reason without inquiring about the unconditioned. As Henry Allison<sup>10</sup> points out, the error occurs when we think we can answer the questions substantively and say something about noumena.

To think we can answer substantively one of the great questions to which reason brings us is to offer an objective validity to that which has only a subjective validity, that is, to offer real possibility to something we can only be sure has logical or conceptual possibility. We certainly can conceive of a supreme necessary being, but we do not have at our disposal a way of confirming the real possibility—and in this case necessity—of such a being.

9. Ibid., B6–7.

10. Henry Allison's *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) is one of the more important works on Kant's epistemology. It explores the various aspects of Kant's claims about the limits of our knowing. Particularly helpful in Allison's work is his ability to situate the epistemological claims of Kant's opus in relation to other theories of knowing.

[I]f I take the concept of anything, no matter what, I find that the existence of this thing can never be represented by me as absolutely necessary, and that, whatever it may be that exists, nothing prevents me from thinking its non-existence. Thus while I may indeed be obliged to assume something necessary as a condition of the existent in general, I cannot think any particular thing as in itself necessary. In other words, I can never complete the regress to the conditions of existence save by assuming a necessary being, and yet am never in a position to begin with such a being.<sup>11</sup>

While the answer to the ultimate why might be what we hope is at the end of the series, we can never take it as our object of investigation. Kant of course is not here committing himself to God's nonexistence or to the impossibility of a necessary being. Rather, he is claiming that any conclusions about God's existence are beyond the scope of what reason can affirm.

This Kant calls subreption and results from what Allison calls a failure of the realist perspective, "what all forms of transcendental realism have in common may be negatively expressed as a failure or, to put it less tentatively, a refusal, to recognize that human cognition rests on a priori conditions of sensibility, which structure the way in which the mind receives its sensory data."<sup>12</sup> The infamous occasions of subreption are the antinomies. The antinomies are special cases of subreption because answering the questions in the affirmative and the negative result in a logical absurdity. The conversion in this case comes at the realization of the absurdity of transcendental illusion, of ascribing objective validity to concerns about God, freedom, and immortality. The conversion is the wake up, the fundamental shift in attention from asking questions about noumena to asking questions about the necessary conditions of our mode of acquiring knowledge of phenomena. The conversion is ultimately Kant's Copernican Revolution, the realization that reason can only be certain about its own structure and capacities and not about things in themselves. This conversion turns out to be the basis for Kant's claim that metaphysics must be epistemology, and it is the basis of Kant's critical turn in philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

11. Kant, *CPuR*, B643–4.

12. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 27.

13. The critical shift in Kant's philosophy is quite evident when one compares his work in the 1780s and 1790s to his early work from the 1750s. Some have argued that the beginnings of this critical turn are visible in some of Kant's work before the first Critique. I am not here concerned with the timing of the critical turn for the sake of identifying it with a conversion but rather with the philosophical realization that reason's proper subject of examination is itself.

For Kant, we need both subjective causes and objective grounds in order to hold cognitions to be true. That is, there must be bases in both the mind of the subject and in the conditions of the object for affirming it. When the objective and subjective bases of our affirmation are insufficient, we opine. Knowledge is possible when we have sufficient objective and subjective conditions. When we have sufficient or valid subjective causes but insufficient objective validity for our affirmation, we have faith. It is in this way that Kant sees himself as making room for faith. We do not have access to the objective conditions of the traditional objects of metaphysics. That recognition, however, paves the way for understanding that such matters of faith do not appeal to possible objective experience.

Thus even after reason has failed in all its ambitious attempts to pass beyond the limits of all experience, there is still enough left to satisfy us, so far as our practical standpoint is concerned. No one, indeed, will be able to boast that he *knows* that there is a God, and a future life; if he knows this, he is the very man for whom I have long sought. All knowledge, if it concerns an object of mere reason, can be communicated; and I might therefore hope that under his instruction my own knowledge would be extended in this wonderful fashion. No, my conviction is not *logical*, but *moral* certainty; and since it rests on subjective grounds (of the moral sentiment), I must not even say “*It is morally certain that there is a God, etc.*,” but “*I am morally certain, etc.*” In other words, belief in a God and in another world is so interwoven with my moral sentiment that as there is little danger of my losing the latter, there is equally little cause for fear that the former can ever be taken from me.<sup>14</sup>

It is precisely this recognition that is involved in Augustine’s conversion. Only upon recognizing the fruitlessness of looking for God as substance or object in the world that he can turn to God as intelligible condition of all things in the world. Augustine never lacks the moral certainty of God. He has the sufficient subjective causes. He does, however, lack sufficient objective causes as he finds himself frustrated at looking for objects or theoretical evidence for thinking of God as he cannot help but have an image for the divine. The critical turn in moving from metaphysics to epistemology is also found in Augustine’s shift from an image or object of God to God as the light of his mind.

14. Kant, *CPuR*, B866–7.



## II

In Book VIII of *Confessions*, Augustine tells us of his moral conversion. Having converted intellectually, Augustine seeks to commit himself to God but sees himself as held back from fully giving his will to Christ by his sexual passions, “what still held me tight bound was my need of woman.”<sup>15</sup> His concern for the will of the flesh prevents him from devoting himself to God’s will. Augustine recognizes that, so long as the concerns of the flesh are able to move him, he will not be wholly committed to God. As such something else will occupy a role reserved for God, that of offering him direction. While Augustine’s narrative focuses on sexual pleasures, the real concern is about all earthly pleasures. Having grasped the perfection of God, Augustine no longer wishes to be concerned with earthly pleasures, and because he has rejected the dualism of the Manichees, there is no room to be directed by two wills:

The new will which I now began to have, by which I willed to worship You freely and to enjoy You, O God, the only certain Joy, was not yet strong enough to overcome that earlier will rooted deep through the years. My two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual, were in conflict and in their conflict wasted my soul.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine is able to move beyond his own enslavement to the flesh when he hears the voice of a child singing. Interpreting the command to take and read as a sign from the Divine, Augustine turns to Scripture to find the key to his moral conversion.

Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.<sup>17</sup>

While in his intellectual conversion Augustine is freed from his earthly concerns in terms of his conceiving of God, in his moral conversion Augustine is freed of earthly concerns in terms of pleasure.

It is with regard to a moral conversion that Kant is most direct in using the terminology of a conversion. In it Kant speaks of a change of heart in

15. Augustine, *Conf.*, 8.1.2.

16. *Ibid.*, 8.5.10.

17. *Ibid.*, 8.12.29.

which there is a reorientation of the basis for establishing one's maxims. In the first Critique, Kant sets God, freedom, and immortality as being beyond the scope of objective validity. These concepts must be considered matters of faith. As his critical philosophy moves, however, from theoretical into practical, Kant holds that these matters of faith turn out to be practically necessary. That is, a critical examination of reason shows that our capacity to know cannot assure us of the objective validity of God, freedom, and immortality but that all our bases for acting requires affirming them.

If we grant that morality necessarily presuppose freedom (in the strictest sense) as a property of our will; if, that is to say, we grant that it yields practical principles—original principles, proper to our reason—as a priori data of reason, and that this would be absolutely impossible save on the assumption of freedom; and if at the same we grant that speculative reason has proved that such freedom does not allow of being thought, then the former supposition—that made on behalf of morality—would have to give way to this other contention, the opposite of which involves a palpable contradiction. For since it is only on the assumption of freedom that the negation of morality contains any contradiction, freedom, and with it morality, would have to yield to the mechanism of nature.

Morality does not, indeed, require that freedom should be understood, but only that it should not contradict itself, and so should at least allow of being thought, and that as thus thought it should place no obstacle in the way of a free act (viewed in another relation) likewise conforming to the mechanism of nature. The doctrine of morality and the doctrine of nature may each, therefore, make good its position. This, however, is only possible in so far as criticism has previously established our unavoidable ignorance of things in themselves, and has limited all that we can theoretically know to mere appearances.<sup>18</sup>

Here Kant is showing that while theoretical philosophy must undergo an autocritique to discover that it cannot provide an experience that can affirm the noumenon of freedom of the will, practical philosophy must use this freedom as a starting point for determining what one must do. While the two investigations might seem to have opposing stances on the role of freedom, the two can and must coexist. Put another way, it might be that we do not have the theoretical devices to affirm or deny the freedom of the will, but when it comes to practical matters, we have no choice but to

18. Kant, *CPuR*, Bxxix.

presuppose it if we are to prescribe right action and assess our moral decisions. Similarly, that the freedom of the will is the fundamental presupposition of our moral examinations, in no way helps us with its theoretical affirmation or denial.

Kant goes on to use this phenomenal experience of freedom of the will as the basis for his practical (i.e. moral and political) philosophy. Though Kant speaks of a maxim that can be universalized, recognized as a law of nature, and instituted as a law in the realm of ends, the categorical imperative is fundamentally concerned with freedom. A good will is one that is free from inclination, coercion, and ulterior motives. Morality, for Kant, is concerned with the freest use of reason, and a moral conversion comes when an agent commits herself to a free employment of reason. This conversion is the choice of what many call a meta-maxim in which the agent chooses to act free of inclination and influence. In *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, Kant suggests that, as an animal, man has a tendency to seek pleasure and thus be subject to the pull of inclination. This is what Kant identifies as evil, and it is the recognition of the possibility of acting free of inclination and the subsequent decision to not let any of her maxims be influenced that an evil agent has a change of heart.

Since this only leads to a progression from bad to better extending to infinity, it follows that the transformation of the disposition of an evil human being into the disposition of a good human being is to be posited in the change of the supreme inner ground of the adoption of all the human being's maxims in accordance with the ethical law, so far as this new ground (the new heart) is itself now unchangeable.<sup>19</sup>

For Kant a moral conversion is not the choice of this or that maxim. It is a choice about what things to allow to influence our choice of maxims. Much the way that Augustine is freed of concern for physical pleasure in the devotion of his will, a moral conversion in Kant is one of being free of any and all inclination in determining one's will. When we recognize that at the core of righteous action is the expression of a free will, we are moved to see to it that our will can always act free of inclination, regardless of the circumstances.

19. Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, transl. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6:51.

## III

Book IX of *Confessions* deals with Augustine's religious or spiritual conversion. For most of his life Augustine struggles with the seeming simplicity and unreflective nature of his mother's devotion to God. While his mother prays for his own devotion to God, Augustine cannot seem to be so moved. In this case, what stands in the way of Augustine's conversion is not one particular question or event but rather a lifetime. Augustine has spent his life seeking to advance and progress in the world. He has earned favor with politicians and earned prestigious academic positions. Augustine had attached to these accomplishments a sense of worth and happiness, and it is for this reason that he thought his contributions to be greater than his mother's who had spent her time living a simple life of devotion.

When Monica is on her deathbed, she and Augustine discuss the life of blessedness. Augustine's religious conversion comes at the realization that his blessedness rests not upon the virtue and grandeur of his earthly accomplishments but upon his devotion to God. Having realized that God does not admit of substance or extension and having freed himself of concern for physical pleasure, the final concern for Augustine's devotion to God is the recognition that his ultimate joy rests not in worldly accomplishments but in faithful devotion to God, "You know, O Lord, that on that day when we talked of these things the world with all its delights seemed cheap to us in comparison with what we talked of."<sup>20</sup> What Augustine once saw as simple and unaccomplished is now the only way to eternal joy.

Kant's moral philosophy accounts for an analogous conversion. In his moral philosophy Kant investigates the methods for establishing the categorical imperative as the moral law and assessing whether or not our maxims live up to it. Kant holds that we must ultimately base our moral decision making on our maxim's adherence to the moral law and not on our pursuit of happiness. He notes, however, that while the determination of what makes our action righteous must be separated from concerns for happiness, practical necessity requires that we hope for happiness. While we may at times be content with our righteousness, that contentment in itself is not sufficient for our happiness. The highest good then, for Kant, is the coinciding of our righteousness and our happiness.

[I]t follows that in practical principles a natural and necessary connection

20. Augustine, *Conf.*, 9.10.26.

between the consciousness of morality and the expectation of a happiness proportionate to it as its result can at least be thought as possible. . . . But since the possibility of such a connection of the conditioned with its condition belongs wholly to the supersensible relation of things and cannot be given in accordance with the laws of the sensible world, although the practical results of this idea—namely actions that aim at realizing the highest good—belong to the sensible world, we shall try to set forth the grounds of that possibility, first with respect to what is immediately within our power and then, secondly, in that which is not in our power but which reason presents to us, as the supplement to our inability, for the possibility of the highest good (which is necessary in accordance with practical principles).<sup>21</sup>

Kant here is suggesting that while reason brings us to the recognition that righteous action must be determined independent of concerns for happiness, practical reason necessarily has such concerns present. The highest good would be the juxtaposition of happiness and righteousness. What we can hope for is a world in which one's happiness is proportionate to one's virtue. The moment of conversion comes at the realization that this highest good is only possible with God. The religious or spiritual conversion in Kant comes from understanding that the highest good, the possibility of being righteous and happy, requires faith in God. In the same way that Augustine realizes that his ultimate joy rests in a devotion to God, Kant holds that the juxtaposition of our righteousness and happiness rests in God.

Now it was a duty for us to promote the highest good; hence there is in us not merely the warrant but also the necessity, as a need connected with duty, to presuppose the possibility of this highest good, which, since it is possible only under the condition of the existence of God, connects the presupposition of the existence of God inseparably with duty; that is, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.<sup>22</sup>

This presupposition is a matter of faith. Faith for Kant is not merely a kind of opinion, it is not blind. It is a kind of holding true that has a similarity to what Kant calls knowledge. While opinion for Kant is subjectively and objectively insufficient, faith has a necessary subjective validity that applies to all rational beings.

21. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, transl. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5:119.

22. *Ibid.*, 5:125.

## IV

One benefit of seeing the connection between Kant and Augustine on conversion is to recognize the practical progression of Kant's critical philosophy. Often Kant is criticized (particularly by thinkers who find a kind of vibrancy in matters of faith) for offering too much to reason and perhaps abstracting too much to the theoretical. Identifying the role of conversion in Kant's critical philosophy points to specific moments that move towards the practical, moments that unite the theoretical and the practical. At the core of each of these moments is a recognition of the necessary practical nature of the human being. These conversions situate our turn to God and religion in the necessary move to the practical. Were we simply concerned with conceiving and cognizing, there would be no basis for any of these conversions and the freedom that comes with them. Our examination of reason, however, would fall short if it did not recognize its own intrinsically practical nature. Our concepts and experience cannot answer the question about whether or not God exists. They can neither affirm nor deny the freedom of the will. They can offer nothing in terms of the happiness that may or may not result from our righteous action. It is only when this theorizing is seen as inextricably linked with practical human beings that reason can hope to offer us anything in terms of these most pressing matters. Our conversions for Kant address problems of theoretical necessity, but their solutions are required by our inherently practical nature.

It is no accident that Kant's essay *What is Enlightenment?* is seen as a work in practical philosophy. While we often think of enlightenment as a kind of purely intelligible emancipation, Kant weds enlightenment to a practical and communal progression. He tells us that enlightenment is not merely understanding. It is not merely being able to think for oneself. Rather, enlightenment is the making use of such understanding:

Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another.<sup>23</sup>

The successes of the enlightenment do not lie in people coming to understand things for themselves. They lie in people—as individuals and as communities—having the resolve to put into practice what they have come

23. Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*, in *Practical Philosophy*, 8:35.

to understand. These moments of conversion are not mere eureka's. Rather they are moments that move the will to act.

This connection between Kant and Augustine on conversion is also fruitful because it enters Kant into the conversation on matters of the relationship between reason and faith. This relationship between reason and faith is an inherent problematic of religious traditions and Kant's conversions allow his critical philosophy to account for their necessary unity and to explain their differences. While Kant is often seen as an adversary of natural theology and organized religion, these conversions indicate that Kant did not abandon faith and religious piety. Quite the contrary, Kant suggests in the religion essay that, if we take seriously the claims of morality, we are necessarily brought to religion:

[m]orality thus inevitably leads to religion, and through religion it extends itself to the idea of a mighty moral lawgiver outside the human being, in whose will the final end (of the creation of the world) is what can and at the same time ought to be the final human end.<sup>24</sup>

Our choices about what is right and what is wrong can be made by a recognition of the authority of the moral law. Our practical activity, however, calls on us to wonder about the ultimate results of our moral choices and this brings us to religion. The title of Kant's religion essay might also seem to obviate a concern for faith, but what Kant is doing is affirming the reasonableness of turning to faith and religion.

We often hear of a dynamic equilibrium of reason and faith expressed as reason-guided faith or faith-guided reason, but such expressions offer little in terms of guidance or prescription for understanding when we must turn to faith and when we must turn to reason. They offer little in terms of an explanation for appealing to both. Aquinas, for example, while he argues for a unity of reason and faith, tries to affirm the existence of God from within reason alone. But in each of his five proofs Aquinas makes a subreptive claim.<sup>25</sup> While it is absurd to affirm that the chain of movers and causes goes on indefinitely, for reason an uncaused cause or unmoved mover is similarly absurd. One contribution that Kant can offer to the conversation is that these conversions are a result of an autocritique of reason. Reason has examined its own capacities and come to understand its lim-

24. Kant, *Religion*, 6:6.

25. Aquinas does discuss a priori proofs but he is quite clear that the arguments of the unmoved mover, uncaused cause, contingency and necessity, gradation and design are scientific a posteriori proofs. Cf. *Summa Theologica*, I q.2 a.3.

its and thus the need for faith. Reason recognizes its inability to answer the question of the definite or indefinite nature of the chain of causes or movers. For Kant, an examination of reason shows that human beings are not meant to simply understand, they are necessarily beings compelled to act. This action requires faith when it comes to the most urgent of human concerns. It requires faith in the freedom of the human will. It requires faith in the immortality of the soul. And it requires faith in a divine Creator who alone is capable of ensuring the happiness of the righteous.

The unity of knowledge and faith stems from their both being forms of holding true (*Fürwahrhalten*) with validity. For Kant, faith and knowledge share in a universal subjective validity, that is, they each have sufficient subjective grounds for holding true. What Kant refers to as matters of knowing are the matters that also have sufficient objective grounds for holding true. These matters have access to objects and structures that lend validity to their claims. It is, however, misleading to think that the lack of such objective sufficiency is in any way disparaging towards faith. The objective validity of matters of knowing lies entirely within reason because it can only be attained by turning to reason's own structure. The objective insufficiency of matters of faith stems from the grandeur of what is at stake. To matters of faith we bring a humility that acknowledges that we alone cannot account for the intelligibility and purposiveness of the world. As Karl Ameriks points out, by the belief that constitutes faith,

Kant obviously means a practical rational attitude that is not a mere matter of individual subjectivity but has a basis in appreciating external factors relevant to one's 'undertaking.' . . . [It involves] finding a perspective that would allow us to understand the whole natural world around as itself literally a scene of action, as the artifact of an intentional cause, and not merely a blind mechanism.<sup>26</sup>

There are those that worry that, while such a link to Augustine might show Kant to be a believer, it shows his critical philosophy to be a cornerstone secularism. They hold that Kant in his attempts to make room for faith has ultimately discredited it or reduced it. As Richard Bernstein points out, a nonbeliever can draw on Kant's move to obviate theoretical proofs of God as support for skepticism about God, and a critic of religion can look to Kant to support the claim that "[a]ny attempt to justify moral

26. Karl Ameriks, "The End of the Critiques: Kant's Moral 'Creationism,'" in *Rethinking Kant*, v. 1, ed. Pablo Muchnik (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 181.



principles by an appeal to a transcendent God is a form of heteronomy that violates our autonomy and freedom.”<sup>27</sup> On this view, Kant’s critical philosophy conditions worldviews where humanity does not need God to derive its moral principles or order its institutions because of the instability and subreptive tendencies of faith and religious traditions. As such, Kant’s separation between the noumenal and phenomenal world leaves faith incapable affirming truth.

Such a view of Kant would misconstrue the role he ascribes to faith. Kant’s rejection of theoretical proofs is not an effort to limit or discredit faith in God but rather to limit and discredit metaphysics. It is precisely because metaphysics is not up to the task of making sense of God, freedom, and immortality that such matters must be left to faith. Far from self-sufficient, Kant is clear that, while the categorical imperative champions freedom and autonomy, any free rational agent must not only see the world as the creation of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God but must also see her free acts as being done in devotion to such a God as lawgiver and judge. Finally, the divide between the noumenal and phenomenal world that some see as compromising the truths of faith actually puts faith in the privileged position. For Kant, this divide keeps knowledge from ever reaching a certainty as strong as the conviction of faith.

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27. Richard Bernstein, “The Secular-Religious Divide: Kant’s Legacy,” *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1038–9.