The concept of God in Kant and Fichte

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Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that Immanuel Kant and J.G. Fichte provide contemporary ways of questioning the thesis that sees transcendence as an unnecessary surplus to the already self-sufficient secular immanent frame. They do so by showing not only the possibility but the indispensability of transcendence, particularly with regards to the concept of God, in the epistemological realm. On one hand, Kant provides a unique epistemological-metaphysical framework in which the absence of knowledge of God does not lead to the lack, the impossibility, or the irrationality of faith. Rather, this absence is shown to be the precondition of a faith in God. On the other hand, Fichte's epistemological-metaphysical framework affords us the idea that the absence of knowledge of God yields a genuine comprehension of God and gives meaning and reality to the finite knowing subject. In this way, the systematic and positive significance of the concept of God can be shown in both figures.

Abrégé

Dans cette thèse, j'argumente que Emmanuel Kant et J.G. Fichte offrent un moyen contemporain de remettre en question la thèse qui voit la transcendance comme étant un surplus inutile dans un cadre déjà auto-suffisant, notamment le cadre imminent laïque. Ils le font en démontrant non seulement la possibilité, mais le caractère indispensable de la transcendance, particulièrement à l'égard du concept de Dieu, dans le domaine épistémologique. D'une part, Kant fournit un cadre épistémologique-métaphysique unique dans lequel l'absence de la connaissance de Dieu ne conduit pas nécessairement à l'absence, l'impossibilité ou l'irrationalité de la foi. Plutôt, une telle absence est démontré comme étant la condition préalable à une foi en Dieu. D'autre part, le cadre épistémologique-métaphysique de Fichte nous ouvre à l'idée que l'absence de la connaissance de Dieu fait place à une véritable compréhension de Dieu et donne sens et réalité au sujet connaissant fini. De cette manière, l'importance systématique et positive de la notion de Dieu peut être démontrée dans les deux cas.

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'God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it? There was never a greater deed — and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all the history up to now!' Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; they too were silent and looked at him disconcertedly. Finally he threw his lantern to the ground so that it broke into pieces and went out. 'I come too early,' he then said; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds need time, even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard. This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars — and yet they have done it themselves!' It is still recounted how on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there started singing his *requiem aeternam deo.* Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but, 'What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchers of God?'

Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Introduction

1. Post-modernity and the "death of God"

What meaning does Nietzsche's statement, namely that "God is dead," carry for those who live in the post-modern Western world? One way to understand this statement is to place it in the wider context of what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls, the end of metanarratives[1]. "Post-modernity" according to Lyotard is "the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies" which is characterized by an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv). These are grand narratives which appeal to some comprehensive principle in order to explain and legitimize historical meaning, experience and/or knowledge. These include political, economic, scientific and religious metanarratives. This incredulity, argues Lyotard, is a product of the progress in the sciences (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii, xxv, 3). As a result of this progress, metanarratives have become obsolete since they are not merely difficult to uphold but inadequate to represent the plurality of heterogeneous and incompatible systems of meaning (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv, xxv). In the positive sense, post-modernity is the era in which varied modes of discourse or "language games," borrowing a Wittgensteinian notion, give rise to institutions in patches. These institutions represent small localized systems of meaning with each their own discourse of legitimation and rules such that, "if a 'move' or utterance does not satisfy the rules, then it doesn't belong to the game they define" (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 10). In sum, under such a conception of post-modernity, the "death of God" may be equated with something like the end of religious metanarratives and the significance these once held.

I would like, nonetheless, to suggest two main difficulties involved in characterizing the post-modern climate in such a way. First, following Paul Ricoeur, one may ask about the status of the discourse in which Lyotard's own hypothesis is announced[2]. That is, if our post-modern world is characterized by skepticism toward metanarratives, then one may equally be justified in challenging Lyotard's narrative about some presumably universal skeptical attitude. In other

[1] Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. See Introduction, pp. 37, 79.
[2] Ricœur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. See pp. 313-314.

words, in pronouncing itself, Lyotard's position not only problematically enters into the "ism" territory that it wants to denounce but also gives rise to the very real possibility of not recovering a genuine point of view, namely, a positive definition of the time in which we live. According to Ricoeur, Lyotard's concept of post-modernity, if it is one, "declares itself to be unthought and unthinkable" (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 314). Thus, it is unclear whether and in what way Lyotard's post-modernity is characterized by the "death of God," (whatever that may mean), let alone, if it is characterizable at all.

Secondly, and more importantly, even if the post-modern climate could be characterized as the end of metanarratives, including religious metanarratives, Lyotard's characterization of post-modernity may ultimately fail to describe actual experience. According to Charles Taylor it is not the case that religion has become less significant or even insignificant; nor have religious beliefs and practices uniformly declined globally (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 423). Lyotard thereby becomes burdened with defining what exactly has died or ended in relation to religious metanarratives. The opposite of Lyotard's characterization seems to be true; metanarratives have not lost their power to convince. Rather, our post-modern age is characterized by a number of dominant discourses that seem to have settled in, i.e. whose representation or construction of reality is too often taken-for-granted as reality "tout court" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 550-551, 555-556). The issue, according to Taylor, is not to rid ourselves from metanarratives but instead to show, borrowing a Wittgensteinian idea, how a "picture," representation, or construction of reality can "hold us captive" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 557). This means questioning the superiority of certain discourses that our Western society has chosen to emphasize. It also means showing how this superiority results in the closing off of certain possibilities, that is, those allowed by other discourses which do not satisfy the rules of the dominant ones. One such unchallenged master narrative is that of Western secularity. It is endorsed by mainstream secularization theories, which inadequately portray post-modernity as presumably a secular or a ‘post-divine’ and ‘post-religious’ era, and "leave no place for the […] 'transcendent,' but which in one way or another [close off this possibility], render[it] inaccessible, or even unthinkable" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 556-557).

2. The significance of religion in post-modernity: Taylor on secularization

Although the term "post-modernity" implies the end of an old way of living, believing, and knowing, Charles Taylor disagrees with mainstream secularization theories about what this "ending," i.e. living in the Western post-modern secular climate, actually entails[3]. By means of a historical-critical analysis, he casts light on the process of secularization in Western Christendom arguing that it cannot simply be defined by a retreat of religion from public life,[4] nor by a decline of religious practices and beliefs[5] (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 423). Although the political and sociological aspects of secularization are important, subtraction theories[6] tend to overlook the cultural sense[7] in which our society is secular (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1-3). According to Taylor, secularization should be understood as a change in the conditions of belief. Far from the absence or disappearance of religion, secularization is both a continuous process of destabilization and recomposition of religious forms. This means that old forms have dissolved and have been replaced by new ones; hence the multiplication of new options including religious, non-religious and spiritual (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 461).

Taylor's critique and deconstruction of the "official story" of Western secularization is two-fold. First, Taylor questions some of the causes which other writers take as essential both in explaining the process of secularization and in portraying our era as 'post-religious.' Secondly, Taylor provides a positive account of the process of Western secularization in order to bring to light what subtraction theories often overlook. With regards to the first of these tasks, Taylor argues that secularization cannot simply be a diffusion narrative. This is the view that the spread of education and literacy is the cause of secularization. Taylor cites the example of the situation in the United States after the Revolution in order to argue against such a view. Particularly, he

[3] Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
[4] This is the political aspect of secularization whereby 'we' in the West can engage in politics without ever encountering God. Public spaces have been emptied of God or of any reference to ultimate reality. We function within various spheres of activity, namely, economic, political, educational, cultural, professional, which do not generally refer us to God or to any religious beliefs. The considerations we act on are internal to the "rationality" of each sphere (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1-2).
[5] This is secularization understood sociologically (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2).
[6] Subtraction theories are those which explain and define the phenomenon of modernity as devoid of religion, as though the religious were subtracted from this phenomenon.
[7] This is secularization understood in terms of the "move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged, and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3).

claims that following the revolt of the elites against oppressive church power, up until the 1960s, there had been a rise of religious adherence and a small decline ever since (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 424). Taylor suggests that writers also tend to focus misleadingly on differentiation[8] and claim that this factor alone causes the marginalization of religion, which refers to the fact that religion becomes less significant or insignificant (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 426). According to Taylor, placing God and religion in certain spheres of social life does not necessarily undermine the faith that may be present, and shape both public and private spheres (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 425-426). For instance, the practice of prescribing modern medication rather than touching relics as a cure is not necessarily a secular practice. Rather it can be a modern yet a religiously or spiritually motivated practice. In other words, faith in the curing power of the medicine, and the life that is thus diagnosed, may be motivated by religious beliefs.

Moreover, Taylor claims that writers confusingly identify secularization with the disenchantment of nature, understood here as the loss of, or freedom from, a number of false beliefs, baseless fears and imagined objects. The new "social imaginary" is also accompanied by a new ideological component in so far as we take ourselves to be superior - now finally free of previous enchantments. Taylor challenges this identification by challenging mainstream secularization theories' definition of "disenchantment" itself. The disenchantment of nature, whereby "five hundred years ago, [people] lived in an enchanted world and we do not", has less to do with the loss of certain beliefs than the loss of a certain way of experiencing the world (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 38). Particularly, it has more to do with different existential conditions rather than just a matter of (optional) beliefs (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 38-39). It is our existential condition - including the fact that we, as opposed to our ancestors, can disengage from whatever lies outside the mind or the inner realm because we make sharp distinctions between inner/outer, self/other, mind/world and understand ourselves as masters of the meanings things have for us - that render the idea of spirits, moral forces, etc, close to incomprehensible (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 40-41; *A Secular Age*, 539; *Sources of the Self*, 113, 257, 462). By contrast, in a pre-modern understanding of the world, the self is rather embedded in a purposeful order with no clear distinction between self and community, or

[8] Differentiation is the phenomenon characterized by functions which were initially carried out together but which are now carried out in separate spheres with their own particular norms, rules and institutions.

between the natural and supernatural realms. Thus, the new modern way of experiencing the world is not characterized entirely by a disenchantment of nature. It also involves a new way of enchanting the world; a remaking and redrawing of particular boundaries such as those previously mentioned (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 39). In sum, it is not simply that we have lost or freed ourselves from a number of beliefs that somehow blurred or disturbed our perception of the world and of ourselves. Rather, we have reconstructed it (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 571). The difference in 'our' enchantment, where it exists, as opposed to 'their' enchantment, is that the elements of belief in enchantment that remain do not form a system, an enchanted cosmos, but are held by individuals qua individuals rather than socially shared (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 531).

Lastly, mainstream secularization theories identify secularization with modernity. They claim that modernity is slowly undermining religious faith, since the more modern a society is, the more secular and thus the less religious it becomes. Writers such Dawkins and Dennett, to name just a few, claim that science makes it hard to believe in magic, and shows religion to be false, irrelevant and destructive since it is based on authority alone (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 4, 428-429). Taylor argues that science is a new structure; while it has undermined old religious forms, it has also left open the possibility of the rise of new religious forms, such as Methodism or new modes of organization in older established churches, for example the Catholic Church (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 436). Writers associate secularization with modernizing phenomena such as urbanization, which refers to the migration of populations from the rural to the urban areas, and industrialization, which sees the center of economic activities shifting focus from non-industrial to industrial work. They claim that these phenomena undermine religious faith (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 426). However, these cannot be the sole causes of secularization according to Taylor, since they may have had different effects in various places and times. Again, for Western society, which is one of the earliest societies to separate Church and State, and specifically for the USA, the reverse seems to be true. Western modernization is accompanied by religious revival. Not only do new forms of religions have and continue to flourish but, Western society has the highest statistics for religious belief and practice (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2).

Taylor's positive account of the process of Western secularization brings to light what subtraction theories often overlook. He hopes to show the kind of possibilities that these theories tend to close off in thinking about the post-modern secular climate. As such, subtraction theories implicitly rely on a particular understanding of "the secular" which carries with it a complex and ambiguous history in the West that is never fully articulated by these theories as such (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 34).

In this way, Taylor argues that secularization has not been a uniform and steady decline of religious faith and practices, but rather a continuous process of destabilization and recomposition of religious forms. Old forms have decayed and have been replaced by new ones (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 461). Taylor avoids generalizing about secularization since it is not a single unchanging phenomenon and thus cannot be explained by single set of causes. As such, he rather describes the various developments that have changed the conditions of belief by conceptualizing the stages that marked the movement from, what he terms, an age of "elite unbelief" to the age of "mass secularization" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 437). Taylor characterizes these ideal types of society as 'the ancient regime' and 'the age of mobilization' in order to arrive at a discussion of religion today.

The ancient regime is an organic society characterized by a hierarchical idea of order (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 438-439). It is an "enchanted" world insofar as God is not merely present in public life, since there is no distinction between the church and state, but is also present in the very fabric of the order of the world. The sacred is understood as that which orders and accounts for the creation and continuing existence of society. In other words, religious and social life are so intertwined that it is hard to distinguish between them (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 442; "Western Secularity," 43). When the ancient regime breaks down, due to the gap between the elites and the masses whereby the former impose the suppression of magic and ritual practices, this has disrupting effects for the beliefs of the latter (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 440). Local community forms are disrupted by the process of elite-engendered destruction and by phenomena such as urbanization, industrialization and dislocation. A spiritual gap is created since people are removed from community life and religious practices (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 441-442).

The age of Mobilization emerges from these developments. In order to fill this spiritual gap, on the side of the elites, the response is to offer new ideologies such as a new religion of reason, exemplified in the Enlightenment's ideals (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 442). The church, competing with new ideologies for the allegiance of the masses, adopts a more compassionate and warmer stance towards adherents (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 444). However, in adopting a political and democratic philosophy, the church begins to mobilize people by organizing and recruiting people into membership organizations, inadvertently changing the old organic order for a new mechanistic order, while attempting to preserve it (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 443, 445, 465). In this new type of society, individuals no longer see themselves as part of an organic unit with each their own assigned place in society, but now, see themselves as being able to choose whether or not to adhere to a religion and which to adhere to. (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 464). God is no longer present in public life due to the new distinction between the State and the church. Although this is no longer an enchanted world per say, God can now be present in other ways, for instance, in the design[9]. In the latter case, the prevailing belief is that there is a moral order established by God and maintained by citizens of the society, which one must strive to realize. Each individual can pursue his or her own purposes while still acting to benefit the whole. Notice that the hierarchical order is no longer present since individuals are always and immediately citizens belonging to society, without necessarily belonging to any specific group within it (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 446-447).

An important part of Taylor's discussion has to do with the historical development of the meaning of the term "secular." The term "secular" is originally understood to refer to the profane or ordinary time in contradistinction to sacred time. It is one term in a dyad that distinguishes two dimensions of existence, living as it were, side by side (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 32). On this basis, a new dyad emerges which now builds on the distinction between "this world"

[9] Taylor exemplifies the American experiment as a model of this new age of mobilization. The American Constitution conforms to the intelligent design model and results in a society of mutual benefit. It is implied in the Constitution that "all are equal and citizens under God," which seems to speak to a kind of shared sense of belonging, coded in religious language. Hence, although American Society is presumably secular, to be an American implies being adherent to God's design (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 448). Taylor discusses the phenomenon of church denominations in order to demonstrate that adhering to the divine design also means to be free to adhere and respect a plurality of denominations in an open way. Personal choice and commitment are essential for these denominations inasmuch as one is at least part of one of these. This implies that being part of any of them makes one belong to a larger "Church", namely, the greater category of "those who have a religion" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 449-450, 454).

which is secular/immanent, and the transcendent/otherworldly[10]. Once this distinction is made, the secular/immanent order "declares its independence" so to speak, from the sacred/transcendent order (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 33). At first, the independence claimed on the part of the immanent is limited and partial since God is still seen as artificer of the immanent/natural order (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 33). However, the secular/immanent order is increasingly understood as emptying itself out of any transcendent "residue." The dominant interpretation becomes one in which the immanent is not merely seen as self-sufficient but as "all that there is" or "the real" as opposed to the transcendent/religious order. The latter is now understood to be a mere human invention and thus an "optional extra" (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 34, 50). Some of the important consequences of this new "immanent" frame are that religion is relegated to the margins of political life and to the private sphere whereby the pressure to adopt a more personal, committed and inward form of religion emerges (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 35, 37). Mainstream secularization theories build on this latter understanding of the secular, ignoring its ambiguous history, which, according to Taylor, explains their tendency to universalize this presumably selfsame process as occurring everywhere. In other words, the secular climate emphasized by subtraction theories, (whereby unbelief, inconceivable in the previous worldview, turns into a matter of choice), is made possible and sustained by a particular social imaginary of a purely immanent character. This speaks to the development of a culture which makes a clear distinction between the natural and supernatural order and which allows for the possibility of living entirely within the natural order (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 50-51). According to Taylor, the "official story" of Western secularization, endorsed by mainstream secularization theories, encourages this kind of closed take on the immanent frame, as devoid of, or closed off from, the transcendent. This however leads to a narrow, linear and overly simplified understanding of secularization, namely, as a uniform and steady decline of religious beliefs and

[10] It should be noted that this is an invention , i.e. a theological category, of Western Christendom (Taylor, "Western Secularity," 33-34). It is a particular historical process which has no equivalent in other religious traditions or even Western Christianity, but which is nonetheless elevated to some general universal historical model presumably part of universal human development and thus applicable universally (Casanova, The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms, 56.72). In other words, even thinking about "the secular" and "the religious" beyond the West is problematic because both are particular Western discursive realities and indeed, abstract categories. However, when viewed as undisputable global social facts, these Western discursive realities testify to the global expansion of the modern secular/religious system of classification of reality that first emerged in the modern Christian West (Casanova, The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms, 61-63).

practices, which nonetheless does not adequately represent experience (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 432, 461).

Taylor's project challenges and re-interprets some of the features of the immanent frame (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549). Taylor does not deny that we live in the 'immanent frame' in the modern West. We indeed have "buffered identities" defined by modern individualism, move in differentiated social spaces, value instrumental rationality, embrace modern science, and understand time to be secular rather than sacred (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37-38, 542-543). However, he argues that this frame does not necessarily have to be understood as self-sufficient and closed to the transcendent (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542-543). In other words, we have undergone a change in our condition. The immanent frame has come about through the development of certain practical and theoretical insights. These have altered the structures in which we live; scientific, social, technological. This has consequently changed our outlook to one in which we see ourselves as living in impersonal (social, ethical, and natural) orders (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 555). This “natural” order seems to further direct us toward the closed perspective. However, of itself, this order leaves the issue open, whether for purposes of ultimate explanation or spiritual transformation, we might have to invoke something transcendent. Actual experience of living within this frame doesn't simply tie one to a single direction (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 555). One may experience this opening in a positive sense, for instance, if the highest good is inconceivable without reference to God or the transcendent (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 544). The opening of the immanent frame may also be experienced negatively, as something whose lack we feel. This includes for instance reactions against reductive forms of modern moral order such as utilitarianism, which can encourage questions such as 'Is that all there is?' (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 545). Thus, it is only when the order is spun or twisted in a certain way, that the immanent order is interpreted as closed to the transcendent (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 594). However, its closure remains an unchallenged framework (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549). Whatever motivates us towards one stance or the other requires a 'leap of faith', i.e. a step beyond available reasons into the realm of anticipatory confidence, which lacks rational grounding. In other words, a certain degree of faith permeates both science and religion whereby, assumptions and ontological commitments, (as for instance in various forms of materialism or

spiritualism) are present in both realms. However, no stance can be taken as "natural" or "obvious" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 550-551, 555-556).

Taylor argues that the movement from the ancient regime to the age of mobilization helps situate religion in historical perspective and its manifestation today. Taylor's main point is that religious practice and belief has not so much declined as it has changed. The Church is present in our lives in a different way. Religion has gone through the change of being "the religion of the soil," that is, the unquestioned presupposition of all aspects of social life, to being something which one must have an opinion or personal stand on, as something which to adhere to or not. This involves a personal commitment and a choice (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 463-464). In this way, religion's meaning shifts from a natural to a reflective one, i.e. it goes from being a community affair to being a partisan or personal affair in the West (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 465). The new spiritual landscape is complex and multi-dimensional with positions ranging from believing and belonging, to 'believing without belonging,' to 'spiritual but not religious,' to a kind of 'bricolage' whereby many are engaged in assembling their own personal outlook and spirituality (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 513-514). However, what undeniably remains in modernity is the continuing importance of an orientation towards the transcendent, "the longing for and response to a more-than-immanent transformation," otherwise unexplainable from the disenchanted worldview adopted by secularization theories. Although our 'secular age' is characterized by "the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no one can foresee," Taylor is adamant about the continuing existence and importance of religion in the Western world (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 535).

3. The significance of the transcendent beyond the religious realm

A Secular Age is Charles Taylor's attempt to save the phenomenon of religion. On one hand, his historical-critical analysis of Western secularization shows that religion, far from disappearing, has merely undergone a process of change. On the other hand, experience shows that religion, far from being insignificant or less significant, is present in a different way in both the private and public sphere. In order to justify religion's continuing existence, Taylor relies on two assumptions. The first is that the need for transcendence is indispensable to human

existence. The second is that religion alone satisfies this indispensable human need. Arguably, Taylor's success at justifying religion's continuing existence depends on his understanding of the significance and particularity of religion.

If religion is defined in the strong sense, as that which "involve[s] the belief in a transcendental reality which is not reducible to anything natural, and the aspiration to a spiritual transformation which is not reducible to merely bodily or mental wholeness and wellness," then it can easily be undermined (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 20, 510). This definition relies on a limited understanding of "transcendence,"[11] namely one whose meaningfulness is defined within, and whose fulfillment can only be realized in, the realm of religion. In other words, according to Taylor, true transcendence, one which is indispensable to human existence, is "religious" transcendence. However, one could argue the opposite and make the case that the need for transcendence can be fulfilled in the non-religious realm, just as one may believe in a transcendental reality which is natural and be aspired to a transformation which is not spiritual but merely bodily. One example involves transforming one's body by practicing yoga, taken as a secular practice not in a Hindu religious context. This illustration seems to undermine Taylor's strong sense of religion. If our indispensable need for transcendence can, in principle, be satisfied by non-religious means, and religion's particularity presumably lies with satisfying such a need, then we have justifiable reason to question the necessity of religion's continuing existence, and if need be, abandon religion altogether. If however, Taylor means to define religion in the soft sense as including other "secular" or non-religious kinds of transcendence[12], then the question arises whether there is still a justifiable reason to call it religion at all. That is, the term's meaning has now transformed to something different, namely a general sense of transcendence or maybe a way of life or a way of evolving, which does not necessarily require a religious character to it. In other words, one could make the case that religion in Taylor's soft sense evolves away from being that which we normally understand and recognize as religion.

[11] Taylor claims that "transcendence" is a multi-dimensional term which generally refers to that which is "beyond." This may include the belief in some good, higher or beyond that of human flourishing, or the belief in the possibility of transformation which takes one beyond merely human perfection. However, these dimensions of transcendence, according to Taylor, only make sense within the religious context, that of belief in some power or agency transcending the immanent order, namely, the transcendent God of faith which appears in most religions (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 20).

[12] I doubt that this is Taylor's position since after all, *A Secular Age* is itself "an attempt to study the fate in the modern West of religious faith in the strong sense" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 510).

Both of these cases seem to present equally unsatisfactory alternatives. Taylor's attempt at justifying religion's continuing existence seems unsuccessful. Success here would require the establishment of what drives this need for transcendence. This involves more than merely pointing to experience in order to claim that this need does in fact exist. It necessitates theoretical grounding. It then requires showing that the religious realm is best suited for the satisfaction of this kind of need. And in case this fails, it calls for an account of the complex relationship between religion and transcendence, at the very least.

4. The concept of God within Transcendental Idealist epistemology

This essay addresses this difficulty in Taylor. Due to a lack of space, this essay will speak only to the first of these problems, that of grounding the phenomenon of transcendence theoretically speaking. This includes exploring that which shapes or animates the experience of, belief in, and knowledge of, the transcendent. This effort is guided by the presupposition that the possibility and meaningfulness of transcendence is not necessarily defined in the realm of religion, as Taylor presupposes.[13]

This essay abandons the specific religious meaning that Taylor invests in, and which surrounds the phenomenon of, transcendence, in order to let this phenomenon acquire meaning in another realm. Particularly, it seeks a renewed appreciation of transcendence in the realm of epistemology, the field concerned with the origin, nature and limits of knowledge. As Taylor suggests, our picture of reality rests on a certain kind of epistemology (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 557-558). Closed world structures,[14] rely on a particularly constructed epistemological framework in which the death of God appears obvious. The latter allows for the naturalization of a particular way of understanding the immanent frame, namely, as closed to the transcendent. This epistemological framework is one in which the lack of knowledge, or the impossibility of knowing God presumably leads to the lack, the impossibility and/or even the irrationality of belief. This thesis specifically questions this inference by means of two different routes. The first

[13] Note also that we may very well find at the end of such an analysis that the transcendent is best expressed in the medium of religious language which would ultimately work in favor of Taylor's desire to save the phenomenon of religion.
[14] These are exemplified in the rationale of mainstream secularization theories and the "buffered selves" that they create.

is found in Immanuel Kant's epistemological framework while the second is found in that of J.G. Fichte.

By means of critical-analysis, my thesis will demonstrate that both Kant and Fichte provide contemporary ways of questioning the thesis that sees transcendence as an unnecessary surplus to the already self-sufficient secular immanent frame. They do so by showing not only the possibility but the indispensability of transcendence, particularly with regards to the concept of God, in the epistemological realm. On one hand, Kant provides a unique epistemological-metaphysical framework in which the absence of knowledge of God does not lead to the lack, the impossibility, or the irrationality of faith. Rather, this absence is shown to be the precondition of a faith in God. On the other hand, Fichte's epistemological-metaphysical framework affords us the idea that the absence of knowledge of God yields a genuine comprehension of God and gives meaning and reality to the finite knowing subject. In this way, the systematic and positive significance of the concept of God can be shown in both figures.

As such, the first task of this project involves the exposition and analysis of a major problematic in Kant's "philosophy of religion," namely, the apparent tension between the *denial of the knowledge of God's existence* in his *Critique Of Pure Reason* and his positive *moral argument for the existence of God* in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. This part of the project advances two sub-theses that speak to Kant's deconstructive and constructive projects. First, according to Kant's epistemology or restrictions on knowledge, metaphysical knowledge, i.e. of God's existence, prized by traditional philosophical theology, is impossible[15]. The relationship between epistemology and metaphysics must presumably be mutually exclusive. Secondly however, such lack of knowledge is essential insofar as the pursuit of metaphysical certainty jeopardizes the very possibility of faith in God's existence. It is precisely these restrictions on knowledge that allow God to acquire reality, and allow faith to acquire rational grounding, in the practical realm.

[15] So far, this is exactly the kind of move adopted and prized by closed world structures exemplified in the rationale of mainstream secularization theories.

The second task of this project involves the exposition and analysis of a major problematic in Fichte's "philosophy of religion," namely, the apparent tension between the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*'s quest for absolute metaphysical certainty or knowledge of the Absolute and the impossibility of such absolute knowledge. This part of the project advances two sub-theses. First, according to Fichte, epistemology and metaphysics are so intimately related that the pursuit of epistemological certainty inevitably leads to the pursuit of metaphysical knowledge. However, metaphysical knowledge is paradoxically the knowledge of the appearance of the Absolute, and thus denies any accessibility to the Absolute as absolute. Absolute knowledge is impossible; the conditions which make knowledge possible transcend knowledge. Secondly, the lack or absence of absolute knowledge is precisely that which gives not only the Absolute, but also the finite knowing subject, its meaning and reality. If God is to acquire reality, the concept of God of traditional philosophical theology as merely transcendent must be abandoned. Instead, the Absolute or God must be understood in terms of its immanent transcendence. For Fichte, this means that, although absolutely inconceivable, the Absolute or God as life reveals itself through the I, which in turn stands as the living connection between the Absolute and its manifestation or appearance.

The third task of this project involves comparing and contrasting the particular ways in which Kant and Fichte lend support to Taylor's overall project, namely, to challenge the "official story" of Western secularization which encourages a closed interpretation of the immanent frame. Although both Kant and Fichte demonstrate the significance of the transcendent in human experience, theoretically and practically speaking, they nonetheless differ in their understanding of the nature of transcendence with relation to the concept of the God and the nature of the human-divine relationship.

Chapter One: The concept of God in Kant's philosophy of religion

Kant's "philosophy of religion" is characterized by an apparent tension between the denial of the knowledge of God's existence in his *Critique of Pure Reason*[16] and his positive moral argument for the existence of God in his *Critique of Practical Reason*.[17] This tension raises an important concern as to whether Kant's positive "Moral Religion[18]" is compatible with, continuous and/or dependent on his negative "Rational Theology[19]." What is the nature of the relation between Kant's "Rational Theology" and his "Moral Religion" with respect to the concepts of "knowledge" and "belief or faith" in God's existence?

Relying on Kant's epistemological theory, I first argue that Kant's denial of the knowledge of God's existence should not be understood as a positive argument against God's existence but rather as the denial of the possibility of theoretical certainty as to whether God exists. Given that no theoretical inquiry can either prove or disprove God's existence, since God is not an object of knowledge proper, the three traditional proofs for God's existence ultimately fail. However, Kant's view is that we can and should have proper metaphysical beliefs rather than an attitude of indifference regarding God's existence, despite the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge. As such, I secondly demonstrate that there is in fact a relation of

[16] The aim of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to limit reason's scope of activity and to ascertain once and for all, "what can be known" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B832-833). As such, reason must "take on once again the most difficult of all tasks-viz., that of self-cognition- and to set up a tribunal that will make reason secure in its rightful claims […] in accordance [with its own] eternal and immutable laws" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axii). This tribunal consists of the critique of the power of reason as such, specifically "all cognitions after which reason may strive independently of all experience" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axii).

[17] The aim of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is (1) to critically assess the entire practical use of reason so as to ascertain that pure reason is in fact practical, (2) to prove the practical use and objective reality of its concepts, i.e. their applicability to objects, and (3) to guard against the pretensions of empirically conditioned reason as the sole determining basis of the will (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, xxv, 3-4). In order to argue for my thesis I also draw on Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* and his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, where he particularly expounds on the moral argument for the existence of God.

[18] This notion is borrowed from Allen W. Wood' *Kant's Moral Religion*. This essay focuses specifically on the moral argument for the belief or faith in God's existence and thus primarily examines the notion of "moral faith," i.e. "that we trust in the wise purposiveness of the creator and ruler of the world, we maintain the conviction that the world is not without moral purpose, and that its purpose harmonizes with our best moral intentions to bring about a good world" (Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 171).

[19] This notion is borrowed from Allen W. Wood's *Kant's Rational Theology*. The term refers to Kant's theoretical investigation (in the area of rational theology) into the rational origin, content, and status of our concept of a Supreme Being (Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 10). This essay focuses on the result of Kant's theoretical investigation, namely, the denial of the knowledge of God's existence or the impossibility of either affirming or denying God's existence based on theoretical knowledge.

compatibility, continuity, and dependence between Kant's "Rational Theology" and his "Moral Religion." I rely for a compatibility thesis on Kant's distinction between various forms of assent or "holding a judgment as true," such that both "faith" and "knowledge" are different yet nonetheless rationally justifiable forms of assent. The argument for the belief or faith in God's existence, which is a reformulation of, if not a partial practical response to, the problem of "incompleteness" faced by reason in the theoretical sphere, establishes a relation of continuity between Kant's "Rational Theology" and his "Moral Religion." A relation of dependence is shown to rest on Allen Wood's *ad absurdum practicum* argument which states that one commits oneself to a practical irrationality if one does not also commit oneself to a belief or faith in God's existence. This is tied to the idea that the very nature, possibility and pursuit of morality rests on the absolute unknowability of God's existence in the theoretical sphere. If God were an object of knowledge, it would be detrimental to morality.

1. Kant's analytic/synthetic distinction

In order to inquire about whether metaphysical knowledge regarding God's existence is possible, an investigation into the nature of knowledge is required. I first argue that Kant's investigation into the conditions of the possibility of knowledge in his *Critique of Pure Reason* reveals that all judgments regarding God's existence, be it "God exists" or "God does not exist," are failed synthetic *a priori* truth-assertions or knowledge-claims. The concept of "God" cannot be an object of knowledge in a synthetic *a priori* judgment since "God" is not a possible or actual object of experience. As such, one can neither affirm nor deny God's existence.

Knowledge is always expressed in a judgment[20]. All judgments are purported truth-assertions or propositions of a "subject - predicate" grammatical form. Since to judge is to hold or represent something as true, there must also be conditions under which I can determine whether my judgment, which purports to be true, is in fact true knowledge as opposed to false knowledge. Now, given that there are different classes of judgments, each exemplifying different

[20] Kant equates thinking or conceiving with judging (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A81). A judgment is a conceptualized representation of a relation between concepts or between a concept and an intuition (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* B93).

ways in which the predicate is related to the subject,[21] there are also particular truth conditions for each class of judgments.[22] These result in different types of knowledge[23] and allow for different ways in which the concept of the subject of such judgments can be properly represented.[24]

Analytic judgments are those in which the predicate belongs to the subject as conceptually or logically contained in it (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A7/B10/11). "One hundred dollars makes me one hundred dollars richer" is one such example. The truth of analytic judgments depends entirely on the logical relation or conceptual content of its terms, and thus is arrived at by mere thought or conceptualization (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A7) As such, in order to be true, an analytic judgment must meet the condition of subjective validity, i.e. the concept of the subject must be logically possible. A "square circle" is not a logically possible thought while "one hundred dollars" is. The judgment must also meet the condition of logical consistency, i.e. the predicate must be related to the subject in such a way that the denial of the relation entails a contradiction (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* Bxxvi, B191). Our analytic judgment "One hundred dollars makes me one hundred dollars richer" is true because its denial leads to a contradiction. Since analysis is all that is required in order to ascertain their truth, analytic judgments have the following implications: (A) Analytic knowledge is merely explicative rather than ampliative. The predicate adds nothing to the concept of the subject but rather serves to clarify the latter by means of analysis or by decomposing the representational content into its constitutive parts (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* B11). (B) Analytic judgments are *a priori*, i.e. necessary and universal, since their truth is absolutely independent of all experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* B11) (C) In being absolutely independent of all experience, nothing accounts for their concepts' applicability to actual objects of experience. Analytic *a priori* judgments cannot ascertain the actual existence of objects but merely their

[21] The predicate can either belong to the subject as conceptually or logically contained in it, in which case, the judgment is analytic, or attached to the subject by means of synthesis, in which case, the judgment is synthetic (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A6–7)

[22] Truth conditions may include subjective validity, logical consistency and/or empirical meaningfulness/objective validity depending on the particular class of judgments (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A151-158/B190-198).

[23] Knowledge can either be *a priori*, i.e. necessary and universal, and thus independent of experience, or *a posteriori*, i.e. derived or dependent on experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* B1-3)

[24] The concept of the subject can either be a merely logically possible thought or also a possible or actual object of experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A596/B624).

logical possibility just as "one hundred dollars makes me one hundred dollars richer" does not establish the actual existence of one hundred dollars in my pocket (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A151, 154).

Kant distinguishes analytic from synthetic judgments. Defined in a negative sense, synthetic judgments are those in which the predicate does not belong to the concept of the subject; the predicate is different from anything that I can think in the mere concept of the subject (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A7/B11). Examples of such judgments include both "there is one hundred dollars in my pocket" and "everything which happens has a cause." Given that synthetic judgments are not analytic, the truth of synthetic judgments is independent of the logical relation or conceptual content of its terms (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A155/B194). As such, something must account for the synthesis. In other words, there must be a way to ascertain that the relation between subject and predicate in fact holds. Kant argues that in addition to meeting the condition of subjective validity, synthetic judgments, unlike analytic judgments, must also meet the condition of empirical meaningfulness/objective validity in order to be true (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxvi, A8-9, A155/B194). Empirical meaningfulness/objective validity[25] can be understood in either of two ways, depending on whether the synthetic judgment is *a posteriori* or *a priori*.

The judgment that "there is one hundred dollars in my pocket" is synthetic; the predicate "existence" is different from anything that I think in the mere concept of "one hundred dollars" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A8/B12) Given that it lacks necessity and universality however, since the world may or may not be such that there is one hundred dollars in my pocket, the judgment is also *a posteriori*. Its truth is entirely dependent on how the world actually is and thus, must be qualified in and by experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A8/B12). In other words, in order to ascertain the truth of my judgment I must consult experience. In turn, experience is "[the conversion of] the raw material of our sensuous impressions into knowledge

[25] Empirical meaningfulness/objective validity can be understood in either of two ways. (1) The concept of the subject must be proven to have actuality (being an actual object of experience) or (2) the concept of the subject must be proven to have real possibility (being a possible object of experience), with both (1) and (2) being opposed to mere logical possibility (not necessarily a possible or actual object of experience) (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxvi).

of objects." Experience thus has two fundamental sources, i.e. sensibility[26] and understanding.[27] (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B30). In other words, experience of an object is only possible as a result of (1) our capacity to receive representations through our faculty of sensibility (by means of *a priori* intuitions of space and time), and (2) our capacity to subject these received representations or objects of sensible intuition to the faculty of the understanding (which allows the thinking of objects through concepts)[28] (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A52/B76).

[26] In the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant argues that sensibility is the faculty which defines the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of objects being given to us and thus, our immediate awareness/representation of them by means of *a priori* intuitions of space and time. The faculty of sensibility is passive insofar as it receives or is affected by objects which are given to it by means of sensations (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A19/B33). The raw material of sense data (what Kant terms the "matter" of appearances) makes an impression on our senses. However, since the received series of sensations/impressions lack an intrinsic structure/form (since that which gives order or structure to sensations cannot itself be derived from or consist in sensations), the faculty of sensibility contributes such a structure/form (what Kant terms the "form" of appearances). The form is "that which so determines the manifold of appearance that it allows of being ordered in certain relations," specifically, in spatial-temporal relations (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A20/B34). We become immediately aware of these sensations/impressions, or they appear to us because sensibility affords us intuitions of these sensations/impressions. That is, they first become appearances through the form of space and time. The result is an empirical intuition, i.e. a sensation/impression which now appears in space and time (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A20/B34).

[27] In the Transcendental Analytic, Kant argues that understanding is the faculty which defines the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of objects being thought. A thought/judgment is simply a mediated or conceptualized representation of a relation between concepts or between a concept and an intuition. It is the representation of a representation (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B93). This act of synthesis, that is, of subsuming a concept under a concept or an intuition under a concept cannot itself have its ground in the judgment since the latter is the result of such a synthesis and thus presupposes it. Categories account for the synthesis in judgments since they are the ultimate functions of unity in representations. They are rules that determine how representations are related. They define, by means of concepts of an object-in-general, the logical forms of all possible judgments (quantitative, qualitative, modal and relational) and the possible ways of conceiving the objects of such judgments (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A70/B95).

[28] Kant argues that the possibility of knowledge and experience in general rests on three subjective sources of cognition: sense, imagination, and apperception (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A115). The faculty of sensibility is passive insofar as it receives or is affected by objects which are given to it by means of sensations. Sensibility merely affords us with a spatial/temporal manifold or collection of immediate sensations/impressions which appear to us because sensibility affords us intuitions of these sensations/impressions. In order to get a single and immediate sensory representation/impression, the latter must be brought under a unitary spatial-temporal form. This is what Kant terms the synthesis of apprehension in intuition (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A116). However, this manifold of empirical intuitions must be unified or combined by an act of synthesis into the presentation or image of an object. Kant terms this the synthesis of the reproduction in the imagination. The latter allows the retention of earlier intuitions such that the mind can transition to these earlier representations, even in the absence of any current representation of them (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A118, A120). Moreover, the synthesized manifold must be made intelligible. We must be capable of forming an idea of the object by bringing the manifold under concepts. This is what Kant terms the synthesis of recognition in the concept. This synthesis allows for the recognition that past representations are related to present ones in a single object of sensation by the use of concepts of an object-in-general. It is important to note that although it is the imagination that bridges the gap between the realm of sensibility and understanding, the three-fold synthesis and thus experience ultimately rest on the synthetic unity of apperception. This is the ultimate synthesis or unification of representations in a single unified consciousness which allows the recognition that the thought belongs in fact to a unified self across time (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A122-123). In order words, experience would be impossible if I were not able to recognize that these representations are "my" representations. (Due to lack of space, I do not discuss the different methods, i.e. analytic and synthetic, in the first and second edition of the Analytic which Kant employs in order to (1) deduce the synthetic unity of

Sensibility provides us with the material condition or intuitive content of synthetic knowledge while understanding provides us with the formal condition or conceptual form of synthetic knowledge. Since synthetic *a posteriori* judgments rest on experience, i.e. a synthesis between intuition and concept, they have the following implications: (A) Synthetic *a posteriori* knowledge is ampliative (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A7/B11). The predicate adds something to the concept of the subject rather than serves to clarify the latter by means of analysis. (B) Synthetic *a posteriori* judgments do not follow or exhibit any necessary or universal rule since their truth is absolutely contingent on experience. They merely tell us something about how the world is but not that it must necessarily be so (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* B10/11). (C) In being absolutely dependent on experience, their concepts must not only be logically possible thoughts but must also apply to actual objects of experience. This means that the condition of empirical meaningfulness/objective validity in synthetic *a posteriori* judgments is met if the concept of the subject can be proven to have actuality. This means that the latter must be an actual object of experience, one which is given through empirical intuition (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A155-156/B194-195).

The judgment "everything that happens has its cause," is also synthetic since the concept of "cause" is not conceptually or logically contained in the concept of "something that happens" as one of its properties or constitutive parts. The former is something different from the latter. However, and unlike the judgment "there is one hundred dollars in my pocket," our present judgment is *a priori* since the connection between "cause" and "something that happens" carries with it universality and necessity (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* B13). Kant claims that the truth of synthetic *a priori* judgments is not "strictly" dependent on experience. "Strictly" here denotes the idea that, although the concept of "cause" is an *a priori* rather than an empirical concept, (the concept is not derived from experience since it carries with it universality and necessity), it nonetheless applies to experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A9-10/B13). If experience alone cannot account for the synthesis, then perhaps the *a priori* concept can. Kant argues that this, also, is not possible. *A priori* concepts, just as *a priori* intuitions of space and time, are merely transcendentally ideal or subjectively valid unless they are also applicable to

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apperception as a result of the movement from the sensible to the intellectual realm as opposed to (2) declare the latter as the pre-condition of the three syntheses and of the possibility of all experience).

possible objects of experience, in which case they are empirically real or objectively valid[29]. In other words, *a priori* concepts, which are mere forms of thought or rules for synthesis in judgments, must be presented with an "intuitive"[30] content to which they can be applied, without which, they are "empty."[31] Given that the intuitive content is always and only given through the form of sensibility, i.e. pure intuitions of space and time, *a priori* concepts are objectively valid or empirically real only insofar as they are sensible, i.e. insofar as they apply to possible objects of experience. In other words, what accounts for the synthesis in synthetic *a priori* judgments is precisely the concept's applicability to possible objects of experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A156/B195). As such synthetic *a priori* judgments have the following implications: (A) Synthetic *a priori* knowledge is ampliative. The predicate adds something to the concept of the subject rather than serves to clarify the latter by means of analysis. (B) Synthetic *a priori* judgments follow or exhibit a necessary or universal rule. They do not merely tell us something about how the world is but that it must necessarily be so (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*,

[29] This is the argument which Kant expounds regarding the empirical reality and transcendental ideality of both space and time as well as the categories (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A35–36/B52). First, Kant argues that intuition alone cannot produce knowledge nor experience. Space and time are subjectively valid or transcendentally ideal (mere forms of intuition or merely the *a priori* necessary subjective forms of all empirical intuitions), insofar as they belong to the subjective constitution of the mind. They are pure (they don't contain anything belonging to sensations) and *a priori* (they are not derived from experience and thus are not contingent on experience since they are not actual entities, nor relations or properties of things as they exist independently of our intuiting, i.e. things-in-themselves) (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A21/B36). They have empirical meaning or objective validity only insofar as they apply to appearances. That they do apply to all appearances is shown by the fact that they first make appearances possible, which never occur unless in these forms. However, the empirical reality of space and time does not for that matter make knowledge or experience possible since the latter requires conceptualization and thus the activity of the understanding. Second, Kant argues that categories alone cannot produce knowledge nor experience. The categories have empirical meaning or objective validity only insofar as they apply to possible or actual objects of experience (objects of sensible intuition or appearances). Apart from their application to objects of experience, they are merely subjectively valid or transcendentally ideal. They belong to the subjective constitution of the mind since they are pure (they don't contain anything belonging to sensations) and *a priori* (they are not derived from, nor contingent upon, experience) (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A81/B106-107). They are mere forms of thinking or rules of synthesis in judgments (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75). Unless they are presented with an intuitive content to which they can be applied, i.e. unless the understanding should be awaken into action, categories have merely a logical use. That the categories do apply to all objects of experience is shown by the fact that they account for the construction of objects of experience which never become objects for us unless intuitions are brought under concepts, i.e. lest we can think objects through concepts. That the categories apply to all objects of experience or are objectively valid is also shown by the fact that their subjective validity (as demonstrated in the metaphysical deduction) can only be discovered and determined by their use. We discover what they are through performing an abstraction of the content of all judgments and attend to the form of judgments (as demonstrated in the transcendental deduction).

[30] In synthetic judgments, this content is intuitive, not merely conceptual. As previously argued, when the content is conceptual or when a concept is merely brought under another concept, the resulting judgment is analytic rather than synthetic.

[31] Outside their synthesis, neither concepts nor intuitions can produce synthetic knowledge of objects since "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75). Taken individually both are necessary but insufficient conditions of synthetic knowledge or experience.

B10/11). (C) Their concepts must not only be logically possible thoughts but must also apply to possible objects of experience. This means that the condition of empirical meaningfulness/objective validity in synthetic *a priori* judgments is met if the concept of the subject can be proven to have real possibility. It must be a possible object of experience, namely, one which can be exhibited in, or constructed from, a pure *a priori* intuition (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A158/B197).

1.1. Kant's denial of the knowledge of God's existence

Based on this exposition of the nature of "knowledge," Kant provides a critique of the three traditional proofs for the existence of God in the Transcendental Dialectic,[32] as an argument against traditional metaphysics,[33] specifically against rational theology. Given that all three proofs rely on the ontological argument[34] according to Kant, it suffices to show that the latter fails to establish the existence of God in order to show that the cosmological and physico-theological arguments also fail.

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[32] The transcendental dialectic is concerned with bringing to light the kind of errors or illusions that result from the misuse of the principles of the understanding in attempts to apply them beyond the realm of possible experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A294-296/B349-354) According to Kant the seat of such errors is the faculty of reason itself. In its logical employment, reason attempts to bring systematic unity and completion to the manifold of knowledge gained by the understanding by means of transcendental ideas. The latter have a unifying or synthesizing function just as the categories of the understanding. Kant characterizes this synthesizing function as reason's search to "find for the conditioned knowledge given through the understanding, the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to completion" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A308/B364). Generally speaking, metaphysics falls into error when it mistakenly takes reason to have real use in the constitution of knowledge by means of concepts of the understanding alone, without the accompanying contribution of sensibility. The illusion which grounds rational theology springs from the assumption that "if the conditioned is given, the absolutely unconditioned… is also given" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A308/B366). The mere idea of reason, i.e. that of the unconditioned which conditions all conditions, is determined not merely as an ideal, i.e. God as an individual being exemplifying the idea of an unconditioned ground, but inferred actual existence. God is necessarily thought as possessing objective reality.

[33] Kant terms traditional metaphysics "dogmatic" since it focuses on establishing truths about objects which are transcendent or lie beyond experience and distinguishes it from "critical" or "transcendental" metaphysics whose nature and extent is defined by Kant's critical assessment of reason and which focuses on the conditions that underlie knowledge and experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B18-19,22)

[34] The cosmological argument is "empirically grounded […]" since it begins with the claim that if anything exists, then there must be an absolutely necessary being which also exists since everything contingent must have a cause. Thus there must be a first cause (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A591/B619). However, the argument goes on to claim that this necessary being or first cause is the most real being or *ens realissimum* (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A605/B633). For Kant then, the cosmological argument relies on the ontological argument. The physico-theological argument "begin(s) from determinate experience and the special constitution of our world […]," namely that it is beautiful, ordered, and harmonious (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A591/B619). Beauty, order and harmony do not reside in the things themselves but must be the cause of a rational intelligence (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A622, 625/B650, 653). The argument culminates with equating this cause with a most real being or an *ens realissimum*, and thus also relies on the ontological argument (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A629/B657).

According to Kant, the ontological argument “abstract(s) from all experience and infer(s) the existence of a highest cause entirely *a priori* from mere concepts” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A591/B619). The argument begins from the concept of a most real being or *ens realissimum*, which by definition encompasses the whole of reality within it, and assigns necessary existence to such a being (since existence is itself part of the whole of reality) (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A594/B622). Kant's critique culminates with the idea that the judgment "God exists" is (a) either analytic or synthetic and (b) either meets the truth conditions of analytic or synthetic judgments or does not. Given that in this judgment, the predicate "existence" seems necessarily related to the concept of the subject "God" or "*ens realissimum*" in such a way that the denial of the relation entails a contradiction, (i.e. its "non-being or the cancelling of its object is contradictory"), the judgment is analytic *a priori* (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A597-598/B625-626). However, in being analytic *a priori*, i.e. necessary and universal, the judgment's truth is absolutely independent of all experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B10/11). As such, nothing accounts for the concept's applicability to an actual or even a possible object of experience.

The judgment "God exists" cannot ascertain the actual existence or real possibility of an object corresponding to the concept but merely the concept's logical possibility. It merely asserts that under the condition that God exists, God exists necessarily. The absolute necessity of the judgment is only a conditioned and not an absolute necessity according to Kant. What this means is that, although a contradiction does in fact result if we reject the predicate of necessary existence while we retain the subject of God, no contradiction arises if we reject both the subject along with the predicate (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A594/B622). If however, the judgment is meant to establish the actual existence of God, (that there is an object corresponding to the concept of God precisely because *ens realissimum* is one concept for which the rejection of its object is in itself contradictory), then the judgment is not meant to be analytic but rather synthetic. Given that (1) "God" is not an empirical but an *a priori* concept, and (2) the relation between "God" and "existence" carries with it necessity, the judgment can only be synthetic *a priori* rather than synthetic *a posteriori*. However, the judgment is a failed synthetic *a priori* truth-assertion or knowledge-claim since "God" is not a possible object of experience. It is neither given in an empirical intuition nor can be exhibited in a pure *a priori* intuition. It fails to

meet the condition of empirical meaningfulness/objective validity which is the truth-condition for synthetic *a priori* judgments (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A602/B630). As such "God" cannot be considered an object of knowledge proper since knowledge can only be that of possible objects of experience, that is, of appearances and not that of things-in-themselves apart from the subjective constitution of our minds.

In sum, the ontological argument, and by extension the other two proofs, fail to establish the existence of God. However, given that God is not an object of knowledge proper, all attempts at denying the existence of God ultimately fail as well since to deny or affirm the existence of God on empirical grounds is impossible (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A640-1/B668-9, A753/B781). It follows that Kant's denial of the knowledge of God's existence cannot be understood as a denial of God's existence as such but rather as the denial of the possibility of pronouncing oneself with theoretical certainty as to whether God exists or not. The absence of such theoretical certainty can easily translate into skepticism, which seems to be the upshot of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Nonetheless, skepticism should not be understood as the latter's final purpose. Kant's willingness to examine the consequences of his critique of traditional metaphysics,[35] as well as his stated intention to "annul knowledge in order to make room for faith," already point to Kant's overall position; that our epistemic limitations do not necessarily oblige us to adopt a noncommittal attitude regarding all metaphysical matters (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx). Rather than suspending judgment regarding all such matters altogether, Kant argues in his *Critique of Practical Reason* that we can and should have proper metaphysical beliefs regarding God's existence since these do not threaten the anti-metaphysical conclusions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In fact, they are indispensable for our practical life, and for rationality itself.

2. The relation between Kant's "Rational Theology" and his "Moral Religion"

[35] Kant examines the consequences of the demolition of traditional metaphysics in a chapter entitled the Transcendental Doctrine of Method. In the latter, Kant argues that the use of pure reason in its speculative or theoretical employment is in fact only negative since it doesn't extend knowledge but limits and guards pure reason against error (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A709/B737). However, if and when it can be demonstrated (in the *Critique of Practical Reason*) that the correct employment of pure reason is practical, it can also be demonstrated that the propositions regarding the existence of God also concern the practical.

2.1. The compatibility thesis

It is in light of Kant's intention that I want to show a relation of compatibility, continuity and dependence between his “Rational Theology” or the denial of the knowledge of God’s existence and his “Moral Religion” or the moral argument for the belief or faith in God's existence. A relation of compatibility could be established if it were possible to show that lack of knowledge (of God's existence) does not make impossible, nor necessarily entails the irrationality of, belief (in God's existence). The issue comes down to "whether, and on what grounds, is one rationally justified or warranted in 'holding something as true' where knowledge is not available?" Note that the issue is not "whether or not knowledge is the only way that we relate to what we take to be true" since not all judgments or truth-assertions are purported knowledge-claims. According to Kant, judgments lie at the very core of rational activity, for they not merely define our theoretical but practical concerns. Questions such as "What should I do"? or "What can I hope for"? are necessarily bound with what we take to be true regardless of whether knowledge is available. What distinguishes judgments or truth-assertions, then, is the degree and type of confidence or assurance with which we hold them.

In case I have both subjective and objective sufficient ground[36] for holding something as true, I hold the judgment or truth-assertion with a degree of confidence which Kant terms certainty (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A822/B850). Knowledge alone enjoys this status in relation to its truth-claims since it “immediately commands itself as truth about reality as such” (Firestone, *Kant and Theology*, 43). If the judgment is a knowledge-claim, I am rationally justified in holding it as true. Since the judgment "God exists" is not a knowledge-claim, it either belongs to the realm of opinion or that of belief/faith according to Kant. In case it lacks both objective and subjective sufficient ground, nothing accounts for its truth-value. That is, there is no available ground to justify or warrant one in ascribing it any truth-value. The degree of confidence that such a judgment enjoys is mere persuasion and thus belongs to the realm of opinion or idle speculation (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A822/B850). However, in case the judgment "God exists" were to meet the condition of subjective sufficiency, (i.e. if it were

[36] Subjective sufficiency means that my judgment is necessarily valid or true for all rational beings whereas objective sufficiency means that the object of my judgment has an empirical reference to an actual or possible object of experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A822/B850). These define a judgment's truth-value.

possible to show that it is necessarily valid or true for all rational beings), then one would be rationally warranted or justified in holding it as true despite its lack in objective sufficiency. In other words, the judgment would retain its truth-value and would enjoy a degree of confidence termed "conviction" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A822/B850).

Kant's classification of the types of judgments according to their degree of "assent" suggests that in principle, knowledge and belief/faith should not be understood or defined in opposition to one another, whereby knowledge is presumably the only rationally justifiable form of assent or "holding-as-true," whereas belief is not (Wood, *Moral Religion*, 14-15). Rather, the distinction between knowledge and belief/faith lies in their status as truth-assertions since they are merely different ways of holding something as true. They can both be termed rational enterprises (Firestone, *Kant and Theology*, 37-38, 43). Importantly however, the classification on its own is not enough to establish the compatibility thesis since we have yet to show that the judgment "God exists" in fact has subjective sufficient ground. As such, let me turn to Kant's "Moral Religion" or the moral argument for the belief or faith in God's existence, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, in order to show that such subjective sufficient ground can indeed be found.

2.1.1. Kant's moral argument for the belief in God's existence

According to Kant, human conduct is governed by practical principles[37] (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, xv). Practical principles are either Maxims or Laws (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 19). If the determining basis of a practical principle lies in its matter, it is a Maxim. It is subjectively determined and valid only for a particular will.[38] If however, the determining basis of a practical principle lies in its form, it is a Law. It has both objective necessity and universal applicability[39] (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 19, 31-32). If a practical law were found capable of determining the will, its form would necessarily be a

[37] Practical principles are rules which determine the will (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 19). In turn, the will consists of our ability to make choices and bring about a state of affairs. It is the expression of reason in its practical use.

[38] Material practical principles presuppose an object or matter as the determining basis of the will. As such, they are subjectively rather than objectively determined since they have to do with the pleasure resulting in the actualization of an object, and thus, one's own happiness or self-love (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 32-33).

[39] A practical law is grounded in formal rather than material principles. Its rule is a categorical imperative whose law-giving force stems from its universalizability (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 40-41). Otherwise, it lacks objective necessity and universal applicability necessary to be termed a law (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 32-33).

categorical imperative or command. Kant wants to show that this is none other than what we already know as the moral law[40] (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 43).

The reality of the moral law and its capacity to determine the will *a priori* is established by the most common practical use of reason[41] (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 116). Ideally, the determining ground or basis of our will should be to promote this supreme and unconditional good, i.e. the moral law, abstracted from all matter or object of volition[42] (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 94-95, 105). That is, pure practical reason demands that we conform to the moral law out of sheer duty and respect for the moral law. However, the interest of reason in its practical use is the attainment of the highest good.[43] Pure practical reason demands that we make the highest good, our end (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 138). The latter cannot merely consist of virtue, i.e. the will's perfection in determining itself in accordance with the moral law.

[40] The categorical imperative, which states "so act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principal of a universal legislation," is the sole candidate for a practical law of reason since its law-giving force stems from its universalizability. (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 45).

[41] We are immediately conscious of the moral law through (1) our capacity to distinguish between different degrees of empirical determinations of the will, i.e. lower-level and higher-level desires, and between that which is good or evil and that which is pleasurable or painful. Either all desires are empirically-based and ultimately aim at happiness or pleasure, in which case the good is the pleasurable or else, a distinction in fact exists such that higher-level desires are not empirically-conditioned (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 34, 37). Our experience already seems to suggest that the second of these must be the case given that some things are bad in a sensuous way but nonetheless good in a moral way, and vice versa (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 82). (2) The reality of the moral law is also discoverable by means of its actual application. It can be exhibited in attitudes and maxims such that we can overcome our sensuous desires which are sometimes contrary to the moral law, and choose to follow the latter (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 60-61, 76). (3) We feel the force and unconditional validity of the moral law, which further proves its reality, through moral feeling which accompanies every moral act (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 65-66). Obeying or transgressing the moral law is followed by a distinctively moral feeling, i.e. one of respect for the moral law or one of humiliation or intellectual contempt (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 98-99, 101). All these constitute practical data with regards to the reality of the moral law.

[42] Acting morally, according to Kant, cannot merely consist of fulfilling "the letter of the law" or acting to fulfill our duty, but requires the right motive. The moral act must contain "the law's spirit," i.e. fulfilling the law for the sake of, and out of respect for, the moral law, rather than out of sentiments we may have for the law (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 94-95). Otherwise, our adherence to the law depends on our liking or loving and thus, our continued pleasure at satisfying this love (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 105). If the law moved the will by means of such material rather than formal principles, that is, by any motive force except duty itself, it would defile the moral attitude and annihilate the moral worth of our actions, which would be performed out of fear or hope and thus self-interest. As such the law would cease to be a law (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 111, 113).

[43] Reason seeks to find the unconditioned totality for all things conditioned. In the theoretical sphere, reason preoccupies itself with what is the case. Its quest thus consists in acquiring complete knowledge (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A308-B365). In the practical sphere, reason preoccupies itself with what ought to be the case. Its quest thus consists in bringing objects into existence or actualizing them in the goal of furthering or acquiring the highest of all possible goods (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 137-138).

It must include our happiness (in proportion to our moral worth).[44] In other words, the end or necessary object of a will determined by the moral law, although not its determining basis, must consist of virtue and of happiness (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 141-142).

The validity of the moral law and thus the practical use of reason, rests on the idea that the highest good must be achievable.[45] However, the antinomy of practical reason is that the conditions for the possibility of the highest good cannot be met, thus making the latter unattainable (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 144-145). Specifically, the first condition of the highest good is virtue. However, a state of complete virtue or complete adequacy of the will to the moral law is impossible for finite and pathologically affected beings. (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 47-48). The finite will would take an eternity to perfect itself in order to reach this holiness (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 155). The second condition of the highest good is happiness. However, happiness does not necessarily follow as an effect from virtue in actual experience. Rather, both seem to restrict and impair one another. (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 144-146).

As such, the highest good is possible only if we postulate the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. Immortality ensures the infinite progression towards the complete adequacy of the will to the moral law[46], while the existence of a divine moral lawgiver or God ensures the commensurability of virtue and perfect happiness[47] (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 155, 158-159; *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:139, 6:181). This establishes not only the basis for the adequation of happiness and virtue but the basis for the possibility of morality.

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[44] As pathologically affected beings, we are not entirely free from our desires and inclinations which includes the pursuit of our own happiness. The latter is a rational end since it is the longing of all finite rational beings and an indispensable need of human nature itself. (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 38).

[45] Morality, which commends us to actualize or further the highest good through our will, would not be a rational enterprise if the end it prescribed were unattainable. "Ought" implies "can" otherwise "ought" is not a duty (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 144-145).

[46] The infinite progression towards the complete adequacy of the will to the moral law is possible only on the presupposition that our existence continues ad infinitum. Therefore, the highest good is practically possible on the presupposition that the soul is immortal (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 155-156).

[47] A finite being cannot through his will cause the commensurability of moral perfection or virtue and perfect happiness (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 158). The latter is possible only on the presupposition of a supreme cause of nature, a being of infinite wisdom and power whose ultimate purpose in creating the world lies in the highest good, and who is capable of bringing about such harmony (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 158-159).

The postulates of God and immortality are conditions of the necessary object, i.e. the highest good, of a will determined by the moral law (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 5-6). They are "attach[ed] inseparably to a practical law that holds *a priori* [and] unconditionally" (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 155). In turn, given the unconditionality and apodictic certainty of the moral law, i.e. it is an object of practical knowledge,[48] the grounds provided in support of the postulates should be regarded as constitutive of epistemic justification (Baiasu, Kant's Rechtfertigung and the Epistemic Nature of Practical Justification, 38). The judgment "God exists" has subjective sufficient ground (or is necessarily valid or true for all rational beings) because it is an indispensable component of reason's practical use (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5-6). This establishes the compatibility thesis and legitimizes Kant's move from the denial of God as an object of knowledge to God as an object of moral faith. The former does not make the latter impossible. In fact, both propositions, i.e. "talks about God," are concordant.

2.2. The continuity thesis

A relation of continuity also holds between Kant's "Rational Theology" and his "Moral Religion;" the completeness (although not coherence) of the first theory rests on its dialogical relationship with the second theory. Specifically, the argument for the belief or faith in God's

[48] Knowledge is not limited to the theoretical realm (Baiasu, Kant's Rechtfertigung and the Epistemic Nature of Practical Justification, 35). Recall that knowledge requires both subjective and objective validity. The condition of subjective validity is met insofar as the concept of the subject is a logically possible thought. The condition of objective validity/empirical meaningfulness is met insofar as the object is also proven to have real possibility or actuality. In the theoretical sphere, our claims have to do with what is the case or objects that exist independently of the knower (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, xix). Unless these objects are given from without by means of intuition, which constitutes the given data or content of theoretical knowledge, they cannot to be cognized at all. Thus, with regard to theoretical knowledge, actuality is attested *a posteriori* by means of empirical intuitions whereas real possibility is attested *a priori* by means of pure *a priori* intuitions of space and time. However, Kant argues that the sources of this actualizing do not have to be sought in theoretical sources of cognition, but can be sought in practical sources of cognition. (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Footnote Bxxvi) In the practical sphere, our claims are about what ought to be the case rather than what is the case (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, xix). We do not deal with objects in order to cognize them but deal with our own power to make these actual, to bring them into existence by the determination our will (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 8, 114). In the determination of our will, the moral law reveals itself with apodictic certainty as a fact of reason. It is an instance of practical knowledge insofar as its objectivity (i.e. actuality) is guaranteed by the *a priori* apodictic certainty with which it is given. We cannot reason ourselves out of the consciousness of our own freedom which consists in our power to overcome sensuous desires and follow the moral law (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 46). No further deduction of the moral law can be given least it is deduced from empirical grounds, in which case, it loses its law-like, unconditional and universally applicable status (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 65-66). (See footnote 29).

existence is a reformulation of, if not a partial practical response to, the problem of incompleteness faced by reason in the theoretical sphere.

Reason's cognitive role or function, as opposed to other cognitive faculties, is to bring systematic unity to the manifold of empirical cognition (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A303/B358, A671/B699). Reason seeks to "find for the conditioned knowledge given through the understanding, the unconditioned, whereby its unity is brought to completion" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A308/B364). In order to think such unity, reason is compelled to speak about nature as if there were a first cause (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A586/B614, A616/B644). In other words, given that all objects of experience seem to presuppose and point to a determinate condition or cause, reason "naturally" or inevitably comes up with the concept of *ens realissimum*, the concept of a most real being or God. The latter contains all reality within itself and grounds all things conditioned (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A576/B604, A616/B644). Now, ideas of reason are necessary since they function as regulative[49] principles that allow reason to move from that which is particular to that which is universal and thus to make sense of reality in a unified, systematic and coherent manner (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A671/B699).

In its self-determination however, reason is faced with an irresolvable problem in the theoretical realm. Reason's quest for the completion of knowledge and explanation of nature can never be achieved (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A616/B644). On one hand, the sole purpose of reason and of its principles in the theoretical sphere is negative. Reason alone cannot be used to gain knowledge; it merely organizes and unifies knowledge gained by the other faculties. If reason's regulative principles are taken to be constitutive of knowledge, reason immediately falls into dialectical illusion since it assigns objective reality to concepts that have no corresponding intuition (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A308/B366). On the other hand, reason's tendency towards extra-empirical knowledge, i.e. knowledge of things-in-themselves, is necessary. Although things-in-themselves are not objects in any sense and cannot be subjected to either our modes of intuition or our categories, we must nonetheless speak or think (even if not

[49] These ideas are regulative in that they are useful principles, subjectively rather than objectively speaking. They cannot extend our knowledge of objects outside of experience (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A616/B44).

speculatively cognize) of them as things-in-themselves (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxvi). The conceptual space or "world" which things-in-themselves seem to occupy even in the negative sense of "that which cannot be known" speaks to us in various ways. First, they speak to us in terms of utility since principles of reason play a role in the systematic unification of the manifold of empirical cognition. In turn, this makes scientific theoretical pursuits possible, if not knowledge itself. One such theoretical aim is the pursuit of scientific knowledge, as guided by the idea that nature is governed by universal or general laws and that these are discoverable (Firestone, *Kant and Theology*, 27-28). Secondly, the reality of things-in-themselves speaks to us in the sense of affection. In at least one acceptation of Kant's doctrine, without things-in-themselves, our sensibility or our passivity in receiving sensations from the world would be impossible (Firestone, *Kant and Theology*, 27-28). There would be appearances without anything that appears (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxvi). Unless the existence of things-in-themselves is at least problematically or tacitly assumed, experience is not possible (Firestone, *Kant and Theology*, 27-28). Faced with the emerging sense of incompleteness with regards to knowledge in the theoretical realm, reason is thus left wanting and dissatisfied (Firestone, *Kant and Theology*, 27).

Faith or belief in God's existence is a partial practical response to the problem of incompleteness faced by reason in the theoretical sphere (Firestone, *Kant and Theology*, 27). It is a "partial practical response" for two reasons. (1) This problematic cannot be entirely resolved least we also admit a halt in the pursuit of reason's theoretical cognitive aims and the eradication of the sensible boundaries which make knowledge possible (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A616/B644). The unity sought by reason is and must remain merely a projected unity. (2) The moral arguments for the possibility of God's existence thus serve as a kind of substitute for the theoretical proofs for God's existence rejected in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Wood, Rational Theology, Moral Faith, and Religion, 403). Whereas ideas or principles of reason are not objects of knowledge in the theoretical sphere, they are granted objective reality in the practical realm (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 8). What justifies this move has to do with (a) what "objectivity" means in relation to ideas or principles of reason and (b) the demand imposed by pure practical reason which has primacy over theoretical reason.

(a) "Granting objective reality" to ideas or principles of reason in the practical sphere cannot be equated with the kind of "objective reality" assigned to objects of knowledge whereby an object is proven to have real possibility or actuality. God and immortality are not objects of theoretical knowledge, and have no corresponding intuition (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 170-171). Moreover, they are not objects of practical knowledge such as the moral law whose objective reality is given with apodictic certainty. According to Kant, to say that we "grant objective reality" to ideas or principles of reason therefore, is to say that objects must belong to these concepts necessarily (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 170-171). The possibility of the practical use of our reason depends on such possibility. However, the determination of these concepts is restricted to what is absolutely necessary for the possibility of thinking, and carrying out, the moral law (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 173-174). To say that God is "the *alone holy one*, the *alone blessed one*, the *alone wise one*" does not expand speculative cognition nor is it a dogmatic attribution of perfections to God (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 166, 177). Rather, such attributions are "one and all moral." (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 166). The moral law's possibility rests on the determination of the concept of the original being as Supreme Being. It admits the concept of God only on the presupposition that God has the highest perfection. (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 177). Thus, according to Kant, that God has the highest perfection is a reasonable hypothesis while granting objective reality to the concept of God is a legitimate move.

(b) What justifies the objectification of the concepts of God and immortality is the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason. The primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason rests on the idea that reason is one and the same reason in both its theoretical and practical use. It must be internally consistent (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 152-153). As such, the relationship between theoretical and practical reason must be one of subordination since either reason's principles, i.e. freedom, immortality and God, are granted objective reality by means of standards which define reason's practical use or denied such objective reality by means of those which define reason's theoretical use. If speculative reason had primacy, it would then not admit propositions of practical reason. Rather, it would reject these as empty reasoning since their objective reality could not be authenticated by means of examples adduced in experience. Experience gives us no warrant in assuming the objective reality of freedom,

immortality and God. However, given that non-empirically conditioned reason determines the will,[50] and granting objective reality to ideas or principles of reason does not constitute an expansion or an overstepping of the boundaries of theoretical knowledge, practical reason must have primacy over theoretical reason (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 154-155). In sum, moral faith or belief in God's existence seems to be an attempt to satisfy practically an otherwise rational need or lack, that cannot be satisfied theoretically (Wood, Rational Theology, Moral Faith, and Religion, 405). This establishes a relation of continuity between Kant's "Rational Theology" and his "Moral Religion."

2.3. The dependency thesis

Finally, a relation of dependence can be established between Kant's "Rational Theology" and his "Moral Religion" based on the idea that the very nature, scope, and definition of moral rational faith is dependent on, and conditioned by, the restrictions on knowledge established in the theoretical sphere.

First, it is absolutely necessary that the morally inclined should not "know" God in the theoretical sense[51]. According to Kant, there is nothing to know about morality. Its very nature and existence depends on faith rather than knowledge. (Kant, *Lectures*, 28:1084). In case knowledge of God's existence were available, acting morally would turn into a sensuous and impulsive enterprise (Kant, *Lectures*, 28:1091). Moral motives would be replaced by hope for reward or fear of God's punishment since God would inevitably be represented as one who rewards or punishes. "This image would force itself involuntarily on the soul" (Kant, *Lectures*, 28:1084, 1091). Consequently, this would annihilate the moral worth of our actions since rather than pursuing morality for the sake of, and out of respect for, the moral law, our emphasis would

[50] That non-empirically conditioned reason determines the will is another way of saying that practical reason is pure. In being pure, it is independent of pathological conditions or inclinations. Unlike theoretical reason, it does not fall into error as soon as it attempts to gain knowledge independently of the contribution of the faculties of sensibility and understanding. In other words, given that reason is practical, it alone is immanent, i.e. keeps within the limits of possible experience, and therefore the empirically conditioned use of practical reason is transcendent and goes beyond reason's domain (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 15-16, 40-41).

[51] To know God in the theoretical sense would also imply that (1) God, among other objects of knowledge, is a finite and empirically-determined and thus empirically limited being rather than an absolute being or (2) that finite rational beings are capable of intellectual intuition or knowing God as a thing-in-itself rather than as God appears to the finite rational mind by means of the subjective contribution of the mind's faculties.

be placed on external acts of faith designed to be pleasing to God (Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:192, 194; *Critique of Practical Reason*, 185-186). Thus, knowledge of God's existence would be detrimental to moral faith and morality.

Secondly, moral faith rests on the notion that God's existence should not be impossible. If it were possible to establish with theoretical certainty that God did not exist, then there would be no rational justification for believing in God's existence. According to Kant however, "without God I would have to be either a visionary or a scoundrel [and] I would have to deny my own [rational] nature and its eternal moral laws" (Kant, *Lectures*, 28:1072). This is what Wood terms the *ad absurdum practicum* argument, which states that one commits oneself to a practical irrationality if one does not commit oneself to a belief or faith in God's existence. Distinguished from an *absurdum logicum*, which is an inconsistency in judgments, an *absurdum practicum* is the result of the denial of a practical rational necessity which leads one to an "unwelcome conclusion" about oneself as a moral agent and thus makes one a scoundrel (Wood, *Moral Religion*, 29). The moral argument is a *reductio ad absurdum practicum* precisely because if I cannot admit God's existence, then I cannot commit myself to the belief that the highest good is attainable since the former is one of its conditions (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 181). Note that one is still free to choose whether to believe in the existence of God or not. However, if no other way can be found to make the highest good possible, I am rationally obliged and not merely justified in postulating God's existence (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, lii-liii). In other words, if I pursue what I do not take to be possible, i.e. if I pursue morality without believing that the highest good is attainable, I am simply irrational (Wood, *Moral Religion*, 29-30). I should then give up on this irrational pursuit and accept an unwanted conclusion about myself, namely, that I am a scoundrel. Given that this conclusion is unbearable, I must believe or have faith in God's existence (Wood, *Moral Religion*, 29-30). In this way, moral rational faith necessarily depends on the possibility of God's existence but also necessarily on the lack of its knowability. In sum, empirical cognition seems to shape the very nature of moral rational faith and limits the scope in which it can be meaningful. This establishes the relation of dependence between Kant's "Rational Theology" and his "Moral Religion."

In sum, Kant's philosophy of religion culminates with the idea that the absence of knowledge of God does not necessarily lead to the lack, the impossibility or the irrationality of belief or faith in God's existence. Rather the particular restrictions on knowledge set by his *Critique of Pure Reason* are essential insofar as they allow God to acquire reality, and faith to acquire rational grounding, in the practical realm. Let us turn to Fichte's philosophy of religion to see whether, and in what way, the concept of God may be positioned with respect to that of experience as such.

Chapter Two: The concept of the God in Fichte's philosophy of religion

Fichte's "philosophy of religion" is characterized by an apparent tension between the 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre*'s[52] quest for, and possibility of, absolute knowledge or truth and the absolute impossibility of such knowledge or truth. This tension raises an important concern as to whether, and in what way, the absolute - understood as being in-itself, for-itself and by-itself and as the ground of the manifold of experience - nonetheless allows conceivability from within the standpoint of experience. In other words, how can the inconceivable be conceived?[53]

Relying on Fichte's criticism of both idealism and realism, I first argue that neither of these views represents absolute truth. On one hand, these positions run counter to the alleged aspiration and role of a philosophical system. Rather than presenting truth as absolute oneness, i.e. having its opposite or antithesis purely contained within itself, these positions are absolutely opposed, incomplete and mutually dependent. On the other hand, these philosophical positions misconstrue the nature of truth since they are factical; from within these standpoints, the Absolute exists as a fact. I secondly argue that this criticism is essential insofar as the *Wissenschaftslehre* wants to avoid these previous difficulties in its quest for absolute knowledge. Specifically, the *Wissenschaftslehre* distinguishes itself from other philosophies without

[52] The aim of *The Science of Knowing*, Fichte's 1804 *Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, is to provide a true account of experience, including the conditions of the possibility of the knowing subject (the I) for whom a world (the not-I) must appear. Fichte's argument culminates with the idea that the finite knowing subject does not have its source in itself. The task becomes one of deducing the finite knowing subject from its absolute and unlimited ground, which must be understood as being in-itself, for-itself and by-itself. Note that Fichte uses both "God" and the "Absolute" interchangeably in the 1804 *Science of Knowing*: *Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*. I will not subject this equation to critique, for reasons of space. However, I do want to note that in his 1806 *Doctrine of Religion*, Fichte will deliberately change the use of the term Absolute to that of God in order to speak of the relationship between God's being (*Seyn*) and God's existence (*Daseyn*) as the relationship between the absolute source or ground of conscious existence and conscious existence itself (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 340).

[53] My discussion will not be limited to Fichte's 1804 *Science of Knowing*: *Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, but will draw upon his 1794/1797 *Science of Knowledge*, the 1800 *The Vocation of Man* and the 1806 *Doctrine of Religion*. My intention is to bring to light certain themes of Fichte's philosophy of religion that reoccur in his different expositions of his *Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte's varied presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, as well as his "Popular Writings," speak not only to his desire to reach different audiences but ultimately his desire to be understood. Although it is not my wish to argue for or against any unity or coherence across Fichte's writings in relation to its content, even less so in a footnote, one must acknowledge the significance of some of the latter's reoccurring themes. Moreover, I make a visible return to Fichte's 1794/1797 *Science of Knowledge* when I discuss the conditions of the possibility of both consciousness and self-consciousness. This return is essential insofar as it provides an in-depth explanation of some of the contents of the 1804 *Science of Knowing*: *Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, particularly with regards to Fichte's refutation of higher idealism and the latter's distinction from "higher realism;" the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s position. Note that I will be referring to Fichte's works by title and year to make it easier for the reader to distinguish the different presentations of his Science.

opposing itself absolutely to them and presents truth as absolute oneness, without rendering it into an absolute fact. It does this by means of its particular genetic constructive method, which traces back all facts of consciousness or principles of would-be absolute positions to their absolute source or genesis, that is, to the highest point of unity in which there are neither disjunctions nor conjunctions, and thus no opposing term. I demonstrate that in this genesis, one must gradually negotiate and traverse three necessary moments, including the refutation of factical realism and the refutation of higher idealism. The resulting higher form of realism, the position of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, culminates with the idea that absolute truth or knowledge is impossible. The nature and structure of consciousness is such that it is unable to conceive absolute oneness or truth. Nonetheless, higher realism gives us a way to conceptualize even this; to conceive the inconceivable albeit (as) absolutely inconceivable. The latter genetic insight can only emerge as a result of a positive reconstruction of truth through the medium of conception and the subsequent annulment of such a conception, ultimately implying that truth must be an enactment or a coming-to-be of genuine philosophical knowing rather than a fact or assertion. I thirdly argue that although consciousness is in a state of alienation with regard to the absolute, reconciliation is nonetheless possible. The absolute gap or hiatus between consciousness and its absolute source can neither be removed nor filled by us conceptually. Rather, this gap can only be filled by us practically, in the very act of living. Ultimately this means living in a way that best exhibits or manifests the presence of the Absolute in us.

1. The nature of truth in relation to philosophy

The very nature of philosophical inquiry rests on the assumption that truth is possible and communicable, not least because all philosophies up until now, in some form or another, have attempted to elucidate what they take to be true (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 23). Although all philosophical systems have this task in common, they nonetheless differ in their presentation of the truth. Now if truth is possible and communicable[54], which is itself at issue here, then philosophy must present the truth as unchangeable and its opposite or antithesis must

[54] This is Fichte's attempt to guard one against the immediate adoption of the view which goes by the maxim that we ought to embrace no particular view or truth because either no such truth is possible nor communicable or because no advantage can arise from the knowledge of it. According to Fichte, whether skepticism is itself a tenable position or not can only be ascertained by means and as a result of an inquiry regarding the nature and possibility of truth (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 481-482).

be purely contained within itself. In other words, truth cannot be a multiplicity, but rather an invariability of opinion, otherwise there will be many different philosophies, presenting each their own absolute truth and “either all or all except one will be false” (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 22-24). As such, given that truth must be absolute oneness, to present the truth is to trace all multiplicity to absolute oneness (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 23-24). "Multiplicity" refers to anything that can be distinguished or that which has an antithesis and "tracing back" means conceiving both multiplicity through oneness and oneness through multiplicity (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 24).

The aim of philosophy is to make reality intelligible, that is, to provide a true account of experience. Two basic philosophies, idealism and realism, attempt to provide such an account by means of a single principle by which everything is to be explained and from which all things are to be derived. Fichte's clearest conception of experience is found in his 1794/1797 *Science of Knowledge*, where he defines it as "the system of presentations accompanied by the feeling of necessity"[55] (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 6). On one hand, it consists of the presence of objects/things (i.e. being) which we see, hear, feel. The immediate grasp of objects/things by means of outward sensible perception is termed "intuition." On the other hand, experience also consists of an intelligence (i.e. thinking) which knows or thinks these objects/things. The consciousness or knowledge of objects/things by means of inward conception is termed "concept" (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 333). The co-existence and inseparability of these distinct elements make experience possible (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 8).

Idealism locates itself in the standpoint of thinking[56], and makes this standpoint absolute. It makes concept primordial, and intuition subordinate. As such, reason or the energy of reflection (i.e. thinking) is taken to be the source or principle of both intuition, and of the object/thing (i.e. being) that appears in intuition (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 88-89). Note

[55] These are presentations which refer to a reality which we take to be established independently of us, as opposed to presentations accompanied by the feeling of freedom or those which appear to us completely dependent on our imagination or will, and not answering to a reality outside of ourselves and our activity (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 6).

[56] Fichte will use the term "thinking" interchangeably with reason, the inner conceptual life, the essence of knowing, the energy of reflection, intelligence, and activity of the intellect.

that inward conception or consciousness embraces the outward sense itself. We are conscious of our seeing, hearing, feeling but can by no means see, hear, feel our consciousness (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 334). According to the idealistic standpoint, this last observation seems to lend support to the idea that there is no certainty about the nature of objects outside of us so much as that of our own condition or the laws according to which we think; according to which we produce a presentation of an object (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 37, 43, 44). Thus, according to idealism, experience must be a product of intelligence or the activity of the intellect in such a way that 1) minds produce their own experience according to the laws of their own constitution and 2) things or objects (i.e. being) that we intuit and conceptualize have no reality save for an intelligence (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 9; *Vocation of Man*, 1800, x) Reason exists as an absolute fact and allows itself to be intuited since that merely requires making intelligible the laws of reason's own constitution (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 88-89).

Realism, with a negative or oppositional relationship to idealism, abstracts entirely from thinking and presupposes the bare content of its thought, the being of knowledge that appears in thinking, as the origin and principle of both intuition and concept. According to realism, thinking or reason cannot be taken as absolute since there must be something, namely "life,"[57] which first makes possible and animates the concept. According to realism, experience is a product of nature or the world of matter in such a way that the latter produces conscious beings and causes experience in them (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 9; *Vocation of Man*, 1800, x). As such, the Absolute cannot be intuited because we cannot explain how life or the force of nature produces thought since everything explainable is explained by it (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 91-92; *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 11-12).

2. Fichte's critique of idealism and realism

[57] Life, in the realistic perspective, is equated with the force of nature by which the intelligent or conceptualizing subject for whom objects/things appear in intuition and thought, first comes to be (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 11). In a realistic mode of thinking, all determinate things have definite number of properties, come to be and cease to be by a constant process of change and through a cause or an existence outside of themselves. Given that I myself am a determinate being, with a definite amount of properties, I could not have come into existence through myself since I couldn't have existed before I existed in order to bring myself into existence (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 11). As such, I am a link in this chain of causal necessity and have come to be through a force of nature outside of me, namely, life (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 6-7, 11).

According to Fichte, neither of these views represents absolute truth. The first of Fichte's two-fold critique of idealism and realism culminates in the idea that none of these views can provide a true account of experience. The problem of accounting for experience is really one of accounting for the difference between subjectivity (thinking) and objectivity (being) without annihilating either, or reducing either to the other. However, idealism cannot account for the nature of objectivity, having annihilated its possibility[58], while realism cannot account for the nature of subjectivity having reduced it to mere being or thing-in-itself.[59] A such, idealism and realism are absolutely opposed, incomplete and mutually dependent philosophical positions, such that either "the independence of the thing or the independence of the self [is necessarily] sacrificed" at the expense of the other (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 14). Neither of these two systems can directly refute its opposite given that their quarrel is about the first principle, which cannot be derived further but must be presupposed. In other words, there is no way of discerning which Absolute should be taken as absolute.

According to the nature of the Absolute or absolute oneness, the latter can no more reside in subjective knowing, (i.e. thinking), than in the thing-in-itself, (i.e. being), as realism and idealism would have it. This is because 1) knowledge is always knowledge of something or some being; knowledge presupposes a being and its correlative consciousness, without which knowledge of any particular thing would be impossible. 2) One arrives at the thing-in-itself only through objectification and abstraction from oneself and thus presupposes such a self for whom this being is an object (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 25-26, 28, 34-35). That said, both 'absolutes' stand in a relation of opposition in such a way that they are necessarily two terms of a more original disjunction or division. The principle of their disjunction must also be the principle of their indivisibility or unification (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 25-26). This is because every unfolding of opposites, according to Fichte, takes place within the scope of their unity, the

[58] Idealism cannot account for the nature of objectivity. Idealism wants to explain the representations of consciousness on the basis of the activity of the intellect in such a way that the intellect is absolute. However, in being postulated as the first and highest principle, it must be understood as pure activity, it cannot be preceded by anything which could account for a passivity therein. The problem with the intellect being an act is that it has no being proper. We cannot deduce out of the intellect which is indeterminate, all determinate things like the world, presentations and phenomena since a determinate cannot be deduced from an indeterminate (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 21).

[59] Realism cannot account for the nature of subjectivity since it cannot bridge the gap or hiatus between things and presentations. It cannot provide a deduction of consciousness because that requires a leap from things to representations (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 21).

unity that first makes their movement possible (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 52). In other words, if absolute oneness is to be conceived, it must be conceived as located in between being (thing) and thinking (its correlative consciousness)[60].

Now although Kant, by way of his transcendental idealism, conceived the Absolute as the union of being and thinking, he ultimately took this union to be absolute (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 30-31, 37-38). Kant objectified and externalized the essence of knowing in what he defined as the transcendental unity of apperception.[61] In so doing, a disjunction was created between absolute oneness and division such that they opposed one another as two absolutes in need of a common root, i.e. a third absolute. However, if the union is taken as absolute, the division is equally absolute since it absolutely opposes the unity. The Absolute must simultaneously posit and annul both the oneness of being and thinking and the division between

[60] Fichte terms this principle pure knowing or knowing in itself. He characterizes the latter as an objectless knowing, i.e. a knowing of no particular thing, because 1) knowing always remains knowing no matter what the object variations, i.e. knowledge is self-identical independently of all subjectivity and objectivity and 2) otherwise we are forced to presuppose some other consciousness which knows this thing and in turn, presupposes a being, ad infinitum (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 25-26, 35).

[61] Recall that Kant was concerned, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, with the conditions for the possibility of experience and knowledge (i.e. the unfolding of experience). This concern included overcoming the dualism between idealism or rationalism and realism or empiricism. Kant's transcendental idealist and empirical realist position holds that knowledge is possible only by the union of intuition and concept, i.e. our capacity to receive representations through our faculty of sensibility by means of *a priori* intuitions of space and time and to subject these received representations to the faculty of the understanding which allows the thinking of objects through concepts (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A52/B76). The highest principle of synthesis between sensibility and understanding is the transcendental unity of apperception. However, according to Fichte, the latter has a problematic status. Although the postulation of a unifying self (i.e. that "I think must accompany all my presentations") is a necessary one, for otherwise one is unable to think of one's experiences as one's own or as belonging to a single consciousness, such an abiding self cannot be known; under Kantian terms knowledge requires the union of sensible intuition and concept which the transcendental unity of apperception itself makes possible. Kant is thus lead to explain, by means of inference rather than deduction, what is given in experience by transcending experience, to what lies beyond the limits of experience. However, if knowledge is limited to what is given in the experience of consciousness, we cannot properly know in the Kantian sense what lies beyond it. According to Fichte, this raises the question as to whether Kant can provide a successful account of how experience unfolds, let alone how it originates. Fichte's claim is that if the essence of philosophy is to discover the root of being and thinking, then it must provide the actual conceptual derivation of both terms from a single principle (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 32). In other words, it cannot merely admit of this unifying principle, as Kant does with regards to the transcendental unity of apperception, as a given fact which is itself nonetheless inconceivable. A science, according to Fichte, must admit absolutely nothing inconceivable. If however, this turns out to be impossible, then a science must at best be capable to say at what point absolute conceivability or intelligibility begins and admit what is absolutely inconceivable as absolutely inconceivable (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 32). From Fichte's perspective, Kant is unable to do so precisely because of the status of the thing-in-itself, i.e. an inconceivable yet necessary postulate for the possibility of experience. Thus the debate concerning the dualism between idealism and realism must also be re-evaluated.

being and thinking (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 38, 42). At bottom, the *Science of Knowing* cannot take either being nor thinking nor the union of these nor their division as absolute because the Absolute does not allow for antithesis or disjunctions. If the Absolute is to be conceived, then it must be conceived as absolutely one and not many. This implies that it must be (1) all-encompassing, (otherwise there will be something existing apart from, or outside of the absolute, in such a way that the latter will itself constitute part of the manifold), (2) absolutely unchangeable, (i.e. nothing new can arise nor change within the Absolute since that requires division) and (3) self-sufficient, (i.e. the Absolute must be absolutely independent and requiring no other being to account for its being, otherwise another being will be presupposed, which in turn will presuppose another being, so on ad infinitum). In other words, the Absolute must be conceived as being through itself, by itself and from itself.

The second of Fichte's two-fold criticism of idealism, realism and now also Kant's transcendental idealism culminates in the idea that all three philosophical perspectives are at bottom "factical." Either thinking or being or the union of thinking and being, are taken as absolute facts. This means that in these perspectives, the Absolute exists as a fact, whether it can be intuited or not (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 89, 92). However, this is problematic in two respects. First, although there is no denying that consciousness is confronted with facts, which in turn seem to have a certain "giveness" and absoluteness about them, facts are not what they appear to be (Di Giovanni, Sacramentalizing the World, 222-223). Namely, there is a certain non-transparency or "hideness" concerning the facts of consciousness precisely because mere facts give the illusion of determinateness, completeness, and transparency but conceal the fact that they have no insight into their own origin (Waibel, Breazeale & Rockmore, *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition*, 223, 238, 240). Facts cannot account for themselves. The "giveness" or "already thereness" of would-be absolute facts do not carry an explanation of their being there (Di Giovanni, Sacramentalizing the World, 222-223). Rather their "thereness" resists explanation because all things are meant to be derived and explained by them. It is in this way that these positions cannot provide the justification for what grounds them as would-be absolute facts or absolute positions.

Secondly, the Absolute cannot be a fact - posited "as" absolute - for that implies living in the image of this "as" such that the absolute's absoluteness is itself mediated by a higher concept. To clarify, given any particular object, to denote it "as" something or to say that it "is" something, is to represent it. According to Fichte, a representation is at bottom a "schema" or an imaginative construction by virtue of which something is represented or characterized by means of a concept. Two elements characterize the nature of a schema. 1) A true schema is one which in fact represents what it intends to represent and false in case it fails to do so. 2) A schema or representation requires, and is only made possible, by a distance between subject and object, namely, between the act of the subject which represents an object by means of a concept and the being-in-itself of that object apart from the thinking subject. In other words, whatever the "is" or "as" designates is not the object itself or its being-in-itself but rather always and already the object's "being out of its being," i.e. its appearance, its outward existence in the concept or again, the act by which its being is determined[62] (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 340). Given that the representation or characterization of an object does not belong to it but is rather said of, or about, it, representation presupposes a place outside the object itself from which the representing is made possible. However, with regard to the absolute, representation is always and already a distortion of the absolute; it is a false schema which does not and cannot represent what it intends to represent (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 340-341). This is because 1) there is no place outside the Absolute from where to speak of it. The existence of a place outside the absolute, from which the attribution would have to be made about it, would limit its all-encompassing nature; the Absolute would stand beside this independent determining act or subject, now as a part of the manifold (Di Giovanni, Sacramentalizing the World, 225). 2) The representation of the Absolute "as" absolute implies that it lives in, by, and through itself and also appears and lives in an image as itself, doubling itself as it were (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 57; Di Giovanni, Sacramentalizing the World, 225). However, this is in absolute contradiction to its indivisibility and unchangeability. Recall that nothing new can arise nor change within the Absolute since that requires division.

[62] Note that this is closely tied to Kant's theory of cognition, which is at bottom representational and which implies that all knowledge is tied to the form of representation; that knowledge falls apart into subject and object and creates a distance between the perception of an object in the inner subject (or reality as it appears to the thinking subject) and the being-in-itself of that object (or reality as it is in-itself apart from the thinking subject). In turn knowledge is limited to that of appearances rather than that of things-in-themselves.

3. The genesis of knowledge: three necessary steps

If the *Science of Knowing* is to represent the Absolute truthfully, and thus make the Absolute or truth discernible from the standpoint of knowledge, it must successfully meet the demands of its own two-fold critique. Specifically, the *Science of Knowing* must distinguish itself from all other philosophies without however opposing itself absolutely to them, and must present the Absolute as being through itself, by itself and from itself, while avoiding making the Absolute into an absolute fact.

Rejecting idealism and realism entirely in favor of a wholly different position will only lead to another absolute position, which implies further opposition and multiplicity rather than absolute oneness. This is precisely what Fichte wants to avoid.[63] As such, the *Science of Knowing* will be concerned with "deriving [all principles of would-be absolute positions] genetically." (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 25) The "genetic constructive method"[64] traces back all facts or contents of consciousness to their source or genesis, by identifying and undermining oppositions or disjunctions within all would-be absolute standpoints by means of conjunctions (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 95-96). In other words, all positions are treated as "natural disjunctions of common knowing." The goal is to identify them as contradictions and overcome their facticity[65] (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 95). This genesis will be performed until we arrive at the intellectual space or context in which all facts can be derived as products or results of a higher principle, i.e. the highest point of unity in which there is no disjunctions nor conjunctions. Now in case the highest principle or the Absolute denies all conceivability, then the *Science of Knowing* will at least have arrived at the point where absolute conceivability begins and where its limit lies, having explained how consciousness becomes factical, at which

[63] The *Science of Knowing* must proceed to present a different principle of absolute oneness, i.e. one which is the highest principle of all disjunctions rather than a product of a disjunction with an opposing term. (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 25)

[64] This is at bottom a dialectical procedure which involves analyzing a given concept or position (thesis) until a contradiction or opposition (antithesis) arises. The two terms of the contradiction are then synthesized or reconciled giving rise to a new concept as the synthesizing one (synthesis) (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, xiii, 113).

[65] The "overcoming" of mere facticity, or the radical finitude or imperfection of consciousness which understands itself as an image of facts, which presumably exist by themselves, reflects the first aspect of the dual nature of the *Science of Knowing* (Waibel, Breazeale & Rockmore, *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition*, 224, 238). Specifically, as a doctrine of truth or reason, it must ascend from phenomena to truth, or to trace all multiplicity and everything that can be distinguished or has an antithesis, to absolute oneness or truth. (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 23, 107).

point appearances become appearances and facts become facts (Waibel, Breazeale & Rockmore, *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition*, 246).[66]

3.1. The refutation of factical realism

I argue that in the application of this genetic method, one must gradually negotiate and traverse three necessary moments in the reappropriation of facticity as 'true' facticity as opposed to 'mere' facticity. These are, respectively, the refutation of factical realism, the refutation of higher idealism and finally the resulting higher form of realism; the position of the *Science of Knowing*. Fichte chooses to develop the factical principle of realism rather than that of idealism in the first moment of the investigation of their facticity. This is Fichte's starting-point since realism, having denied the principle on which idealism rests, at least acknowledges idealism in a negative relationship, whereas for idealism, realism is impossible. Recall that realism abstracts from thinking or reason and identifies the content or being of knowledge which appears in thinking, i.e. life, as absolute (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 96-97). In doing so, realism recognizes the reality of thinking or reason even if it ultimately reduces subjectivity to mere being or thing-in-itself (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 21). Idealism however, annihilates the possibility of objectivity 'tout court' and with it, makes even the beginnings of realism impossible (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 21). Given this starting-point, the *Science of Knowing* does not affirm the absolute validity of realism as opposed to idealism. Nor does it wish to negate it absolutely. Rather, it wants to catch it in self-contradiction and correct it. Fichte claims that in this discovered contradiction, a disjunction will appear and factical realism will allow itself to be understood genetically (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 97).

In opposition to factical idealism's claim that reason exists as a fact and allows itself to be intuited, realism's strength lay precisely in what it took as the absolute, namely, life's in-itself and within-itself. In realism, the in-itself has meaning only to the extent that it completely denies all construction, and all constructability. It exists independently of any asserting, thinking, and intuiting and is to be described purely as what negates thinking (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*,

[66] The "reappropriation" of true facticity reflects the second aspect of the dual nature of the *Science of Knowing*, that is to say, as doctrine of true phenomena or appearance, it must descend from truth to appearance with a positive appraisal of the phenomenal world as phenomena and not mere appearance. This means understanding the nature of facts as merely facts (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 107).

1804, 97). However, this is precisely where realism's self-contradiction lies. Specifically, to bring about this very in-itself, I must think the in-itself energetically. My insight into the negation of thinking in itself presupposes positive thought, and so only "in thought, thinking annuls itself in the face of the in-itself" (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 98). Based on this observation, factical realism has been refuted since we can never get past the fundamental negation of ourselves or our very thinking over against the Absolute in order to get to the Absolute.

Nonetheless, this last discovery is of great importance. That "thinking annuls itself in the face of the in-itself" is immediately evident. Fichte calls this the "absolute intuition" since the Absolute in-itself is found here. What the absolute intuition projects is negation, an absolute pure nothing; the annihilation or destruction of the concept that stands in strict opposition to the Absolute in-itself (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 98). Note that we could not have constructed the in-itself in this immediately true and clear concept; as previously demonstrated, the Absolute denies all construction, and all constructability [67]. As such, and this is the first defining feature of higher realism,[68] the in-itself must construct itself by means of itself. It must bind itself with absolute intuition. In other words, the Absolute constructs itself in this immediate intuition in such a way that its absolute self-construction and absolute intuition are one. They presuppose each other in their arising. However, in so far as we carry out this construction, we do not occur or exist independently of the absolute. If we are to do justice to the absolute's nature, rather than falsify it, we must not objectify the Absolute (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 122). We must remove all negative or positive determination and all relativity from our conception of the absolute. This precisely means that we can no longer think of the Absolute as a being set over against our knowing. Instead, we must identity with it through or by means of that knowing. The Absolute must be conceived as a living principle which lives in us and manifests itself through us. It is that which sets itself down in our knowing and as our knowing according

[67] Given the absolute's nature as being in-itself, by-itself and through-itself, it must necessarily be the Absolute which constructs itself to the extent that this construction occurs.

[68] As we shall see, higher realism, the position of the *Science of Knowing*, which supersedes and takes up into itself both factical realism and idealism which have been refuted, is a position which recognizes that no fact of consciousness can be taken as absolute since to reflect on oneness or truth is to see it not as pure oneness but as a unity-in-relation or a unity-in-difference. By means of higher realism, we conceptualize this, i.e. we have the absolute insight or intuition, and thus we pause and relinquish ourselves from this *Evidenz* or intuition since it is null, negating and without meaning.

to Fichte. Note that this does not means that the Absolute is known to us or that we are constructing it originally, since we cannot. It is merely known by us or known to itself through us, through the exhibition of this act itself, namely the act of conscious existence (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 98-99).

What then does Fichte mean when he argues that the Absolute is "known by us" or "sets itself down in our knowing and as our knowing" as opposed to "known to us"? Fichte's attempt is to bring out the lively nature of the absolute, namely, that it exists in the concept as living rather than in intuition as dead (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 98-99). The testimony of intuition is invalid when it comes to the absolute. Particularly, insofar as the Absolute appears in absolute intuition, it always and already appears as relative to a not in-itself, i.e. as that which negates asserting, thinking, and intuiting. As such, it does not appear in intuition as it is in-itself, removed from all positive or negative determination and all relativity, but always as part of a relation of opposition (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 98). In any particular determination, as expressed in the judgment that so and so is or exists, we always and already have done it by way of a maxim or a law based on negation. Anything "is" insofar as it "is not" something else. So the in-itself, in any such determination, (when we think it or are aware of thinking it), is always an object of intuition, namely, negating, dead, and a pure nothing. Note that based on this last observation, factical idealism has also been refuted, having claimed that the Absolute allows itself to be intuited. The absolute, argues Fichte, must rather be understood to exist in the concept as living. Although this will only be qualified in what follows, this is the first formulation, under the higher realist perspective, of the absolute's presence in the exhibition of the act of thinking or conceptualization (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 98-99).

3.2. The refutation of higher idealism

In the second necessary moment, a new idealism, higher idealism, is presented. It attempts to establish itself against this new higher realism. This new perspective claims that we must have energetically reflected on the in-itself, which itself negated vision. That the in-itself constructs itself by means of itself and binds itself with absolute intuition is nevertheless qualified in and by our own vigorous reflection. Thus, the in-itself could only have appeared as a

result of this reflection (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 102). As such, higher idealism make consciousness absolute. [69] Nonetheless, this new higher idealism, according to Fichte, is still factical; the only thing that can attest to our thinking actually is our consciousness of this thinking. It remains completely ambiguous whether thinking or consciousness originates from self-consciousness, or whether self-consciousness arises from thinking or consciousness. "Which is more primordial?" Perhaps both may be mere appearances of a deeper hidden oneness which is more primordial still and which grounds them both (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 105-106). Put differently, higher idealism is refuted since, having posited consciousness as absolute, it cannot provide the genetic middle term for two disjunctive terms. Namely, thinking (consciousness) and awareness of thinking (self-consciousness) still call for a higher oneness that grounds them genetically (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 103).

The conditions of the possibility of both consciousness and self-consciousness were Fichte's concern in his 1794/1797 *Science of Knowledge*. In the latter, Fichte argued that the possibility of consciousness always presupposes self-consciousness. Consciousness is the act of thinking objects outside oneself whereby thinker and thought are distinct. In other words, actual consciousness or knowledge rests on a principle of opposition between the subject which is conscious and the object of which it is conscious. Fichte had enunciated this principle of opposition as "A not-self (i.e. object thought) [is] opposed absolutely to the self (i.e. thinking subject)." (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 104) However this relation of opposition between subject and object is not one of negation or annihilation. Otherwise conscious life would be impossible. It must thus be understood as a relation of reciprocal determination. Subject and object "must be posited together, without mutual elimination." "The opposites in question must be taken up into the identity of the one consciousness" (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 107). This is essentially Kant's claim that the "I think" must accompany all my representations. The manifold representations cannot be my representations if they do not belong to one self-consciousness.[70] In other words, all instances of knowledge presuppose the identity of the subject or the unity of consciousness (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 37, 39;

[69] Note however that, this new idealism, as opposed to the merely factical idealism, does not make reflection which belongs to thinking as absolute. Rather it posits the immediate intuition of this reflection as absolute.
[70] Kant argues that as my representations, they must conform to the condition under which alone they can stand together in one universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not all belong to me (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B132, 137).

Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 20). Fichte enunciated this principle of the unity of identity and difference (or reciprocal determination of positing and counter-positing) as follows: "in the self[,] I oppose a divisible not-self to the divisible self." (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 110) However, Fichte should not be understood as merely reiterating Kant's argument. As we shall see, Fichte's "original insight" will come in the form of a contribution to the theory of self-consciousness (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 18). He will not be content with merely identifying self-consciousness with the ground of all other knowledge. What is more, he will certainly not make it into an absolute.

To make self-consciousness absolute may seem justifiable. After all, we have just argued that self-consciousness is the place of both the identity of subject and object and their distinction. As this unity of identity and difference or reciprocal determination of thinking subject and object thought, it must be presupposed as the ground and condition of possibility of all knowledge or consciousness, rather than a product of the latter. If we stop at this last insight and make self-consciousness absolute, Fichte argues, we end up with a form of absolute idealism (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 105-106). In the latter perspective, the absolute I or immediate self-consciousness is placed at the pinnacle of its deductions and is understood to be its own ground, self-identical and incapable of inner disjunctions (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 106). However, the *Science of Knowing* will not stop at such an insight. Rather, an analysis of the nature of self-consciousness reveals that we cannot trust the immediate testimony of consciousness when the object of the latter is the self. Self-consciousness is not its own ground.

In order to demonstrate this, Fichte asks that we perform a thought-experiment. We are asked to bracket experience along with all things which appear to us and to bring to explicit awareness our very own self (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 6, 17). It is immediately evident that we do not know the I as we know other objects (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 21). First, the I gains evidence about its operations by the fact that it performs them. An element of immediacy in self-consciousness is not present in the consciousness or knowledge of objects. Whereas the latter is made possible through the mediation of concepts, the I is immediately conscious (1) that it acts and (2) of what it enacts. It is immediately aware of itself, by means of what Fichte terms an "intellectual intuition," as both production and product, subject and object,

being and seeing (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 17, 39). Second, whereas objects are objects "for another" (self), the self is "for itself." It is aware of itself (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 28). If the self were not "for itself," it would be "for another," which in turn would be a self. In this case, we would never arrive at a self-determination that possesses self-consciousness, stuck as it were in an inescapable circularity (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 28). Therefore, we must presuppose the existence of the self to be inseparable from its being "for itself" or it's self-consciousness (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 98-99). That said, the self cannot be understood as a merely given fact. It must be understood as an act through which it comes into existence and through which it simultaneously comes to be for itself. The existence of the self is its positing in a relation with itself (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 24-26). Fichte's formula which expresses this act is "the self begins by an absolute positing of its own existence[71]" (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 99).

3.2.1. Consciousness' self-alienation: the impossibility of absolute knowledge

Now, Fichte argues that the I's absolute positing is an original act whose nature and ground cannot be fully recovered in reflective activity, having already occurred in pre-reflective activity, rather than as a result of such activity[72] (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 99). Specifically, as soon as consciousness attempts to grasp itself conceptually, or as soon as it inquires about its own nature and ground, it fails. This is because consciousness involves a break or gap between the occurrence of awareness itself (what we do in asserting something) and the object intended in consciousness (an assertion). (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 141). Consciousness cannot reflect upon itself other than "as" posited or objectified, that is, other than as an object or product of reflection. As such, thinking cannot witness itself as thinking or

[71] Fichte's formula "the self begins by an absolute positing of its own existence" includes three terms; (1) the I, which posits (2) itself, as (3) itself. In order of genetic derivation, this act has priority over self-consciousness or the act by which "in the self[,] I oppose a divisible not-self to the divisible self," as the condition of possibility of the latter. In turn self-consciousness has priority over consciousness or the act by which "a not-self (i.e. object thought) [is] opposed absolutely to the self (i.e. thinking subject)," as the condition of possibility of the latter (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 40). Nonetheless, all three acts, which for the sake of comprehension and inquiry are distinguished, must be understood as arising simultaneously. Note that this foundational aspect of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* is what distinguishes his account of experience from that of Kant's. Whereas the latter's account of experience was limited to deducing the conditions of the possibility of experience, i.e. how experience unfolds, Fichte's account of experience is an attempt at deducing the conditions of possibility of the origin of experience.

[72] Recall that the condition of possibility of consciousness is self-consciousness such that the possibility of the latter cannot itself be the result of the former.

production, but always and already as a product of the latter (Rametta, Speculative Structures, 124). In other words, consciousness can never see itself at work in the productive act since this would ultimately transform the production into a product. It would render the subject into an object. Rather, consciousness objectifies and blurs the true origin or genesis of its object such that the object of consciousness is the result of a "projection through an absolute or irrational gap" (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 111). This projection of a real and actual thinking process which is absolutely inconceivable is the structure of consciousness. However, as projection, it is “death at its root” because it projects a gap and is a rupture of intellectual activity (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 111-112).

Fichte's discussion culminates with the idea that we cannot trust the immediate testimony of our consciousness since the I's activity conceals itself in its production in our very effort to know it (Rosen 48). (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 103, 105-106, 141). Knowledge is self-alienating since the conditions that make knowledge possible transcend knowledge. The "I" remains completely inaccessible, purely self-enclosed and hidden. It cannot apprehend itself fully or refuses mediation since once apprehended or objectified, it is lost once again to and by reflection[73] (Rametta, Speculative Structures, 124). The consequence is that absolute knowledge is impossible. Ascending from phenomena or multiplicity to truth or absolute oneness would require going beyond objectification. However, the form of existence is that of objectivity, which has no relation to truth as truth (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 172-173). We cannot enact a passage to the Absolute conceptually unless we give up consciousness or cease to be consciousness and ultimately annihilate ourselves. In sum, consciousness itself, being the source of everything factical, must be struck down along with all other factical standpoints (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 110-111).

[73] Another way to understand the activity of self-consciousness is by the analogy of vision. Self-consciousness is an activity in which an eye is inserted; it sees itself so long as it is this activity and sees itself as this activity. What is invisible to and in an act of vision is the origin of the act of vision (Rametta, Speculative Structures, 124). Vision can't see itself while it sees, namely, in seeing itself as that which sees, it divides itself once again between the I that sees (subject) and the object seen (Rametta, Speculative Structures, 131). This is why a more prior activity, through which the activity is endowed with sight, must be presupposed (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 31-32, 40). Since the self's activity or seeing is also its being, to see itself prior to its seeing means ceasing to exist (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 30-31).

At this point, one may wonder whether the *Science of Knowing* produces the most thoroughgoing skepticism. After all, it points out the disjunctions, and hence contradictions, that are present within all philosophical systems so far developed, and indeed in every finite mode of awareness. The *Science of Knowing* not merely doubts the implicit validity of consciousness in a provisional way but asserts and proves the invalidity of what the general doubt merely puts into question (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 107-108). As such, it seems to undermine the idea that truth is possible and communicable. The *Science of Knowing* however, does not end with skepticism. It rather undermines it by means of its higher realist perspective. It presents us with another alternative, one in which the absolutely inconceivable can be conceived, albeit as inconceivable.

3.3. Higher realism

Higher realism, the standpoint of the *Science of Knowing*, adopts the following maxim or principle in its investigation into the nature of truth: "if never of truth itself, then of this truth's factical appearance" (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 111). This means that on the condition that absolute oneness or truth is inconceivable, we must conceive it as such, namely, as absolutely inconceivable. Strictly speaking, truth cannot be a fact or assertion but rather an event[74], an enactment or a coming-to-be of genuine philosophical knowing (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 22, 29). If the truth were a fact, i.e. if it could be communicated objectively or factically, then one could simply adopt a factical and presumably absolute position such as idealism or realism. However, we have seen that these views of truth are problematic. Philosophy then must be a living presentation of ideas, a free and subjective re-creation of the truth in its living profundity (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 29). The role of the *Science of Knowing* is to provide the right circumstances in order that an intuitive and immediate mental grasp into the fundamental nature and structure of truth creates itself in us (Waibel, Breazeale & Rockmore, *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition*, 245-246). This genetic insight or *Evidenz* can only emerge as a result of a positive reconstruction of truth through the medium of

[74] Note that this is precisely what distinguishes the standpoint of the *Science of Knowing* from that of others; it presents the Absolute as being through itself, by itself and from itself, while avoiding making it into an absolute fact. As such, it meets the requirement of the second part of Fichte's two-fold critique.

conception and the subsequent annulment of such conception[75] (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 104). This is the only way that the inconceivable can appear as inconceivable; the only way to construct what denies all constructability. What does this genetic insight ultimately reveal? It certainly does not reveal the fundamental nature and structure of the Absolute itself; it reveals the nature of consciousness and its subsequent inability to conceive the absolute. After all, to conceive the inconceivable as inconceivable is to draw a line whereby absolute conceivability begins and where its limit lies (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 142).

Let us reconstruct Fichte's argument. Given that consciousness is the source of all appearances and it, as previously argued, has no relation to truth as truth, all appearances of the Absolute are mere appearances in which the Absolute simply fails to appear. The absolute, as it were, never appears, except as that which does not appear. In no way does it enter our science as pure and for itself. Rather, consciousness always and already projects both the in-itself and the not-in-itself which mutually posit one another for the sake of comprehensibility and which negate one another in reality. In other words, the Absolute is simultaneously the principle of both the apparent oneness and the apparent multiplicity (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 56). This projection happens immediately, through a gap, without being able to provide an accounting of itself. However, we see into the fact that our projection or representation of the Absolute is a false schema, a mere *Schein* or illusion, i.e. one which does not and cannot represent what it intends to represent (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 42-44, 89). As such, to arrive at truth, if this is indeed possible, we must unconditionally let go of this projection since it is nothing but mere appearance, and essentially non-being. We must deny the validity of consciousness by bracketing and abstracting from all effects of consciousness. The latter, however necessary, is in no way sufficient for the discovery and establishment of truth as such (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 110).

What remains following such an abstraction is precisely Absolute Being in-itself resting on itself (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 114). In abstraction from all relatedness, this is a being which is entirely through itself, by itself and from itself, or what is the same, all-

[75] Specifically, to construct that which denies all constructability we must first posit the concept of the Absolute and then bracket and ultimately annul the latter (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 42-44, 89).

encompassing, absolutely unchangeable and self-sufficient. It needs no other being for its existence. Precisely through this “not-needing,” it becomes more and more real since neither "needing" nor not-needing" belong to it absolutely. It means nothing in relation to its essence since it alters nothing about being-in-itself (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 114, 116).

Finite consciousness must be participating in the essence of being-in-itself in a certain way, given that the Absolute is primordially the source of being and thinking, and is entirely through itself, by itself and from itself. Insofar as the Absolute projects something, it necessarily projects itself completely, as it inwardly is; as absolutely inconceivable or as that which does not appear, rather than something other than itself. According to Fichte, I become Being-in-itself insofar as I produce this genetic insight because I project myself as that which is absolutely inconceivable or as that which does not appear. I am a mode of the Absolute or its being out of his being, because I manifest myself as the one undivided Being itself, in itself, of itself, through itself, which does not let itself be seen. (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 117). Note that the insight regarding my own nature and the subsequent impossibility of absolute knowledge or truth is itself an instance of perfect or absolute knowledge. Specifically, I enjoy a mode of intuition in which I am immediately present to myself. I have an immediate but non-sensible acquaintance with my own nature. I understand myself perfectly since I see myself for what I truly am; a non-seeing. I comprehend myself as incomprehensible (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 198).

The law or maxim of higher realism has been proved[76] since higher realism recognizes that no fact of consciousness can be taken as absolute; to reflect on oneness or truth is to see it not as pure oneness but as a unity-in-relation or a unity-in-difference. Any disjunction which remains is not of two things but of different aspects of one and the same thing, and that, only from the perspective or standpoint of knowledge (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 156). In other words, to ask about the nature of the relationship between Absolute Being and his appearance/manifestation/existence is a question motivated by interest internal to thought itself[77].

[76] This means “to give no credence to the assertions of simple, immediate consciousness, even if one cannot factically free oneself from them, but rather to abstract from them” (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 119).
[77] It is in his 1806 *Doctrine of Religion* that Fichte will deliberately change the use of the term Absolute to that of God and will speak of the relationship between God's being (*Seyn*) and God’s existence (*Daseyn*) as the relationship between the absolute source or ground of conscious existence and conscious existence itself (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 340). He will do so in order to emphasize that consciousness, although inseparably united with the

The closest we come to represent this relationship is by means of the concept of life. Life is the unifying principle which unites Being's self-enclosed immanence with Being's emanation. As Fichte puts it: "the two highest disjunctive terms […] life's inner and outer life, the forms of immanent and emanent existence [are] separated by an impassable gulf and by truly realized contradiction [conceptually speaking] (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 91). Our life, in other words, is the very medium of the life in itself of the absolute. However, we pause and relinquish ourselves from this *Evidenz* or intuition since it is null and without meaning (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 117-120). Our living thinking and insight cannot be represented, hence: "away with all words and signs!" (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 60).

In our undertaking of a personal, living reconstruction of the truth by means of a genetical insight or *Evidenz* into the constitution of factical consciousness, we have arrived at the highest standpoint of the Wissenschaftslehre. In doing so, we have mastered genetically all factical positions, including factical realism and factical idealism. Fichte terms this position higher realism. First, it stands for the genesis of both realism, i.e. the view that we live immediately in the act of living itself and thus are being-in-itself, as well as idealism, i.e. the view that only in reflection we come to realize that the in-itself in our reflection is a conceptual construct, a projection not more real than its conceptual counter-part, the not-itself. As such, it can also be termed a realist idealism or an idealist realism. Second, the form of knowledge of the highest realism is not related to the Absolute as though it were an external object. Rather, it is the Absolute or Being's own self-presentation in which subject, object and activity are indistinguishable. Third, by means of this highest realism, we have succeeded at the self-realization and self-knowledge of the absolute. We have arrived at the point at which we can conceive the unconceivable as unconceivable, the point at which absolute conceivability begins

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Absolute in the innermost root of its existence, is nonetheless not the Absolute itself and can never become it (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 344-345, 365). The distinction between being and existence is seen to be only for us, and only a result of our limitation. However, this distinction is necessary in and to mere existence itself so that being may be apprehended as being and the Absolute as absolute (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 355) Therefore, Fichte's concern will be to explain that although the Absolute or God is Being in-itself, for itself and by itself, (1) God nonetheless appears or exists in the form of consciousness or knowledge and (2) although consciousness or knowledge is at bottom likewise an absolute, eternal and unchanging unity, a manifold, with its infinite variety of forms which make up the world of experience, nonetheless appears in and for consciousness and appears necessarily so (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 352, 362).

and absolute inconceivability ends. This is the absolute origin of knowledge comprehended in knowledge which cannot view its absolute origin without viewing its non-existence or its limit.

This quest for absolute truth also reveals something about the nature of our existence. Our very existence testifies to the presence of an unconscious/pre-conceptual source through which all being emanates. What can be asserted about this inexplicable or underivable source? (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 111-112). This source can only be understood as a primordial unity whose two disjunctive terms are consciousness and self-consciousness. This source also accounts for their reciprocal determination (Rametta, Speculative Structures, 129-130). This source or absolute unity is unconditional, independent of any relation, and transcends limited existence. We only know of the presence and reality of this absolute unity by its effects, namely, it gives rise to conscious life. It allows selfhood to come into being or existence in order that it might become manifest or appear as that which cannot be grounded, manifest or as that which cannot appear (Henrich, Fichte's Original Insight, 42).

4. Consciousness' reconciliation with the Absolute

Although consciousness is in a state of alienation with respect to the absolute, reconciliation is nonetheless possible, as the practical implications of Fichte's 1804 *Science of Knowing*: *Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre* and his 1806 *Doctrine of Religion* suggest. The absolute gap or hiatus between consciousness and its absolute source can neither be removed nor filled by us conceptually. Rather, this gap can only be filled by us practically, in the very act of living. Consciousness is in a state of alienation to the absolute. It is aware of the presence of an absolute reality which is its ground but which nonetheless remains inconceivable. This alienation or absolute gap cannot be removed because it allows for the possibility of conscious life. The nature of knowledge is such that we cannot traverse the gap or enact a passage to the Absolute conceptually without doing injustice to absolute oneness and its relation to consciousness, that is, without distorting the truth of this relation. Knowledge, argues Fichte, can get us nowhere; all knowledge is subject to doubt. Specifically, the genesis of knowledge has led us to the insight that all would-be absolute truth or knowledge produced by mere thinking is false insofar as it presupposes something still higher as its foundation. In other words, no knowledge can be its

own foundation and proof (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 71-72). The closest we come to truth conceptually speaking, is by means of the *Science of Knowing*, the highest form of reflective unity, which conceives absolute truth as absolutely inconceivable (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 71). Although it brings to explicit awareness the presence and reality of the Absolute within consciousness, insofar as the *Science of Knowing* is itself a conceptual construct, it must be struck down.

Given that we cannot reconcile with absolute oneness by means of knowledge or conceptual discourse, is there no prospect of reconciliation? Fichte will argue just the opposite. We do not exist for idle self-observation. The end of knowledge is not knowledge itself but must ultimately serve our practical purposes. In other words, theoretical reason is not autonomous; if it were, practical activity would be close to impossible given that all knowledge is subject to doubt. Rather theoretical reason has its foundation in practical reason, namely, the will. (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, viii, 79). It is therefore not the case that we take hold of reality and truth by means of knowledge. Rather this rests on faith, i.e. a decision of the will to recognize the validity of knowledge, which in turn, is inseparably bound with our interest to produce a certain reality (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 73).[78] Reflection or knowledge only brings to explicit awareness our existential commitment to what we believe ought to be the case or ought to be true. In other words, it brings to explicit awareness our particular view on what we take to be true based, as it were, on the kind of person that we are (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 16)

The question thus arises: "What ought to be the case?" According to Fichte, the reality that we ought to produce can only be one appropriate to our worth (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 74) This reality must promote and call for our absolute and independent self-activity, which we feel to be inseparably united with our own existence and consciousness of ourselves, and which we know to be closest and truest to our dignity. The inner voice of our will, which speaks to us insofar as it imposes duties upon us, calls us to act according to the requirements of freedom that we feel (Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 1794/1797, 6, 16). The voice of our

[78] Put differently, I do not act because I know, rather something becomes knowledge to me because I must act. Just as I am not hungry because there is food available to me but rather something becomes food for me because I am hungry (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 80).

conscience commands us to respect the image of freedom on earth. As such, we already know infallibly what ought to be the case and what we ought to do, through the voice of our will (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 76).

Now, how does this relate to the possibility of reconciliation with the Absolute? According to the result of Fichte's genesis of knowledge, the inner voice of our will must be understood as God's will, which speaks and manifests itself through us. This must be the case if we are to do justice to the nature of the Absolute as source and living principle of conscious existence. We have previously argued that the separation between Absolute Being and its existence, appearance, or manifestation is apparent rather than real. The I's life is not distinct; it must be understood rather as an image or mirror of God's own life (Di Giovanni, Sacramentalizing the World, 229-230). However, this recognition is at bottom merely conceptual, and as such, a mere distortion of truth. To avoid making truth into a fact, which is really death at its root, we must identify with truth in and as a pure act of living itself (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 116). We must become this truth, not merely in word but in deed; not merely in theory but in practice (Di Giovanni, Sacramentalizing the World, 230-231). This can only mean manifesting and promoting the image of truth in moral-practical activity. Insofar as we listen to, and freely obey, our will, we are existentially committed to manifesting this truth or reality in actual experience. According to Fichte, it is by means of the voice of our conscience that the spiritual world embraces us as its members and it is by means of our free obedience, through our actions and deeds in the sensible world, that we raise ourselves into this spiritual world (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 99, 107).

Now, this has been the intention of the *Wissenschaftslehre* all along; not merely knowledge but wisdom, not only reflective but lived (Rametta, Speculative Structures, 121-122). The *Wissenschaftslehre*'s discovered truth is not a fact but an act, meant to engage the listener so as to awaken in him/her a new sensibility, a new attitude and ultimately to awaken change in him/her on an ethical-practical level.[79] This new sensibility consists of seeing the world as the object and sphere of our duties, i.e. not just as a sensuous or material world but as a moral or

[79] This change will no doubt have far-reaching consequences on the social-political level which this essay, given its limited scope, cannot elaborate on.

spiritualized world (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 77-78). In other words, insofar as we have become truth, the world assumes a new significance. Instead of possessing independent existence, it is now understood to be the appearance or manifestation in consciousness of the Absolute (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 365). The accompanying new attitude consists of directing all of our efforts and striving towards moral perfection, and thus of cultivating our understanding, and acquire knowledge, with the sole intention of giving duty a greater scope and a wider sphere of activity (Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1800, 116). Limitation of space preclude a throughout address of Fichte's derivation of this practical thesis from his theoretical position as outlined above. We may say, however, that for Fichte, reconciliation with absolute oneness is possible insofar as the latter does not consist in what we conceive but rather in what we are, pursue and live; insofar as we live in such a way so as to visibly reflect the presence of the Absolute in us.

In this way, Fichte's philosophy of religion culminates with the idea that although knowledge of God is impossible, this impossibility is precisely what gives not only the absolute, but also the finite knowing subject, its meaning and reality. Particularly, the Absolute's reality is revealed through the finite knowing subject as its source, living principle and end. Let us now compare and contrast Kant and Fichte's concept of the God in order to see whether the human-divine relationship, made possible by such conceptions, can also be understood differently.

Chapter Three: Comparison between Kant and Fichte's concept of God

Although the study of the nature of human knowledge undeniably reveals, for both philosophers, the presence of a reality that absolutely resists or transcends conceptualization, I argue that each offers a different way of conceiving this reality and our relation to it. On one hand, Kant and Fichte hold different conceptions of the transcendent, understood as God or the Absolute. On the other hand, they present different accounts of the nature of our commitment to this reality.

1. Kant's God as non-Absolute

Kant's God is a necessary concept of reason[80] which acquires objective reality in the moral-practical realm and for moral-practical purposes, the concept of God has no corresponding intuition, and thus cannot be an object in any empirical sense. However, it is nonetheless granted objective reality insofar as the postulate of God is one of the conditions of the necessary object, i.e. the highest good, of a will determined by the moral law. The latter, in turn, holds *a priori* and unconditionally (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 8, 5-6, 155). According to Fichte, "God exists in morality as a principle, but not for his own sake; instead, so that he maintains the moral law" (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 200). For one thing, God's existence functions as a means to an end; it is a means for attaining the highest possible good. For another, God's perfections, i.e. that he is "the *alone holy one*, the *alone blessed one*, the *alone wise one*" seem to be legitimately attributed to God only insofar as they are "one and all moral"[81] (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 166). In other words, according to Kant, these attributions escape the charge of dogmatism only insofar as they serve the purposes of morality. Arguably, from within Kant's system, it is difficult to see how there can be any rationally justifiable reason to assume the possibility of God's existence in case the world is not governed by morality; our commitment to

[80] The concept of *ens realissimum*, the concept of a most real being or God is a necessary concept of reason insofar as it plays an essential role in the systematic unification of the manifold of empirical cognition. Specifically, the concept of God functions as a regulative principle that allows reason to move from that which is particular to that which is universal and thus to make sense of reality in a unified, systematic and coherent manner (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A671/B699).

[81] The moral law's possibility rests on the determination of the concept of the original being as Supreme Being, and thus admits the concept of God only on the presupposition that God has the highest perfection. Otherwise, we are not justified in dogmatically attributing these perfections to God (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 166, 177).

God's existence is entirely contingent upon our commitment to the moral law."If [one] had no moral law, [one] wouldn't need a God" (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 200). Echoing Fichte's view, I would like to suggest the following: that God's qualified existence takes away from his absoluteness, that is, from his being in-itself, by-itself and for itself. On one hand, God is not for-itself but rather, for the sake of another, namely the moral law. On the other hand, God is not by-itself but rather stands beside the moral order as its creator, maintainer and governor.

1.1. "Actual" faith in God's existence

That God's existence is qualified by morality also makes it difficult for Kant to account for the human-divine relationship. Specifically, his moral argument, meant to rationally justify the belief or faith in God's existence, cannot by itself produce or awaken the belief whose indispensability it demonstrates. I would like to suggest that the difficulty stems from Kant's ambiguous definition of what belief or faith actually entails. In some instances, Kant seems to downplay the strength of belief or faith. Particularly, he argues that (a) only a regulative assumption or necessary hypothesis[82] concerning the supreme cause of things is required for "moral faith" and that (b) whatever God does is simply reinforce one's good dispositions (Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:137-138, 6:154 footnote). At other instances, Kant wants to amplify the strength of this belief when he argues that moral faith, by its very nature, requires "the acceptance of the existence of this lawgiver [which] means more than the mere possibility of such an object" (Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:6 footnote). It seems as though morality then, rests on a full-fledged belief that God "actually," rather than "hypothetically," exists. Without the "actual" belief or faith in God's existence, morality loses its strong hold on the morally-inclined individual, whom is now faced with the possibility that the highest possible good may not be attainable. If God's existence becomes a questionable matter, so does morality. It seems therefore, that belief must rest on certainty rather than on any consideration or balancing of reasons for or against God's existence. His non-

[82] The requisite for the admissibility of a hypothesis is merely the certainty of the possibility of the object itself. According to Kant, hypotheses are admissible in the sphere of pure reason only as tools for defending one's own position, not for grounding one's assertions. They are problematical judgments which can neither be confuted nor proved; they cannot be used for the purpose of supporting the arguments in favor of one's own propositions but only to show that the opposite view has no more speculative advantage than one's own. (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A769-782/B797-810).

existence cannot even be an option or possibility. Rather, the morally inclined individual must be existentially committed or live as though it were proved that God exists. Problematically, even if the practical arguments provide the best basis for rational and justifiable belief or faith in God's existence, they nonetheless do not establish its actuality (Wood, Rational Theology, Moral Faith, and Religion, 405). Put differently, "the recognition of a command is far from being capable of justifying belief in the existence of the conditions of its fulfillment; on the contrary, the recognition can only occur after this belief [is established]" (Di Giovanni and Harris, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 151). Arguably, Kant's account of the human-divine relationship suffers from his failure to recognize that perhaps belief in God's existence it is not necessarily defined, limited to, nor exhausted by our commitment to morality, and therefore cannot be awakened by rational argument. Insofar as the human-divine relationship does exist in Kant's system, it is lifeless. For how can we relate to a God who cannot be known nor intuited, and whose presence and reality, other than being defined in a practical situation and as a response to a practical difficulty, is a mere transcendent one?

2. Fichte on God's absoluteness: God as moral World-Order

Fichte capitalizes on the difficulties faced by Kant; his entire *Wissenschaftslehre* rests on the presupposition that if anything is "absolute," it must by definition be in-itself, by-itself and for-itself. This starting-point allows Fichte to safeguard God's absoluteness. Recall that Fichte demonstrates the indispensability and reality of the Absolute as the living principle which lives in us and manifests itself through us (Fichte, *Science of Knowing*, 1804, 111-112). Specifically, as far as our theoretical nature is concerned, the Absolute reveals itself as the source or ground of conscious life. It is the primordial unity which accounts for the reciprocal determination of consciousness and self-consciousness, and as such appears as concealed or absolutely inconceivable (Rametta, Speculative Structures, 129-130). Given, however, that theoretical reason has its ground in practical reason, knowledge must ultimately serve practical ends. As far as our practical nature is concerned, the Absolute reveals itself as the end of our practical pursuits. It is the inner voice of our will, which speaks to us insofar as it imposes duties upon us. In this way, God is the moral World-Order which builds itself gradually in and through our right-actions, and is absolute insofar as God is not distinct from this Order.

2.1. Commitment to morality for God's sake

Fichte's starting-point, i.e. that God is absolute, also paves the way for a different conceptualization of belief or faith in God's existence which, in turn, allows the possibility for an authentic human-divine relationship. Given that God is in-itself, by-itself and for-itself, everyone necessarily, by means of his actual existence, receives his/her portion in the super-sensuous Being. Otherwise, he/she would have no actual existence. The Absolute is present in all beings without exception (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 454). However, all beings are still faced with the possibility of the Absolute remaining concealed because "the essential and irreversible laws of consciousness, laws which are found in the very nature of consciousness itself, [make it such that] God is veiled […] in consciousness, by manifold concealments." (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 382, 454). Our vision is infinite, whilst our being is one with the Absolute (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 470). Now, that "God alone is" exists in religion as an immovable fact. From within the standpoint of religion, belief or faith in God's existence is unshakable; it does not rest on any rational argument but rather on the certainty or conviction that there is nothing beside God (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 375). Presumably, Fichte's science shares this insight with religion insofar as it demonstrates that God is absolute. However, what exists in religion as a fact, is turned into vision or sight from within the standpoint of science insofar as the latter explains God's essential nature (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 467). Science goes beyond the fact into the manner of this fact by explaining how the immediate knowledge or certainty of God's existence obtains from the immediate knowledge or certainty of our own existence (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 378). However, that "God alone is" still remains a theoretical or conceptual matter in both religion and science. As we have demonstrated, such conception of God is abstract and unsubstantial; when we say "God is," he is to us essentially nothing, and by this very expression itself, is made into nothing (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 375). We cannot get to the Absolute theoretically speaking.

Science and religion, conceptual in nature, must ultimately give place to life, in a practical sense. In other words, to be awakened to and recognize the truth that God actually lives, moves, and perfects his work in us, is to identify with this truth. This means manifesting this truth or reality in our life, practically speaking, through outward moral acts. In the standpoint of

true religion, according to Fichte, God is "that which he who is devoted to him and inspired by him does" (Fichte, *Doctrine of Religion*, 1806, 376-377). Notice that, both the individual from within the standpoint of true religion, and from within that of morality, are committed to morality, or at least ideally should be. However - and here is the most important distinction between Kant and Fichte's conceptions of belief or faith - in Kant's world, we believe or have faith in God insofar as this is necessary for the possibility of morality; whereas in Fichte's world, that we are committed to acting morally is evidence of our commitment to manifesting God's already accomplished presence in us through outward moral acts. The human-divine relationship which obtains from Fichte's understanding of belief or faith is negative yet direct. It is negative insofar as the Absolute is transcendent; it defies verbalization and knowledge. It is direct insofar as the Absolute is immanent in the I as its source, living principle and end.

This part of the essay has attempted to demonstrate that Kant and Fichte's philosophies present radically different conceptions of God and subsequently, of the human-divine relationship, despite the fact that they share the same starting-point; the impossibility of knowing God. At bottom, in Kant’s system, our commitment to the existence of God is for morality's sake. In Fichte's system, it is just the opposite; our commitment to the existence of morality is for God's sake.

Conclusion

The present thesis explored that which shapes or animates the experience of, belief in, and knowledge of, the transcendent. Having chosen epistemology as the realm in which to seek for a renewed appreciation of transcendence, this thesis has attempted to show that the impossibility of knowing God does not necessarily lead to a lack, impossibility, or irrationality of faith in God's existence. Particularly, Kant and Fichte's philosophies, far from being part of the wider narrative of disenchantment, have been shown capable of informing present-day debates about the nature, place and presence of the transcendent by providing positive resources for the "God-talk" or "divine discourse"[83]

Throughout this study, it has become evident there is no shortcut or easy way, as Lyotard's position seems to imply, to understand what Nietzsche's statement, namely that "God is dead," means for those who live in a "post-modern" Western world. What we do know is that we cannot begin to understand the ways in which God can be present or manifest in the immanent frame without taking a step back. We must digest the sources of our culture. We must understand what kind of metanarrative our Western society has chosen to emphasize and examine whether it cannot be understood differently. Metanarratives have transformed and taken on a new disguise in the form of "endings." However, what exactly has ended? Are these endings justified? This is the only way of opening up the possibility for a "God-talk" that is meaningful. We must do so not only for the advancement of knowledge; we have the responsibility to define ourselves and our time not merely in a negative but also in a positive sense. That is, we cannot define ourselves as merely living in the after-math of an old way of believing and knowing as if merely freed from it. Rather, we must also be able to identify what has ended and what has come to replace the latter. Only in such a positive definition can we find the possibility of, and freedom for, a new way of living, believing and knowing. Kant and Fichte provide us, differently, with such ways forward. Their philosophical aspirations can instigate re-negotiations of the secular narrative. They both speak of a God who, far from being dead, can be present in different ways

[83] As a parenthesis, it would have been interesting to investigate the role that religion plays in both these philosophical systems, along with its relationship with the phenomenon of transcendence. In Fichte particularly, the religious form of representation, via myth and symbol, is essential insofar as it provides ways of dealing with dimensions of reality which are incomprehensible in, and invisible to, the philosophical form of representation, among others.

within the very tradition thought to effect such a radical transformation of the "conditions of belief" that God could have been pronounced "dead." Clearly, a renewed attention to the life, and alternatives, of this concept is required. It should be focused on the points of connection between philosophy of knowledge and philosophy of religion, by means of which this transformation was effected. Only such a focus can reveal the hidden complexities that characterize our current, "secularized" situation, and the displacements rather than destruction of the metaphysical and theological absolutes that define our immanent frame.

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