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Robert Holyer

*Unconscious Belief
and Natural Theology*

Stephen Palmquist

*Faith as Kant's Key
to the Justification of
Transcendental Reflection*

Robert A. Krieg

*Karl Adam's Christology:
Towards a Post-critical Method*

Robert Hill

*The Mystery of Christ:
Clue to Paul's Thinking
on Wisdom*

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FAITH AS KANT'S KEY TO THE JUSTIFICATION OF TRANSCENDENTAL REFLECTION

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I

Kant is sometimes criticized for not having devoted more effort to the question of how Critical philosophy is possible.¹ To compensate for this neglect, interpreters have tended to focus on one or more of three methods of justifying Kant's transcendental perspective (and particularly his assumption of the thing in itself). Interpreters have stressed the role it plays: (1) in the overall system to which it gives rise, (2) in Kant's special theory of transcendental idealism, and (3) in relation to Kant's transcendental arguments. Since I have provided my own version of (1) in several other papers,² I shall here concentrate more on (2) and (3). However, I shall do so only in order to demonstrate their secondary importance to a *fourth* method, which I will argue is Kant's ultimate and indispensable key to the justification of transcendental reflection, and which therefore accounts for his neglect of clearly justifying his task in other ways.

In his *Prolegomena* Kant suggests it is sometimes necessary for the philosopher to adopt 'a rational faith which alone may be possible for us, sufficient to our wants, and perhaps even more salutary than knowledge itself'.³ Although this would appear at first sight to be precarious ground on which to build an epistemological foundation for a philosophical system, it seems to me that Kant treats it not only as sufficient, but as the necessary support for both his transcendental and his practical perspectives. The purpose of this paper therefore, will be, first, to demonstrate that he does in fact use faith as the justifying key to his transcendental perspective, and second, to defend its legitimacy in this role.

1 E.g. W.H. Walsh, *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp.249-55.

2 In particular, 'Knowledge and Experience. An Examination of the Four Reflective "Perspective" in Kant's Critical Philosophy', *KSt*, forthcoming, and 'Six Perspectives on the Object in Kant's Theory of Knowledge', *Dial*, forthcoming.

3 *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, tr. L.W. Beck (New York, 1950), p.120.

Before discussing the merits of this rather unorthodox claim, we must understand what Kant means by the word 'faith' (*Glaube*). George Schrader may be right in saying that for Kant 'the term faith is not used in any conventional sense';⁴ but this does not justify his charge that it therefore 'serves to confuse the function of the critical method as applied to moral experience' (p. 183). For if we make the effort to understand his own special use of the word and to apply it consistently, then I believe it can serve instead to *clarify* the nature of Kant's Critical method.

Ewing aptly observes that 'faith does not mean for Kant belief on authority or belief without ground, but believing what we have adequate grounds for believing but cannot absolutely prove'.⁵ Kant describes faith as 'the moral attitude of reason in its assurance of what is beyond the reach of theoretical knowledge'.⁶ Such 'assurance' can result from either ordinary 'contingent belief' or special 'necessary belief'.⁷ The latter, strictly Critical kind of belief, is based on the assumption that 'I know (*weiss*) with certainty that no one can have knowledge (*kennen*) of any other conditions which lead to the proposed end' (B852).⁸ This assumption does not entitle us to 'speculative knowledge' or 'theoretical cognition' ('*Wissen*') concerning the condition in question;⁹ instead it means that the condition is regarded as sufficient 'only subjectively' (B850). Accordingly, 'the expression of belief is, from the objective point of view, an expression of modesty' — i.e. of an awareness of our ignorance — even though it is, 'at the same time, from the subjective point of view, an expression of the firmness of our confidence'.¹⁰

Most commentators limit the application of these and other comments on faith to Kant's moral philosophy, ignoring or denying their application to his epistemology. For example, his claim to 'deny knowledge (*Wissen*), in order to make room for faith' (Bxxx) is often taken out of its wider context¹¹ and

⁴ 'The Thing in Itself in Kantian Philosophy', *Kant*, ed. R.P. Wolff (London, 1968), p. 183.

⁵ A.C. Ewing, *A Short Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London, 1930), p. 9.

⁶ *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, Part II, II. J.C. Meredith (Oxford, 1952), p. 145.

⁷ *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. Kemp Smith (London, 1929), p. B852. Hereafter, all references to Kant's first *Critique* will be incorporated in the text in the conventional manner; page numbers will refer to the second German edition ('B'), except when the material is unique to the first edition ('A'), as specified in Kemp Smith's translation.

⁸ Kant's technical term for objective 'knowledge' is *Erkenntnis*. He defines *Wissen* as a more subjective term: it refers to cases in which 'the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient [for the subject] both subjectively and objectively' (B850). Kant's use of the verbal forms of both words in the same sentence at this point is therefore a potential source of confusion.

⁹ Kant, *Prolegomena* (n.3 above), p. 120.

¹⁰ B855; see also B498-9 and *Prolegomena* (n.3 above), p. 25.

¹¹ Kemp Smith's translation tends to encourage this interpretation by dissecting Kant's one long paragraph at this point (Bxxiv-xxxi) into five paragraphs.

regarded solely as an allusion to the way the denials of the Dialectic make room for the faith of practical reason. It is undoubtedly true that Kant's immediate point in making this assertion is to stress the need for faith in one's employment of practical concepts such as 'God, freedom, and immortality'; but it is rarely acknowledged that his general argument depends on the premise that the same 'attitude of reason' must also hold true in the first *Critique* for the thing in itself.¹² Just as he regards the faith of practical reason as the legitimate response to our lack of knowledge concerning God, freedom, and immortality, so also he regards the faith of theoretical reason as the legitimate response to our lack of knowledge concerning the thing in itself. The two cases are directly parallel; indeed, it is the main purpose of Kant's paragraph (Bxxiv-xxxi) to demonstrate their similarity, and in so doing to establish the logical priority of faith in the thing in itself for both epistemological and moral reflection. The thing in itself, therefore, should not be regarded as a 'wild card', slyly included in Kant's epistemology solely 'for the purpose of his ethics':¹³ once it is accepted as a rational presupposition of faith, it forms the very ground in which the Critical philosophy is planted.

In the remainder of this paper I will attempt to defend this interpretation of the role of faith in Kant's philosophy by relating it to three specific issues. First, I will elaborate on what it means to say the thing in itself must be accepted on faith. I will then contrast this approach with that which regards transcendental arguments as the only valid key to the justification of transcendental reflection. And finally, assuming my interpretation is correct, I will consider the relationship between epistemological faith in the thing in itself and moral faith in the ideas of practical reason. If I am successful, I will have demonstrated not that Kant believed he had not established his system as *undoubtedly* 'true', but rather that he held transcendental philosophy to be 'true' only for those who follow his initial leap of faith.

2

In discussing the concept of 'noumenon' — a term related to, but not to be equated with, 'thing in itself' — Kant says in B344:

The relation of sensibility to an object [i.e. to the thing in itself] and what the transcendental ground of this unity may be, are matters undoubtedly so deeply concealed that we . . . can never be justified in treating sensibility as being a

12 S.F. Barker admits 'it is implausible to suppose that [Kant] himself regarded his moral philosophy as providing the main basis for saying there are things-in-themselves' ('Appearing and Appearance in Kant', *Kant Studies Today*, ed. L.W. Beck [La Salle, Illinois, 1969], p.285). But instead of offering an alternative justification, he argues that the thing in itself is a groundless assumption, resulting from Kant's acceptance of two contradictory theories of perception (pp.283, 289). I have attempted, however, to demonstrate their compatibility in 'Six Perspectives' (n.2 above).

13 Walsh (n.1 above), pp.159-60, 166.

suitable instrument of investigation for discovering anything save always still other appearances — eager as we yet are to explore their non-sensible cause. He concludes on this basis that the only legitimate function of this 'empty' concept is negative: 'to mark the limits of our sensible knowledge and to leave open a space which we can fill neither through possible experience nor through pure understanding' (B345).

What Kant does not explain at this point is whether (and if so, how) this 'space' can be regarded by us as filled in any way. If he intends it to represent the same reality as the 'non-sensible cause' of appearances (B334) — and it seems obvious to me that he does — then he must regard this space as being 'filled' in some sense by the thing in itself. Since for us the thing in itself is unknowable by definition,¹⁴ it would not fill the space beyond our sensibility with *knowledge* of 'the relation of sensibility to an object' (B334); it would merely provide us with a label for the *belief* that there is a supersensible 'ground' of the world as we know it. The only problem this raises is, of course, how to justify such an assumption.

Henry Allison argues against this interpretation when he says:

Properly construed, this problem is not, as is generally believed, that of somehow justifying the assumption of the existence of unknowable entities. Rather, it is to show the possibility and the significance of . . . considering things (i.e. empirical objects) as *they are in themselves*, which means as they are apart from the conditions under which we can know anything about them.¹⁵

I am, in fact, largely in agreement with Allison's interpretation; for Kant is indeed primarily concerned with investigating the various 'perspectives' from which 'things' can be considered.¹⁶ Consequently, a good deal of what he says about the thing in itself can be interpreted as referring to how the *concept* of 'things apart from our knowledge of them' can be analysed. But this, surely, is not what Kant has in mind when he talks about the thing in itself as the 'cause' of appearance (as in B334). On the contrary, he is regarding the thing in itself as that which *fills* the transcendent space which is for us unknowable. To regard it in this way is to hypostatize its *concept*, so that its *existence* (in some transcendent, but analogously categorical sense of the word) must be presupposed (cf. B855). And any talk which even alludes to such hypostatization of unknowable concepts *does* require some justification.

Kant says that 'the modest language of a rational belief (*vernünftigen Glaubens*)' enables us to 'assume . . . the *existence* of something possible and

¹⁴ I have argued this point in detail in an unpublished paper entitled 'Must the Thing in Itself Be Knowable "In Principle"?'

¹⁵ 'Things in Themselves, Noumena, and the Transcendental Object', *Dist.* 32 (1978), p.49.

¹⁶ This interpretation, including an explanation of the extent of my agreement (and disagreement) with Allison, is developed in more detail in the two papers mentioned in note 2 above.

even indispensable for the guidance of the *understanding* and of the *will* in life'.¹⁷ The assumptions which guide 'the will', or 'practical reason', are those which concern the *existence* of what for theoretical reason are merely 'ideas' (e.g. God, freedom and immortality). Likewise, the assumptions which guide 'the understanding', or theoretical reason, are those which concern the *existence* of what would otherwise be a mere concept (*viz.* the thing in itself). Aside from the fact that the form Kant gives to practical reason is dependent on the form he first gives to theoretical reason, his justification for both is the same: even if the sensibility cannot intuit as an appearance something which the understanding can think as a concept, its employment in a philosophical system is not forbidden as long as the reason (theoretical or practical) can present itself with sufficient evidence to assume its existence on faith. Without such evidence, Kant's faith would not be '*rational belief*'.

To put faith in the thing in itself is not so much to accept it as a separate entity, as to accept that the objects which fill the world of our experience have *some* nature 'in themselves': it is to believe that they are not *mere* appearances, for there is something about them which, in principle, transcends our knowledge. Findlay is largely correct, therefore, to say Kant

plainly does not regard [this assumption] as involving any difficult, problematic step: it is rather . . . a primordial certainty which stands in no need of justification, even if its lack of empirical content means that it can never be ranked as knowledge . . . [Thus] we cannot but conceive of, and believe in, such non-apparent objects or aspects of objects, even though we can have no knowledge of them.¹⁸

But he errs in saying the thing in itself 'stands in no need of justification'; for Kant does not regard it merely as an unsupported 'extra' which can be accepted or rejected, and which is peripheral to the main purposes of the Critical philosophy. On the contrary, his entire system is an attempt to provide *good reasons* for assuming that the objects of our experience are appearances which are grounded in the unknowable thing in itself. He adds faith to these reasons as the ultimate justification of his presupposition because he thinks it is impossible ever to *prove* that it is 'objectively valid'. In §3 I will consider in more detail why he thinks this is so. But before turning to this question I will touch upon one of the most important 'reasons' Kant has for putting faith in the thing in itself.

If the philosopher adopts faith in the thing in itself at the outset of his *transcendental* inquiries, then he will find it is not necessary to appeal to faith to justify his *empirical* inquiries. Kant states this rather obscurely in a long note in the second edition Preface to the first *Critique* (Bxxxixn.):

it still remains a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us (from which we derive the whole material of

¹⁷ *Prolegomena* (n.3 above), p.25, emphasis added.

¹⁸ J.N. Findlay, *Kant and the Transcendental Object* (Oxford, 1981), p.2.

our knowledge, even of our inner sense) must be accepted merely on *faith*, and that if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof.

This passage might at first sight appear to contradict my claim that faith is Kant's key to transcendental justification. It would do so if 'things outside us' referred to the thing in itself as regarded from the transcendental perspective.¹⁹ But this could not be Kant's intention, since he goes on to give a brief summary of the proof he has supplied in his *Refutation of Idealism* (Bxxxixn-xlin). The empirical idealist against whom he is arguing doubts the existence of *empirical* objects — i.e. objects of experience, or, as Kant calls them, phenomena. So the 'things outside us' in this context must be *phenomena*. Moreover, Kant would never claim to have provided a *proof* for the existence of the thing in itself, since he consistently regards it as unknowable.

Far from contradicting my interpretation, Kant's statement confirms it by implying that the philosopher can avoid the 'scandal' of having to take refuge in faith to justify his acceptance of phenomena (i.e. 'things outside us' from the empirical perspective) only when he puts faith in the thing in itself (i.e. in the reality of 'things outside us' from the transcendental perspective). In other words, the philosopher will be unable to prove the 'objective reality' of empirical objects unless he presupposes that these objects are phenomena which, when regarded transcendentially, are appearances of the unknowable thing in itself. If he does muster up enough faith to make such a presupposition, the way is open for a completely adequate solution to this long standing philosophical problem. The solution, quite simply, is that from the empirical perspective 'inner experience itself (the real existence of which the empirical idealist does not doubt) depends upon something permanent which is not in me, and consequently can be only something outside me' (Bxli-xlin) — namely, phenomena. Not only can phenomena be proved to exist, they can also be regarded as (in principle) completely knowable by the scientist. But if the philosopher cannot bring himself to take this initial step, then he will inevitably confuse the transcendental and empirical perspectives, and, taking the objects of experience to be things in themselves, find himself unable to prove his belief in their existence.

Kant would surely be disappointed to find that his solution to this 'scandal' has not prevented it from continuing to spread — indeed, to thrive — in some philosophical circles to this day. A good example is W. V. Quine's declaration that 'in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind'.²⁰ He bases this on the rather more

¹⁹ Barry Stroud takes this passage in this way in 'Transcendental Arguments', *JPh* 65 (1968), p. 241f.

²⁰ 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', *PhRev* 60 (1951), p. 41.

plausible supposition that 'The totality of our so-called knowledge and beliefs . . . is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges' (p.39). But the 'man-made' nature of all knowledge does not preclude the philosopher from discerning different *kinds* of knowledge or belief; it does not require him to reduce all knowledge to mere 'cultural posits', as Quine seems to think (p.41). Quine is unable to make any strict distinction between knowledge of 'physical objects' and belief in 'gods' for the same reason Berkeley was unable to do so: both philosophers confuse the transcendental with the empirical and consequently fail to distinguish between faith in the thing in itself and faith in matters of empirical interest.

The reasons why philosophers such as Berkeley and Quine refuse to take advantage of Kant's transcendental faith are fairly obvious. But the reason why some philosophers, on the other hand, shun the need for faith as the key to transcendental justification even though they do distinguish along Kantian lines between the transcendental and the empirical perspectives are not quite so evident. It is to the alternatives offered by such philosophers, therefore, that we must now turn our attention.

3

Few commentators (if any) would question Schrader's observation that 'the doctrine of the thing in itself presents the single greatest stumbling-block in the Kantian philosophy'.²¹ Understanding what Kant meant by the doctrine — i.e. the role it plays both in his overall system and in his transcendental idealism — can help prevent it from being regarded 'as a perversity' (p.49), inasmuch as it can be interpreted in such a way that it makes quite good sense.²² But even the most coherent interpretation could not prevent the philosopher who demands *knowledge* from 'stumbling' over it; for the thing in itself is by definition unknowable. There is, however, one alternative to faith as the ultimate justification for its employment which would satisfy all but the most persistent sceptic: the thing in itself could be justified by constructing a transcendental argument for the necessity of its existence. Since any appeal to faith would thereby be rendered superfluous, we must carefully examine the possibility of realizing this goal.

Kant himself never uses transcendental arguments on behalf of the thing in itself; instead, he limits their use to determining what must be presupposed to be true about the *phenomenal* world in order for our experience of it to be possible (e.g. B38, A402). H.J. Paton thus has good reasons for suggesting that the validity of presupposing the thing in itself 'is not considered by Kant

21 'The Philosophy of Existence', *The Philosophy of Kant and our Modern World*, ed. C.W. Hendel (New York, 1957), p.49.

22 I have attempted to do so in 'Six Perspectives' (n.2 above).

to be in need of proof', and that such a proof would have seemed 'ludicrous' to him.²³ But this is not entirely fair, since Kant does occasionally supply rather brief arguments for his presupposition, such as that if experience has bounds, then 'that which binds it must lie quite without it'.²⁴ Such comments do provide a possible basis for attempting on Kantian grounds to construct a transcendental argument for the necessary existence of the thing in itself.

Chipman constructs such an argument by keeping as close as possible to Kant's own statements. He gathers together a number of fragmented bits of reasoning and forms them into a single, surprisingly complete, transcendental argument:

- (a) The objects of experience exist only as spatiotemporal appearances,
- (b) Insofar as we judge that there are appearances, we must be prepared to judge that there are things appearing,
- (c) To speak of a thing appearing is, by implication, to make use of the concept of a thing-other-than-as-it-appears, Ergo,
- (d) Objective experience requires us to postulate things-other-than-as-they-appear, or things in themselves.²⁵

Although Chipman thinks Kant's theory of the thing in itself is 'consistent', he admits that even this reconstructed argument remains 'inconclusive' (p.489): 'Kant has not succeeded in establishing that we must postulate things in themselves as a necessary condition for the possibility of objective experience, but . . . their possibility must nevertheless be countenanced' (p.498).

Walker attempts to compensate for the inconclusive nature of such reconstructed forms of Kant's position by straying rather further from Kant's own methods. He maintains that, once we recognize that 'Kant was simply mistaken' to think the thing in itself must be completely unknowable, the way will be open to construct transcendental arguments which can establish some highly significant conclusions about its nature.²⁶ It is unnecessary to discuss the details of Walker's position at this point, however, because I have argued elsewhere (see n.14 above) that his position is radically incoherent both in itself and as an interpretation of Kant. If his transcendental arguments prove anything, they yield conclusions only about the phenomenal world — conclusions which Kant himself has already supplied.

Philosophers who attempt to construct a transcendental argument for the validity of presupposing the thing in itself apparently fail to see the reason why 'the formal character of transcendental arguments does not interest [Kant]';²⁷ as a result, like 'the critic who dissects a transcendental argument,

²³ *Kant's Metaphysic of Experience I* (London, 1936), p.170.

²⁴ *Prolegomena* (n.3 above), p.109.

²⁵ 'Things in Themselves', *PPR* 33 (1973), p.491.

²⁶ *Kant on Pure Reason* (Oxford, 1982), p.3.

²⁷ Martin Kallin, 'What Makes an Argument Transcendental? A Study in Kant's Logic', *Proceedings of the Ottawa Congress on Kant*, ed. P. Laberge, et. al. (Ottawa, 1976), p.421.

[i.e. one which Kant does give] with merely formal instruments', they 'may miss the heart of the matter' (p.423). It is indeed unfortunate that Kant himself does not present his argument as clearly as Chipman has shown to be possible. But it is not surprising that even in its clearest form it is not undeniably conclusive. For Kant never intends his comments to provide anything but *good reasons* for adopting his transcendental perspective.

When Kant says, for instance, that the presupposition of the thing in itself is 'not only admissible, but unavoidable',²⁸ he is implying not that a transcendental argument could ever *prove* it to be necessary, but that it is unavoidable for anyone who wants to ask transcendental questions (i.e. questions about the subject and/or object of experience from the transcendental perspective). To ask such questions without presupposing the thing in itself (as in some versions of phenomenalism) is 'to be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears' (Dxxvi-xxvii). For, as Rolf George rightly says, 'if Kant's theory of objectivity is correct, it is not for us men to say that there are objects of representation but no things in themselves'.²⁹ It may be that representations are somehow generated out of nothing; but if we wish to construct a coherent theory of the phenomenal world, we must presuppose that this is not the case. Therefore, the 'heart of the matter', which is likely to be missed by those who wish to *prove* the validity of Kant's presupposition, is that doubt in its validity can in the end be countered only by faith.

This interpretation of Kant's intentions reveals a fundamental point at which he agrees with the sceptic: both Kant and Hume would maintain that objects are necessarily unknowable, so that even the philosopher cannot claim to have objectively valid knowledge of them. Kant would add that this is true only so long as an object is regarded as a thing in itself; but this should not be taken as an attempt at entirely refuting the sceptic. For his response to being 'awakened' by Hume was not, as is too often assumed, to conjure up arguments enabling him to fall comfortably back asleep again. Rather, having realized that the sceptic's doubts as such can never be satisfied merely by means of logical proof and disproof, he formulated the doctrine of the thing in itself as his *concession* to the sceptic.

Transcendental arguments, then, are designed to convince the sceptic that knowledge is possible only if the object is regarded as an appearance, and that this entails our presupposing that it conforms to certain synthetic a priori forms of knowledge, supplied by the subject (namely: space, time and the categories). When the role of these arguments is taken into consideration, it

²⁸ *Prolegomena* (n.) above, p.62.

²⁹ 'Transcendental Object and Thing in Itself — The Distinction and its Antecedents', *Actes des 4. Internationalen Kant-Kongress II*, ed. G. Funke (Berlin, 1974), p.194.

becomes evident that Kant's position is not, as Eva Schaper suggests, that we must view the world 'as if' these forms of knowledge apply to objects, even though we know that in reality they do not, or that objects of experience 'can be taken "as real" for all empirical purposes';³⁰ on the contrary, it is that these forms must *really* apply to empirical objects and that such objects *must be* empirically real in order for experience itself to be possible. If the arguments are successful, the sceptic must agree that representational knowledge is possible (i.e. that knowledge does not have to be a direct apprehension of the thing in itself), but he is *not* forced to admit that the representations of experience are grounded in the thing in itself. Kant does not construct a transcendental argument on the latter point because he knows the sceptic's acceptance of it depends in the end on his willingness to adopt some amount of faith.³¹

This conclusion enables us to accept Klaus Hartmann's suggestion that all systems of transcendental philosophy 'can be explained only from within, not from without'³² without jeopardizing the success of Kant's attack on Hume's scepticism. Kant is here attempting not so much to force the sceptic (or any other 'outsider') to relinquish his position, as to integrate the valid insight acknowledged by the sceptic (that reality in itself is not knowable) with the valid insight acknowledged by the rationalist (that reality as we know it is necessarily characterized by certain unchanging forms), and in so doing to provide the impartial observer with a coherent alternative to both extremes.

Kant's success, though by no means complete, can be measured by the fact that philosophers who refuse to adopt faith these days are generally not so sceptical (or perhaps, not so forthright) as to admit to drowning their despair in food, backgammon and merriment, as Hume did;³³ instead they adopt one of several agnostic positions, which enable them either to ask transcendental questions without committing themselves to belief in the thing in itself (as in phenomenalism), or to ignore transcendental questions altogether (as in

30 'The Kantian Thing-in-itself as a Philosophical Fiction', *PhQ* 16 (1966), p.237.

31 A transcendental argument for the existence of the thing in itself would be analogous to an ontological argument for the existence of God (cf. B725-6). Kant rejects both for much the same reason (viz. '... to make room for faith' (Bxxx)). This similarity reveals the inadequacy of E.W. Cameron's attempt (in 'God, Kant and the Transcendental Object', ed. G. Finke (n.29 above), pp.347-53) to force Kant into a dilemma on this subject, whereby it would be necessary for him either to accept the validity of the ontological argument or to reject the validity of his theory of the transcendental object (which, for Cameron, is apparently the same as the thing in itself). Cameron's error is to assume with little or no evidence (viz. a misreferenced quote on the *empirical* certainty of one's own existence, said to be from B355) that Kant is committed to the view that the transcendental object must 'exist', when in fact he regards it as (for us) nothing but a *concept* (A103). The parallelism between this and his practical concepts should become more clear in §4.

32 'On Taking the Transcendental Turn', *RMet* 20 (1966), p.249.

33 *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Book I, Part IV, Section VII.

extreme forms of pragmatism). Kant would have nothing to say to the latter group, except perhaps that their pragmatism itself only makes sense within the broader context of Critical philosophy. But to the former group he would question the authenticity of their supposedly 'transcendental' questions by pointing out the incoherence of adopting a 'phenomenal' view of the world without assuming something transcendent which necessarily limits our knowledge. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that either group would be anxious to listen.

4

Now that we have clarified the role of faith as Kant's key to justifying the transcendental *starting point* of his Critical philosophy, we must touch upon its role as the practical *goal* of his system. It is important for us to consider the latter not because practical faith is essential to the justification of his transcendental turn (cf. n. 12 above), but because it is often regarded as the only context in which he refers to faith. We must therefore conclude our discussion by examining how practical faith in the ideas of reason differs from theoretical faith in the presupposition of the thing in itself.

An idea of reason is a concept which serves to unify our interpretation of experience by providing a rational explanation of what the unconditioned source of some kind of experience might be (B383-6). Speculative metaphysicians make the mistake of believing they can reason their way to knowledge of such unconditioned objects. But Kant denies this possibility, insisting that, because an idea is merely a concept, with no corresponding intuition, it can never constitute knowledge of the unconditioned. Instead, it can be employed effectively only by those who are willing and able to put faith in the practical value of its use (B499-500).

Kant says practical faith 'refers only to the guidance which an idea gives me, and to its subjective influence in the furthering of the activities of my reason which confirms me in the idea, and which yet does so without my being in a position to give a speculative account of it' (B855). Another, better known description of what is involved in adopting such faith is that it involves viewing certain objects of experience 'as if they had their ground' in the object represented by an idea (B709), even though the reality of this object is not objectively knowable. In suggesting this interpretation, Kant is intimating that we should regard the idea not as a 'philosophical fiction',³⁴ but as our best

³⁴ Cf. Schaper (n.30 above), p.233. Schaper's comparison of the ideas with the mathematical use of $\sqrt{-2}$ is unwarranted. For the mathematician *knows* he is working with a fictitious hypothesis, to the extent that he labels it an 'imaginary number'. The Critical philosopher, on the other hand, does *not* know the extent to which the ideas he employs accurately represent the unconditioned; but he *thinks* and therefore *believes* they do, otherwise he would not regard them as valid assumptions. Kant says in B397 that, even in their

approximation of what the unconditioned object really would be, if we were able to gain knowledge of it. Because its speculative employment can never be legitimate, faith in the idea is required in order to justify its practical employment.

How, then, are the ideas of reason and the faith on which they depend related to the thing in itself and the faith on which it depends? Many of the claims Kant makes in discussing the ideas can certainly be applied directly to the thing in itself as well. He says, for example, that through the ideas 'we really know only that (concerning the field to which they apply) we know nothing' (B498); and the same can be said of the thing in itself (cf. B45). Moreover, Kant's references to the thing in itself in his discussion of the ideas often connote that the two notions are inextricably related.³⁵ But the closeness of their relationship should not lead us to agree with those interpreters who propose that the thing in itself should actually be included as an idea of reason.³⁶ To do so would be to ignore the difference between Kant's transcendental and practical perspectives. For when the thing in itself is mentioned in the context of a practical perspective (such as Kant adopts whenever he discusses the ideas), it always refers to what the thing in itself would be if it were an unconditioned object of *knowledge*; and this is precisely what he means by the (technically more accurate) term, 'positive noumenon'.³⁷ The ideas are concepts of what might be true about the thing in itself *as positive noumenon*, based on what we actually encounter in experience; they are regulative, rather than constitutive, of experience. By contrast, the thing in itself *as such* is a transcendental presupposition referring to that which is *ultimately* constitutive of (at least) the matter of experience, but which is not considered in experience to be either regulative or constitutive. When this distinction is taken into consideration, it becomes obvious that Kant's use of the latter from the transcendental perspective is quite distinct from his connection of the former with the ideas from the practical perspective.

'pseudo-rational' (i.e. speculative) use, the ideas 'are not fictitious, and have not arisen fortuitously, but have sprung from the very nature of reason'. Only when the object represented by an idea is hypostatized as a real object of empirical knowledge does Kant regard it as 'a mere fiction' (B608).

³⁵ See e.g. B593-4 and *Prolegomena* (n.3 above), p.102.

³⁶ E.g. Schaper (n.30 above), p.238. Schaper strays even further from Kant by combining this approach with the interpretation of ideas as 'useful fictions' (cf. n.34 above), thus requiring the philosopher to *know* the thing in itself does *not* exist, yet to make use of it anyway. This stands in sharp contrast to Kant's more modest approach of putting rational faith in the validity of presupposing its reality from the transcendental perspective. Schaper's belief that things in themselves 'have to remain fictitious' in order to 'make sense' (p.236) results from her tendency to regard the thing in itself as an empirical, rather than a transcendental, presupposition.

³⁷ I have attempted to establish this distinction between Kant's use of the terms 'thing in itself' and 'positive noumenon' in 'Six Perspectives' (n.2 above).

The fact that Kant positions the thing in itself and the positive noumenon at opposite ends of the spectrum of knowledge indicates that the sort of faith which is employed in each case is at least in some respects different. In its transcendental use it is directed towards a single, necessary, theoretical presupposition: the whole realm of transcendental reflection is closed to the philosopher who is unwilling to adopt faith at this point. In its practical use, on the other hand, it is directed towards a variety of practical presuppositions, the denial of which may or may not affect the coherence of the overall system. But apart from the difference in the object to which it is directed and in its relation to that object (as determined by its position in the unfolding of the system), the faith required at these two points is really the same. It is the reasoned decision to treat as true a presupposition which cannot be defended objectively, but which is suggested by the objectively known facts to be the best (or perhaps, the only) choice available which will enhance the unity of the system to which it belongs. When Kant adopts rational faith in the thing in itself, it generates a systematic movement of thought through the whole spectrum of human knowledge, which comes full circle to rest where it began, with faith in the unknown, considered now as the tool of practical reason.

Numerous implications follow from this understanding of the role of faith, particularly in the areas of moral philosophy and philosophical theology. The most obvious example concerns the typical philosopher's view that his ultimate goal is to reach a certainty which is in no sense dependent upon faith. Philosophers of all sorts can readily be found who tend towards this attitude: Heidegger can serve as a typical instance. He describes philosophy as a science of 'thinking' which excludes all faith, relegating the latter to theology.³⁸ But if I am correct in my interpretation of Kant's justification for the type of reflection in which Heidegger himself is interested, and if Kant is correct in putting it forward, then philosophers who push aside faith in this way are in danger of either letting their overconfidence in the powers of unaided human reason lead them to make unwarranted speculations (e.g. about 'Being'), or letting their lack of confidence prevent them from making any significant affirmations at all. For there would then be an important sense in which faith is not only relevant, but vital to the task of the philosopher.

An example of how this perspectival view of the role of faith is applicable to theological issues is the potential it has for resolving the age-old theological controversy over the question of the relationship between faith and reason. With all his 'Enlightened' emphasis on the superiority of reason, Kant saw that transcendental reflection must be preceded by faith if it is to be consistently and coherently employed. Yet at the same time, he saw that reason precedes

³⁸ *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford, 1962), pp. 10, 27, 205-6 (numbers refer to the seventh German edition).

faith when it is viewed in a practical context. The theologian, I suggest, could apply this twofold understanding of faith to his own situation by arguing that religious faith likewise precedes reason transcendently (e.g. when considering the necessary conditions for salvation), even though reason precedes faith in practical matters (e.g. when considering the meaning of a particular doctrine). Of course, such an attempt to integrate the two alternatives into a single consistent solution would have to be discussed in great detail before any firm conclusions could be established.

Other examples could be provided, but are peripheral to the purpose of this paper, which has been to clarify the unfortunately obscure emphasis Kant put on faith. Transcendental reflection can, as we have seen, be partially justified in other ways as well. But our conclusion has been that, by regarding faith as Kant's key to the justification of transcendental reflection, we can say, with T.D. Weldon, that Kant is 'entitled to his view that the nature (indeed, the very "existence") of things in themselves inevitably remains for us a matter of belief, not of scientific metaphysical knowledge'.³⁹ Only when we follow Kant in replacing our natural tendency towards dogmatism or scepticism with a rational faith in the legitimacy of the transcendental presupposition will we be in a position to judge the validity of critical philosophy. Just as practical faith in the ideas can 'bring unity into the body of our detailed [i.e. empirical] knowledge' (B675), so also we may find that such theoretical faith can bring unity into our understanding of the nature of human knowledge in general.

³⁹ *Introduction to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Oxford, 1945), p.11.