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THE SECRET THAT GOD KEEPS FROM US: ON THE NECESSARY PLURALITY OF  
RELIGIONS IN KANT<sup>1</sup>

**W**hy are there many religions and not just one?

Why, whenever we speak of religion, are we always, at the same time, speaking of *religions*? Why are there many different ways to believe, to pray, to worship...to have faith? Why, given the oneness or at least the totality of the holy element that so many religions presuppose, is the access to this totality so shattered, so fragmented? Why, or how, given all the wars that have been fought in the name of religion, has the plurality of the religious experience persisted?

And why, perhaps most importantly, does this plurality of religions seem so necessary to the ways we think about religion, to our most basic concepts of or ideas about religion? These questions, of course, are extremely difficult to answer, so much so that it may seem as though faith itself did not want us to pose them. As though God himself did not want to transmit this knowledge to us – as though he wanted to keep it to himself, to keep it a *secret*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>It is by design that I mention the word *secret* here, for this paper, as will become clear over the next few pages, deals with the place of the secret in religion. As such, my paper owes a great deal to Derrida's seminal work on this subject, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995; originally published as *Donner la mort*, in *L'éthique du don*, Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don, eds Rabaté and Wetzel, Paris: Métailié-Transition, 1992).

My aims here, however, are quite different from those of Derrida's text. Where Derrida turns to the concept of the secret – and specifically as it is articulated by religion rather than philosophy – in order to locate a duty or task (*devoir*) that lies

As though from the very beginning of our inquiry we were dealing with a kind of blind spot of knowledge. And given that our inquiry concerns faith, this is perhaps unsurprising. For not knowing is perhaps the experience *par excellence* of faith, or at least the way that faith is usually posited. We have faith, we are told, precisely *because* there is no knowledge, no knowledge at hand, because knowledge is somehow lacking. Or to view faith in a less negative manner, faith is said to go *beyond* what knowledge can bring us, can give us. In either case, faith is posited as lying outside of knowledge, outside of reason, as the contrary of or in opposition to reason: faith *and* reason.

And indeed, this is the way Kant speaks of faith in his most important study of the subject, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.<sup>3</sup> Kant's aim in this book, as the title indicates, is to think about the relationship between religion and reason, and it is not difficult to summarize the way he conceives of this relationship: reason, for him, is superior to religion, because it provides us with an ability to think conceptually that far surpasses those provided by the various religions of the world. However, this characterization is not exactly faithful to Kant's text. For there is one religion that Kant privileges, a religion that acts as a kind of border for Kant, inasmuch as it provides a midway point of sorts between the experience of religion and that of reason. I am speaking, of course, of Christianity. Kant argues throughout this text that if Christianity is superior to all other religions this is precisely because of its relationship to reason. Christianity, is a kind of reason *avant la lettre*, a "reason for dummies," one could say, a body of knowledge that contains within it, if only in a nascent or potential form, much of the same wisdom that in the end can only be held, as the book's

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beyond all ethics (and would thus be the foundation of what Derrida calls an "absolute responsibility" [67]), my paper attempts to locate, within the secret (and specifically, the place of the secret in Kant's *Religionsphilosophie*), a different kind of demand: that of a necessary plurality of religions.

The twenty-odd years since the publication of Derrida's book have witnessed a flourishing of texts dealing with religious concepts of secrecy, and the way these concepts are taken up in philosophy, theory and literature. These include Derrida's own "Literature in Secret," included in the second edition of *The Gift of Death* (2007); Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis, ed. Donis and David Webb (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), a series of interviews of Derrida conducted by Ferraris; John D. Caputo's "Instants, Secrets, and Singularities: Dealing Death in Kierkegaard and Derrida," in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. Martin Matustik and Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 216-38; and the excellent collection *Le Secret: Motif et moteur de la littérature*, ed. Chantal Zabus (Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 1999), which includes several essays that deal specifically with religion. I should also mention here the recent special issue on "Religion and Secrecy" of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 74.2 (2006), which includes Ann Williams Duncan's very informative "Religion and Secrecy: A Bibliographical Essay" (469-482).

<sup>3</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. George di Giovanni, in Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31-191. All emphases within quotations, unless otherwise noted, are Kant's.

title tells us, by reason alone. Christianity, for Kant, could be characterized as a reason for the masses, who, if they cannot aspire to reason, can at least exist within a set of tenets, codes and commands that simulate those of reason; and while reason is exclusive because it requires a level of intellect to which most of humanity is denied, Christianity—for the simple reason that anyone can become a Christian—is completely and absolutely inclusive. Christianity therefore exists in a privileged relationship to reason, for the step from the former to the latter is quantitative rather than qualitative: Christianity is the only religion that can be said to exist *within* the limits of reason.<sup>4</sup>

Christianity, however, is not the only religion that interests Kant in his book. I am not referring here to his very interesting, but in the end only passing, references to Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, but to the only religion, aside from Christianity, that Kant deals with at length in this text. I am referring here to Judaism, and specifically to the *border* between Judaism and Christianity.

Christianity, of course, could not exist in anything other than a liminal relationship to Judaism—it could not exist in any other way than one that would place it in contact with Judaism, that would have it *touching* Judaism at any of multiple points. For must Christianity not be said to have grown out of Judaism? Any limit between them, it would seem, could not possibly divide, as limits are most often thought to do, an inside and an outside, but would rather be a complex interior limit or set of limits that divides a body from that which it has incorporated or built upon. Yet this is decidedly *not* the way Kant conceives of their relationship. The relationship Kant posits between Christianity and Judaism is not truly one of incorporation, nor is it one that would posit the latter as the foundation of the former. On the contrary, for Kant, the relationship between Christianity and Judaism can only be one of *exclusion*. An exclusion that is based on a certain conception of faith: Kant seeks to exclude Judaism precisely because, he argues, Judaism is not a true religion, inasmuch as it does not truly have any relationship to *faith*.

How, then, does Kant arrive at this conception of Judaism?<sup>5</sup> Let us turn toward

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<sup>4</sup>Kant's treatment of religion is therefore very different from the classic (to the point that it has become a cliché) Marxist conception of religion as the "opium of the masses." Rather than a veil or a cloud of smoke that would conceal or distort rational thinking, religion (that is, Christianity) for Kant is on the contrary a kind of "entry point" or first step on the road to reason.

<sup>5</sup>Throughout this section, I will be dealing with Kant's comments on Judaism and its relationship to Christianity. I will not take into account the "other" monotheism – Islam – simply because Kant says very little about it. In a way, this is unsurprising. For one thing, Islam, for Kant's specific context, would have been a distant reality: the Ottoman Empire, by this time, was in serious decline, and the closest Muslim communities to Königsberg would have been in the remote and, from the standpoint of Enlightenment, backward southeast of Europe; the Jews, on the other hand, had been established in the Germanic regions of Europe for the better part of two millennia at the very least (Amos Elon notes that the earliest written record of their presence in these territories dates from 321 A.D.; see Elon, *The Pity of it All* [New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002], 21), and if we can infer from Kant's overwhelmingly

his text here, to understand exactly what is at work and what is at stake in Kant's conception. And let us note, first of all, that Kant's treatment of Judaism occurs in a section of the text in which he is speaking of *history*: the third part of the text, entitled "The Victory of the Good Principle over the Evil Principle, and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth," and specifically the second of this part's two divisions: the "Historical Representation of the Gradual Establishment of the Dominion of the Good Principle on Earth." This "division," therefore – a "historical representation," in contrast to the "philosophical representation" of the first of this part's divisions ("Philosophical representation of the victory of the good principle in the founding of a Kingdom of God on earth") – could be said to leave the terrain of philosophy, to a certain degree, in order to deal with the historical development of faith. And in dealing with a history, Kant also writes a history of his own: for how else could he "represent" a history than by writing a new one, inflecting a specific history in order to make it his own?

Let us look more closely, then, at this Kantian historiography. Kant writes, "This history [that of the establishment of the good principle on earth] can have unity...only if merely restricted to that portion of the human race in which the predisposition to the unity of the universal church has already been brought close to its development."<sup>6</sup> This unity is vital because "we must have a principle of unity if we are to count as modifications of one and the same church the succession of different forms of faith which replace one another."<sup>7</sup> In speaking of "forms of faith" (*Glaubensarten*), Kant would seem to be introducing perfectly the shift by which one of these "forms" (Christianity) splits off from, all the while arising out of, another (Judaism). Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Kant continues:

[W]e can deal only with the history of the church which from the beginning bore within it the germ and the principles of the objective unity of the true and *universal* religious faith to which it is gradually being brought nearer. – And it is apparent, first of all, that the *Jewish* faith stands in absolutely no essential connection, i.e. in no unity of concepts, with the ecclesiastical faith whose history we want to consider, even though it immediately preceded it and provided the

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negative treatment of Judaism the perception of a certain threat regarding this other in his midst, it is logical that he would not have felt the same way with regards to Islam. For another thing, Islam, simply for the fact that it comes "after" Christianity, would for obvious reasons concern Kant less than Judaism – though in truth the issue of temporality here is extremely complex, given that Islam entertains a no less complex relationship to its foundations than Christianity, and given that these foundations overlap with those of Christianity. Yet one also wonders, given the fleeting and enigmatic treatment of Islam in Kant's text (and given that most of his criticisms of Judaism would not hold up against it), whether Kant felt a certain need to *avoid* Islam – that "uncontaminated" monotheism that in many ways exists in a no less intricate relationship to Christianity than Judaism.

<sup>6</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:124.

<sup>7</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:125.

physical occasion for the founding of this church (the Christian).<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the question of faith, there is little that needs to be said here. Kant is marking out what he perceives as a qualitative difference between the Jewish and the Christian approaches to faith. And yet let us note here that he is not speaking solely of faith. He is speaking, rather, of a *portion of the human race*, one that, he claims, is marked by its *unity*. Speaking of faith, therefore, he speaks not only of a faith but also of a certain *people*, a people of faith; and indeed, how could this not be the case, given that he has announced his terrain as one not only of religion or philosophy, but *history*?

But let us remain close to the text here, in order to begin to understand the charge being made against Judaism, or as is becoming clearer and clearer, against *the Jews*. Kant writes:

The *Jewish faith*, as originally established, was only a collection of merely statutory laws supporting a political state; for whatever moral additions were *appended* to it, whether originally or only later, do not in any way belong to Judaism as such. Strictly speaking Judaism *is not a religion at all* but simply the union of a number of individuals [*sondern bloß Vereinigung einer Menge Menschen*] who, since they belonged to a particular stock [*da sie zu einem besondern Stamm gehörten*], established themselves into a community *under purely political laws* [*sich zu einem gemeinen Wesen unter bloß politischen Gesetzen...formten*], hence not into a church; Judaism was rather *meant* to be a purely secular state, so that, were it to be dismembered through adverse accidents, it would still be left with the political faith (which pertains to it by essence) that this state would be restored to it (with the advent of the Messiah) [my emphasis]. The fact that the constitution of this state was based on a theocracy (visibly, on an aristocracy of priests or leaders who

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid. In this passage, Kant is clearly taking issue with Mendelssohn, who, in a famous passage in his 1783 text "Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism," in *Jerusalem, and Other Jewish Writings*, ed. and trans. Alfred Jospe (New York: Schocken, 1969), gives the following response to an anonymous "Searcher for Light and Right" who, based on criticisms Mendelssohn is perceived to have made of Judaism, has challenged him to convert to Christianity:

This challenge is stated solemnly and movingly enough. Nevertheless, my dear sir, shall I take this step without first pondering whether it will really extricate me from the state of confusion in which you think I find myself? If it were true that the cornerstones of my house are so out of alignment that the entire building threatens to collapse, would I act wisely if I attempted to save my belongings simply by moving them from the lower to the upper floor? Would I be safer there? Christianity, as you know, is built upon Judaism and would therefore collapse along with it. Thus, when you say that my conclusions undermine the foundations of Judaism and offer me the safety of your upper floor, must I not suspect that you mock me? (58)

boasted of instructions directly imparted to them from God), and that God's name was therefore honoured in it (though only as a secular regent with absolutely no rights over, or claims upon, conscience), did not make that constitution religious.<sup>9</sup>

What we find here is an extremely interesting articulation of the origins of Christianity (which nonetheless reproduces the most banal and uninteresting Christian discourses on Judaism, on the supposed inferiority of Judaism), indeed an extremely interesting articulation of the concept of the origin. Judaism, argues Kant, is not exactly other to Christianity, yet nor does it deserve to be viewed as integral to the latter, as the essential foundation that Christianity cannot do without. If Christianity undeniably emerges out of Judaism, it is not in the mode of one religion emerging out of another, but rather as a true religion (what for Kant is perhaps the only true religion) emerging out of a "non-religion," or as a religion, to be more precise, emerging out of a political pact. Kant's reproach against the Jewish religion is precisely that *it is not a religion*, but merely a set of "purely political laws," the vision of a "secular state," a "political faith"; and the division Kant wants to draw here is clear: on the one hand, religion, and on the other, politics.

Yet we are not dealing here solely with the origins of Christianity (and its supposed inheritance from Judaism); rather, as the passage above makes clear, we are dealing with the origins of *the Christians* (and their supposed provenance from *the Jews*). Kant's entire lexicon here is not only one of faith, but of the peoples to whom this faith belongs, of the people literally brought about by this faith or these faiths. What is at stake in the passage, to use Kant's own terms, is the question of *community*: what distinguishes the Jews from the Christians is the fact that the Jewish community, their common being or essence (*gemeiner Wesen*), is purely political, purely secular. What binds the Jews together, as opposed to the Christians, is not faith but rather a "political faith," a faith emptied of its religious content—a faith emptied of its faith, of itself.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, what places the Jews and the Christians on opposite sides of a division is faith itself, the extent to which a people can be said to possess a faith, the extent to which a faith can be said to inhere in a people. And what is at stake is the very Kantian concept of faith. We will again need to follow Kant closely here, and specifically, the continuation of his text, in which he gives three "proofs" that the religion of the Jews is not, and was never meant to be, a religion.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>There would, of course, be much to say here regarding the Christian concept of *kenosis*, itself, of course, denoting a faith emptied of all faith, as it were, a faith that consists in emptying or expelling itself from itself. One even wonders how it is that Kant, whose text consists, in the main, of a rigorous examination of the New Testament, could possibly have made this charge against Judaism without the slightest meditation on how it might apply to Christianity. I refer here simply to the many recent theoretical texts on Paul which discuss this concept and its importance.

The first and briefest of these proofs, of these charges against Judaism, is the following: “all its commands are of the kind which even a political state can uphold and lay down as coercive laws, since they deal only with external actions”<sup>11</sup>. And Kant immediately gives an example – the example *par excellence*:

[A]lthough the Ten Commandments would have ethical validity for reason even if they had not been publicly given, yet in that legislation they are given with no claim at all on the *moral disposition* in following them (whereas Christianity later placed the chief work in this) but were rather directed simply and solely to external observance.<sup>12</sup>

At stake here, then, is again a certain distinction, that between “external actions” and an internal “moral disposition” (*moralische Gesinnung*). What is interesting here is that we are dealing with *the same body of commandments* taken up differently by two “distinct” religions, but while the commandments hold for both religions, only Christianity places its emphasis (its “chief work,” *Hauptwerk*) on the moral disposition that should accompany them, which they should command and out of which they should arise. Mere “external observation,” would be not religious but political. From here, we pass to the second proof of the areligiosity of the Jews: the fact that, for them “all the consequences of fulfilling or transgressing these commandments, all rewards or punishments, are restricted to the kind which can be dispensed to all human beings in this world indifferently.”<sup>13</sup> The consequences of obedience or disobedience, therefore, lie, for Judaism, not in an afterworld but in this world. The Jews may conceive of an afterlife, but this is not an *ethical* conception, insofar as rewards and punishments in this afterlife do not depend on the deeds or misdeeds of this one.

Now since “no religion can be conceived without faith in a future life, Judaism as such, taken in its purity, entails absolutely no religious faith.”<sup>14</sup> Kant does admit that Judaism conceives of an afterlife. However, what is key for him is the difference between the Jewish and Christian conceptions of this afterlife:

It can hardly be doubted that, just like other peoples, even the most savage, the Jews too must have had a faith in a future life, hence had their heaven and hell, for this faith automatically imposes itself upon everyone by virtue of the universal moral predisposition in human nature. Hence it must have come about *intentionally* that the lawgiver<sup>15</sup> of this people, though portrayed as God himself, did not

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<sup>11</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:126

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>*Gesetzgeber*, also translatable as “legislator” or “lawmaker.” The use of this word is unsurprising, given that Kant follows an entire tradition here, yet interesting, as the word fits seamlessly within Kant’s “secular” conception of Judaism. This opens up, of course, onto a much larger issue: that of the name of God. I will limit myself here to a few remarks on this issue. Kant undoubtedly made use, during the preparation of his

wish to show the least consideration for the future life – an indication that his intention was to found only a political and not an ethical community [*das er nur ein politisches, nicht ein ethisches gemeines Wesen habe gründen wollen*], for to speak in a political community of rewards and punishments not visible in this life would be, on this assumption, a totally inconsequential and improper procedure. Now, although it can also hardly be doubted that the Jews subsequently produced, each for himself, some sort of religious faith which they added to the articles of their statutory faith, yet such a faith never was an integral part of the legislation of Judaism.<sup>16</sup>

The Jews – referred to in the past tense – must indeed, as human nature requires, have believed in an afterlife; yet this afterlife (as opposed to that of the Christians) is not an *essential* part of their “religion,” since their “lawgiver” did not concern himself with it. Even worse, this lawgiver – since human nature compels us to conceive of some sort of afterlife – must *intentionally* (*absichtlich*), as Kant emphasizes, have ignored the “future life” (hence even the Jewish God, for Kant, is not an ethical being). While the Jews, therefore – or rather, each Jew for himself – eventually produced a conception of the afterlife (hence adding “some sort of religious faith” to “the articles of their statutory faith”), this conception is not integral to the “legislation of Judaism.”

Which brings us, finally to the third and perhaps most important proof of Judaism’s areligiosity. This proof concerns the absence of a universal project in Judaism, reflected in the claim made by the Jews that they are “the chosen people.”

[F]ar from establishing an age suited to the achievement of the *church universal*, let alone establishing it itself in its time, Judaism rather excluded the whole human race from its communion [*Gemeinschaft*, also community or collective], a people especially chosen by Jehovah for himself, hostile to all other peoples and hence

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text, of Luther’s translation of the Bible, and his seemingly limited conception of God as “lawgiver” or legislator would seem to be influenced by Luther’s translation of the tetragrammaton as “Lord” (“*Herr*”). This translation, however, is implicitly criticized by Mendelssohn in his own translation of the Psalms and the Pentateuch, where *Yehova* is rendered in a much less “secular” fashion, as “*der Ewige*” (“the Eternal”). On this matter, see Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 52-3.

It should be noted that Kant deviates from Luther where he deems it necessary: Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, in their 1934 translation of *Die Religion*, note that when Kant, in the very section we have been reading, cites the verse from Matthew 5:12, “Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (“*seid fröhlich und getrost, es wird euch im Himmel wohl vergolten werden*”), his use of the term *vergolten* (repaid) differs from Luther’s *belohnet* (rewarded). See Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1934), 125 n.1.

<sup>16</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:126-27

treated with hostility by all of them.<sup>17</sup>

The Jews—and nowhere has it been clearer that Kant is speaking of a *people* here, of what he calls the Jewish communion or community—treat other communities with hostility or enmity, and are treated in like fashion by other communities. Furthermore, by Kant’s logic, the Jews are treated with hostility only *because* of the hostility they first showed to others because they jealously guard God for themselves: the entire history of this hatred, this exclusion, turns on the question of specificity and universality, universality and singularity. The areligiosity of the Jews—the fact that their faith is not a faith at all but a mere “political faith”—lies in the fact that, unlike the Christians (or the Muslims, for that matter), they have no pretensions to universality: God is not exactly their God alone, but he has indeed *chosen* them over and above all the other communities.

The *wrong* that the Jews have committed—or, we could state within a Kantian framework, and with no exaggeration, the *evil deed* they have undertaken<sup>18</sup>—revolves precisely around the fact that they have, to a certain extent, kept God for *themselves*. Rather than opening up God to the entire universe, they have sought to keep him as their own. They have sought, in other words, to keep God a *secret* of sorts: to keep God as that which they and they alone share amongst themselves, not precisely in exclusion of others but “better” than others. While others may (indeed should/must) worship or venerate the same God (insofar as God is One), the Jews partake in the Godhead in a *singular* way, the Jewish community has a *singular* relationship with God, the knowledge of which is defined precisely by the fact that it is *denied* to others, that it “belongs” to one people *alone*. The Jewish “faith” is to be neither shared with nor communicated to others: it is to be jealously possessed, guarded, hidden—kept in *secret*.

## §

Kant’s most damning criticism of the Jews, then, concerns their lack of any pretence to universality, this secret that they share amongst themselves. They are guilty precisely because they keep a secret; the very existence of this secret suffices, for Kant, to reveal their guilt. And yet interestingly, Kant devotes one of the most fascinating sections of his text to the place of the secret in Christianity.

Let us recall that for Kant, Christianity holds a privileged place among faiths, inasmuch as it grants us direct access to the realm of reason. There are, however, elements of Christianity that do not fit within the bounds of reason, that stubbornly refuse their incorporation within reason. Kant in no way shies away from these elements. On the contrary, his treatment of them is extremely interesting. For he treats them—as would seem logical, in a text that announces itself as dealing with boundaries—on the borders of his text. He treats them, that

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 6:127.

<sup>18</sup>Recall, again, the title of this section: “Historical representation of the gradual establishment of the dominion of the good principle on earth.” Are the Jews not posed precisely *in opposition* to the establishment of this good principle?

is, in a series of “General Remarks” (*Allgemeinen Anmerkungen*) that follow on the heels of each of the book’s four chapters, remarks that, rather than being continuations of the chapters they follow, are, to use Kant’s word, merely “appended [*angehängt*]” to them.<sup>19</sup>

What is essential about the themes dealt with in these *Anmerkungen* is the fact that they cannot be subsumed within reason. Kant states as much at the conclusion of the first of these remarks—or rather, in a note that follows the first of these remarks and explains the need to treat their subject matter outside of the main “body” of the text. Therefore, Kant’s explanation amounts to be a note on a note. And as would be expected, he does so through a vocabulary that focuses on the phenomenon of the *border*, that explains the need for these general remarks in and through a reflection on the border. He writes:

This General Remark is the first of four which are appended, one to each part of this writing, and which could bear the labels 1) Of Effects of Grace; 2) Miracles; 3) Mysteries; and 4) Means of Grace. – These are, as it were, *parerga* to religion within the boundaries of pure reason; they do not belong within it yet border on it. Reason, conscious of its impotence to satisfy its moral needs, extends itself to extravagant ideas [*überschwenglichen Ideen*] which might make up for this lack, though it is not suited to this enlarged domain. Reason does not contest the possibility or actuality of the objects of these ideas; it just *cannot incorporate them into its maxims of thought and action* [my emphasis].<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, reason—posited as the subject of the last two sentences—treats these *parerga* in an extremely enigmatic fashion: it neither confirms nor denies their existence. We are unsure, having read this passage, whether they are “possible or actual.” These extravagant ideas nonetheless seem *essential* to reason in some way: in the face of its own lack, reason seems inevitably to “extend itself” to them. Yet it only confronts them as something completely foreign: it only engages with this “inscrutable field of the supernatural” at its limits, its borders.<sup>21</sup>

Of these four *parerga*, in this inquiry into the issue of secrecy in Kant’s treatment of religion, I will focus on a single one, that of *mysteries*, which is to be found at the end of the book’s third part: (the part in which Kant discusses the Jews): holy mysteries or *heilige Geheimnisse*. What, then, is a *Geheimnis*? A mystery, of course. And yet the word also translates, in English, by *secret*. In the *Geheimnis*, in other words, we find a cluster of significations that isn’t exactly translatable by a single English word; the *Geheimnis* covers senses or meanings that in other languages—English and the Latin languages at the very least<sup>22</sup>—are conveyed by two

<sup>19</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:52.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>*Geheimnis* can be translated, in French, as both *secret* and *mystère*, in Spanish as *secreto* and *misterio*, in Portuguese as *segredo* and *mistério*, in Italian as *segreto* and *mistero*.

words.<sup>23</sup> Kant's translators, of course, have preferred the word "mystery," and this is undoubtedly the most logical choice, following with the entire Christian tradition. However, can we be so certain that the one sense excludes the other – can we be so certain, in other words, that when we are talking about a holy mystery here, we are not also speaking of something like a *holy secret*?

We can begin our response to this question by looking more closely at the *Geheimnis*. The adjective form of this noun is *geheim*, that which is kept secret, confidential, or hidden, and Kant speaks often, throughout the text, of that which, in religion, is undertaken *insgeheim*, secretly—behind closed doors. Indeed, the metaphor of the door is an apt one here, for these words make us think of nothing less than those words that begin with the root *heim*, such as *Heimat*, *heimisch*, *heimelig*, or indeed the noun *Heim* and the adverb *heim*, all of which refer to what in English we would call the *home* (which is of course itself derived from the German *Heim*). The connection could not be more evident: we think also here of the adverb *heimlich* (secretly, clandestinely), the noun *Heimlichkeit* (secrecy, furtiveness), the verb *heimlichtun* (to be secretive).

And these connections, these etymological links and derivations, should not surprise us. For does the secret not provide a *home* of sorts, a kind of dwelling place for that which is not to be let out into the world? Is the *Geheimnis* not the outcome, the *ge-heim*, of a bringing-close, a holding of information close to the body, because for one reason or another it is not permitted to see the light of day? What is *insgeheim* is no doubt not only that which I do not wish to speak or reveal, it is that to which I have given a kind of dwelling or hearth, that for which I have provided an abode, a staying or resting place – what one might refer to in French as a *demeure*.

A secret, then. But we have already stated that Kant's translators have justly employed the word "mystery" to render *Geheimnis* here. What, then, would differentiate the *secret* and the *mystery*? Perhaps we can begin our response to this question by isolating two possible differences, differences that belong largely to the commonplace or everyday notions of these words and that we may have to nuance or problematize later on. First, the secret and the mystery would seem to have somewhat different relationships to *language*. The mystery, on the one hand, would be that to which language has no access: mysteries occur when there are no words to describe given phenomena, when events, or rather the reasons behind events, resist attempts by language to explain them. Mysteries would seem to close themselves off to words. This is not the case with secrets: words would seem not only to have an intimate relationship to secrets, but to be *the very element out of which secrets are composed*. Hence, a paradox: secrets, characterized by their silence, are nonetheless comprised of that which seems inimical to silence—in other words, of language. Indeed, we can suggest another difference based on this distinction, a difference in the respective relationships of

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<sup>23</sup>We should not forget the existence of the German word *Mysterium* here. The word is, however, far less common than *Geheimnis*, and what is key here is that both secret and mystery would most often be translated into German by a single word, *Geheimnis*.

secrets and mysteries to *knowledge*: while a mystery is by definition unknowable, a secret is not only known but known intimately – all too well, we could say.

This would lead to the second difference that we can suggest. Perhaps part of what marks the difference between secrets and mysteries is a motivation, one that we would associate most often with negative connotations, and one that we would generally attribute not to the mystery but to the secret: while the knowledge of a mystery is by definition possessed by no one (or almost no one – we will return to this question below), a secret (precisely because it is composed of language, because it is made up of words) is indeed possessed, owned, *kept*: kept not only by those who “keep the secret,” but also kept *away* from others, at times for benevolent reasons (as when the “keeper” thinks that harm may come to those who gain knowledge of the secret, or that those who gain access to it may use it in harmful ways), most often for malevolent ones (the secret’s keeper wants to keep all of the benefits that accrue<sup>24</sup> from the possession of the secret for himself). While a mystery does not need to be kept or kept watch over, therefore, a secret, on the contrary, is most often not only guarded but also *jealously* guarded. On the one hand, the unknown, on the other, that which is dangerous precisely because it can be known. Yet just such a motivation – a motivation to *keep* the *Geheimnis*, a motivation on the part of one to keep it from others – is central to Kant’s discussion here. We will explore this further below. For now, let us look more closely at Kant’s text, to see how it is that the thinking of the *Geheimnis* develops.

From the very beginning of his “General Remark,” we can see not only that Kant’s *Geheimnis* (unsurprisingly, given the breadth of the German word) seems to exhibit the characteristics both of the mystery and the secret, but also that, whether we think of the first or the second of these translations, his treatment of the *Geheimnis* is a strange one. For one thing that the mystery and the secret would have in common is *silence*, either because nothing is known about it or because its bearer does not want anything known about it. And yet we can see throughout this “General Remark” that what marks the *Geheimnis*, for Kant, is above all its relation to *speaking*:<sup>25</sup> to communication, to profession, indeed to *confession*. Let us look at the first paragraph of this remark:

Investigation into all forms of faith that relate to religion invariably runs across a *mystery* [*Geheimnis*] behind their inner nature, i.e. something *holy* [*Heiliges*], which can indeed be *cognized* [*gekannt*] by every individual, yet cannot be *professed* publicly [*öffentlich bekannt*], i.e. cannot be communicated universally [*allgemein*]

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Unsurprisingly, given the close conceptual relationship between religion and finance, we often seem to find ourselves on the terrain of finance in Kant’s text. See especially 6:66-6:78, where Kant speaks at length about debt, credit, estimation, etc. On the links between religion and finance see: Philip Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety*, (London: Routledge, 2002); Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), reviewed in Clayton Crockett’s “Money and Credit, Theologically Speaking,” in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9.3 (Fall 2008), 7-10.

<sup>25</sup>And is this not logical for an *Anmerkung*, for that which is *angemerkt*?

*mitgeteilt*]. – As something *holy* it must be a moral object, hence an object of reason and one capable of being sufficiently recognized internally [*innerlich...erkannt*] for practical use; yet, as something *mysterious* [*Geheimen*], not for theoretical use, for then it would have to be communicable [*mittelbar*] to everyone and hence also capable of being externally and publicly professed [*äußerlich und öffentlich bekannt*].<sup>26</sup>

One cannot think about belief or faith (again, in German we are dealing with a single word—*Glaube*—that covers what, for other languages, are distinct words and meanings<sup>27</sup>), then, without a *Geheimnis*: investigation into faith (*all* forms of faith, not only Christianity), Kant states, must *invariably*—or *inevitably*, *unavoidably* (*unvermeidlich*)—deal with the question of the *Geheimnis* (which, as he tells us twice here, is *holy*—indeed, is defined in part by this holiness). A *Geheimnis*, furthermore, which cannot be professed or confessed, made known (*bekannt*): and unlike the commonplace Christian conception of confession, therefore, this *Geheimnis*, so central to faith, cannot be spoken away (for we cannot speak of it at all). It cannot be confessed, professed, or *communicated* (*mitgeteilt*), at least not universally or *publicly* (*öffentlich*). The *Geheimnis* would seem to stand in the way of Kant's project, that of thinking a *religion within the boundaries of reason*: for is Christianity—the only religion that could possibly be spoken of in relation to reason—not characterized (as opposed, as we have already seen, to Judaism) by its *universality*? What we are dealing with here would seem inimical to the concept of universality, inasmuch as it constitutes the most internal (*innerlich*) of phenomena.

I should remark in passing that this emphasis on *speaking* would seem to bring us, in our reflections on the *Geheimnis*, away from the mystery of which tradition speaks, and closer to the *secret*. For are we not speaking, here, of something that, beyond simply being unknown, is defined as *unspeakable*—unconfessable, uncommunicable, unavowable? What seems noteworthy here is that Kant, in the very first paragraph of this excursus on the *Geheimnis*, writes not only of that which cannot be known, but of that which cannot be *voiced*.

The *Geheimnisse* of which Kant speaks, however, while they may not be speakable, are nonetheless not wholly untransmissible. We can know them, we can know of them, they can be made known to us. How is this so? The response has to do with the *openness* of these *Geheimnisse*. Kant has already, again, spoken in these terms in the first paragraph of this section, cited above: *Geheimnisse*, he has stated—indeed he has stated it not once but twice—are not *öffentlich bekannt*, are not publicly professed. They are *innerlich* (internal) and not *äußerlich* (external) matters. *Innerlich erkannt*, he states: and given, first of all, that what is *innerlich erkannt* and what is *nicht öffentlich bekannt* are spoken of in the very same breath (coming into contact with one another in and through the opposition Kant

<sup>26</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:137.

<sup>27</sup>Again, for the Latin languages as well as for English. Hence, in French: *foi* and *croyance*, in Spanish: *fe* and *creencia*, etc.

draws between them), and given, second, the common resonances between the *kennen* words Kant employs here (*kennen*, to cognize; *erkennen*, to recognize; *bekennen*, to profess, confess, avow), the way each of these words echoes the others, we find another link with the act of *speaking*: as though what we were dealing with here were not simply something that is internally recognized, but internally *spoken*. Spoken with a silent voice, spoken, paradoxically, in a voice that speaks but cannot be heard.

The *Geheimnis*—at once spoken and silent—that cannot be *öffentlich bekannt*, publicly pro/confessed, is nonetheless, somehow, revealed to us—made *open*, that is, made open to us. Kant says so only a few paragraphs on. Having just spoken of a divine trinity that, he claims, is necessary to any faith—faith in God’s threefold quality as holy, benevolent and just – a faith without which we risk anthropomorphizing God, and which is “by nature available to all human reason and is therefore to be met with in the religion of most civilized peoples” (6:140), Kant writes the following:

But since this faith [in a divine trinity], which purified the moral relation of human beings to the highest being from harmful anthropomorphism on behalf of universal religion and brought it up to measure with the true morality of a people of God [*eines Volks Gottes*], was first set forth in a certain doctrine of faith (the Christian one) and made public [*öffentlich*] to the world only in it, its promulgation [*Bekanntmachung*] can well be called the revelation [*Offenbarung*] of something which had hitherto remained a mystery [*Geheimnis*] for human beings through their own fault.<sup>28</sup>

The *Geheimnis*—in this case, the mystery of divine trinity which though it is found in the religion of most “civilized peoples,” *first* came to light in the Christian religion (a strange claim, given the relatively recent birth of Christianity<sup>29</sup>)—though we have already seen that it is never *öffentlich bekannt*, is nonetheless involved, somehow, in an *Offenbarung*, a revelation (a making-open). An opening that consists of an *öffentlich Bekanntmachung*, a public (an open) promulgation or announcement (a public/open making-professed or -confessed, one could state). And that which cannot be pro/confessed literally begins to make itself audible here: in and through its revelation/opening, it seems to do that which by definition it cannot: articulate or voice itself.

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<sup>28</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:141.

<sup>29</sup>A claim, furthermore, that Kant seems to refute in a note on the very same page. Speaking of “the threefold quality of the moral head of the human race,” Kant states that “many ancient peoples hit upon this idea,” including the Zoroastrians, the Hindus, the ancient Egyptians, and the Goths. And as if incredulously, Kant ends the note with the following enigmatic passage: “*Even the Jews* [my emphasis] seem to have pursued these ideas in the final period of their hierarchical constitution. For in the charge of the Pharisees that Christ had called himself a *Son of God*, they do not seem to put any special weight of blame on the doctrine that God has a son, but only on Christ’s claim to be the Son of God” (6:141).

The secret is literally *open*: what is most proper to this secret, it would seem, is that it reveals itself...*without, for all that it reveals itself, becoming any less secret*: the *Geheimnis* does not cease to be the *Geheimnis*, the *Geheimnis* remains *geheim*, even (and especially, as this is what is most proper to it) in its promulgation, in its profession or confession, in its articulation. *Remaining secret, the secret nonetheless secretes*. Rather than smoothing over this contradiction, we must seek to maintain it, to move about within its tension because it is in and by this very contradiction that Kant develops his thinking of the secret.

An *open* secret.<sup>30</sup> Let us note that the secret is not merely open. It is always open to *someone*. And yet this is still erroneous, for it is never open to a single person: what is most proper to the secret, on the contrary, is the fact that it is *shared*.<sup>31</sup> We have seen earlier, for example, that part of Kant's reproach of the Jews is based on the fact that in the very non-universality of their religion (or rather, to employ Kant's terms, their "political faith"), they seem not only to exclude the rest of humanity, but to keep (to share, to hold *in common*) a secret from them: a certain covenant, a certain wisdom, a singular relationship to God. Yet strangely, this very element for which he reproaches the Jews seems now not only to be present in other religions, but indeed to appear as that which is most fundamental to them, for secrecy, we have seen, is essential not only to the Jewish "faith" but to *all* faith, to all faiths. And what is more, if secrecy is, as Kant seems to have stated regarding the Jews, reason in and of itself for guilt (evidence, that is, that evil has been perpetrated, a sin has been committed), is anyone, by Kant's own account, more guilty of this charge than the Christians? Kant has stated, after all, in the passage we have just read, that the mystery of the holy trinity, while it is "to be met with in the religion of most civilized peoples," was nonetheless "first set forth in a certain doctrine of faith (the Christian one)." Are the Christians, in other words, not the bearers *par excellence* of the secret—does the secret of the Jews (and hence also their guilt) not pale in comparison to that of the Christians, to this essential secret that was *first* revealed to them? Confluence, therefore, yet again, between community and secrecy—the secret (the specific *Geheimnis* of the holy trinity), Kant states, is "inherent in the concept of a people regarded as a community [*liegt in dem Begriffe eines Volks, als eines gemeinen Wesens*]", as though the one could not be thought without the other.<sup>32</sup>

Yet while this secret may indeed be held in common, may indeed be essential to the very concept of community, it must nonetheless remain, in its very openness, open/closed. For while a community may "possess" the secret, while the secret may "belong" to the community, the secret does not cease, in this possession or belonging, to be secret—to be withheld from the very "members" of the

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<sup>30</sup>The secret is essentially open. Which means, of course, that strictly speaking, the secret is *impossible*.

<sup>31</sup>Has Kant himself not stated in this section that the *Geheimnis* is *mitgeteilt*?

<sup>32</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:140. Also see Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, (London: Verso, 1994) 129-30. Here Žižek discusses the inherent link between secrecy and community. He conceives of the Lacanian superego as the "underside" of the Law, its "'unwritten,' obscene secret code," which constitutes the "'spirit of community.'" See especially the third chapter, "Superego by Default."

community who would purport to guard it. The *Geheimnis* (and we seem again to be much closer to the terrain of the secret than that of the mystery) that is held by the “people” is also kept from them. The *Geheimnis* indeed has a *bearer*, a *keeper*—and a jealous one at that. We again follow Kant here:

Now regarding these mysteries [Kant has just spoken about the call, satisfaction and election], so far as they touch the moral life-history of every human being – namely how does it happen that there is a moral good or evil in the world at all, and (if evil is in every human being and at all times) how is it that good will still originates from it and is restored in a human being; or why, when *this* happens in some, are others however excluded from it – regarding this God has revealed nothing to us, nor can he reveal anything, for we would not *understand* it [*hat uns Gott nichts offenbart, und kann uns auch nichts offenbaren, weil wir es doch nicht verstehen würden*].<sup>33</sup>

The jealous keeper of the secret is of course none other than God.<sup>34</sup> A God who,

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<sup>33</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:143-4.

<sup>34</sup>In putting things thus (and this has already been the case earlier in the essay), I leave myself open to the charge that I am anthropomorphizing God; and this is no doubt a serious danger, given Kant’s insistence that we avoid this at all costs. If I state things in this manner, however, it is not in order to counter Kant. On the contrary, I am attempting here to remain as close to him as possible—as close, in other words, to his text, and to the *articulation of the logic of the secret within this text*, as possible. I have tried to argue that at least two key points in Kant’s text—his treatment of the Jews, and his “General Remark” on the *Geheimnis*—Kant articulates, even if in spite of himself, a theory of secrecy, and a theory of the specifically and irreducibly religious nature of secrecy. A secret, however—as Kant implies when, in the passage I have just cited, he writes of that which God has not revealed to us—must have a “keeper,” someone who “knows” the secret but refuses to tell it. And the keeper of the secret, I have tried to argue, for the deep logic of everything Kant has said about the *Geheimnis*, is none other than God.

The risk of anthropomorphism, therefore, is admittedly and undeniably present. To my mind, it is all a question of the conception one has of God—of what, exactly, the name God refers to. Derrida, in a discussion of holy or divine secrecy in a text (*The Gift of Death*) cited earlier in this essay, writes the following:

We must stop thinking about God as someone, over there, way up there, transcendent, and, what is more – into the bargain, precisely – capable, more than any satellite orbiting in space, of seeing into the most secret of the most interior places. It is perhaps necessary, if we are to follow the traditional Judeo-Christian-Islamic injunction, but also at the risk of turning it against that tradition, to think of God and of the name of God without such idolatrous stereotyping or representation. Then we might say: God is the name of the possibility I have of keeping a secret that is visible from the interior but not seen from the exterior. (108, translation slightly modified)

Derrida ties God, the very *name* of God, to the secret—to the possibility that I have (that the subject has) of keeping a secret. My aim here is somewhat different, yet analogous:

it seems—and here again we are faced with the impossibility of choosing between secret and mystery—is both incapable of revealing the *Geheimnis* to us, and has also *chosen* not to do so. Indeed, there seems to be a strange conjunction of free will and impossibility here, for Kant says that God both cannot and will not reveal the *Geheimnis* to us: surely it must be one or the other? God, in this formulation, sounds like nothing less than a suspect who, while he does not exactly confess, nonetheless cannot get his story straight.

The *Geheimnis*, in any case, is *God's* possession: it is his to keep, both because he can and because he must. And does this fact—the fact that the bearer of the secret is none other than God—not already tell us something essential about the *Geheimnis*? This text is the only place in which Kant treats the secret/mystery systematically—the only place in which he articulates something like a theory of the secret. The only place in which the articulation of such a theory is possible, in other words, is a text on religion; and indeed, the only place in this text at which the secret can be spoken of systematically is at its *borders*, within this “General Remark” that both belongs and does not belong within the text.

What Kant seems to be telling us, in other words, is not only, as we have already seen, that “[i]nvestigation into all forms of faith...invariably runs across a *mystery*,”<sup>35</sup> that we cannot think about religion without thinking about the *Geheimnis*, but also that there is no thinking of the *Geheimnis* which is not also at once a thinking of religion, a reflection on faith. That we cannot think the one without the other: that every time we speak about secrets, we are already, in some way, leaving the terrain of reason (or rather, occupying its *boundaries*), and entering a terrain of faith, or at the very least a terrain on which the distinction between faith and reason becomes problematic, if not impossible. No thinking of secrecy that is not at once a thinking of religion: the secret is, always and irreducibly, as Kant states in the first line of this “General Remark,” a *holy secret*; the secret, in its very essence, is *God's secret*.

Or said another way, the secret is always, to some degree, that which God cannot and must not reveal to us. God's secret is essentially a silent secret: it is, fittingly given the etymology of the word, kept *radically separate* from us. And yet we

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God, I am trying to state, is in some way nothing other than the name of secrecy itself, a secret withheld from all those who “belong” to a religion, which is nonetheless essential to the very possibility of that religion. In a way, Derrida's conception of the secret says nothing else, for example when he writes, just a few lines on from the passage cited above, of “a witness that others cannot see, and who is therefore *at the same time other than me and more intimate with me than myself*” (109, emphasis in original)—once this witness exists, writes Derrida, “then what I call God exists” (109). God, in other words, would be that part of me—of *us*—that lies beyond us, a secret we keep from ourselves without even knowing it, without possessing the knowledge either of the secret or of the fact that we guard it from ourselves.

For a slightly different treatment of this issue, see Nancy's essay, “Le nom de Dieu chez Blanchot,” in *La Déclosion* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 129-133. Though Nancy never mentions secrecy as such, it is always, it seems to me, present.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 137.

have already seen that the secret's relationship with silence is tenuous at best—that the secret is constantly *communicated, confessed, professed*, even if this communication, this con/profession, does nothing to render the *Geheimnis* any less secret. What is most proper to the secret, as Kant articulates it, is indeed this continuous relationship to speaking, or rather this inhabiting of a middle ground between speech and silence. And a middle ground, at the same time, between revelation and concealment: the secret of which Kant speaks, we have seen, is literally an *open secret*; an openness that is itself a speaking of sorts (let us recall that its *Offenbarung*, Kant has said, is a *Bekanntmachung*), but a speaking, a sounding, that articulates itself *silently*: it is, we might say, *entrouvert* (as though the door to the *Geheimnis*, the door to this “home,” were ajar).<sup>36</sup> Our reading of Kant's secret forces us to distrust him, to a certain extent, when he tells us that God cannot or will not reveal the *Geheimnis*, for the deep logic of the text—of this text literally *obsessed* with speaking, of opening (a text with its mouth agape)—says otherwise. The secret always lies in an intimate relationship with “communicating,” with speaking, with what we could call, perhaps, the *voice—the voice of the secret*.<sup>37</sup>

## §

What, then, is the sound that this silent voice somehow, impossibly, emits? It is perhaps a call of sorts, albeit only a silent call, a secret call, a call that, while it is not heard as such, nonetheless comes to resonate in its very silence and secrecy.

*The one faith calls the many into being.* Isn't this the lesson of the secret in this text? Isn't this the lesson that the secret, the various secrets of this text, want to impart to us?

The secret, on the borders of faith just as Kant places it at the borders of his text, can never be imparted to us, for it is always God's secret—always a divine secret, a secret that cannot and must not be shared with us. And it is essential to faith, not only to the Christian faith but to faith itself: no faith, Kant seems to say, without a secret of faith, without some element that holds itself back from us, some element that refuses to be incorporated by reason. And yet this secret, though it is kept from us, is nonetheless shared out among us. What we partake in is the very not-knowing of this secret, or, to use the terms that insist throughout Kant's text, the secret speaks to us, but only in a silent voice. And our task, in faith, is quite simply to listen to this silence.

Now let us note this: a faith, Kant states, is always the faith of a people. Kant

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<sup>36</sup>As though this home, in other words, were not completely secure, lacked the security that is in some ways proper to a home – as though the home were not quite a home, un-home-ly: *unheimlich*. And perhaps the necessary *openness* of the *Geheimnis* would force us to think, here, a certain *Unheimlichkeit* that is proper to it. Indeed, hopefully my attempt to deconstruct the *Geheimnis* has been at the same time a commentary on the necessary *Unheimlichkeit* of the *Geheimnis*.

<sup>37</sup>See Cory Stockwell, “Kant and the Sublime Murmur of the We,” *Mosaic* 42.1 (March 2009), 19-32. Here I discuss Kant and voice.

states the same thing with regard to the Jews and the Christians. The difference, the difference he claims to note between the former and the latter, is one of specificity or singularity versus universality: one is born a Jew, but anyone, at anytime, can become a Christian. But Kant is wrong. And the deep logic of his text shows this. Or rather, he is right and wrong at the same time. It is indeed true: anyone can become a Christian. Anyone—*but not everyone*. Neither Christianity nor any other religion can ever truly become universal. And it is not any external element but rather Christianity itself—the secret of Christianity, the secret of faith itself—that determines this.

What is a secret? A secret only ever occupies borders—the border of a text, the borders of both understanding and reason, the borders of faith...and hence: the borders of a *people*. Faith and its people, inseparable...and secrecy at the borders of this inseparable, indivisible entity. What secrecy *gives*, therefore, as with any border, is a community: secrecy, at the borders of community, *delineates the we and hence makes this we possible*. Without a border—and secrecy, Kant has insisted again and again, is what constitutes the border here—there can be no community, no common being or essence, no *we*. And further: since the secret, essentially, speaks, even if “only” in a silent voice, we must state that the secret, lying at the border, *calls into being* the “we” that it makes possible. And this, perhaps, is why the secret is essentially *silent*: its voice speaks not a particular content or meaning, but simply—*simply?*—*that* there be a *we*, that a community come into being. The tense of the secret is perhaps essentially subjunctive.

What, however, is proper to the border? Its most essential characteristic is, put simply, the *outside*: a border always lies on the outer edge of that which it delimits, indeed, it always constitutes this edge. And in constituting this edge, it at the same time constitutes an outside. The border necessitates the existence of an outside, even if this outside, this beyond, is nothing more than the border itself.

*The one faith, then, calls into being the many.* Every faith, in other words, calls into being all of the others.<sup>38</sup> The very existence of a faith, of the secret of faith, calls into being its own outside, precisely because faith is always the existence of a border, a limit, an edge, a beyond. One faith calls into being another; one secret calls into being another.

For if Christianity is impossible without this secret, then it is logical that Judaism, indeed all of its others, will also be impossible without a secret. For each faith, a secret, an entire set of secrets. And yet the very fact that borders are always shared means that we must say the same thing about secrets: secrets, essentially shared among the people of one faith, are at the same time (isn't the characteristic or quality most proper to a border that it be shared?) shared

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<sup>38</sup>And in doing so, does it not also call into being its own splitting, its own shattering; does it not call into being a multiplicity that precedes its unity (through which its unity is articulated); does it not call into being the very multiplicity that precedes any and all call?

*between* faiths, bring into being not only the *we* of single faiths but the *we* that crosses faiths, the *we* that lies between faiths. A secret—speaking in different tones of silence across faiths, speaking in many tongues or languages or voices of silence—brings into being not only a community of faith, but *communities* of faith. Or rather, not exactly many different forms of the *we*, but the difference from itself, of itself, *to itself*, perhaps, of a single *we*. The secret shares out among its peoples, in an infinity of voices, this internal difference—a difference that is always both internal and external, beyond and within, insofar as it constitutes a border—that is the difference to itself of faith and of faiths.

And indeed, Kant's text says nothing else, even if *in spite of itself*. A shared secret, between Christianity, Judaism, the Islam that is always present in his text despite almost never being named...and beyond. Such is the community uttered by Kant's secret if not by Kant himself, by that voice that the text keeps secret and keeps secret to itself. Such is the voice that speaks, at and as the text's own beyond, the outside that lies not somewhere else but right here, on this border that is faith's secret.

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