

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Orr and Kant: An analysis of the intellectual encounter behind ‘The Christian worldview’

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## Abstract

Today, Christianity is often described as a ‘worldview’, especially among Reformed evangelicals in the USA. In this article I return to the 1890 lectures where Scottish theologian James Orr adapted the concept of *Weltanschauung* for Christian purposes. Although it was coined by Immanuel Kant in 1790, and primarily used in subsequent decades to theorise cultural difference and evaluate aesthetic expression, Orr nevertheless claims that the idea of a worldview is ‘as old as the dawn of reflection’ and thus appropriate to articulating Christianity. I examine Orr’s engagement with the Kantian and emerging historicist context, paying particular attention to his epistemological and aesthetic citations and showing how Orr both adopts and departs from the characteristic features of the Kantian subject. I conclude by assessing the philosophical and theological costs of this project that, among other things, positions Christianity for perpetual culture war within secular societies similarly shaped by the post-Kantian subject.

**Keywords:** evangelical; Immanuel Kant; James Orr; Reformed theology; secular; worldview

Today, framing Christianity as a ‘worldview’ (*Weltanschauung*) is so common that it often passes unnoticed, especially among Reformed Evangelicals in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The term has enabled a popular apologetic strategy and continues to headline pedagogical literature.<sup>2</sup> As a ‘worldview’, Christianity can be exempted from competitive parity among other so-called world religions and positioned on a broader, Western-centric cultural-political playing field. For twentieth-century advocates of this apologetic-pedagogical approach – including but not limited to Nancy Pearcey, Francis Schaeffer, James Sire, Greg Bahnsen and Cornelius Van Til – Christianity is frequently

<sup>1</sup>While the term worldview (sometimes ‘world and life view’) has taken on a life of its own in contemporary English usage, it is widely recognised as the most common translation for a related constellation of German terms including *Weltanschauung*, *Weltbild*, *Weltansicht*. I discuss the relation of these terms in greater depth below.

<sup>2</sup>Before 1960 the term ‘Christian worldview’ was nearly non-existent in English language publishing. Since 1980, its rise resembles a hockey stick graph, with incidences appearing almost exclusively in conservative Reformed and Evangelical writing on pedagogy and apologetics. See [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Christian+worldview&year\\_start=1800&year\\_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct\\_url=t1%3B%2CChristian%20worldview%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2CChristian%20worldview%3B%2Cc0](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Christian+worldview&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2CChristian%20worldview%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2CChristian%20worldview%3B%2Cc0) (accessed September 2020).

opposed to and defended against other putatively world-organising ideologies such as secularism, humanism, collectivism, communism, and generalised 'Eastern' worldviews.

This strategy, comes at a theological cost. In order to render Christianity as *Weltanschauung*, Christian teaching and practice must be rearticulated to fit and appeal to a specific, historical and geographically located representation of the human being: a kind of human distinctly articulated by Immanuel Kant (who invented the term *Weltanschauung*), popularised in the wake of German idealism, and representative of the struggles and ambitions particular to a secularising and colonising European project. Judging from the way 'the Christian worldview' is commonly presented by its recent proponents, part of the appeal of this Christian rearticulation is its claim to epistemic certainty, conceptual stability and rational integrity: the ideal features commanded by a self-transparent, sovereign subject that is itself something of a caricature of Enlightenment 'man'.<sup>3</sup> Not only does the valorisation of such a subject defer the wider range of historically Christian articulations of the human and the ecclesial-theological task, it also forgets the complex philosophical, scientific and cultural circumstances that led Immanuel Kant's successors to popularise his neologism in the first place. Effectively, *Weltanschauung* was used in the post-Kantian milieu to relativise and contextualise, rather than reify, the sovereign subject.

Kant coined *Weltanschauung* in his 1790 *Critique of Judgment* while addressing a set of problems distinct to his project: specifically, while pursuing a fuller account of how reflective judgements are possible for a subject who can only claim knowledge of empirical representations and whose access to freedom is mediated solely by the formal force of the moral law. For Kant, the aesthetic experience of the sublime represents the way human consciousness overwhelms and exceeds the subject's ability to synthesise objects of empirical knowledge. The moral law may provide access to freedom, but Kant recognised that this alone cannot give a satisfactory account of the fuller dimensions of human life: poetry, culture, art, education and the human sciences generally. There must be a dependable way for human beings to make use of aesthetic ideas to make sense of the dimensions of life that cannot be adequately represented as objects of knowledge. For successors like Hegel and contemporaries like Herder, this concern prompted the emergence of a new theory of meaning that Charles Taylor, following Isaiah Berlin, calls by the shorthand 'expressivism'.<sup>4</sup> An expressivist theory of meaning understands linguistic and cultural modes of production as meaningful for what they reveal about the human and material-historical context of emergence rather than by virtue of external verification. This approach to meaning proved useful for theorising both artistic expression and cultural difference. When Wilhelm Dilthey popularised *Weltanschauung* to construct a more formal theory of the human sciences, the term described the core infrastructure of human consciousness that responds to the historical-material circumstances in which the subject is placed and from which the subject expresses its distinct mode of the human condition.

Although recent scholarship has begun to place (and mostly defend) the Reformed Christian adaptation of the language of worldview within the broader context of

<sup>3</sup>For appeals to this kind of subject, see e.g. James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 4th edn (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Greg L. Bahnsen's popular lectures, *Defending the Christian Worldview Against All Opposition* (Audio, American Vision, 2005).

<sup>4</sup>Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977); Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

modern European thought, these arguments tend to downplay the significance of Kant's coinage and thus the aesthetic and material dimensions of his arguments for thinking in terms of worldview, thus presenting the articulation of a worldview as a foundationalist exercise.<sup>5</sup> This article considers the aesthetic concerns that prompted the turn to *worldview* as a lens for clarifying thought and assesses the changes the term underwent in a Reformed Christian context, considered against the backdrop of German idealism. It proceeds by examining the citational relationship between Scottish Reformed theologian James Orr, perhaps the first to adapt *Weltanschauung* for Christianity, and the broader Kantian context that Orr explicitly engages. Abraham Kuyper, who with Herman Bavinck exerted a more direct influence on American Reformed theologians like Cornelius Van Til, credited James Orr with the theological discovery of the term.<sup>6</sup> By returning to Orr's 1890 Kerr lectures, I intend both to remember the fuller affective and imaginative dimensions of this adaptation, and to show how Orr, who was in many ways a Kant aficionado, nevertheless altered the concept to fit his particular apologetic aims in a secularising political and ecclesial context.

The article proceeds in four parts. First, I reconstruct the aesthetic concerns and citational relationships between Kant, John Milton (widely recognised as a poet of the sublime) and the Kerr lectures in which Orr adapts *Weltanschauung* to redescribe Christianity. Then I examine the philosophical problems prompting Kant's coinage of *Weltanschauung*, and go on to consider Dilthey's popularisation of the term to theorise the human sciences. In these first three sections, I show that *Weltanschauung* emerges from a set of philosophical problems that generated the need for a new expressivist theory of human meaning in the wake of Kantianism. In the fourth part, I examine Orr's adaptation against the expressivist backdrop of Kant and Dilthey. I conclude by reflecting on the theological and cultural implications of this distinctive rearticulation of Christianity.

### Orr against the backdrop of Kant and Milton: Between critical philosophy and poetics

What was James Orr looking for when he adapted *Weltanschauung* for Reformed theology? Early in the first of his 1891 Kerr Lectures, he cites a famous image from John Milton's 'Areopagitica', a 1644 pamphlet containing a speech against censorship delivered before a predominantly Presbyterian parliament.<sup>7</sup> According to Orr,

<sup>5</sup>See David Naugle, Jr., *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002); James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004). Naugle treats the appropriation as basically coherent in Christian use, with some caveats, arguing that it effectively captures the need for Christianity to present itself as a comprehensive system that addresses every area of life. James Sire, who with Francis Schaeffer was a major populariser of using the term to defend Christianity, has registered concern over what he admits was an uncritical adoption of a historically specific term. Yet he ultimately concurs with Naugle's defence of the term.

<sup>6</sup>For more on Orr's and Kuyper's respective contexts, see Glen G. Scorgie, *A Call for Continuity: The Theological Contribution of James Orr* (Atlanta, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989); John Halsey Wood, Jr., *Going Dutch in the Modern Age: Abraham Kuyper's Struggle for a Free Church in the Netherlands* (New York: OUP, 2013).

See also Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), pp. 21–5, 56–7); Peter Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). Heslam notes the extent to which Kuyper embraces modern structures in order to represent Calvinism as a worldview (pp. 111–12).

<sup>7</sup>Orr's Kerr Lectures were subsequently published as *The Christian View of God and the World*. For citational purposes, the published version of these lectures will be abbreviated CV.

We are reminded of Milton's famous figure in the 'Areopagitica', of the dismemberment of truth, – how truth was torn limb from limb, and her members were scattered to the four winds; and how the lovers of truth, imitating the careful search of Isis for the body of Osiris, have been engaged ever since in gathering together the severed parts, in order to unite them again into a perfect whole.<sup>8</sup>

Orr is opening a discussion of the function and status of Christian teaching in the late nineteenth century, and this image roots his project in a rich polyvalent and affective field of reference. The Egyptian mythology of Isis and Osiris enjoyed longstanding popularity in Europe, with the figure of Isis in particular serving as a touchstone for changing attitudes toward the relationship between science, nature and truth.

Ordinarily, the popularity of Isis iconography was oriented around the function of her veil. Earlier Enlightenment approaches to science took their point of departure from an ancient Isis inscription reported by Plutarch – 'No mortal has raised my veil' – and assumed a Promethean posture that proclaimed to have accomplished that very thing.<sup>9</sup> Anton van Leeuwenhoek, for example, titled one of his letters, 'The Secrets of Nature Unveiled', and many of his letters were adorned with frontispieces depicting Isis iconography.<sup>10</sup> Yet Pierre Hadot charts a different, more 'respectful' approach to Isis, gaining popularity into the nineteenth century: one in which Isis remains veiled and the task of the investigator is to measure her tracks and perhaps even to touch her mantle *qua licet*, or as much as is permitted.<sup>11</sup> In this later emerging account, typified by Goethe, the study of nature is not a violent disrobing but a hermeneutical exercise. It involves reading and relating nature's many veils, linking the task of scientific investigation to mythic interpretation. For Goethe, 'the symbol (and therefore the originary phenomenon), insofar as it is a form and an image, lets us understand a multitude of meanings, but itself remains ultimately inexpressible. It is "the revelation, alive and immediate, of the unexplorable"'.<sup>12</sup> This approach remembers two dimensions of the myth: not just that of Isis as a veiled goddess representing nature, but also Isis as a mourning searcher reassembling pieces of the truth.

Kant, who theorised conditions for scientific investigation and became increasingly preoccupied with the role of aesthetic ideas, takes a similar approach in his third *Critique* where he links the veil of Isis to the idea of the sublime:

Perhaps no one has said anything more sublime, or expressed a thought more sublimely, than in that inscription on the temple of Isis (Mother Nature): 'I am all that is, all that was, and all that shall be, and no mortal has lifted my veil.' Segner utilized this idea in an illustration full of meaning that he placed at the beginning of his *Physics*, in order to fill his disciple, whom he was already on the verge of introducing into this temple, with a sacred shudder, which is to dispose the spirit to solemn attention.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup>James Orr, *Christian View of God and the World as Centered in the Incarnation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Plutarch, 'Isis and Osiris', section 9; Hadot, *The Veil of Isis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 237–8.

<sup>10</sup>Hadot, *Veil of Isis*, p. 239.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 240–1. See also ch. 20.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 257; Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, §752.

<sup>13</sup>Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (hereafter *CJ*) (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), §49.

In a 1796 essay, Kant also criticised those who want to unveil Isis not through scientific investigation but through mystical intuition. According to Kant, that which is hidden under the veil – the secret – is not the kind of thing that can be revealed. It must be ‘felt’ through a series of procedures that place one in relation to the moral law:

Such is the secret that can be felt only after a long development of concepts of the understanding and carefully tested principles, thus only through work. It is not empirically given (set up for rational analysis) but is given *a priori* (as an actual insight within the limits of our reason), and it even widens rational knowledge to the supersensible, but only from a practical point of view: not by some sort of feeling that grounds knowledge (the mystical) but by clear knowledge that acts on feeling (moral feeling).<sup>14</sup>

For Kant, the true mystery is not nature, but that which the idea of the sublime gestures to: namely, the freedom that exceeds all representational grasp of phenomena.<sup>15</sup> Freedom cannot become an object of experience, but serves as the foundation for the human being to be reoriented from heteronomy to autonomy, enabling a power of the will to oppose nature by clarifying its own principles and embracing them as one’s own.<sup>16</sup> This passage also suggests the tantalising opening to the supersensible that characterises so much of Kant’s later writings: the need for reason to make use of totalising aesthetic ideas in order to form reflective judgments through which the subject can refine her orientation to nature through freedom. At the end of the essay, Kant writes that

bringing moral law within us into clear concepts according to a logical methodology is the only authentically philosophical [procedure], whereas the procedure whereby the law is personified and reason’s moral bidding is made into a veiled Isis (even if we attribute to her no other properties than those discovered according to the method above), is an aesthetic mode of representing precisely the same object.<sup>17</sup>

Here, Kant again holds together the two images of Isis: one who searches diligently for truth by means of ‘purifying principles’, another who dons the veil ‘in order to enliven those ideas by a sensible, albeit only analogical, presentation’ that must avoid ‘the danger of falling into an exalting (*schwärmerische*) vision, which is the death of all philosophy’.<sup>18</sup> Philosophy, for Kant, involves refining reflective judgements to accord with the limitations of reason and the demand of the moral law.

Milton’s retrieval of the Egyptian myth emphasises the remembering work of Isis. He uses this image to demonstrate the positive relationship of extra-Christian myth to Pauline preaching in order to make a Christian case for freedom from external censorship. Earlier in the pamphlet, Milton discusses the relationship between mythology and Christianity:

<sup>14</sup>Kant, ‘Superior Tone’, in Peter Fevnes (ed.), *Raising the Tone* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 69.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 71–2.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

Not to insist upon the examples of Moses, Daniel, and Paul, who were skilful in all the learning of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Greeks, which could not probably be without reading their books of all sorts; in Paul especially, who thought it no defilement to insert into Holy Scripture the sentences of three Greek poets, and one of them a tragedian; the question was notwithstanding sometimes controverted among the primitive doctors, but with great odds on that side which affirmed it both lawful and profitable; as was then evidently perceived, when Julian the Apostate and subtlest enemy to our faith made a decree forbidding Christians the study of heathen learning: for, said he, they wound us with our own weapons, and with our own arts and sciences they overcome us.<sup>19</sup>

Here, the case for the freedom to publish rests on a more fundamental providential faith that works to arrange the objects of learning – whatever their source – in such a way that they enliven Christian reason. This is clear when Milton references Isis in the passage that Orr later cites:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who, as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb, still as they could find them.<sup>20</sup>

Here Milton weaves an account of the incarnation into the Egyptian myth itself, superimposing truth with the body of Jesus and with that which remained to be taught when Jesus ascended, yet was broken into pieces and scattered after the Apostolic age. He continues:

We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection. Suffer not these licensing prohibitions to stand at every place of opportunity, forbidding and disturbing them that continue seeking, that continue to do our obsequies to the torn body of our martyred saint.<sup>21</sup>

Isis, here and in general, represents the feminine, nature and funerary rites. Censorship disrupts the work of mourning, the care for the body of the beloved dead that echoes the women visiting the tomb. Such work also recognises the body of the dead as uncontained, as present in the world at large and veiled beyond the domain of that which is already marked by the legible signs of Christianity, awaiting the second coming.

This gesture calls us back to the title of Milton's pamphlet, which may also refer to the Areopagus where Paul preached in Acts 17: 'For as I went through the city and

<sup>19</sup>John Milton, 'Areopagitica' (Project Gutenberg Ebook #608), pp. 9–10.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you' (v. 23). According to Paul, the unknown God is the creator of heaven and earth; a sublime being, untethered to material shrines, calling human beings to 'search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us' (v. 27). For 'as even some of your own poets have said, "We are also his offspring"' (v. 28). The secret, on this account, is God. Yet this sublime God is revealed in 'the man he has appointed', whom Milton links with the coming – and the second coming – of truth itself.

Sanford Budick's recent book, *Kant and Milton*, explores convergences between Miltonian poetics and Kant's interest in the sublime.<sup>22</sup> This is illuminative in part because it speaks to one of the debated problematics of Kant's project, namely the role of language and the imagination in relation to cosmic ideas that cannot be grasped but that, with the right procedures, can enable reflection on the structure of subjectivity and a negative concept of the freedom that enables morality. Across the critical writings and in his late essays, Kant maintains the uses of religious ideas and aesthetic objects to guide reason in its practical operation: the 'aesthetic mode of representing precisely the same object', that is, the sublimity of the moral law itself.<sup>23</sup> For Kant, an aesthetic idea is an idea that paradoxically represents its inability to represent. A great poet, like Milton, uses language to grant access to the universality – the communicability – of the sublime. As a concept, the sublime is associated with the dreadful pleasure of being before something that overwhelms the subject. Kant cites the Egyptian pyramids which, like other worldly examples, ultimately function like the words of the poet.<sup>24</sup> They are a series of veils referring the subject to the sublimity of the ideas of reason as a negative representation, ultimately pointing to what Kant calls our 'supersensible vocation' as moral beings.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to citing Milton, Orr opens his lectures by approvingly citing Kant as his source for the term *Weltanschauung*:

The idea of the '*Weltanschauung*' may be said to have entered prominently into modern thought through the influence of Kant, who derives what he calls the '*Weltbegriff*' from the second of his Ideas of Pure Reason to which is assigned the function of the systematic connection of all our experiences into a unity of a world-whole (*Weltganzen*). But the thing itself is as old as the dawn of reflection, and is found in a cruder or more advanced form in every religion and philosophy with any pretensions to a historical character.<sup>26</sup>

Orr follows this claim with the first of several historical demonstrations delivered from principle, a method that he articulates in *The Progress of Dogma* (1901). This echoes the Kantian articulation of philosophical work as well as Orr's own confidence in the

<sup>22</sup>Sanford Budick, *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). Some critical readers of Budick have argued that he demonstrates resonance rather than influence. After all, as Budick himself notes, by Kant's writing "Miltonic" was already synonymous with "sublime." For the purposes of this article, the resonance is what is important. For more, see reviews by Gordon Teskey and Daniel Shore.

<sup>23</sup>Kant, 'Superior Tone', p. 71.

<sup>24</sup>Kant, *CJ*, §26.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, §27.

<sup>26</sup>Orr, *CV*, p. 5.

legibility of historical progress.<sup>27</sup> There, like Kant and with gestures to Milton, he mobilises *Weltanschauung* as a cosmic idea that organises the interpretation of worldly objects for moral ends.

This is not an isolated move. Orr frequently expresses admiration of Kant. *The Progress of Dogma* alone contains many approving references. At one point, Orr even places Kant beside the Reformers as two historical pillars of Christianity's historical unfolding, writing that the Reformers elevated the rule of scripture while Kant contributed the centrality of ethics. Together, these established the historical conditions for Christianity to come to consciousness as a worldview.<sup>28</sup> In the Kerr lectures, where Orr posits this coming-to-consciousness, he reoccupies three key features of Kant's project: (1) Kantian ethics, or the centrality of the moral law as a divine command leading to the cultivation of a kingdom of ends; (2) a theory of historical development through the workmanlike testing and refining of the ideas of pure reason; and (3) commitment to the relationship between knowledge and creativity, or the idea that knowledge is possible because the object of knowledge is actively created by and presented to the active mind. These features illumine both the motivation for and the significance of Orr's peculiar adaptation of *Weltanschauung* and help us to understand not only Orr's novel assertion, but also why he finds *Weltanschauung* an aesthetically and affectively compelling lens for reframing the Christian task. In this section, I begin discussing the first two. I complete this discussion later in the article.

First, Orr reserves a privileged place for the moral life across the lectures. In Lecture 1, he distinguishes the 'religion of Jesus Christ' from other 'religions of the world' by arguing that Christianity exalts the office of teaching: 'It comes to men with definite, positive teaching; it claims to be the truth; it bases religion on knowledge, though a knowledge which is only attainable under moral conditions.'<sup>29</sup> This echoes Kant's claim both that the ideas of pure reason are useful for the attainment of knowledge and that the proper end of the attainment of knowledge is morality.<sup>30</sup> Later, in Lecture 4, he argues (citing Isaak Dorner) that the relation of God's non-ethical distinctions to God's ethical nature is best understood as a means to an end. God is a fundamentally ethical being, and the 'kingdom of God' is 'the consummation of God's world-purpose' in the sense that 'the government of the world is carried on for moral ends'.<sup>31</sup> This theme recurs later, accompanied by an explicit citation of Kant:

Everything which strengthens our view of the world as a scene of moral government, everything which leads us to put a high value on character, and to believe that the Creator's main end in His dealing with man is to purify and develop character, strengths also our belief in immortality. The only way we can conceive of the relation of nature to man, so as to put a rational meaning into it, is, as Kant has shown, to represent it to ourselves as a means to the end of his culture and morality.<sup>32</sup>

Like Kant, Orr wants to understand the moral will as the proper end of divine revelation, as orienting other speculative ideas including that of immortality.

<sup>27</sup>James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 2019), pp. 22–6.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>29</sup>Orr, *CV*, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter *CPR*) (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), §1.2.

<sup>31</sup>Orr, *CV*, p. 133.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 158.



Second, Orr understands Christian teaching as directing the pursuit of knowledge and the government of the world to moral ends. This is a methodical, refining work – a work that carefully searches for truth through interpretive exercises. In a generally Miltonian gesture, Orr understands this interpretive task as a performative remembering of the sovereign body of Christ:

No duty is more imperative on the Christian teacher than that of showing that instead of Christianity being simply one theory among the rest, it is really the higher truth which is the synthesis and completion of all the other, that view which, rejecting the error, takes up the vitalising elements in all other systems and religions, and unites them into a living organism with Christ as head.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the lectures Orr advocates a method that dutifully relates the principled claims of Christian revelation to the objects of worldly appearances. In a generally Kantian register, he argues that, because theology (like all transcendent claims) is prone to antinomies,

the different sides of Biblical truth have to be harmonised in a wider conception, unity of view has to be sought in a field where only parts are given, and much is left to be inferred. All this involves a large amount of theoretic treatment in theology, and may – I should rather say must – result in showing that the truths of Revelation have also a theoretic idea, and are capable of theoretic verification and corroboration.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Orr is depicting a mode of work that recalls the image of Isis as searcher and gatherer. However, where Kant holds a strict distinction between reason in its pure operation and in its practical operation, Orr conflates the two by reifying the epistemic status of revelation. This recalls Milton insofar as the truth, for Orr, is restitched under the domain of divine sovereignty that is rooted in the incarnate personhood of Jesus Christ. Yet where Kant draws on a kind of Miltonian poetics to represent the *sublimity* of poetics veiling the sublime freedom of the moral law, Orr asserts the clarity and objectivity of revelation. For Orr, the body of the god is immanent; it is effectively *noumena made phenomena*. It is a resurrected body that revitalises the putatively proper order of worldly facts and values. These differences will prove important in Orr's innovative reoccupation of worldview.

### The sublime, expressive function of *Weltanschauung* for Kant

Now, in order to cast Orr's dependence on as well as departure from Kant – and push toward Orr's reoccupation of the third Kantian feature, that of the relationship between knowledge and creativity – let me give a fuller exposition of the function of *Weltanschauung* for Kant. *Weltanschauung* is a neologism in the *Critique of Judgment's* first division on the Aesthetic Judgement.<sup>35</sup> The topic under discussion is

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>35</sup>There is debate over the relationship between the terms *Weltanschauung* ('world intuition') and *Weltansicht* ('world view'), as well over the relationship between *Weltanschauung* as it appears in the *Critique of Judgment* and the first *Critique's* Ideas of Pure Reason as *Weltbegriff* ('world concept', CPR, A838/B866). For discussion of the former distinction, see Jürgen Trabant, *Humboldt ou le sens du langage*

the structure of reflective judgements, which Kant (unlike Hegel) distinguishes from determinate judgements. Determinate judgements operate on objects given through the forms of sensibility under the formal guidance of an existing rule. They are explanatory. Reflective judgments are interpretive.<sup>36</sup> According to Rudolph Makkreel, reflective judgments 'seek universality wherever we are left with a remainder of particularity' as guided by 'subjective necessity'.<sup>37</sup> Reflective judgements are thus self-orienting rather than submissive to a given universal.

This difference is crucial because it addresses and complicates the common (though ultimately unpersuasive) view that Kant's critical project is limited by empty formalism and incapable of addressing the fuller reality of embodied human life.<sup>38</sup> This perception derives from the implications of the first *Critique*, in which Kant sought to protect scientific progress from Humean scepticism.<sup>39</sup> Scientific progress was under threat because, if one cannot render determinate judgments over given objects (for example, make objective claims about natural causality), then it is impossible for scientific knowledge to build on itself. In the first *Critique*, Kant establishes the universal validity of empirical judgements by asserting that human beings *can* render determinate judgements over the objects we constitute for ourselves through the *a priori* synthesis of the sensibility and understanding. Yet, this way of justifying empirical knowledge shifts the crisis of epistemic confidence to other domains: religion, history, culture, sociality, feeling, art. These domains refer to modes of human creativity that are contingent, subjective and hidden. They are not given as an object under the forms of intuition to be ruled by the categories of the understanding – or, at any rate, their status as a phenomenal object does not capture what is interesting about them. They are modes of human *expression*, and their meaning is indexed to interior as well as relational human *experience*.

Thus, it is crucial that, when Kant theorises reflective judgement in the third *Critique*, he is finally gesturing toward a positive role for aesthetic mediation – poetics, language, art and human expression more generally. Reflective judgement allows reason to seek unity beyond the domain of cognisable representations and legitimises this use of the ideas of reason beyond the formal bounds of morality alone.<sup>40</sup> For example, reason might generate a concept of nature as purposive not because its purposiveness can be synthesised as a representation or an objective determinate judgment, but in order to enable reflection on relationships between objects. Or reason might generate a concept of a collective 'people' not because such a sublime idea can be determinately represented, but in order to examine relationships between cultural artefacts.

Reflective judgement produces concepts from particulars that are then used to compare and interpret. This dimension of Kant's project acknowledges the importance of theorising the space between the formal structure of reason and the world of representational phenomena – that is, the Miltonian poetic space to be inhabited meaningfully

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(Liège: Madarga, 1992); Trabant, *Traditions de Humboldt* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1990). See also James Underhill's discussion in *Humboldt, Worldview, and Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), chs 7 and 15 (particularly pp. 121–3, 134–43).

<sup>36</sup>Rudolph Makkreel, 'Reflective Judgment and the Problem of Assessing Virtue in Kant', *Journal of Value Inquiry* 36 (2002), p. 213.

<sup>37</sup>Rudolph Makkreel, 'The Role of Judgment and Orientation in Hermeneutics', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 34/1–2 (2008), p. 32.

<sup>38</sup>This was one of Hegel's characteristic criticisms of Kant's system.

<sup>39</sup>See *CPR*, A832/B860.

<sup>40</sup>In the second *Critique*, Kant allows reason to draw from the noumenal world in a negative way and only for the purposes of duty to the universal command of the moral law.

by human expression and creativity. According to Charles Taylor, this signals the modern interest in poesis that began to emerge with the humanist recovery of rhetorical persuasion but would be more fully carried out by the Romantics and marks the emergence of 'expressionism': a broader approach to meaning as the expression of hidden interiority rather than metaphysical representation.<sup>41</sup>

Kant actually coins *Weltanschauung* in the middle of a discussion of sublime ideas, a crucial moment in his articulation of reflective judgement:

The infinite, however, is absolutely (not merely comparatively) great. Compared with this, everything else (of the same kind of magnitude) is small. But what is most important is that even being able to think of it as *a whole* indicates a faculty of the mind which surpasses every standard of sense. For this would require a comprehension that yielded as a measure a unit that has a determinate relation to the infinite, expressible in numbers, which is impossible.<sup>42</sup>

Thinking of the infinite as a whole involves the creation of a concept based on experience – positively, the experience of wholes; negatively, the experience of limits. This is not a spontaneous operation of the concepts of the understanding; after all, the object is not and cannot be given through the forms of space and time. It is instead possible through a 'faculty of mind' capable of reflecting on objects of sense as if veils, in order to represent their unrepresentability. Kant continues:

But *even to be able to think* the given infinite without contradiction requires a faculty in the human mind that is itself supersensible. For it is only by means of this and its idea of a noumenon, which itself admits of no intuition though it is presupposed as the substratum of the intuition of the world (*Weltanschauung*) as mere appearance, that the infinite of the sensible world is *completely* comprehended in the pure intellectual estimation of magnitude *under* a concept, even though it can never be completely thought in the mathematical estimation of magnitude *through numerical concepts*.<sup>43</sup>

*Weltanschauung* appears alongside a reference to the noumena. This is worth noting because Kant ordinarily protects noumena from any semblance of positive content. Here, however, noumena plays no less than three positive roles: it is constitutive of the ability to form a concept of an infinite object; it performs the function of a presupposition; and, as presupposition, it functions *as if* it is the substrate of *Weltanschauung*.<sup>44</sup> In this context, *Weltanschauung* as 'intuition of the world' and 'pure intellectual estimation of magnitude' enables a mode of judgement which would otherwise be impossible. The *concept* of the intuition of the world enables the comprehension, on a purely intellectual level, of concrete infinitude – a conception that would be impossible through *a priori* synthesis. Kant concludes the paragraph as follows:

<sup>41</sup>Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup>Kant, *CJ*, §26 (emphasis original).

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.* (emphasis original).

<sup>44</sup>Kant seems to be positing a relation to noumena akin to the three postulates of pure practical reason from the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

Even a faculty for being able to think the infinite of supersensible intuition as given (in its intelligible substratum) surpasses any standard of sensibility, and is great beyond all comparison even with the faculty of mathematical estimation, not, of course, from a theoretical point of view, on behalf of the faculty of cognition, but still as an enlargement of the mind which feels itself empowered to overstep the limits of sensibility from another (practical) point of view.<sup>45</sup>

What the *Weltanschauung* provides – in its strangely intimate relation to the elusive noumena – is not knowledge, but the *ability to think* and in so doing to *enlarge the mind*, responding to a *feeling* of empowerment elicited by a *practical point of view*. Yet, like poetic veils as well as the postulates of pure practical reason, it allows for thinking to employ the concept of noumena only *as if* it were cognisable.<sup>46</sup>

In Kant's critical project, *Weltanschauung* does not assume a particularly prominent role, but it does perform a precise function at a critical juncture. Namely, it resolves a constellation of problems surrounding the uses of ideas for orienting objective human scientific investigation, subjective human artistic expression and the universal compulsion of human moral conduct. These problems have to do with the meaning of human expression (cultural, religious, artistic) in a world in which scientific knowledge is possible only within strict bounds. These are the same problems that would render *Weltanschauung* useful among intellectual movements emerging from German idealism and its critics. They are also the same problems that would drive the *Weltanschauung* to widespread pop-cultural use in late nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>47</sup> There are many theorists one ought to consider when tracking the movements of this concept, but one of the most prominent and illuminating for present purposes is found in Wilhelm Dilthey's theorisation of the human sciences. In the next section, I briefly to examine how Dilthey mobilises the term within this same set of problematics before finally circling back to Orr's articulation of *Weltanschauung* and the significance of his friendly and fraught relationship to Kant.

### Dilthey's historicising appropriation of *Weltanschauung*

To reiterate, Kant's notion of 'world intuition' addresses two problems facing the Kantian system specifically and German thinking generally at the turn of the eighteenth century. The first is whether positive things can be said about the relation between noumena and phenomena in the formation of reflective judgements. This amounts to the question of whether judgements about phenomena have a basis in reality. The second is whether a human science is possible, whether judgements about history and culture can be objective enough to attain the status of a science. As colonial and missionary accounts challenged and destabilised European conceptions of the human and prompted new disciplines of study, a perceived fissure between empirical representations and presumed metaphysical grounding posed a fundamental problem. These historical contingencies set the conditions for the emergence of a new theory of meaning. According to the broad modern movement called 'expressivism', language, art and

<sup>45</sup>Kant, *CJ*, §26.

<sup>46</sup>A fuller analysis of this passage would relate it to the role of imagination across Kant's critical project.

<sup>47</sup>For more on this, see Todd Weir, 'Hitler's Worldview and the Interwar Kulturkampf', *Journal of Contemporary History* 53/3 (2018), pp. 597–621.

social practices were construed as meaningful not because they imitate a metaphysical ideal, but because they reveal something about the human.<sup>48</sup>

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), a key populariser of *Weltanschauung*, used the concept to provide the object of analysis for the study of human life across geography and history. What can a set of artefacts, writings, social practices and other cultural productions tell us about the intuition of the world shared by a group or envisioned by a person of influence? According to Dilthey, the analysis of worldviews enables a glimpse of the life nexus, the site where the human will meets and responds to the particular constraints of her material world-situation. Here is a longer but especially helpful passage from his ‘Berlin Plan’:

Knowledge cannot go behind life, of which it is a function. Life always remains the presupposition of knowledge, i.e., of the consciousness of knowledge contained in life. As a presupposition of knowledge itself, life is not analyzable by knowledge. Thus the foundation that necessarily contains the presuppositions of all knowledge is life itself – the totality and fullness and power of life. The character of life is visible in the structure of all living creatures. Its meaning issues from this structure. Life is at the same time intelligible and inscrutable. It is unfathomable, yet accessible to the poet, the prophet, the religious person, the historian. Their originality and ultimately the final value of everything they offer us lies in the fact that they articulate the secret of this world. What the dogmas of the theologian and the formulae of the metaphysician ultimately express in conceptual and historical symbols is the sense of life. We all seek to express it, each in his own way. But the infinite cannot be expressed.<sup>49</sup>

This explanation is situated nicely in the problemata of *Critique of Judgment* §26. Expressive artefacts serve as veils for noumena, which means they represent some intuition of the world as an object useful for study without actually disclosing noumena themselves. They ‘articulate the secret of this world’ while also keeping the secret of worldly inscrutability.

While Dilthey extends much of Kant’s epistemological framework, he describes his point of departure from Kant by arguing that the Kantian *a priori* is ‘fixed and dead’, and that hermeneutics must necessarily encompass the *a priori* through the progressive activity of cultural production and interpretive work:

The real conditions of consciousness and its presuppositions, as I grasp them, constitute a living process, a development; they have a history, and the course of this history involves their adaptation to the ever more exact, inductively known manifold of sense-contents. The life of history also encompasses the apparently fixed

<sup>48</sup>Though Orr focuses on Kant, a fuller treatment of these questions and the emergence of expressivism would give equal emphasis to Hegel, who in some ways took Kant’s productive imagination as his positive point of departure. See, for example, Hegel’s assessment of Kant’s contributions in the early essay *Glauben und Wissen*. For more on the consequences of expressivism and the human sciences, see Theodore Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (New York: OUP, 2016). Vial traces how an expressivist theory of meaning informing both German idealism and theological liberalism is quietly implicated in an ultimately racist theory of the human that reinforces European superiority. In addition to his discussion of Kant, see especially his discussion of Herder and Schleiermacher in ch. 5.

<sup>49</sup>Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, vol. 1 of *Wilhelm Dilthey: Selected Works*, ed. Rudolph Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 489–90.

and dead conditions under which we think. They can never be abrogated, because we think by means of them, but they are the product of development. And with this, I bring the study of the human intellect into its natural relation to our knowledge of the earliest known stages of the human race, namely, the development of meanings in language, and the development of mythical thought.<sup>50</sup>

Dilthey's innovation on Kant's use of *Weltanschauung* may be summarised as follows: aesthetic artefacts are not only known as isolated objects rendered by the human mind as knowable representations; when examined in their historical-cultural contexts, they also convey the reflective world intuition imprinted on them by their creators as an object of analysis. By studying artefacts in this way, with particular attention to historical time and geographic place, the human scientist can develop a progressive-yet-unfinished conception of human life itself.

This is a departure from Kant, and particularly from interpretations of Kant prevalent at Dilthey's time. For Kant, poetics refer not primarily to human life but to the sublimity of the morally autonomous subject. According to Ilse Bulhof, Dilthey's distinctive deployment of Kant's *Weltanschauung* is shaped instead by the larger task of theorising the human sciences:

Dilthey gave explicit directions for such a systematic study of thought, that is, world-views. He felt that the study should focus on structural features, those features which all world-views share, regardless of content. As products of different experiences of reality, world-views are all different. But because they are interpretations created by the same psycho-physical structure – man – and about the same reality – the external world – the philosophical systems that articulate world-views share certain basic features.<sup>51</sup>

For Kant, while scholars continue to reevaluate the fuller force of productive imagination across the critical project, the moral law remains central to the structure of human consciousness. Yet in Dilthey there is an echo of a Miltonian approach to poetics as capable of representing intelligible things precisely through their relativity, their failure to represent in an absolute sense. In fact, in an echo of Kant's aesthetic judgement, Dilthey argues that reason must be 'free to play' with philosophical systems themselves as artefacts.<sup>52</sup>

Here, one might be tempted to view Orr as the more faithful Kantian, despite the fact that Orr's account also betrays Dilthey's influence. Though Orr wants to rearticulate Christianity as a worldview in order to study and demonstrate its systematic quality, and this involves rendering Christianity as an expression of divine revelation, he is not interested in the (perhaps inevitably relativistic) historicist study of worldviews. His interests are moral, and he draws on the totalising quality of *Weltanschauung* in order to demonstrate Christianity's historical persuasiveness and its ability to cultivate morality. In the final section, however, I show how Orr's rearticulation of Christianity as

<sup>50</sup>Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, pp. 500–1. A more exhaustive account of the trajectory from Kant to Dilthey would move especially through Hegel and Herder.

<sup>51</sup>Ilse Bulhof, *Wilhelm Dilthey: A Hermeneutic Approach to the Study of History and Culture* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), p. 91.

<sup>52</sup>Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, p. 93.

a worldview constitutes a novel rearticulation of the concept itself, departing both Kant and Dilthey while retaining – and reifying – the basic structure of the modern subject.

### Orr's adaptation of *Weltanschauung*

Earlier I argued that Orr reoccupies three recognisable features of Kant's philosophy: a commitment to ethics, a theory of historical development through the workmanlike testing and refining of the ideas of pure reason, and a commitment to the relationship between knowledge and creativity. Kant's Copernican Revolution established the conditions for objective knowledge of appearances by positing that the human mind creates the objects of its own knowledge through a *a priori* synthesis. Reflective judgements make use of the imagination's capacity for reaching beyond these bounds in order to enable reflection on the negative structure of subjectivity while also restricting knowledge to phenomenal representations. This allows Kant to account for the fuller dimensions of human life – poetry, culture, art and education – without reifying these as objects of knowledge or polluting the pure form of the moral law. Orr's reoccupation of Kantian anthropology comes with philosophical and theological costs. He effectively shifts the expressive human subject, hidden from herself but actively synthesising objects of knowledge and expressing aesthetic ideas, to a divine subject who does the same. This produces a peculiar kind of heteronomous yet sovereign human subject. In this section, I focus on Orr's philosophical anthropology, beginning with two areas where his departure from the Kantian subject is especially decisive. In conclusion, I reflect on the theological and political costs of this project.

First, Orr agrees that the 'human soul' (*psyche*) cannot create objects of knowledge from beyond the bounds of empirical sensibility. Yet, in a move that Kant would have never admitted, Orr argues that the soul nevertheless 'demands a knowable object' in order to ultimately find itself. The soul is not satisfied with the power of reflective judgements and sublime poetics to situate the subject in relation to the hiddenness of its own freedom. Instead, a 'personal' and 'thinking Spirit' demands an 'infinite object', leading it to 'postulate' God.<sup>53</sup> While Kant also characteristically refers to God as a postulate,<sup>54</sup> Orr's postulation 'carries the argument a good deal further than Kant' by arguing that the 'moral law is not comprehensible except as the expression of a will entitled to impose its commands upon us'.<sup>55</sup> He thereby personifies and particularises the moral law, fundamentally altering its nature as well as its relationship to the human subject, as I will detail below.

While Orr acknowledges 'certain services which the German speculative movement in the beginning of the [nineteenth] century rendered to Christianity, in laying stress on the essential kinship which exists between the human spirit and the Divine',<sup>56</sup> and while he continues to frame this kinship as morally mediated, he reads divine-human kinship as structured by the particular will expressed by the Christian incarnation rather than by reason. Orr argues that the incarnation is the fitting answer to the question posed by

<sup>53</sup>Orr, CV, p. 113.

<sup>54</sup>In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that a person must proceed as if God exists and will apportion virtue and happiness, thereby rendering the moral life coherent. See Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 5: 123.

<sup>55</sup>Orr, CV, pp. 109–10.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 120.

the desire to locate something of the human in the divine.<sup>57</sup> For Kant, it is exactly the opposite. Kant wants the moral law to be treated as a divine command not because it is sourced to God – this would constitute heteronomy – but because it is intrinsically compelling.<sup>58</sup> Orr refuses many possible interpretations of the incarnation, including that the incarnation signals metaphysical unity with God or ‘moral union’. Instead, the incarnation is the ‘entrance of a Divine Person into the human’.<sup>59</sup> Once again, the incarnate *God* is the primary subject who creates objects of knowledge and wills meaning through expression. The moral law is not formally universal, but a primary mode of divine expression.

Second, Orr understands the Christian worldview to enable the verification of the God-postulate as an object of knowledge.<sup>60</sup> This claim also hinges on the incarnation. The meaning of all phenomena is anchored to the divine expression that constitutes itself as an object of knowledge within the phenomenal world for and within the human subject, thereby enabling the phenomenal world to corroborate what first appears to the human as a transcendent idea.<sup>61</sup> Loosely echoing but also inverting the basic structure of Dilthey’s worldview method, Orr recommends a method of historical analysis to show that the reality of the divine being ‘implied’ by this expressed will can be empirically verified.<sup>62</sup> There are ‘laws of the spiritual nature which determine beforehand what the character of the object must be which alone can satisfy the religious necessity’, and Orr argues that ‘a survey of [religion’s] manifestations in history reveals its nature to us’.<sup>63</sup> Recall that Dilthey proposes an exercise of studying human artefacts in the context of their worldviews in order to construct an objective science of the human. This analysis proceeds through the study of relative human difference. Orr, however, suggests the Christian worldview enables worldly ‘facts’ to attain absolute meaning, verifying the law-like quality of particular and objective divine expression that creates communion between God and humanity.<sup>64</sup> According to Orr, ‘the Christian religion mostly creates its own capacity by which its truth can be perceived – creates the organ for its own verification’.<sup>65</sup> Historical examination is thus identical to Christian apologetics.

When discussing the nature of the human in particular, Orr moves back and forth between a somewhat crudely rendered Kantian subject who knows, judges and legislates morally; and an anti-Kantian subject defined by heteronomous commitment. Orr writes that the postulate of God is accompanied by the ‘postulate of Man in the image of God’, and this human postulate is verified into an object of knowledge by moral corroboration:

The moral consciousness is one of the most powerful direct sources of man’s knowledge of God. In the earliest stages in which we know anything about man, a moral

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>58</sup>See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Metaphysics of Morals* in *Practical Philosophy*, 5: 129–30; 6: 439. I am grateful to Amy Hollywood for helping me clarify this point.

<sup>59</sup>Orr, *CV*, pp. 241–2.

<sup>60</sup>Orr discusses this claim in relation to Kant, *ibid.*, p. 418.

<sup>61</sup>To be clear, this claim is philosophically murky in general, and incoherent with respect to Kantian philosophy.

<sup>62</sup>Orr, *CV*, p. 111.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 115.



element blends with his thought. There grows up within him – he knows not how – a sense of right and wrong, of a law making its presence felt in his life, prescribing to him moral duties, and speaking to him with a ‘thou shalt’ and ‘thou shalt not’ in his soul which he dare not disregard. His thoughts, meanwhile, accuse or else excuse each other. This law, moreover presents itself to him as something more than a mere idea of his own mind. It is a real judging power in his soul, an arbiter invested with legislative but also with judicial functions. It has accordingly from the first a sacred character. It is a power not himself making for righteousness with him. He instinctively connects it with the Power he worships.<sup>66</sup>

Some of this language is akin to the Kantian claim that the subject is aware of the sublimity of the moral law within, but Orr departs from Kant when he argues that the conscience is both internal and external to the subject, that it is a ‘real judging power in his soul’ as well as the ‘Power he worships’.

Because Orr argues that God and the Christian human come to share a cognitive-judicial apparatus by means of incarnate revelation, he proceeds to propose that the Christian subject ought to exercise divinely grounded sovereignty over the significance of worldly knowledge:

It is not merely that man is related to nature by his body, but he is in Scripture, as in science, the highest being in nature. He is, in some sense, the final cause of nature, the revelation of its purpose, the lord and ruler of nature. Nature exists with supreme reference to him; it is governed with a view to his ends; suffers in his fall, and is destined to profit by his Redemption.<sup>67</sup>

Later in the same lecture, Orr refers to this as ‘[man’s] deputed sovereignty over creatures’ and cites a sequence of historical evidences to prove the reality of this sovereignty: ‘conquests over material conditions’, ‘achievements in art and civilisation’, ‘employment of nature’s laws and forces for his own ends’ and ‘use of the lower creatures for service and food’.<sup>68</sup> This recalls the first Kerr lecture, where Orr names the task of Christian teaching as the exercise of sovereign power within – and ultimately over – a worldly landscape marked by competing worldviews:

No duty is more imperative on the Christian teacher than that of showing that instead of Christianity being simply one theory among the rest, it is really the higher truth which is the synthesis and completion of all the other, that view which, rejecting the error, takes up the vitalising elements in all other systems and religions, and unites them into a living organism with Christ as head.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 110–11.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 140–1.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 11–12. Though I have not explored this angle here, one must wonder whether Orr had the famous frontispiece to Hobbes’ *Leviathan* in mind when describing Christian sovereignty and the extent to which modern theories of state are also shaping Orr’s rearticulation of Christian power. Hobbesian logic of state sovereignty is one in which the individual members of a collective cede certain of their individuating qualities in order to actively constitute and participate in the total governing and protecting power of the sovereign.

Here, the characteristic language of duty is marshalled to ends distinctive to Orr's project. The duty of the teacher-as-deputy is to amplify divine expression, actively organise worldly phenomena to verify divine expression and ultimately to submit to Christ as the agent of this act.

What, then, is the function of *Weltanschauung* for Orr? Recall that Kant coins the term to refer to an intuition of the world as a whole. This intuition enables reflective judgement to make practical use of a transcendent idea – that of an infinite whole – that would otherwise be purely speculative and beyond the bounds of knowledge. Kant's *Weltanschauung* enables modes of human expression and creativity that situate the subject in relation to both phenomenal objects of knowledge and to the unrepresentable sublimity of the moral subject. In the wake of adaptations by Hegel and others, Dilthey capitalises on *Weltanschauung* to ground a method for the human sciences that studies and compares human artefacts as relative expressions shaped by localised intuitions of the world.

Orr sees *Weltanschauung* – the 'conception of an All or Whole of things' – as a valuable lens through which to retool Christianity in a modern context. To do so, Orr reinterprets God as the originary expressive subject and autonomous moral legislator, reinvesting the Christian worldview with both revelatory and metaphysical significance. The Christian worldview – essentially, God's worldview – invites the Christian subject to recognise scripture as divine expression, the incarnation as a particular expression of moral law, and the Christian task as interpretive world organisation under a sovereign mandate. At the risk of philosophical incoherence, Orr adopts a Kantian framework but proceeds to render noumenal ideas, such as the idea of God and of the world as a whole, as phenomena. God's will thus becomes an object of human knowledge. Orr also renders culturally and geographically located ideas about Christian teaching as absolute ideas, sanctioned by a singular expressive will and sanctioning a specific world order. Perhaps most strikingly, the Christian worldview acts as a currency to invest human subjects with divine power that is both foreign to, and yet fully identified with, their newfound ability to know, judge and act with sovereign authority.

## Conclusion

This article is interested in why 'worldview' has assumed widespread popularity among Reformed and Evangelical Christians, often replacing terms like 'faith' or 'religion'. I have approached this question by focusing on one textual site of the term's initial adoption, asking what James Orr may have been looking for when he first claimed *Weltanschauung* for Reformed theology. Orr executed his project in the wake of a century of intellectual, political and cultural struggles over the status of miracles, scriptural authority, Christian identity and the disestablishment of the church. Yet his invocation of Milton's *Areopagitica* suggests something more than a polemic. Orr is looking for an aesthetic frame by which Christians can conceptualise and materialise their task: to arrange the objects of learning – whatever their source may be – in such a way that they are made profitable to enliven Christian reason.

Milton invokes this desire by embracing the limitations of a subject embedded in a world where nature veils the unknowable and faith is situated between loss and expectation. Milton's call to action thus appeals to a complex emotional register. A Christian's movement in the world is affectively cast by mourning, searching and hoping. *Finding* is partial and provisional, for the incarnate and resurrected body of the God is not here but will come again. The interpretation of nature functions by means of veils that cannot be raised, and poetry represents that which must remain hidden, both internal and

external to the subject. A human being cannot constitute God as an object of knowledge any more than she can constitute the sublime structure of her own self, yet she may reflect on the structure of subjectivity and form a negative concept of moral freedom through the expression of aesthetic ideas. In this way, reason may be enlivened while touching its constraints.

Orr's reconceptualisation of God as the primary expressive subject replaces the human's use of pure practical reason with heteronomous adherence to one absolute system. Orr's humans neither mourn nor hope and have little facility with poetry. They proceed with sanguine confidence, treating the worldview not as a reflective judgement but as the cipher for absolute interpretive authority. The work required by the worldview lies in its implementation, not in self-critique. The broad outlines of the Kantian subject remain in place: God constitutes objects of knowledge through his own creative acts and generates meaning through aesthetic, incarnate expression. These outlines, however, are displaced onto the particular 'divine Person made human', the person to whom all others are made subservient and under whom they are deputised. What for Milton and Kant was poetry is rendered by Orr as law: a law that is not rational but is itself a particular artefactual expression that grants its receivers interpretive sovereignty over the world. Read against Dilthey's project, Orr fuses the particularity of one *Weltanschauung* with the aesthetic idea of the world as a whole under the putative claim of divine authority. This asserts the Christian worldview as both exceptional and superior to all others, valid regardless of material, geographic or cultural conditions shaping the way particular humans imagine their worlds. Analysis is no longer comparative, but a tool of interpretive conquest.

Philosophically, the costs of this adaptation have to do with coherence. Can one retain the Kantian subject without protecting the noumenal-phenomenal distinction and the integrity of pure practical reason? Can one use 'worldviews' for study without bearing in mind the contextual factors that inform human difference? Orr himself is ambivalent on this point. On the one hand, he argues that Christianity must be 'reconcilable' with science and 'in harmony with the conclusions at which sound reason ... independently arrives'.<sup>70</sup> But he also argues that there is a fundamental 'antagonism' between the 'modern' view of the world and the Christian view of the world,<sup>71</sup> and that despite the fact that *Weltanschauung* emerged from the intellectual context of the former, it is nevertheless an idea 'as old as the dawn of reflection'.<sup>72</sup> Here, Orr performs the very argumentative steps that he is advocating. He assumes prior Christian ownership of all ideas regardless of intellectual, historical or cultural context.

Theologically, the costs of this ambivalence may be even greater. Orr's adaptation of Kantian subjectivity both re-describes the divine will in suspiciously modern terms and deprives Christianity of its historic resources for situating the subject in relation to hiddenness, loss and epistemic limitation. Examples abound, but one from Orr's own Reformed tradition may be most salient. When Orr ties the postulate of God to the human, he recalls Jean Calvin's famous claim that the 'knowledge of God and ourselves' is 'joined by many bonds'.<sup>73</sup> For Calvin, this relationship is mediated by positive and negative elements. Humanity subsists in God as God's creation, yet sin erodes the

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>73</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1966), 1.1.1.

positive relationship of the creature to God. This ‘feeling’ of ignorance, poverty, and infirmity – in short, of loss – drives the human to contemplate and yearn for the good things of God. Redemption, granted by grace, is effected by spiritual exercises that teach the Christian to routinely critique his or her own sin-warped judgements and to rely on revelation to see the world as it is, the school of piety and the theatre of divine glory.<sup>74</sup> While Calvin suggests that the Christian should experience gradual sanctification, the task of self-critique is perpetual until death and the hiddenness of creation serves as a constant witness to the providential divine will.<sup>75</sup>

Orr’s sanguinity divinises certain qualities of the modern subject while discarding the nuance that Kant supplies to the autonomous self, or the ways in which Kant blunts the sovereignty of the human subject in all matters except the universal demand of the moral law. Because Orr grants Christians an immediate relation to the divine will, his adaptation has the paradoxical effect of aggrandising a specific representation of humanity under the auspices of total subservience to God. Despite Orr’s claims to historic Christianity, his project reconstructs Christianity in the unmistakable outline of European modernity, placing it in perpetual cultural antagonism to more nuanced modes of modern philosophical anthropology while also forgetting more nuanced Christian representations of the human attuned to limitation and hiddenness. If the goal of this project was to retool Christianity for robust culture war, it may be deemed a success – albeit one that is hemmed by its thorough and philosophically problematic commitment to modern, secularised subjectivity.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.17.4; 2.6.1. For my own views on the interpretation of these passages, see Michelle C. Sanchez, *The Resignification of the World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2019).

<sup>75</sup>See, for example, Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.17.4, 2.13.2, and 2.14.3. Here, nature is ‘clothing’ for divine providence and Christ is veiled in flesh. Calvin refers to the ‘glory’ of God being unveiled, but never the deity of God. See also 3.6.5, where Calvin discusses the perpetuity of imperfection; and 3.2, where Calvin indexes the Holy Spirit’s illumination to the heart’s ability to grasp the promises of God (rather than worldly knowledge) through the light of scripture.

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