Religion After Kant

Religion After Kant:
God and Culture in the Idealist Era

Edited by

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PREFACE

PAOLO DIEGO BUBBIO
AND PAUL REDDING

An undeniable feature of public life in the West over the last decades has been the revival of debates over religious belief—debates into which a considerable number of philosophers and scientists have been drawn. From the perspective of the first decades of the twenty-first century, the assumption that many in the mid-twentieth century had entertained about the inevitable secularization of western thought has come to seem presumptuous: rather than religion as declining with modernization, it seems to have rather been *secularism itself* that has become increasingly contested at all levels of society.[1] One obvious cause of renewed interest in these topics has been the growth of both Christian and Islamic fundamentalism throughout the world, and the increasingly perspicuous influence on politics of evangelical culture within the United States. At the most conspicuous level this latter phenomenon has given rise to a type of revived eighteenth-century confrontation between science and religion which has been played out in forms such as disputes over the place of evolutionary biology and its rival "creation science" in school curricula. And yet the "science–religion" debate has not been restricted to the crude dichotomizing of science and religion that is usually presupposed there. While it is sometimes said that the one exception to the global process of "desecularization" has been the institutions of higher education in the West, this scholarly culture *too* has seen the return of endorsed theistic views in contexts from which they had been previously largely absent. Thus academic philosophy is said to have undergone its own process of

[1] See, for example, Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. D. Eerdsman Publishing Company, 1999).

desecularization over the last three or for decades sparked off by the appearance of Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* in 1967.[2]

The debate over the role of religion in public policy as well as the increasing desecularization of philosophy itself has, not surprisingly, led to the emergence of the opposing views of the "new atheists", and as a result it is now not unusual to find public encounters opposing atheists and theists working within the sciences or philosophy—encounters that, 50 years ago, would have been thought to be a dying, if not extinct, cultural species. As a representative encounter here, one might take that between Daniel Dennett and Alvin Plantinga, held at the 2009 meeting of the "Central Division" of the *American Philosophical Association* and subsequently published in book form.[3] Dennett and Plantinga are both distinguished analytic philosophers, well-known for their work both within their specialist areas as well as for their public stances as atheist and Christian theist respectively. As an equivalent encounter between practicing *scientists*, one might take the example of the debate held in 2007 in Birmingham Alabama,[4] between the evolutionary biologist and leader of the "new atheist" movement, Richard Dawkins and the Christian mathematician and philosopher of science John Lennox—a debate centred around Dawkins's book *The God Delusion*.[5]

Debates of these sorts typically center on issues such as the rationality of a belief in the existence of God, or the role of appeals to God in explanations of the world, and here protagonists appeal to similar sorts of criteria—theists asserting and atheists denying, for example, that theology is, like science, evidence-based, or that the existence of God can be appealed to from known facts about the universe via the methodologically respectable process of "inference to the best explanation". In this way, we might say, the standard assumptions *uniting* disputants here are of a broadly *realist* nature: it will be jointly held, for example, that there is a fact of the matter as to whether or not the universe contains signs of a godly creative intelligence, and it will be assumed that theses of this sort

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[2] Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967). This claim is made by Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism", *Philo*, 4 (2/2001).

[3] Daniel C. Dennett and Alvin Plantinga, *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[4] As organized by the "Fixed Point Foundation", a video is available at http://www.fixed-point.org/index.php/video/35-full-length/164-the-dawkins-lennox-debate.

[5] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006); John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion Hudson plc, 2009).

can be supported or rejected on the basis of evidence. Among theists one encounters the view that it is not *science itself* that is the enemy of theology but "scientism" or "naturalism" which is a general world-view that might *itself* be thought of as a quasi-religion. And one finds theists appealing *to science* in criticism of such naturalism, as Plantinga, for example, does when he argues that *naturalism* conflicts with the theory of evolution, because naturalism cannot account for how "true" beliefs, and not just adaptive behaviour, could come to be selected for, or, as Lennox does, in his argument that naturalism is incompatible with the practice of science because the scientist *must* assume that the world has an ultimately rational structure, one that can be best *explained* by its having been caused by a rational creator.

In debates of this type, while the disputants may argue as to whether the accounts of religion and science are actually *compatible*, there seems to be an underlying agreement that they are *commensurable*. Thus participants typically show little sympathy for alternative views such as that of Stephen J. Gould that religion and science, as "non-overlapping magesteria" (the "NOMA thesis), have differing criteria such that the claims of one cannot be evaluated by the criteria of the other.[6] Similarly, they have little time for those who question the realist aspirations of either science or religion, a questioning that is commonly dismissed as signs of a malignant "postmodernist relativism". Among the targets of this latter type of criticism would surely count the philosophers Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, whose engagement in *The Future of Religion* represents a very different form of exchange of opposing views over religion.[7]

Despite their differences, Rorty and Vattimo share a very different conception of philosophy than anything discernable within the approaches of Dennett and Dawkins, or Plantinga and Lennox. Both are explicitly critical of the sort of realism (usually referred to as "metaphysical realism") they see as structuring the first kind of debate, and they see their own approaches to philosophy in this regard as being explicitly "post-metaphysical". In the case of Rorty, this post-metaphysical approach takes the form of a development of a distinctively *pragmatist* strand within twentieth-century analytic philosophy; in the case of Vattimo, it consists

[6] Stephen J. Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magesteria", *Natural History* 106 (1997): 16-22.

[7] Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2005). For a critique of the first style of confrontation over religion from a position more aligned with this second style, see Paolo Diego Bubbio and Philip Andrew Quadrio, eds., *The Relationship of Philosophy to Religion Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2011).

of a development of the "hermeneutic" approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer.[8] Following some version of a philosophical "linguistic turn", each regards thought as essentially embodied and located within historically evolving discourses or "vocabularies", the elements of which gain their significance from the ways in which they are enmeshed with patterns of behaviour, or, as with the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, "forms of life". Such conceptions of philosophy, in which any attempt to represent the ultimate structure of reality "as it is in itself" is disavowed, in turn provide the frameworks within which each expresses his orientation to religion. Aware that the term "atheist" could lead to his position being construed as *realist*, Rorty thus abandoned the term that he had *formerly* used to capture his stance, preferring the term "anti-clerical" to capture his opposition to religion. But "anti-clerical" could also stand as a description that captures Vattimo's *religiously-based* critique of hierarchical forms of institutionalized religion. These encounters, therefore, unfold in very different ways than those that could be grouped with the Dennett–Plantinga debate.

Were one to single out a historical figure around whom these two opposing contemporary approaches to both philosophy and religion, represented by Dennett and Plantinga on the one hand and Rorty and Vattimo on the other, could be situated, it would have to be, we suggest, the figure of Immanuel Kant. Kant's project, as stated in the title of his first major work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*,[9] was to initiate, in the name of the Enlightenment itself, a *critique* of the way that the Enlightenment had hitherto understood its own goal—the goal of achieving the type of realistic picture of the way the world is "in itself", the goal shared by protagonists of the first sort of encounter described above. Kant had thought of his critique as being carried out in the spirit of the Enlightenment because, on the one hand, it was meant to be carried out on a basis that was entirely free from any presuppositions coming from Christian dogmatics, and, on the other, that it was based upon a conception of the limits of human knowledge once one took seriously the thought that humans were, as finite beings, incapable of any "God's-eye view" perspective onto the world. Only a being such as an omniscient God, Kant claimed, could be capable of the sort of knowledge that traditional

[8] See, for example, Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, republished 2009); Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004).

[9] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

philosophy aimed at. Adopting a realistic attitude to our own finite capacities to know, we humans must settle for a knowledge of the world as *relative* to those capacities—a world of "appearances" rather than "things in themselves", or "phenomena" as opposed to "noumena". But Kant's concept of "God" here was meant to be employed for purely *contrastive* purposes, to bring into focus the limits of human cognition. God was one of the traditional objects of the metaphysics Kant was now criticizing—there could be no rational theses about the nature or existence of God that could be established by the theoretical use of reason. And yet one might pose the question as to *whose* God, the "finite" human beings of Kant's account were being contrasted.

With his *critique* of "pure reason", that is, his critique of a faculty purportedly capable of knowledge of the world "in itself", Kant had made explicit the type of *gap* between the aspirations of empirical science and the aspirations of the old "metaphysics". Science, the development of which he clearly celebrated and encouraged, aimed at the objective knowledge of appearances by bringing them under universal laws. But the resulting knowledge could not be identified as knowledge of the world "in itself", the sort of knowledge desired by metaphysics up to that time, the aspiration to which he discouraged. And as such, science could not be brought to answer questions such as whether the known universe bore the imprint of a rational God. To the extent that the *idea* of God found a place in Kant's philosophy, it was not as part of any possible explanation of the world. However, Kant, in the second edition of the *Critique*, also described this denial of *metaphysical* knowledge as a way to "make room for faith",[10] and his concept of God came to find a place in his account, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*,[11] as a "postulate" that was meant to somehow help finite beings achieve the sort of transcendence of personal interests demanded by the laws of morality. Moreover, despite his desire to keep philosophy free from theology, Kant would seem to have presupposed a particular *idea of God* in his moral philosophy, a presupposition that might be held to have undermined its purported indifference to doctrinal religious belief. This was the type of feature of Kant's philosophy that would lead many of those coming after to him to the critique that he had not extracted himself from the cultural determinations of his time in the way that he had assumed.

Pretty clearly, because of their commitments to realism, we might see the approaches of Dennett, Plantinga, Dawkins and Lennox as representing a

[10] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.

[11] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

generally *pre-Kantian* philosophical approach, and their prominence in the intellectual world clearly indicates that Kant's critique of the traditional metaphysical project *had not* swept all before it. Rather, it created a deep division within philosophical culture, with a good deal of philosophy that is *chronologically* post-Kantian being marked by a conscious *refusal* to follow Kant. This refusal has been based upon what has been perceived of as internal problems within Kant's own philosophy and, more generally, the alleged unacceptability of the developmentally "post-Kantian" forms of philosophy to which it gave rise. In fact, the form of philosophy that became institutionalized within the English-speaking world in the first half of the twentieth century was in many senses born of a rebellion against the Kantian and post-Kantian forms of philosophy that had caught on there at the end of the nineteenth.

In contrast, the *pragmatist* and *hermeneutic* approaches of Rorty and Vattimo are clearly continuous with the type of thought that had developed *after Kant*, which, while disagreeing with much that Kant himself had written, nevertheless held to his fundamental critique of a *realistically* conceived metaphysics. Thus while Kant had assumed that the architectonic of the mind responsible for shaping its theoretical and practical representations to be universal among all humans, those following him, and working in the context of an unfolding "linguistic turn" in their contemporary philosophy,[12] were attuned to the historical and cultural specificity of the forms of representation in which thought was expressed. The mind, or more generally, "spirit", could now be thought of as having its own history, leading to the type of grand metaphysical picture found in the work of G. W. F. Hegel. And while early analytic philosophy may have rejected the path through Kant to post-Kantian forms of thought, the presence of Rorty and Vattimo can be taken as a mark of a resurgence, within the last three or four decades, of this style of "post-Kantian" thinking. Witness, for example, the resurgence of interest in the post-Kantian idealist whose idealism was declared to be "absolute", G. W. F. Hegel—a resurgence that would seem to have been highly improbable up to, say, the early 1970s.[13] And not only Hegel, here, has been the focus of

[12] On the "linguistic turn" in German philosophy after Kant, see Christina Lafont, *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*, trans. José Medina (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

[13] The Hegel revival in English-speaking philosophy first got underway with Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), but the works of Robert B. Pippin (*Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Terry Pinkard (*Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge

such resurgence of interest, but also Hegel's near contemporaries, Fichte, Schelling, and the "Jena romantics", as well as later thinkers who, while clearly challenging Hegel's idealism, might nevertheless be identified as within the strand of post-Kantian thought—Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, Wagner and Nietzsche.

The individual essays in this volume are dedicated to the reassessment of the relations between religion and philosophy in the light of various positions taken within this post-Kantian context. The contributors share a belief that the philosophies of the major post-Kantian figures of this period have, up until very recent times, been badly misunderstood, and that it is only now with the help of the burgeoning literature in this area that we are able to properly appreciate what is at issue in the positions they defend in the name of "metaphysics". While Kant had been resolutely critical of the metaphysical projects of his predecessors, he had also held out the promise of a new, transformed project of metaphysics, carried out in a "scientific" manner. From one perspective, the succeeding idealist metaphysical projects could look like "pre-Kantian" regressions, but from another, they could be seen as Kantian *transformations* of the very project of metaphysics itself.[14] And, of course, it is only against the background understanding of their conceptions of metaphysics that we could start to understand what they meant in their discussions of God and religion.

The eight essays composing this volume are organised chronologically. In "Kantian Origins: One Possible Path from Transcendental Idealism to a 'Post-Kantian' Philosophical Theology", Paul Redding explores the central question of Kant's metaphysics. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant is famously critical of the aspirations of metaphysics, traditionally understood as a project aiming at a knowledge of "things in themselves". From this point of view, Kant is a *sceptic* about metaphysical knowledge. But Kant *also* discusses metaphysics as an *achievable* science, and in such contexts clearly intends "metaphysics" to be understood in a new and transformed sense. Here metaphysics is meant more as a knowledge of

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University Press, 1996) were instrumental in the development of a conception of Hegel's project that could be embraced by philosophers working in the later parts of the twentieth century. Crucially, with the work of Robert Brandom and John McDowell, even versions of Hegel's philosophy came to appear in the heartland of analytic philosophy that had effectively constituted itself in its break with Hegel and other forms of post-Kantian idealism. On this movement, see Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[14] See, Paul Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 2009), ch. 3.

"what reason brings forth entirely out of itself" than a knowledge of how things are "in themselves". Redding explores some of the implications for Kant's moral theology of these different ways of understanding his own project of transcendental idealism in relation to "metaphysics". In particular, these two opposed understandings of "metaphysics" are used to shed light on the problematic "postulates" of God and immortality from the *Critique of Practical Reason*. While the postulates doctrine seems to be open to both realist and projectivist readings, Redding argues that when viewed from within the *transformed* sense of metaphysics, a quite different and distinctly "idealist" reading of Kant's theology comes into view. In turn, when seen in this way, the continuity of Kant's thought with post-Kantian forms of idealism is better appreciated.

In "*The Volcano and the Dream: Consequences of Romanticism*", Robert Sinnerbrink focuses on a tradition that continues to fascinate and unsettle: that of early German romanticism. In the aftermath of Kant's critique of metaphysics, German romanticism erupted as a flash of brilliant thought and radical cultural-political hope that dissipated just as quickly. By the time Hegel began revising his *Science of Logic*, romanticism was all but over. Yet it remains a dissonant counterpoint to the Enlightenment project's more triumphal strains. Having shaken the ground of religious faith, and criticised an overly instrumental rationality, romanticism championed the idea of an aesthetic mythology of reason. No thinker has criticised this philosophical style more effectively than Hegel, whose withering critique demolished its historical legacy for nearly a century. Indeed, contemporary critics still rehearse variations on Hegel's classic critique: that romanticism is an empty subjectivism, valorising feeling and advocating irony, resulting in scepticism and nihilism to which the inevitable response is either an impotent *Sehnsucht* or a reversion to political conservatism. What, then, are the consequences of romanticism? Is the idea of an aesthetic mythology of reason a dubious relic of history? Or does it suggest a response to the nihilism of our post-religious age? To answer these questions, Sinnerbrink examines the ambiguous character of early romanticism, reflecting critically upon Hegel's famous critique of it. Romanticism, it is argued, remains a necessary element of our modern self-understanding and an important corrective to the disenchanting effects of modern rationalism, in particular its evacuation of meaning in relation to religion and its fragmentation of experience in relation to art. Romanticism persists in the tradition of aesthetic or poetic thinking that seeks to respond to the ongoing crisis of meaning afflicting religion.

Both Chapter Three and Chapter Four are devoted to Hegel. Over the last few years, Hegel's philosophy of religion has become the object of

intensive research activities conducted from different interpretative approaches. We have therefore decided to include two papers, the first featuring a "hermeneutic" approach, and the second a "revisionist", or "post-Kantian", approach to Hegel.

Maurizio Pagano, in "Hegel as an Interpreter of Religious Experience", shows the relevance of the *interpretative* dimension of Hegel's philosophy of religion, already acknowledged by some of the prominent thinkers in the tradition of contemporary hermeneutics. His main thesis is that Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are organised around the relation between two aspects – one that can be defined as *logical-argumentative*, the other as *concrete-hermeneutical*. In order to show the truth of religion, Hegel *describes* religious experience, *emphasizes* its most important moments, and *provides* an interpretation of it. Usually Hegel's third course, taught in 1827, is regarded as representing his philosophy of religion in its mature form. While this claim can be accepted, the specific and original contribution of the other courses should not be easily dismissed. The paper intends to show that only a comprehensive analysis of all the courses allows an adequate grasp of the intention that guided Hegel in this work. In its final section, Pagano also suggests that there is a hermeneutical dimension in the Hegelian reading of Christianity, and that this approach might be relevant for contemporary thought.

Damion Buterin offers a different, but not incompatible, take on Hegel's philosophy of religion with his paper "Hegel's Incarnationalism". Buterin argues that Hegel's reflections on the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, which initially appear in his early theological writings, underpin his recognitive paradigm of human rationality, as found mainly in the works of the Jena period. Relying on a survey of recent "revisionist" assessments of Hegel's God-talk, Buterin addresses his theory of recognition against the backdrop of his epistemic program in the *Logic*. He finally suggests that the role which recognition plays in the Berlin lectures on the philosophy of religion can be taken as evidence of its reliance on religious sources from the outset.

Within Schelling's vast production on the topic of religion, Wayne Hudson chooses to focus on his last series of lectures, given in Berlin from 1841 onwards. Hudson presents a "prospection" of the condition of "postreligion" and suggests that resources for such a prospection can be found in Schelling's last philosophy, especially if Schelling's claims are appreciated in terms of strategic operations, and not only with regard to his arcane and possibly variable philosophical architecture. Notably, no attempt is made in this paper to argue that Schelling's doctrines are correct, or to resolve the many controversies which surround his work.

Rather, Hudson construes Schelling's work in terms of strategic operations which are of potential value independently of their role in his own changing and incomplete philosophical architecture. The work of the later Schelling, it is argued, transcends the thematics in terms of which it has been received.

With the following chapter, we are transported to the other extreme of the religious spectrum of the post-Kantian tradition, that represented by the so-called left-Hegelians, whose most reputed member is, no doubt, Ludwig Feuerbach. Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of religious illusion as unconscious projection of human attributes is well-known, as is the fact that this critique is anchored in a philosophical anthropology. What is more rarely acknowledged, however, is that Feuerbach's philosophical anthropology entailed a sophisticated theory of human faculties. In his paper "Feuerbach's philosophical psychology and its political and aesthetic implications", Jean-Philippe Deranty proposes a reconstruction of Feuerbach's metapsychology, and identifies three elements in particular, which, it is argued, make his work particularly interesting in a number of current discussions. First his metapsychological model serves not only to explain the psychological mechanism underpinning religious projection. It also delivers a key argument, indissolubly normative and transcendental, at the heart of his humanism. This argument, encapsulated in his concept of "love", can be substantively compared to later attempts, most recently by Axel Honneth, to base a normative model of social and political theory in philosophical anthropological arguments. Second, Feuerbach's overall metapsychological model reserves a special place for imagination and presents a fascinating account of, as he calls it, the "entrancing power of images". Finally, bringing together the different features of Feuerbach's thought allows one to argue that his conception of a post-metaphysical world was not only of political, but also of aesthetic, import. In other words, Deranty suggests that it is possible to develop a "Feuerbachian" theory of aesthetic modernity, once again in dialogue with contemporary proposals in this area.

The following chapter, focusing on Kierkegaard, presents several connections with the previous papers. In his paper entitled "Kierkegaard Is Standing by Himself – Through Hegel's Help. The Notion of Sacrifice in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*", Paolo Diego Bubbio analyses the inter-related notions of sacrifice and kenotic love, which effectively represent the thematic core of *Works of Love*, one of the less famous and yet more intriguing of Kierkegaard's works. Bubbio pursues this analysis in the context of a broader thesis: that Kierkegaard is as a distinctively post-Kantian philosopher, namely, a philosopher who goes beyond Kant in a

way that is nevertheless true to the spirit of Kant's original critical idealism. More specifically, Bubbio argues that the notion of sacrificial love represents Kierkegaard's response to the "Kantian paradox" identified by Terry Pinkard, and that the figure of Christ as model plays a key role in this response. Bubbio explores the notion of sacrifice as it appears in *Works of Love* in great details, identifying its features, the metaphors Kierkegaard employs to provide a picture of it (including the original and surprising metaphor of "the dash", hence the paper's title), and its limits. In the conclusion, Bubbio compares the notion of kenotic sacrifice with Hegel's notion of sacrifice, arguing that Kierkegaard tries to make more explicit and "concrete" some themes that were nevertheless already present in Hegel's philosophy, and considering the strengths and limitations of the Kierkegaardian notion of kenotic love.

The final chapter is devoted to Nietzsche. Nowadays, Nietzsche is usually read either as the inventor of postmodernism, or as the metaphysician of the "will to power", or else, as a stimulating new voice in virtue ethics. Julian Young, in his paper "Nietzsche's New Religion", reminds us that to his own contemporaries Nietzsche was, first and foremost, a *religious* thinker. His fundamental mission, they held, was not to "kill God" but to think through the question of how the vacuum left by his death should be filled. Yet though there was wide agreement as to the character of the project there was no such agreement as to its content, as to what kind of "new religion" might count as authentically "Nietzschean". Nonetheless, Young suggests, it is possible to work out, with a reasonable degree of certainty, the nature of Nietzsche's positive religious thought and to reconstruct at least the outline of the kind of religious outlook he wished to see replace Europe's fading faith. The key to doing so, Young argues, is to recognise the decisive *and enduring* influence exercised over him by his intellectual mentor, Richard Wagner. Understanding the nature of this influence, it is suggested, is the key to understanding the character of his response to the religious crisis of his age.

As editors, we believe that these eight papers represent an important contribution to the reassessment of the relations between religion and philosophy in the post-Kantian tradition. But, as already noted, such work has more than historical value. An in-depth appreciation of the philosophical strategies that are peculiar to this tradition better allows the assimilation of a legacy that can be fruitfully used to face contemporary philosophical challenges.

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CHAPTER ONE

KANTIAN ORIGINS: ONE POSSIBLE PATH FROM TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM TO A POST-KANTIAN THEOLOGY

PAUL REDDING

1. Kant's Ambiguous Metaphysics

After two centuries of Kant interpretation there is still no general agreement over the nature of Kant's most basic philosophical commitments. One issue in particular about which it is difficult to find consensus is his metaphilosophical attitude towards the very project of metaphysics itself. A traditional way of reading Kant has been to regard him as a metaphysical *skeptic*, who denies to us finite knowers the capacity to know "things in themselves" or "noumena", restricting our knowledge to "appearances" or "phenomena". In recent decades, however, this has been contested by more "deflationist" readings that deny that Kant is any way committed to a realm of unknowable objects beyond that of empirical phenomena—that is, that deny that Kant has in mind a separate world of *metaphysical* objects about which we *could be* ignorant. Thus rather than read Kant as speaking of two worlds, it is alleged that we should read him as speaking of just *one world* that can be presented to us in thought in two different *ways*.[1] But others have objected that this

[1] The "deflationist" view is most associated with Henry Allison's path-breaking *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983; revised and enlarged edition, 2004). For similar approaches, see also Graham Bird, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) and *The Revolutionary Kant* (Illinois: Open Court, 2006), and Arthur Collins, *Possible Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999). An important early work in this regard was Gerold Prauss, *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1974).

deflationary or "epistemological" account fails to do justice to Kant's views, and what might be called "neo-metaphysical" readings have re-appeared, affirming Kant as a "realist" about the transcendent realm of things in themselves.[2]

Despite their obvious differences, it might still be said that such deflationary and "transcendental realist" approaches at least agree on the *sense* of the "metaphysics" that they either attribute to Kant or have him disavow. Here "metaphysics" is generally taken to mean what philosophers had traditionally taken it to mean (and mostly still do): a knowledge of how the world ultimately or "really" is, independently of the way in which we know it in empirical experience—in Bernard Williams's happy phrase, a knowledge of how the world is "anyway". However, does Kant always intend knowledge of this kind when he uses the term "metaphysics"?

Part of the confusion surrounding Kant's stance towards metaphysics would seem to stem from the fact that despite the "skeptical" theme running through many parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant nevertheless describes the intention of that work as putting *metaphysics* on the path of *science*,[3] and signals his (ultimately unfulfilled) intention of writing a "Metaphysics of Nature".[4] However, among those parts of the *Critique* expressing a positive, *non-skeptical* attitude to metaphysics are ones that seem to indicate a *quite different* understanding of what metaphysical knowledge should be concerned with. This is, I suggest, a *proto-idealist* approach to metaphysics that had allowed followers like Fichte, for example, to see themselves as following the "spirit" if not the letter of Kant's Transcendental Idealism. Consider the passage in the "Preface" to the first edition where Kant says of metaphysics that it "is the only one of all the sciences that may promise that little but unified effort...will complete it....Nothing here can escape us, because what reason brings forth entirely out of itself cannot be hidden, but is brought to light by reason itself as soon as reason's common principle has been

[2] See, for example, Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Robert Greenberg, *Kant's Theory of A Priori Knowledge* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) and Kenneth R. Westphal, *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[3] "Now the concern of this critique of pure speculative reason consists in that attempt to transform the accepted procedure of metaphysics, undertaking an entire revolution according to the example of the geometers and natural scientists". Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bxxii.

[4] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axxi.

discovered".[5] This approach to metaphysics as an activity in which reason is *properly* concerned entirely with its own products rather than with what exists *anyway* is characteristic of what I have called a *strong* interpretation of Transcendental Idealism ("strong TI") in contrast with the weak interpretation that is presupposed by deflationary and realist stances ("weak TI").[6]

While in weak TI, "metaphysics" means what it traditionally meant, strong TI urges us to think of metaphysics in a different way. It is the science of what reason produces *out of its own activity*, not the science of what ultimately exists "anyway". This rhetoric of something non-natural—reason—bringing forth a content "entirely out of itself" so that it can thereby grasp it is, of course, familiar to readers of Fichte and Hegel. For Fichte it is the self-positing absolute "I" and for Hegel, "spirit", that are described in this way.[7] Here I will avoid the substantive interpretative question as to whether Kant *intended* his Transcendental Idealism to be understood in weak or strong ways. Rather, I want to trace the consequences that this apparent ambiguity over "metaphysics" had for his thoughts about religious belief, as this is an area in which many interpreters have recognized a tangle of similar controversy-ridden ambiguities.

Kant's attitude to metaphysics must, of course, have direct consequences for his attitude to the objects of religious belief since God and the immortal soul are central objects of the rationalist discipline of "special metaphysics".[8] From the perspective of Kant's Copernican turn, the rationalists' claims to *knowledge* of such purported supersensible things in themselves could not survive, and this collapse is reflected in the section on the "Ideal of Pure Reason" in the Transcendental Dialectic (Division 2 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*), where Kant famously undermined various traditional proofs of the existence of God. But if this critique gave hope to

[5] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Axx.

[6] Paul Redding, *Continental Idealism: Leibniz to Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[7] For example, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*, from 1827–28, Hegel describes it as the nature of spirit "to bring forth what it is, to bring it to manifestation, to disclosure, to consciousness. The vocation of spirit is to make itself be what it is in itself…The absolute disposition or substance of spirit is its freedom, and the destiny of its action". Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit, 1827–8*, translated with an Introduction by Robert R. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 60–61.

[8] In the rationalist tradition that emerged from Leibniz, Aristotle's dual sciences of that of "being qua being" (in *Metaphysics* book *gamma*) and the "highest" being (in *Metaphysics* book *lamda*) appeared as the disciplines of *general* and *special* metaphysics respectively.

his contemporary secularists, such hopes would have been disappointed by his doctrine, most well-known from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, of the necessity of "postulating" the existence of God from the perspective of *pure practical* reason.[9] An anticipation of this apparent move of ushering in God through Transcendental Idealism's *practical* aspect is already apparent in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant mentions the famous need to "deny knowledge in order to make room for faith".[10] There Kant states that empirical experience may reveal the world to be a mechanistic realm, but that we should not take this to undermine our concepts of God or freedom of the will. First, we can still coherently *think* these latter notions without contradiction, and next, the doctrine of the limitation of our knowledge *to appearances* will necessarily cut both ways in relation to theology. While we cannot establish the existence of God on theoretical grounds, neither do we have good reason to *deny* the existence of such a purported supersensible object merely from a scientific knowledge of *appearances*. Later in the first *Critique*'s "Transcendental Doctrine of Method", and anticipating the "postulates" doctrine of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant attempts to give the concept of God more positive standing by declaring the idea of God to be a necessary *supplement* to practical knowledge of the moral law because "without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization".[11]

As with Kant's position in general, I here want to avoid the substantive interpretative question about his actual beliefs about God: what I am more concerned about are the consequences that follow from the adoption of one or other of strong or weak interpretations of Transcendental Idealism itself. However, at the level of interpretation, I *do* want to suggest that looking at Kant's conception of God provides evidence for a strengthening of the strong interpretation when one follows the changes in Kant's views between the classical period of Transcendental Idealism and his latest writings of the *Opus Postumum*.

In the following sections I explore some of the implications for Kant's moral theology of these different ways of understanding the project of Transcendental Idealism, and then examine the significance of the changes

[9] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On the more general notion of postulate, see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A232-5/B285-7.
[10] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx.
[11] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A813/B841.

that Kant's own Transcendental Idealism was undergoing in the late 1790s.

2. Moral Religion from the Perspective of Weak TI

On the weak reading of TI, given that we can have no knowledge of "things in themselves", we will be able to neither prove nor disprove the existence of God on *theoretical* grounds. In contrast, Kant's doctrine of "pure practical reason" from the *Critique of Practical Reason* appears to promise an *alternative* for the establishment of such a metaphysical entity. How to take Kant here, however, has long been the source of dispute. The basic problem is captured well by Sebastian Gardner who notes that with the doctrine of the postulates of pure practical reason Kant seems to aspire "to reach a reality that is not in this way merely transcendentally ideal, i.e., a reality which is (and is known to be) the way it is, independently of our subjectivity and its representation, an aspiration which, Kant seems to claim, morality fulfills". However, "if the ground supplied by practical reason, through [pure practical reason], for attributing objective reality to the ideas of reason is also purely subject-oriented and Copernican, then this is not the case: we may know that our representations of God and immortality are not subjective in the same sense as our cognition of empirical objects, since they are not conditioned by our forms of sensibility, but we still do not know that they match transcendental reality."[12] Kant thus seems to hover, and his interpreters will predictably divide, between implicit realist and nonrealist theologies. But neither seems satisfactory. "A nonrealist reading of practical cognition makes it intelligible that theoretical reason should accept the postulates: it simply need not take their claim with full cognitive seriousness. However, a nonrealist interpretation makes it hard to see what value the theological postulates could be thought to have and all too easy to understand why Kant's rational faith should have been attacked by his contemporaries as mere ersatz religion: what use are God and immortality as mere 'as-if' representations, mere 'Fictionen', as Jacobi put it?"[13]

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[12] Sebastian Gardner, "The Primacy of Practical Reason", in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham. Bird (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 271. The internal quote is to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxvi.

[13] Gardner, "The Primacy of Practical Reason", 272. For a recent synoptic defense of the *theistic* reading of the postulates, see Frederick C. Beiser, "Moral faith and the highest good", in Guyer, *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a *non*-theistic

In his discussion of the practical postulates Kant repeatedly stresses that the existence of God is established from the perspective of *practical*, not theoretical, reason, but exactly how we are meant to take this is far from clear. After all, the paradigmatic form taken by the determinations of practical reason is that of the *imperative* rather than the declarative, but, as Paul Guyer notes, the postulates "have the same form as any theoretical proposition, namely, that of asserting that a certain object or property with certain predicates exists".[14] Certainly in places the postulates seem to have a merely psychological significance of *enabling a certain type of action*, with their objects limited to a merely "as if" status, making Kant's approach to theology look like a type of naturalistically based projectivist "error theory", elements of which can be found in Guyer's own interpretation.[15] Elsewhere, however, Kant seems intent on giving a more robust "objectivity" to the concept of God that leads to those interpretations that support a theistically *realist* reading. This is most apparent in Kant's central strategy from the second *Critique* which is to argue from the necessity of the Categorical Imperative to that of the "highest good" as a necessary *object* taken by the moral will. We know the way of the world means that morally acting agents are not necessarily rewarded with happiness, but from a moral point of view, Kant thinks, we nevertheless think that a situation in which goodness is rewarded *should* prevail: we *must* thereby *will* it. Thus this combination of rightness and happiness—the highest good—has become *internal* to the good will itself. But as God is the only being capable of bringing about the highest good, this suggests that some *quasi-logical* connection can be established between willing the highest good, and a belief in God. But as Gardner asks, how can such a doctrine cohere with the "unrestricted Copernicanism" that characterizes Kant's metaphilosophy, the view that "all objects without qualification are to be considered as having to 'conform to our cognition'"?[16]

I suggest that both opposing projectivist and realist readings of the postulates are alternatives within the broader context of what I have been

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reading of the postulates, see for example Onora O'Neill, "Kant on Reason and Religion", *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 18 (1997): 267–308.

[14] Paul Guyer, "From a Practical Point of View: Kant's Conception of a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason", in *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 365.

[15] Gruyer, "From a Practical Point of View", 369–71. See also Guyer's "The Unity of Nature and Freedom: Kant's Conception of the System of Philosophy", in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[16] Gardner, "The Primacy of Practical Reason", 271. The internal quote is from Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xvi.

calling the weak interpretation of Transcendental Idealism. We might make this interpretation of Transcendental Idealism more articulate by thinking of it as combining an idealistically interpreted *Aristotelian epistemology* with a *nominalist ontology*. Kant had been trained as an Aristotelian, and his conception of logic was that of an Aristotelian *term* logic. This is reflected in his way of conceiving of the logical form of judgment as involving the joining of two concepts[17]—a sortal concept in subject position and an attributive concept as predicate. This role played by sortal concepts in subject position effectively means that for him, as for Aristotle, there can be no genuine role in reasoning for *singular* judgments, that is, judgments whose subject term is a singular term, such as a proper name. Within Kant's framework, then, perceptual judgments about individual things have to take the logical form of what, for Aristotle, were *particular* rather than singular judgments. To play a role in cognition, a singular judgment like, say, "*Socrates* is pale", has to be given the form of a particular judgment, as in "*This man* is pale". As we will see,

[17] See, for example, Kant's discussion of the *form* of the categorical judgment in the *Jäsche Logic*: "In categorical judgments, subject and predicate constitute their matter; the form, through which the relation (of agreement or of opposition) between subject and predicate is determined and expressed, is called the *copula*." Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, ed. and trans. J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 601. Kant treats the other judgment forms (hypothetical and disjunctive) as depending on the form of the categorical judgment in as much as that categorical judgments constitute the *matter* of the others.

Kant's position on logic, however, is complicated by the fact that for *transcendental* (rather than formal) logic, Kant's approach seems to anticipate Frege's later radical break with term logic. Thus in the "Transcendental Analytic" of the first *Critique*, Kant seems to reject the idea that a judgment involves the relation between independent terms. "I have never been able to satisfy myself with the explanation that the logicians give of a judgment in general: it is, they say, the representation of a relation between two concepts…I remark only that it is not here determined wherein this **relation** consists." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B140–1. On the Fregean aspects of Kant's transcendental logic see: Mary Tiles, "Kant: From General to Transcendental Logic," in Dov M. Gabbay and John Woods, eds. *Handbook of the History of Logic: Volume 3, The Rise of Modern Logic: From Leibniz to Frege* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004); Manley Thompson, "Singular Terms and Intuitions in Kant's Epistemology," *Review of Metaphysics* 26 (1972–3): 314–43; Robert Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); and my *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 3.

this problem of singular judgments is clearly going to be felt when Aristotelian philosophy is engaged with the God of *monotheistic* belief.[18]

The Aristotelian logical structure of judgment is reflected in Kant's quasi-Aristotelian category theory, but here the difference to Aristotle is crucial. Whereas Aristotle thought of the categories as structuring *being*, Kant's "idealism" is just the commitment to *anti-realism* about such categorical forms. That is, Aristotle had thought of the logical structure of judgments as mirroring the ontological structure of being, while Kant thinks of the logical structure of judgment as primary and as deriving from the knowing subject itself rather than from the world. His idealism was primarily an idealism about *form*. One way of interpreting such an idealist attitude to Aristotle's categories is to see it as a consequence of a *nominalist* ontology, as nominalism can be considered just as the denial that the world is structured by Aristotle's categories.[19]

Thinking of Transcendental Idealism as weakly interpreted in this way may help make sense of just those places where Kant seems to attempt to provide a place for a *bare knowledge* of God's *existence* as detachable from anything else we might know about him, as the medieval nominalists had similarly made God unknowable to human reason in this way, making God primarily the object of *faith* rather than knowledge. Aspects of Kant's discussions of the postulates of pure practical reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason* seem to typify such a view. Thus, Kant says of the ideas of freedom, immortality and God that we are instructed on the basis of the apodictic practical law that these ideas "*have objects*, although we are not able to show how their concept refers to an object, and this is not yet cognition *of these objects*". Kant glosses what it is to have no *cognition* of these objects by saying that one cannot "judge synthetically about them" nor "determine their application theoretically" nor make "theoretical

[18] In the medieval tradition, the problem was confronted by treating singular judgments as having the same logical form as universal judgments on the basis of the affirmative forms allowing no exceptions.

[19] Such a claim was argued at the end of the nineteenth century by Francis E. Abbot in *Scientific Theism* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1885). The idea of Kant as a qualified nominalist was repeated in the mid-twentieth century in Theodor Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Stanford University Press, 2001). "I believe that you would be well advised to convince yourselves that Kant's starting point is that of nominalism and that in this respect he finds himself in line with the rejection of a conceptual realism that has prevailed since the end of medieval philosophy." And yet while "we can say that the foundation of Kantian philosophy is still nominalist…Kant stands on the threshold of a development in which the considerations that led to a radical nominalism begin to turn against themselves." (124–5).