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Affirming without Endorsing: Kant on Religion as Ancillary to Reason[1]

Abstract: The affirmative interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion defends the claim that Kant not only considers religious discourse meaningful but also develops ideas that could further be applied by theologians and religious believers themselves. It has been suggested, accordingly, that Kant's religious thought manifests universalist, ecumenical tendencies and, moreover, can serve as a basis to defend Christian faith. However, in this paper, I consider the alternative that Kant, rather than supporting a determinate kind of religiosity, employs religion in the service of human reason – as an indispensable means of the realization of reason's ends.

Keywords: affirmative interpretation, Christianity, Immanuel Kant, rational faith, Enlightenment

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According to the affirmative reading of Kant's philosophical theology and philosophy of religion, Kant makes room – as Stephen Palmquist and Christopher Firestone have put it in their introductory essay to *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* – for meaningful "God-talk, God-thought, and even God-experience".[2] For Palmquist and Firestone, the affirmative reading requires that one "interpret Kant as *affirming* theology and/or religion *and* interpret that affirmation as a position *worthy of being affirmed* by theologians and/or religious believers".[3] This means that Kant should be interpreted not only as recognizing in religion a specific field of philosophical inquiry, but also as offering concepts and doctrines that are apt to inform the existing religious and theological discourses.

My aim in this paper is to consider what Kant's affirmative approach to religion and theology actually comes down to. Following Kant scholarship, I will zoom in on two possible ways to understand Kant's affirmation. The first of these ways, which I call universalist, highlights Kantian ecumenism and rationalism: a tendency to determine a universal moral core present in what Kant refers to as historical faiths.[4] The second way of construing Kant's

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[2] Christopher L. Firestone, Stephen R. Palmquist, "Editors' Introduction", in: *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Christopher L. Firestone, Stephen R. Palmquist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 3.

[3] Ibidem, 28.

[4] While natural language use allows that two terms, 'religion' and 'faith', denote one and the same set of phenomena, Kant makes a distinction between the meanings of these terms. The distinction is clearly articulated at RGV, 6:108, which reads: "There is only *one* (true) *religion*, but there can be several kinds of *faith*". Immanuel Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason", in: Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 140. Religion, in line with its definition at, e.g., RGV, 6:154, is a way of representing the commands ("duties") of practical reason in which the commands are viewed as God-given. Since reason is universal, there can also be one religion founded on reason. In a letter to Carl Friedrich Stäudlin, Kant places religion within "the field of pure philosophy", beside metaphysics and morality. Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 458 (Br, 11:429). For religion addresses one of the questions that constitute the system of pure reason, that is, "What may I hope?" (cf. Log, 9:24; KrV, A 805/B 833). Throughout the *Religion*, Kant uses the term 'faith(s)' to refer to sets of beliefs and practices based on historical revelation, such as Christian Scriptures, and "statutory laws" established within particular confessional traditions – in this case, he usually speaks about ecclesiastical faith. But he also distinguishes "rational faith" from "a historical faith", whereby he regards the former as universal and necessary and the latter as "merely based on facts", hence particular

affirmation of religion consists in attributing to him an attempt to defend, reform, or provide the basis for a particular kind of historical faith, that is, Christianity, especially in its Protestant breed, though not exclusively in it. These two ways of looking at Kant's affirmation of religion do not have to be read as in mutual opposition but can be considered complementary if one thinks of Christianity as a faith best instantiating the universal moral core that Kant considers to be foundational for religion.

As I will argue, though, both of these ways have flaws: the universalist reading rules out some historical faiths from the set of those that meet the standards of Kant's rational religion, whereby, paradoxically, it may encourage division and dissent among the existing forms of religiosity. The reading that emphasizes Kant's preference for one over other historical faiths offers an account of Christianity which can be reasonably deemed to be at odds with some basic tenets of the faith[5] and instead support a form of deism. Thus, as an alternative to these two ways of rendering Kant's affirmative approach, I will suggest a third option on which the approach is manifest in featuring religion as a corollary of human rationality.

The universalist interpretation

On the interpretation I have called universalist, Kant outlines the foundations of religious belief and uncovers what Wilhelm Dilthey characterizes as the necessary "core" (*Kern*) of all faiths, which needs to be separated from their contingent "husk" (*Hülse*).[6] Together with Herbert of Cherbury, John Locke, Christian Wolff, and the German Enlightenment deists, avers Dilthey

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and contingent. Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries", 136–7 (RGV, 6:103). This paper tracks Kant's distinction between (kinds of) faith and religion when the context makes it requisite.

[5] These basic tenets, determining what Christianity is as a *revealed* religion, are stated in the Nicene Creed and include God's Triunity, divine Incarnation in Jesus, and the Resurrection of Christ. To be a Christian means to recognize the *centrality* of these tenets for faith, rather than their merely subsidiary, for example, morally empowering role.

[6] Wilhelm Dilthey, "Der Streit Kants mit der Zensur über das Recht freier Religionsforschung", in: Wilhelm Dilthey, *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels und andere Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990), 297.

in *Der Streit Kants mit der Zensur über das Recht freier Religionsforschung*, Kant represents an ecumenical tendency that would consist in "trac[ing] back the core of Christianity to a universal rational faith and unit[ing] the educated of all churches in this faith".[7] This rational faith (*Vernunftglaube*) contains two articles which are based on the doctrine of the postulates of pure practical reason – the existence of God and the immortality of the soul – and presuppose the idea of the highest good that provides the necessary completion, the final unifying end, and the motivational supplement of morality.[8] Since rational faith builds on morality, and morality is grounded in an a priori law legislated by practical reason, rational faith must be endorsable by all (finite) rational beings, regardless of what historical faiths they subscribe to.

The universalist reading underlies what Allen Wood identifies as liberal theology "meant to effect a convergence of traditional religion with modern culture",[9] because it is supposed to pave the way for openness and tolerance towards different creeds. The reading finds textual support in the metaphor of two concentric circles that Kant introduces in the second Preface to *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*: enclosed within the circle representing a historical faith, a narrower "inner circle" is placed that stands for "the pure religion of reason".[10] This inner circle can be reached, Kant suggests, once the historical faith has been stripped of its empirical or contingent components, a process that should lay bare the rational core of the faith. In an earlier version of the Preface, adduced by Dilthey, Kant says that the rational moral core can be uncovered in the scriptures of different historical faiths – be they Zend-Avesta, the Vedas, the Quran, or the Bible – which deliver "suitable material" for the philosopher's analysis.[11]

In my view, there are at least two problems related to the universalist reading. First, as of recently, scholars of Kant's intellectual milieu have argued

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[7] Ibidem, 295.

[8] For different meanings of the highest good, see Eckart Förster, "Die Wandlungen in Kants Gotteslehre", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 52(3) (1998); Lawrence Pasternack, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant on Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (London–New York: Routledge, 2014), 17–60.

[9] Allen W. Wood, *Kant and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 188.

[10] Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries", 64 (RGV, 6:12).

[11] Dilthey, "Der Streit Kants", 300.

that he would not seek the common core of different faiths but rather put forward a conception of religion that resulted in marking out some faiths as incompatible with the account of a universal rational faith. More specifically, he would reduce the sacramental dimension of Christianity to its moral function, ignoring thereby its soteriological meaning, and deny the status of religion to Judaism.[12] Unlike Moses Mendelssohn, Kant would not strive for creating unity (*Einheit*) among the plurality of creeds; instead, he would impose on these creeds a uniform standard of 'true' religiosity (*Einerleiheit*).[13] Unlike Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in *The Education of the Human Race* (1780), Kant would not even regard historical faiths as approximating the religion of reason and would not acknowledge their contribution to making humankind more rational. Arguably, then, his would be anything but a universalist account of religion that is supposed to promote ecumenism and tolerance toward different creeds.

Second, the universalist reading defines the common core of faiths in terms of reason-based morality. But even if religious faith encourages moral practice, both on the individual and communal levels, morality need not constitute the centerpiece of a faith, especially one based on supernatural revelation. The revealed doctrines that do in fact constitute the core of many faiths – such as the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus in Christianity – may have a meaning that far transcends the moral aspects of these faiths and that cannot even be explicated or made sense of in moral terms. By displacing revealed doctrines to the peripheries of religious faiths and putting their moral contents at the center, the universalist reading runs the risk of providing a distorted account of the existing faiths.

However, the proponent of the universalist interpretation could reply that Kant's account of religion is not descriptive; rather, in his definition of the

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[12] Cf. Ian Hunter, "The Early Theological Reception of Kant's Religious Philosophy", in: *Oxford History of Modern German Theology*, ed. Grant Kaplan, Kevin M. Vander Schel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023). On Kant's position on the Jewish faith, see Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries", 154–159 (RGV, 6:125–131); cf. also Ian Hunter, "The Early Jewish Reception of Kantian Philosophy", *Modern Intellectual History* 19(1) (2022).

[13] For a discussion of Kant's and Mendelssohn's approaches to the plurality of faiths, see James Schmidt, "German enlightenment", access 21.01.2025, https://www.academia.edu/3751157/German_Enlightenment.

term,[14] Kant *projects* its meaning in line with his intended reform of religion. In other words, the advocate of the universalist interpretation could acknowledge that instead of bringing out the common features of the existing faiths, Kant suggests a criterion that any faith should pass in order to approximate or instantiate 'true' religion – what he often refers to as "pure moral faith".[15] Yet, as some of Kant's critics discussed recently in detail by Ian Hunter (i.e., Saul Ascher and Benedict Stattler)[16] would contend, far from manifesting an ecumenical tendency at its roots, such a reform may be conducive to an aggressive intervention into the faiths, potentially threatening their identity – a consequence that not only conservative religious believers and defenders of religious pluralism would find unacceptable, but that challenges the claim about the tolerant nature of Kant's views on religion that Dilthey and Wood have brought to the fore.

Reading Kant as a Christian thinker

Another way of reading Kant's philosophy of religion affirmatively is to emphasize the Christian themes present in his thought. According to Otfried Höffe, Kant's *Religion* expresses "the four building blocks of Christianity: original sin, Christ, judgment day, and the Church" in the idiom of pure moral faith.[17] Firestone and Jacobs have described a project along these lines as the "*Religion* – as – Translation" thesis (without embracing the thesis themselves) and explained it as a claim that the *Religion* should be regarded

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[14] See footnote 4 above. In "The Conflict of the Faculties" (in: Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 262), Kant's definition of religion reads: "the sum of all our duties regarded as divine *commands*" (SF, 7:36). See also: SF, 7:74; RGV, 6:84; MS, 6:440, 443, 487; KpV, 5:129.

[15] See, e.g., Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries", 144 (RGV, 6:112).

[16] See footnote 12 above.

[17] Otfried Höffe, "Holy Scriptures within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: Kant's Reflections", in: *Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: A Critical Guide*, ed. Gordon E. Michalson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 15.

"not as an extension of Kant's arguments in the critical philosophy, but as a translation of the Christian faith"[18] into its rational counterpart.

Still others – for example, Jacqueline Mariña, Norbert Fischer, and Frederick Beiser – have suggested that Kant's philosophy of religion should be read as rooted in the Christian tradition, especially Augustinian, informing his concepts of grace, moral autonomy, and "radical evil".[19] To an extent, such readings may remind of Friedrich Paulsen's programmatic essay, *Kant, der Philosoph des Protestantismus* (1899). Paulsen attributes to Kant "irrationalism", i.e., the doctrine that "with mere knowledge (*Wissen*) reason cannot go beyond empirical reality; it knows nothing about God and divine matters, religion rests exclusively on faith (*Glauben*) and not on demonstration (*Beweisen*)".[20] Kant's anti-dogmatism and anti-intellectualism, according to Paulsen, places "intellectual unbelief at the foundation of moral faith",[21] an attitude akin to the Protestant reliance on "heart" and the will. Paulsen underscores the practical orientation of both Protestantism and Kantianism: they encourage us that we love God by making our will morally good and reject speculation multiplying "proofs" for divine existence. Critical toward ecclesiastical authorities, Kant would ground the certainty of faith in the subject's inner moral disposition and the idea of God in us.[22] Despite recognizing reason's insufficiency in matters of faith, he would make room for its autonomy in science,[23] thereby warranting scientific progress inhibited, in Paulsen's view, by reliance on authorities in the Catholic world.[24]

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[18] Christopher Firestone, Nathan Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 48.

[19] Jacqueline Mariña, "Kant on Grace: A Reply to His Critics", *Religious Studies* 33(4) (1997); Norbert Fischer, "Kants Idee *est Deus in nobis* und ihr Verhältnis zu Meister Eckhart. Zur Beziehung von Gott und Mensch in Kants kritischer Philosophie und bei Eckhart", in: *Meister Eckhart als Denker*, ed. Wolfgang Erb, Norbert Fischer (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2017); Frederick C. Beiser, "Moral Faith and the Highest Good", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[20] Friedrich Paulsen, *Kant, der Philosoph des Protestantismus* (Berlin: Reuther und Reichard), 7. On the "irrationality" of Protestantism, see ibidem, 10.

[21] Ibidem, 14.

[22] Ibidem, 15.

[23] See ibidem, 23, 32–35.

[24] Ibidem, 25–26.

There can be little doubt that Christian (Pietist) upbringing and education left a lasting impact on Kant's thought,[25] yet this fact in itself does not make him a Christian philosopher or an apologist of Christianity in any of its confessional forms. Admittedly, Kant sees Christianity most fit for the propagation of reason-based moral faith when he claims that Christianity's "true first purpose was none other than the introduction of a pure religious faith"[26] and that it is "supposedly *destined* to be the world religion".[27] Nevertheless, Kant's 'affirmation' of Christianity extends so far as this faith can serve as a 'vehicle' of rational religion, thus as a means of the realization of reason's ends. As a historical faith, Christianity expresses a contingent and evolving form of religiosity, relative to a particular time and space in human history.[28] On some accounts, such an approach to religious faith would be considered as resulting in deism;[29] hence, it could not testify to Kant's apologetic intention with regard to Christianity understood as a religious faith based on supernatural revelation.

Also, on somewhat closer inspection, the "*Religion* – as – Translation" thesis allows bringing out deistic assumptions latent in Kant's religious and theological thought, rather than confirming its apologetic tendency. For supposing that the main tenets of Christianity can be rendered in terms of pure moral faith, which (*pace* Paulsen's 'irrationalist' reading) is based on reason (albeit practical) and not historical revelation, the difference between Christianity and the moral faith would come down to idiom alone. Thus construed, in its essence, Christianity would turn out to be identical with the religion of reason[30] and, as *the* universal rational faith, it would have to be "as

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[25] See Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 34–60.

[26] Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries", 159 (RGV, 6:131).

[27] Immanuel Kant, "The End of All Things", in: Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, 231 (EAD, 8:339).

[28] For textual evidence supporting this claim, see, e.g., the embryo metaphor at RGV, 6:121 (Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries", 151).

[29] Cf. Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 2013), 68.

[30] Indeed, Kant's understanding of Christianity allows this option, though it would be more correct to claim that he offers a dual account of the faith: as both rational and revealed. Accordingly, in the *Conflict*, he says: "Christianity is the Idea of religion which must as such be

old as the creation", to recall the title of Matthew Tindal's deist classic,[31] that is, independent from its revelation in history. Moreover, as a corollary of the 'translation' of the main Christian doctrines into rational faith, the suprarational aspects of these doctrines would have to be left out or moved to the peripheries of 'true' religion – as a theoretical supplement to pure moral faith that can but need not be endorsed by a believer.[32]

Consider the central tenet of the Christian faith: the Incarnation. In Part Two of the *Religion*, Kant explicates this tenet in relation to both natural religion and historical revelation. In terms of the former, God incarnate in Jesus is represented by an account of the archetype (*Urbild*) of morally perfect humanity, whereas in terms of the latter – by a human being that provides an example (*Vorbild*) of moral perfection, a "teacher of morality" who might have as well existed in history. There is nothing in the 'divinity' of Jesus construed as moral excellence that could not in principle be achieved by any other human being.[33] For perfect obedience to the moral law, in which Jesus's divinity consists for Kant, is a duty of each finite rational being. Yet, the archetype itself cannot be identical with historical Jesus, which is why Kant's theory proves unfit for accommodating the doctrine of Incarnation. The archetype, which has "come down to us from heaven", hence we cannot explain its origin, can be cognized through our reason,[34] rather than historical revelation, unlike Jesus the moral teacher. It is our practical reason that endows the

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based on reason and to this extent be natural. But it contains a means for introducing this religion to human beings, the Bible, which is thought to have a supernatural source." Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties", 269 (SF, 7:44). Cf. Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries", 179–184 (RGV, 6:157–163).

[31] The full title reads: *Christianity as Old as the Creation: Or, the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature.*

[32] On the supernatural doctrines of Christianity as a theoretical supplement of pure moral faith, Kant writes in the preface to *The Conflict of the Faculties* as follows: "revelation is useful in making up the *theoretical* deficiency which our pure rational belief admits it has […] and helps […] to satisfy a rational need", even though considered as "contingent tenets of faith", the doctrines remain "nonessential" for the religion of reason. Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties", 242 (SF, 7:9).

[33] Stephen Palmquist argues for Jesus's divinity understood in this sense in: "Could Kant's Jesus Be God?", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52(4) (2012). But this is not the sense in which Jesus's divinity is professed in the Nicene Creed.

[34] Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries", 104 (RGV, 6:61).

archetype of moral perfection with objective reality.[35] We recognize a morally excellent person in Jesus described in the Gospels because of the idea of moral perfection in our reason, and not because we derive moral cognition from our acquaintance with biblical Jesus. The divinity that we may recognize in this figure is not the divinity *of* Jesus, but the divinity *in* Jesus: the moral disposition that we attribute to him or believe him to exemplify.

Another central notion of Christianity – that of grace – is not rejected by Kant either but reinterpreted in terms of inscrutable "higher assistance", which we, however, have to deserve by following the moral law. But such an understanding of grace rules out the idea that divine action upon our will can provide a concomitant cause of our morally good choices. Regardless of the succour or empowerment we might receive from God to stay on the morally right track, only *we* can be the authors of the goodness of our will. By way of an illustration:

> *Religion*: "Granted that some supernatural cooperation is also needed to his becoming good or better, whether this cooperation only consist in the diminution of obstacles or be also a positive assistance, the human being must nonetheless make himself antecedently worthy of receiving it […] the command that we *ought* to become better human beings still resounds unabated in our souls; consequently, we must also be capable of it, even if what we can do is of itself insufficient and, by virtue of it, we only make ourselves receptive to a higher assistance inscrutable to us".[36]

> *Opus postumum*: "Animals can be made by God, because there is, indeed, in them a *spiritus* and even *anima* (*immateriale*), but not *mens*, as free will. *Whether God could also give man a good will?* No, rather, that requires freedom".[37]

Accordingly, Kant makes space for divine grace as a means supporting the human being's pursuit of moral betterment. But moral betterment itself, being a duty, cannot be contingent upon one's reception of divine grace, because

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[35] Ibidem, 105 (RGV, 6:62).
[36] Ibidem, 89–90 (RGV, 6:44–45).
[37] Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 237 (OP, 21:34).

its condition lies in the will – morally legislative practical reason. Since only those actions can be deemed moral in which the will exercises autonomy, that is, follows its own law, we cannot become good in that we follow the divine law or submit ourselves to the divine will. Thus, Kant's account of the relation between divine grace and human will invites Pelagianism, or at least comes close to the account of a 16th-century Christian humanist, Erasmus.[38]

While there are reasons to read Kant's views on grace as compatible with Christian heterodoxy, Mariña has offered an interpretation that tries to salvage the consistency of Kant's approach with a more traditional Christian outlook,[39] Protestant and Catholic alike. She attributes to Kant the idea that divine grace (in its general sense) can be equated "with the moral law and its effect upon us".[40] To respect the moral law as the primary incentive of our actions, contends Mariña, means to become receptive to the operation of divine grace in us. Thus, on Mariña's reading, Kant would accommodate the Christian idea of our necessary receptivity to God's grace by equating this receptivity with moral awareness.

Yet, according to Kant, we owe moral awareness to the self-legislative activity of our reason. But what does the claim that we become receptive to divine grace in virtue of our legislation of the moral law to ourselves actually come down to? In my view, the claim can be understood in at least the following two ways: (i) to exercise moral autonomy means precisely to be affected by divine grace (the former is both the necessary and sufficient condition of the latter); (ii) to exercise moral autonomy means to work toward deserving the reception of divine grace – the "higher assistance" inscrutable to us. Opting for the first way of understanding the claim in question may imply what

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[38] In his treatise titled *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio* (1524), Erasmus argued that attributing moral desert and fault to agents presupposes freedom of the will, against which Luther responded in *De servo arbitrio* (1525) that granting freedom to the human will in morally good choices annuls the work of divine grace, the Holy Spirit and Christ's vicarious atonement included. Luther accused Erasmus of Pelagianism: propagating a 5th-century heresy that human beings are capable of morally good choices without the assistance of divine grace. For Kant's affinities with Erasmus, see Elizabeth C. Galbraith, "Kant and Erasmus", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46(2) (1993).

[39] Mariña, "Kant on Grace". On what 'traditional Christian outlook' refers to, see footnote 5.

[40] Ibidem, 399.

I elsewhere (provisionally) called the 'deification' of practical reason,[41] and this is a move toward a deistic reading of Kant's religion.[42] Opting for the second one, in turn, takes us back to reading Kant on the relation between human will and divine grace as subscribing to Pelagianism. Arguably, none of these ways suffices to corroborate Kant's affirmative – let alone apologetic – intention with regard to the Christian faith.

Affirming without endorsing:
Kant's religion as ancillary to reason

Kant's philosophy of religion may not provide the best resource when it comes to arguments in support of 'traditional' forms of Christianity, understood as religious faith based on supernatural revelation. Yet the Enlightenment – or Kant's intellectual milieu – would abound in instances of Christian heterodoxy, bordering on religious rationalism and deism:[43] Socinianism, neology, and different forms of rational religion. It is to these varieties of 'Enlightenment religiosity' that Kant's religion bears more resemblance than to any institutionalized and dogmatic forms of the Christian faith. Religious rationalists, if one may refer to these diverse groups with a common name,[44] would offer an amalgam of philosophy and theology, based on the supposition that the divine is directly accessible in human reason: through "clear

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[41] See Anna Tomaszewska, "Kant's 'Deification' of Reason in the *Opus postumum*: An Attempt at Reconciling God and Autonomy", in: *Perspectives on Kant's Opus postumum*, ed. Giovanni Pietro Basile, Ansgar Lyssy (New York–London: Routledge, 2023).

[42] According to Winfried Schröder, the Enlightenment deists would think of reason as the locus of divine light (*lux divina*), implanted in all human beings and giving individuals the authority to critically assess historical faiths. See his *Ursprünge des Atheismus: Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik- und Religionskritik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2012), 308–309.

[43] In light of recent research, these are rather vague concepts that capture the views of both self-styled 'Christian deists' like Thomas Morgan and Matthew Tindal, as well as critics of Judaeo-Christian revelation, such as Hermann Samuel Reimarus and Voltaire. See, e.g., S.J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

[44] See Ian Hunter, "Kant's *Religion* and Prussian Religious Policy", *Modern Intellectual History* 2(1) (2005): 9.

and distinct" ideas,[45] "inner light", or the "givenness" of reason itself.[46] Likewise, given Kant's conception of God as "the moral law itself, as it were, but thought as personified",[47] thus, considering his tendency to 'deify' morality, we can attribute to him the rationalists' idea that reason gives us access to the divine, although this access cannot be expected to result in the theoretical cognition of God.

However, there does not seem to be much difference between raising morality to the status of religion[48] and reducing religion to morality, for such an approach encourages conceiving of religion as an idiom by means of which moral insights can be conveyed. To illustrate the point, one can read Kant's allegorical analyses, in Part Two of the *Religion*, of Christ's Resurrection in terms of the victory of the good over the evil principle in us as an example of how religious idiom captures morally relevant insights. But we can leave aside the problem of the reductionist reading of Kant's religion if we consider his aim to consist not in advocating any particular kind of religion, but in establishing a relation between reason and religion such that the latter is envisaged as indispensably ancillary to the former. I shall explicate what this suggestion comes down to using three pieces of textual evidence that support the following claims: 1) religion is requisite for reason to accomplish its ends; 2) religion makes our rationality internally consistent; 3) religion warrants a tendency that Kant finds to be intrinsic to human reason – what I would call reason's drive for self-transcendence.

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[45] Employing the notion of clear and distinct ideas, Lodewijk Meijer argued that true philosophy equals the "Word of God", since the ideas have their origin in divine reason. Therefore, the Scriptures should be read by the philosopher because he holds the key – clear and distinct cognitions – to divine wisdom, conveyed (also) by the Holy Writ. See his *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture (1666)* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005), 105–106, 113–115, 117.

[46] See Johann Ch. Edelmann, *Die Göttlichkeit der Vernunft* (Berleburg, 1742). Edelmann identifies God with reason (*Vernunft*), explicated both as inner light and the capacity for discursive thinking; to corroborate his insights, he resorts to an exegesis of the Prologue to John's Gospel.

[47] Immanuel Kant, "Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion", in: *Religion and Rational Theology*, 409 (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz, 28:1076; cf. V-Phil-Th/Pölitz, 28:1091).

[48] Cf. Stephen R. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 137.

The first piece comes from Kant's Enlightenment essay (1784). Kant defines enlightenment as an individual's emerging "from his self-incurred minority",[49] by which one can understand a striving to achieve rational autonomy. The motto of enlightenment that Kant borrows from Horace – "*Sapere aude!*" which can be translated as "have the courage to be *wise*"[50] – points to the moral dimension of the process. Kant defines wisdom, for example in the essay *The End of All Things* (1794), as "practical reason using means commensurate to the final end of all things – the highest good – in full accord with the corresponding rules of measure",[51] and attributes it primarily to God. Derivatively, human wisdom consists in relating one's actions to the system of ends and their unity in the highest good; we act wise when we pursue the highest good, for the objective reality of which the existence of God must be postulated.[52] Thus, insofar as enlightenment necessitates the human being's striving for rational autonomy and there is a moral dimension to the striving, manifest in the furtherance of the highest good, hence insofar as enlightenment is an end of practical reason, theistic faith turns out to be vital for the possibility of reason's end being accomplished.

The text which illustrates the claim about religion being requisite to make reason internally consistent can be found in § 87 of the *Critique of Judgement* in the righteous atheist example.[53] Kant's argument rests on the premise that a moral person ought to promote a moral world. But due to the limitations intrinsic to human nature, bringing such a world about requires the cooperation of an intelligent – omniscient and omnipotent – being, rather than a contingent combination of happiness and virtue (the components of the highest good realized in the moral world[54]). Unless he endorses faith in God,

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[49] Immanuel Kant, "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?", in: *Practical Philosophy*, 17 (WA, 8:35).

[50] This is a literal translation. As is well known, Kant renders Horace's adage as: "Have courage to make use of your own understanding!". Ibidem.

[51] Kant, "The End of All Things", 228 (EAD, 8:336).

[52] See Immanuel Kant, "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?", in: *Religion and Rational Theology*, 12 (WDO, 8:139).

[53] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 276–281 (KU, 5:447–453).

[54] See Lawrence Pasternack, "Restoring Kant's Conception of the Highest Good", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55(3) (2017).

the moral atheist will entertain inconsistent beliefs: 1) that the moral world can be brought about by his own efforts, since it is his duty to promote the ideal, and 2) that the moral world cannot be effected, since aligning happiness with morality exceeds the agent's capacities, given his rather limited mastery over nature and deficiencies in moral judgment.

Finally, based on the theological fascicles of the *Opus postumum*, one can reconstruct an argument for religion as a means of authorizing what may be called reason's drive for self-transcendence. Though the passages in which Kant identifies God with practical reason have occasionally been interpreted as testifying to the redundancy of the idea of God in his late reflection on religion and theology,[55] arguably Kant's employment of the idea in the doctrine of practical self-positing (*Selbstsetzung*) justifies an opposite approach. The subject constitutes herself as a person when she exercises autonomy – self-legislation of the moral law binding for each rational agent. The idea of God as a "hypostasis of the absoluteness of moral duty"[56] both extends self-legislation on a community of agents and allows the subject to conceive of herself as a member of the moral community. The point here is not that while exercising moral autonomy the subject takes over the role of God – the sovereign of the ethical community introduced in Part Three of the *Religion*. Rather, the idea of God allows a perspective on moral autonomy that transcends the individual dimension of the exercise of practical reason.

The three examples given above are meant to show that Kant considers religion to be ancillary to reason whose goals are determined independently of religious faith. Accordingly, Kant's affirmative approach to religion could be understood not as inviting the endorsement of a particular kind of faith, but as acknowledging religion's subsidiary, albeit indispensable, role in the realization of reason's ends. There is, though, a degree of ambiguity in this conclusion. On the one hand, it furthers the idea that, on Kant's construal, religion itself is a form of rationality – precisely because it promotes the ends

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[55] See Adela Cortina, "Die Auflösung des religiösen Gottesbegriffs im *Opus postumum* Kants", *Kant-Studien* 75(3) (1984).

[56] Vittorio Mathieu, *La filosofia trascendentale e l'Opus postumum di Kant* (Torino: Edizioni di 'Filosofia', 1958), 418.

of reason. On the other hand, it highlights the insufficiency of reason[57] which cannot realize its ends on its own. But in whichever of these senses Kant affirms religion, it seems correct to observe that none of them necessitates the affirmation of supernatural ends such as salvation or eternal life. Though justifying this claim would require a separate argument, it is here that the secular potential of Kant's approach to religious faith seems to emerge.

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[57] An anonymous referee has pointed out that in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant affirms religion in a number of different ways: in Part Two, by showing how religion can provide a means of converting our *Gesinnung* from evil to good; in Part Three, as a way of overcoming unsociable sociability; and in Part Four, by making sense of practices such as prayer and churchgoing. Apart from adding more nuance to my exposition, the reviewer's remark remains compatible with my general claim about religion being for Kant complementary or subsidiary to reason in the sense spelled out above. All in all, the diverse ways in which Kant affirms religion are subordinated to the pursuit of practical reason to bring about a moral world (or empower individuals to bring such a world about).

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