

Boyarin says he has written not positivist, old-fashioned history, but the “history of discourse”. But even if this does not mean just “history of ideas”, his disclaimer does not exempt his account from a historian’s scrutiny, because Boyarin does present his discussion as an explanation for a real, historical occurrence. Having made a case for religious continuity, he has demonstrated difference instead. This difference is not one of ideologies or public relations only; there were and are real differences between Judaism and Christianity even when numerous members of each religion might have participated in both simultaneously—when rabbinic authors, for example, inadvertently recorded instances of Jewish martyr-ideals or Christians showed themselves agile tricksters, or more commonly, when Jewish and Christian people visited each other’s shrines and prayed forbidden prayers. If rabbis and bishops called such actions disobedience, historians are free to call it participation. What they are bound to do, however, is to submit their conclusions to the court of scholarly judgment. I doubt that Boyarin’s construal of his chosen texts will hold up under scrutiny; it is too partial, and too partisan, in its use of evidence. In the meantime, however, it sheds a slanting light across the features of each group and makes them stand out in vivid contrast.

Robin Darling Young  
*School of Religious Studies*  
*The Catholic University of America*  
 620 Michigan Avenue  
 Washington, DC 20064  
 USA

*Kant and the Problem of God* by Gordon E. Michalson, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999) xi + 196 pp.

In this book, Gordon Michalson argues that Kant’s ethics and philosophy of religion are characterized by what he calls a “principle of immanence” ultimately incompatible with theistic belief. Kant’s philosophy, he claims, leads down the slippery slope of transposing all references to God to ourselves, à la Feuerbach. This larger argument, introduced in his first chapter, mostly rests on his development of four supporting claims. These are developed in chapters two through five, with one chapter devoted to each of the claims. The last chapter investigates the implications of his findings for the prospects of mediating theology.

In chapter two Michalson argues that the God of Kant’s moral faith is an impoverished one. The God of the traditional proofs—in particular the ontological one—is much fuller and more robust than the God that we are required to postulate as moral beings. Whereas the former is the most perfect being on whose activity the entire created order depends, all that moral faith requires is the belief in a being adequate to the task of proportioning virtue and happiness. It would have been helpful had Michalson provided an in-depth argument as to what exactly moral commitment implies we must hope about the nature of the world and the conditions of the possibility of such a world, but he does not develop this particular argument further. Instead he moves on to make the claim that since Kant’s God is postulated as the result of a *moral* need, the nature of such a God is circumscribed by morality. His calling attention to the “apparent yoking of the divine will to the requirements of the highest good—as though the preordaining God of Luther and Calvin had been given a script to follow by the philosophers” (p. 42) amply demonstrates his presuppositions. And in a telling rhetorical flourish, he speaks of the “resulting transfer of bondage of

the will from humanity of God" (p. 51). All of this, he claims, results in "theistic shrinkage" and a "diminishing of the divine". He seems to advocate the position that anything other than a divine command theory of ethics, along with a profound sense of the inscrutability of God's will and the humble demeanor proper to such a vision of God, radically diminishes the divine. If God *must* be moral, then we have a significant limitation on God's freedom. But too little is said about the problems associated with voluntarism. While a brief mention is made of an alternative within Christian theology to voluntarism, it is left highly unclear in which ways Kant's circumscription of God's nature by morality diminishes the divine any more than the anti-voluntaristic tradition of Christian thought.

The third chapter deals with Kant's conception of autonomy. Here Michalson develops his second major claim: in conceiving of reason as capable of setting its own ends, Kant has marginalized God since God is no longer the source of morality. Before the eighteenth-century, the proper ends and destiny of human beings were something revealed in Scripture and came from a source outside ourselves, but Kant's philosophy claims that through reason we can set our own ends. Michalson uses the language of "self invention" to characterize what results when reason is thought of as capable of setting its own ends. He repeatedly tells us that Kant's understanding of the "free standing character" of autonomy as a feature of the will "needs no additional metaphysical support" (p. 72, cf. p. 49) and further claims that Kant unhooks the will from "any particular feature of human nature" (p. 77). At this point, Michalson's rhetoric and argumentation are misleading at best if not just flat out wrong. His metaphor of "self invention" suggests an arbitrary character to the ends of reason, as if some other ends could have been chosen instead. Ignored as well is the fact that for Kant reason has a very specific character and structure and that it is the very *nature* of reason which determines its ends. Hence insofar as human nature is rational nature, the proper ends of the will are determined by this aspect of human nature. In fact, in the *Religion* Kant explicitly discusses the predisposition to personality as one of the elements in our fixed character and destiny as human beings predisposing us to the good; it is that in virtue of which we are rational and accountable beings.

Michalson explores Kant's claims regarding the interests and needs of reason in the fourth chapter. Reason has an inner teleology and strives for totalization. This results in reason's usurpation of the role traditionally ascribed to divine providence, since it is now reason that determines human destiny. In his fifth chapter, Michalson argues that in the latter books of the *Religion* the ethical commonwealth or community supplants God's role in helping individuals to overcome radical evil. Kant's development of the idea of an ethical commonwealth, as well as his philosophy of history, suggest that Kant believed that the highest good could be achieved on earth. Michalson concludes that the postulate of immortality is thereby superseded by the theory of the moral progress associated with the ethical commonwealth. And in a final argument revealing a fundamental misunderstanding of Kant running throughout the book, Michalson claims that there is "no argumentative bridge to a claim of divine existence without prior appeal to the postulate of immortality". Hence Kant subverts his own argument. In fact, however, the postulate of immortality plays no role in Kant's argument for God's existence. The key factor, as Susan Nieman points out, is the ultimate gap between reason and nature: the causality of nature is heedless to reason's interests. And if this is the problem, Kant would be hard pressed to understand the highest good in purely immanent terms. This gap leads Kant to posit a wise author of nature that providentially harmonizes the causality of reason and nature.

The larger project of Michalson's book is the attempt to show that any mediating theology that takes Kant as its inspiration is ultimately wrongheaded, since fundamental to Kant's vision is a drive towards immanence that ultimately leaves no room

for God. Michalson's project is a failure for several reasons. First is the fact that at key junctures Michalson simply gets Kant wrong. This is exacerbated by too much reliance on secondary literature and too little direct examination of Kantian texts. Second is Michalson's too narrow a view of what the alternatives to a Barthian "post liberal" theology are. There are more points of contact between Kant and traditional Christian theology than Michalson imagines. For example, it is ultimately unclear why the belief that God works in and through us should marginalize God. After all, the belief in the work of the Spirit has been around since Christianity's inception. Moreover, it remains unclear why reason's ability to apprehend ends that *must* be chosen diminishes the divine. Why must morality come to us from the outside in order to preserve God's sovereignty? Is it not possible that reason is itself the image of God in us? And can it not be argued that it is only through this image that we are able to truly understand, and therefore to love God? A mediating theology taking its inspiration from Kant need only affirm that human nature is graced insofar as it is rational. From a theological point of view, the larger issue is whether the idea of a graced human nature somehow diminishes the divine. Unfortunately this question remains unexplored in this book.

Jacqueline Marina  
*Department of Philosophy*  
*Purdue University*  
*West Lafayette, IN 47907*  
 USA

*Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* by Reinhard Hütter, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) xviii + 314 pp.

There is no doubt, I think, that Reinhard Hütter's *Suffering Divine Things* is an important book. It is important both because of its claim that theology is impossible outside of the context of the church, and because of the intellectual rigour with which that claim is defended. Taking as his point of departure the 1928 correspondence between Adolf von Harnack and Erik Peterson, and countering in some critical respects the recent accounts of theology put forward by George Lindbeck and Oswald Bayer, Hütter seeks to show the inseparable connection between the church as "the public sphere of the Holy Spirit", on the one hand, and the possibility of theology on the other. Without a proper sense of the ecclesial locus of theology, without its grounding in the peculiar practices of the church, theology simply has no binding authority nor any basis on which to speak the truth. The development of this position, though first and foremost an attempt to think theologically about the nature of theology itself, is also a response to the contemporary crisis in theology in which the pluralistic and fragmentary conditions currently shaping theology and church undermine any claim to speak or bear witness to the truth.

Hütter follows Peterson in observing that the temptation of Protestant theology in particular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been to demonstrate its public relevance and authority through appeal to reason, to religious inwardness and spirituality or to political activism. But Hütter agrees with Peterson that "this inherent crisis of relevance will not be resolved until Protestantism reclaims its 'churchly' identity, that is until the church again constitutes a specific public". What does this mean?