



KANT-STUDIEN

Philosophische Zeitschrift der Kant-Gesellschaft

83. Jahrgang · Heft 2 · 1992

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herausgegeben von

Gerhard Funke und Rudolf Malter

Sonderdruck

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

Abhandlungen

- S. Palmquist, Hong Kong:
Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality? 129
- M. K. Green, Oneonta/New York:
Kant and Moral Self-Deception 149
- K. R. Davis, Nashville/Tennessee:
Kant's Different "Publics" and the Justice of Publicity 170

Berichte und Diskussionen

- P. Baumanns, Bonn:
Kants transzendente Deduktion der reinen Verstandesbegriffe (B). Ein
kritischer Forschungsbericht. Vierter Teil 185
- H. E. Allison, San Diego:
Gurwitsch's Interpretation of Kant. Reflections of a Former Student 208
- H. Williams, Aberystwyth/Wales:
Morality or Prudence? 222

Buchbesprechungen

- A. Gurwitsch, Kants Theorie des Verstandes, ed. Th. M. Seebohm (K.-B. Beils) 226
- A. Sutter, Göttliche Maschinen. Die Automaten für Lebendiges bei Descartes,
Leibniz, La Mettrie und Kant (R. Klockenbusch) 228
- M. Kuehn, Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768 – 1800. A Contribution
to the History of Critical Philosophy (R. Pozzo) 233
- F. Gebler, Die Gottesvorstellungen in der frühen Theologie Immanuel Kants
(G. B. Sala) 236
- S. Semplici, Dalla teodicea al male radicale. Kant e la dottrina illuminista della
,Giustizia di Dio' (R. Pozzo) 238
- G.-J. Ju, Kants Lehre vom Menschenrecht und von den staatsbürgerlichen
Grundrechten (G. Cavallar) 240
- U. P. Jauch, Immanuel Kant zur Geschlechterdifferenz (H. Beck/M. Kuehn) . 243
- Kant, La Metafisica de la Costumbres. Tr. A. Cortina Orts und J. Conill
Sancho (M. Caimi) 246

Literaturhinweise

- J. Court, Kants Beitrag zur Theorie und Praxis von Spiel und Sport
(L. Baumann) 248
- M. Höpker, Kants Suche nach dem Begriff (L. Baumann) 248
- J. Kim, Kants Postulatenlehre (L. Baumann) 249
- E. Kunkel, Das ,Ich denke'. Seine gnoseologische Relevanz in Kants ,Kritik der
reinen Vernunft' (L. Baumann) 250

H. Lange, Kants modus ponens (L. Baumann)	251
W. Nolting, Die Objektivität der Empfindung, Hölderlin. Mit einer Einleitung zu Kant und Hegel (L. Baumann)	251
H. Weeland, Autonomie und Sinnprinzip. Zum Vorgang kantischen Philosophierens (L. Baumann)	252
K. Wellner, Das Bewußtsein. Beschreibung und Kritik der Transzendentalphilosophie bei Kant, Fichte und Schelling (L. Baumann)	253
<i>Mitteilungen</i>	
Mitteilung der Japanischen Kant-Gesellschaft	255
Rumänische Kantübersetzung	255
Kant in der Philosophischen Bibliothek	256
Colin and Ailsa Turbayne Berkeley Essay Prize	256

Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?

by Stephen Palmquist, Hong Kong

I. Introduction: *The myth and its source*

Does Kant reduce religion to morality? Before answering this question we must clarify just what it means to “reduce” one idea or way of thinking to another. What would it *mean* for someone to “reduce religion to morality”?

Reductionism can be understood in either a loose or a strict sense, which we can call “explanatory” and “eliminative” reductionism, respectively.¹ In the loose sense reductionism means explaining everything relevant to a given field of inquiry in terms of a single, all-pervasive factor outside that field, which is *necessary* to a proper understanding of that field. For example, proponents of a double aspect theory of the relationship between brain states and mental states might argue that every mental state is directly correlated to some brain state; yet this would not require them to treat the two types of states as identical, or to advocate the actual *description* of all mental states in terms of brain states. Strict, eliminative reductionists, by contrast, believe one special way of explaining something is not only necessary, but *self-sufficient*, so that it can actually *replace*, or *explain away* all other possible explanations. Proponents of strict reductionism would argue that all talk of mental states is pointless, since *nothing but* brain states exists or has any value.

If we accept this distinction between explanatory and eliminative forms of reductionism, then the question occupying our attention can be rephrased in two ways: loosely, *Does Kant regard morality as the single explanatory factor in terms of which all that is necessary to religion can be explained?* and strictly, *Does Kant believe religion can be “explained away” as nothing but a special form of morality?* In other words, does Kant think morality is *necessary* for all true religion, and if so, does he also think it is *sufficient*?

To many readers of Kant the answer to our question seems so obvious that they never bother even to pose the question. Kant clearly *does* reduce religion to morality (in both senses), so the story goes, for he consistently stipulates in defining religion

¹ I am grateful to an anonymous referee for suggesting the terms “explanatory” and “eliminative”, and for offering numerous criticisms of a previous version of this paper, without which the present version would be considerably less clear.

that "Religion is ... the recognition of all *duties* as divine commands."² Does this not require us to regard religion as nothing but a special way of looking at man's duties — i. e., at his *morality*? Indeed, we need go no further than the title of Kant's most important book on religion, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, to see that he assumes right from the start that religion can and ought to be viewed *only* within a narrow set of rational limits — a reduction if ever there was one! Likewise, if we open the book itself, we find that on the first few pages of the first edition Preface Kant tells us morality is not based on religion; rather, religion is based on morality. And throughout the rest of the book, he repeatedly passes judgment on religious beliefs and practises by asking about their value for the moral improvement of the religious believer.

We should not be surprised, therefore, to find interpreters as prestigious as Ernst Cassirer, whose study of Kant's life and works is usually quite trustworthy, assuming an affirmative answer to the question at issue without supporting his view with any textual evidence:

... the Kantian system does not in general recognize the philosophy of religion as a fully independent member of the system, as a way of looking at things that is idiosyncratic and rests on autonomous and independent assumptions ... [Instead,] *the substance of his philosophy of religion comprises* for him only a confirmation of and a *corollary of the substance of his ethics*. Religion 'within the limits of reason alone' ... has no essential content other than that of pure morality. The conversion of pure rational religion into pure ethics is required ...³

Moreover, it is not uncommon, especially in brief summaries of Kant's philosophy of religion, to read explicit statements of an even more dogmatic kind, such as when Edwards proclaims: "... we have in Kant the *complete reduction* of religion to morality."⁴

² Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793), tr. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson as *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* — hereafter *Religion* —, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960, p. 153/142. References to Kant's works will cite the *Akademie* page numbering. When this number is not specified in the translation, the translation's pagination will be added after the dash, as above. The only exception is Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* — hereafter *Kr. d. r. V.* — tr. N. Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan, 1929, references to which will cite the original pagination of the second (B) edition. References to works which do not appear in the *Akademie* edition (*Lectures on Ethics*, tr. L. Infield, which is a translation of P. Menzer, *Vorlesungen über Ethik*, 1924; *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, tr. A. W. Wood, which is a translation of K. H. L. Pöhlitz, *Immanuel Kants Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, 2. Auflage 1830) will specify only the translator's pagination.

³ Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, tr. J. Haden, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 381–2, 385 (emphasis added). C. C. J. Webb expresses the same idea more succinctly when he describes Kant's theory of religion as "an appendix to Ethics": *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926, p. 62.

⁴ Rem B. Edwards, *Reason and Religion*, Washington D. C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1979, p. 46 (emphasis added). Edwards bases his reductionist summary of Kant's position only on the title of *Religion* and on Kant's definition of religion. He assumes that

However, if we put aside this long tradition and examine Kant's own claims with an open mind, we will find that the traditional, unequivocally affirmative answer to our question is not faithful to his true intentions. Sadly, it comes so close to a proper understanding of the points Kant was actually trying to make, that its subtle distortions have, to my knowledge, remained virtually unchallenged. In order to reveal these distortions, let us first look more closely at the three sources most often used to *defend* the traditional myth of eliminative reductionism: the *title* and the first *Preface* to Kant's book on religion, and his *definition* of religion. For a proper understanding of these is indispensable if we are to understand Kant's intentions. We can then examine in section III the general content of his system of religion. Although a thoroughgoing interpretation of the details of this religious system is beyond the scope of this study, such a general overview will provide us with enough evidence to make a fair assessment in section IV of the extent to which Kant's theory of religion reduces religion to morality.

II. Prolegomena to Kant's System of Religion

There are two common assumptions about the *title* of Kant's book on religion (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*) which, when made, virtually determine in advance that Kant's views will be interpreted strictly, in terms of eliminative reductionism. Yet, as we shall see, both of these assumptions are

Kant "shared with the rationalists of his century the conviction that reason alone is sufficient for all religious knowledge"; so he infers that, because Kant regards morality as "the essence of 'true religion'", it must also be true that "nothing else really matters" for Kant (p. 46). As a result, he concludes his discussion with a (completely unjustified) summary of Kant's view which implies that it should be relegated to the scrap heap: "With a mere definition of *religion* Kant believes he has shown that no 'true religion' contains a belief that God really exists ..., that no 'true religion' contains a reliable and self-authenticating revelation, and that no 'true religion' makes a place for prayer, ritual, or any other expression of unique duties to God" (p. 52). Not only does Edwards fail to recognize that, as we shall see in section III, Kant does preserve a *necessary space* for such elements in all true religion, but he also completely ignores the fact that Kant supports each of his claims with *arguments* (not mere *definitions*; see note 18 below).

Another typical example of a blatantly reductionist interpretation of Kant's theory of religion is Kwan Tze-wan's *Kant's 'Humanistic' Conception of Religion*, *Tunghai Journal* 24 (June 1983), pp. 95–118. Kwan repeatedly *adds* words like "nothing but", "only", or "just" to Kant's own words to make them *appear* to defend eliminative reductionism (see especially pp. 110–111), when nothing in Kant's text indicates that this is his intention. Kwan sets up an absolute dichotomy between an historical fact and its symbolic meaning, as if no event could be both at once! Thus, in discussing the "symbolic meaning" of Kant's idea of "Christus", he says "God or Christus ... is just a human fiction, a projection, an idea or an Ideal" (p. 111). He concludes by saying that for Kant "No God will tell us if we are really on our way toward a pure rational faith ... Only the human conscience" (p. 112). But this misses Kant's point, which, as we shall see, is that if God *tells* us, it must be *through* such rational channels as the conscience.

utterly opposed to Kant's expressed intentions. The first assumption is that *Grenzen* refers to a strict *limitation* placed on religion by reason — a limitation which (like all true "limits", e. g. in mathematics) establishes an absolute barrier which cannot in any way be overcome. Yet Kant explains elsewhere that *Grenzen* must not be regarded in such a strict or one-sided way: "Bounds [*Grenzen*] ... always presuppose a space outside a certain definite place and inclosing it; limits [*Schranken*] do not require this, but are mere negations which affect a quantity so far as it is not absolutely complete."⁵ Despite his reputation to the contrary, which developed as a result of the unfortunate "patchwork" interpretations of his work, Kant is usually very careful to give precise meanings to the terms he uses, and then to stick by those meanings. So we should give serious consideration to the implications of this passage for the title of Kant's book. If Kant had wanted to say that reason imposes limits upon religion which must not be surpassed, then he would have surely used the term *Schranken*. His use of *Grenzen* rather indicates that he has in mind a *boundary* (like a fence dividing two portions of land), on either side of which we can find legitimate (though different) aspects of one and the same territory (viz. religion). On one side we find what is rationally necessary and on the other, what is empirically real. Kant's title, then, does *not* reveal a desire to force all aspects of religion into a single, rational mold; rather, it reflects his intent to examine *one side* of a fundamentally two-sided issue.

The second assumption regarding the title of Kant's book concerns the proper interpretation of the phrase *bloßen Vernunft*, which has traditionally been rendered into English either as "Reason Alone" or as "Mere Reason". The former choice, adopted by Greene and Hudson in their standard translation of this work, would clearly imply self-sufficiency, and hence a tendency towards strict reductionism on Kant's part. Yet, such a translation not only stretches the literal meaning of this common German word, but it neglects an important nuance in the original. The word *bloßen* can mean either "mere" (thus indicating that something *more* is possible and perhaps even required for full satisfaction) or "naked". Greene and Hudson were certainly aware of this dual meaning, since they actually used "naked reason" as the translation for *bloßen Vernunft* at several points in their text (see e. g. *Religion* 10/9); nevertheless, they suppressed this implication entirely in their translation of the title itself. Perhaps their reason was that, if Kant had wanted to use "naked" in his title, he almost certainly would have used the more explicit word, *nackt*. There is, however, a third alternative which does not seem to have occurred to any of Kant's translators. For there is one English word which parallels the dual meaning

⁵ *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, tr. L. W. Beck, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1950, p. 352. The English words "limit" and "boundary" have a similar connotation, especially in light of the mathematical use of the word "limit".

of *bloßen* almost exactly: that word is “bare”, which, just like *bloßen*, can mean either “mere” or “naked”.⁶

When these two mistaken assumptions are brought to light, a more balanced translation comes into view: *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* is the best English translation of what Kant himself intended to say in the title of his book. That Kant’s use of *bloßen* was an *intentional*, though covert, way of referring to *nakedness* can be clearly seen by taking note of the fact that in the text itself Kant makes use on several occasions of the analogy of “the religion of reason” being like a *naked body* which can be rendered *presentable*, or socially acceptable, only by dressing it in some type of *clothing* (see e.g. *Religion* 195/183). If Kant had not wanted to hint at such an analogy in his title, he almost certainly would have used his more technical term, *reinen* (“pure”) to refer to the inner or “invisible” aspects of all true religion. Similarly, that Kant’s use of *Grenzen* is meant to imply *territorial boundaries*, rather than *absolute limits*, is suggested by other, related metaphors, such as when he considers what happens when one side “trespasses” on the other side’s property, or “imports something” from the other side for use within “its own economy”, or “declares war on” the other side, etc. (see e.g. *Religion* 9–10/9, 13/12).

The “double aspect” character of Kant’s system of religion is also made clear by several other analogies used from time to time in *Religion*. Kant consistently refers to “the pure religion of reason” *not as itself constituting* everything necessary for true religion, but rather as providing us with its necessary *core* or “kernel”. Other (i. e., non-moral) aspects of religion are never regarded by Kant as *identical* to false religion; rather, they *become* false only when the religious person fails to recognize them as the “shell” or “vehicle” (i. e., as the *means*) through which the “kernel” or “canon” (i. e., the *end*) of religion can be promoted, and as a result *detaches* them from their proper grounding in morality.⁷ All these analogies imply that, as we shall see in more detail in section III, Kant is thinking not about exclusiveness, but about the *proper priority between two necessary elements*. Kant gives these two elements a number of different names, the most common of which are “faith” and “pure religion” as the two aspects of “religion”. (These two senses of “religion” must be kept in mind if we are to avoid misunderstanding Kant’s view; so we will return to them again shortly.) Indeed, just as each of Kant’s Critical works is designed not to establish a system of metaphysics itself, but to prepare the *foundation* upon which to construct the *building* of metaphysics, so also the title of *Religion* ought to remind us that this book is designed more as the Critical (or even

⁶ Another possibility would be “unaided”, since „*bloße Vernunft*“ does indicate that Kant wishes to examine the rational nature of religion *unaided* by divine revelation. However, this choice is less literal, and considerably less colorful than “bare”. Kant was very fond of such, often rather fanciful, metaphors, so a good translation should convey this fanciful nuance as faithfully as possible.

⁷ *Religion* 123 n/113 n, 135 n/126 n; see also *The Conflict of the Faculties* (hereafter *Conflict*), tr. M. J. Gregor, New York: Abaris, 1979, pp. 36–37.

transcendental) prolegomena to real (empirical) religion, than as an attempt to *replace* all empirical manifestations of religion with a "pure" alternative.

On its own, of course, a proper understanding of the title of *Religion* does not constitute a conclusive argument on the basis of which we could answer the question with which we are here concerned. Rather, it only provides us with hints which may or may not prove to shed new light on the text itself. Let us therefore turn our attention now to the beginning of the first Preface, where Kant is often interpreted as saying religion is just a kind of footnote or appendage to morality.

In the first few paragraphs of this Preface, Kant asserts:

... morality ... stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over [man], for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself ... Hence for its own sake morality does not need religion at all ...; ... it is self-sufficient ... But although for its own sake morality needs no representation of an end which must precede the determining of the will, it is quite possible that it is necessarily related to such an end, taken not as the ground, but as the inevitable consequence of maxims adopted as conformable to that end ... Morality thus leads ineluctably to religion, through which it *extends itself* to the idea of a powerful moral Lawgiver, *outside of mankind*, for Whose will that is the final end (of creation) which at the same time can and ought to be man's final end (*Religion* 3-6/3-6, emphasis added).

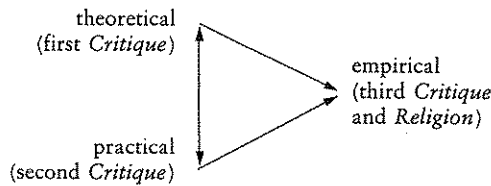
Three key points arise out of this passage. Each of these leads to eliminative reductionism if it is just slightly misinterpreted. In what follows, therefore, I will attempt to explain not only what Kant is trying to say in each case, but also how his words are misconstrued by the traditional interpretation.

First, Kant is saying that even though morality is *logically*, or perhaps *transcendentally* self-sufficient (i. e., even though no reference to religion is needed to explain what morality *is*), morality is nevertheless *teleologically incomplete* (i. e., its *ultimate purpose* cannot be realized by remaining merely within its own bounds). Just as the foundation of a building is "complete" in the sense that it can stand all on its own, and does not depend on anything *prior* to it in order to serve its purpose, and yet its *purpose* is not complete until an actual building is constructed upon it, so also the nature of moral action can be *understood* apart from any reference to religion, and yet the *purpose* of morality in general, as well as the actual *fulfillment* of the task morality presents to us, cannot be understood without stepping *beyond* the exclusively moral standpoint to adopt a new, *religious* standpoint, based on the moral. This point is sure to be misunderstood if we fail to take special note of Kant's distinction between the "ground" and "consequence" (or "end") of morality. When Kant says morality "leads to religion", he does not mean religion can therefore be explained away in terms of morality; on the contrary, he means religion *as such* fulfills a *necessary* function. As far as its "ground" is concerned, morality is "self-sufficient": all we need is our own (human) practical reason. But as far as its "consequence" is concerned, we must look beyond *mere* morality in hopes of finding some *third thing* which can bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical. And that "third thing", in *Religion*, is "religion."

The common view that for Kant true religion is entirely humanistic (man-centered) [see note 4 above] neglects the fact that in this passage he says morality necessarily

"extends itself", or points beyond itself, to the idea of a God. The "final end (of creation)" to which Kant refers is undoubtedly mankind.⁸ However, the second point arising out of this passage is that an *entirely* man-centered philosophy is not the type that best serves the interests of mankind. Rather, the purpose of morality (which *is* man-centered) will best be fulfilled by viewing morality in terms of something *outside man*. Within Kant's moral system, the idea of God had to be introduced as a *postulate* just to conceive of the *possibility* of reaching the goal of establishing the highest good. Now he is saying the only way morality can fulfill its purpose is to regard this possibility (i. e., the postulate of the existence of God) as an *actuality*. In other words, only if we interpret our moral experience as one which is guided by a Being who shares with us a common goal do we have any hope of completing the task morality sets for us. This extension of religion beyond morality into the realm of *empirical reality* is implied when Kant says: "Morality as such is ideal, but religion imbues it with vigour, beauty, and reality."⁹

Once the *teleological* function of *Religion* is fully appreciated, a third point can be drawn out of the passage quoted from the first Preface. The function of *Religion* in Kant's philosophical System is related most closely to the function of the *third Critique* (which is to synthesize the theoretical and practical aspects of the first two *Critiques*). Accordingly, the relationships between the three parts of Kant's Critical System can be pictured in the following way:



Both *Religion* and the *third Critique* try to answer the third question which Kant says characterizes the tasks of the philosopher: "What may I *hope*?"¹⁰ Indeed, I believe part of Kant's reason for writing *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* was that he realized the *third Critique*, published three years earlier, did not provide a sufficient answer to this question. If so, then *Religion* can be regarded as his new attempt to complete the *Critical* part of his System.¹¹

⁸ In *Critique of Judgment* (hereafter *Kr. d. U.*), tr. J. C. Meredith, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952, p. 435, Kant says "man is the final end of creation."

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (hereafter *Ethics*), tr. L. Infield, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1979, p. 81.

¹⁰ The first two questions are "What can I know?" and "What ought I to do?" (*Kr. d. p. V.* B 832–833). Elsewhere Kant adds that all three questions can be summed up in a fourth question, "What is man?" (see his *Logic*, tr. R. Hartman and W. Schwarz, New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1974, p. 25/29).

¹¹ Clearly, the questions relating to man's *hope* are associated much more naturally with religion than with aesthetics or teleology (the subjects of the *third Critique*). Moreover, *Religion* fits more closely than the *third Critique* does into the systematic patterns established in the first two *Critiques* (see ch. 10 of my forthcoming book, *Kant's System of Perspectives*).

A careful examination of Kant's various *definitions* of "religion" will not only support the above suggestion as to the proper place of *Religion* in Kant's System, but will provide the context for a proper understanding of Kant's "official" definition in *Religion*. In his *Lectures on Education* Kant defines religion as "the [moral] law in us, so far as it is imprinted upon us by a legislator and a judge; it is morality applied to the knowledge of God [i. e., to theology]."¹² Conversely, he claims in *Lectures on Philosophical Theology* that "religion is nothing but the application of theology to morality".¹³ These two statements would contradict each other if for Kant religion were simply identical to, or a sub-category of, morality. The statements are actually suggesting, on the contrary, that morality and theology are the two *complementary* opposites which, when combined in a synthetic unity, give rise to religion. This is why Kant can say *both* that "morality leads inevitably to religion" (*Religion* 8 n/7 n) and that "theology also leads directly to religion".¹⁴ Each *leads* to religion, because each is incomplete on its own, just as each of the first two *Critiques* can be said to lead to the third *Critique*. The religion towards which they lead must therefore clothe the "bare" body of pure moral religion with some theoretical clothing, in the form of an "historical" or "revealed" or "ecclesiastical faith" (see e. g. *Religion* 102–103/94, 162/151). A real (i. e., empirical) religion which can do this without distorting the priority of the "pure religious faith" at its core can qualify for what Kant calls "the universal religion of mankind" (*Religion* 155/143).

If we turn now to Kant's standard definition of religion, the error lying behind the strict reductionist interpretation can easily be exposed. The fact that his definition is intended to *extend* morality beyond its own boundaries to theology, and then beyond both to a new, distinctively religious perspective, becomes especially obvious if we look at the context in which Kant proposes his definition:¹⁵

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Education* (hereafter *Education*), tr. E. F. Buchner as "Lecture-Notes on Pedagogy" in *The Educational Theory of Immanuel Kant*, London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908, p. 494/214. See also *Ethics* 81: "Religion is the application of the moral laws to the knowledge of God, and not the origin of morals ... All religion assumes morality, and morality cannot, therefore, be derived from religion."

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, tr. A. W. Wood and G. M. Clark, London: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 26.

¹⁴ *Kr. d. U.* 481. Kant makes a similar remark in *Ethics* 78–79: "Religion is morality applied to God. It is ethics applied to theology ... Accordingly, religion is the combination of ethics and theology ..." However, he insists in *Education* 493/211 that, even though "the concepts of religion always presuppose a theology", in religious education "one must not begin with theology ... Morality must precede, theology follow, and then we have religion" (494–95/215). Thus there is a strict parallel between morality and theology in their relation to religion: Kant explains in *Conflict* 36 that "theology" is "the sum of certain teachings regarded as divine revelation", whereas "religion" is "the sum of all our duties regarded as divine *commands*".

¹⁵ The quoted text comes from *Religion* 153–54/142–43. However, the same definition of religion can be found in the first *Critique* (B 846–47), the second *Critique* (p. 129), and the third *Critique* (p. 481), as well as in *Religion* 103–4/95 and *Conflict* 36. Likewise, in *Religion* 110/100 Kant says "the performance of all human duties as divine commands ... constitutes the essence of all religion."

Religion is (subjectively regarded) the recognition of all duties as divine commands. That religion in which I must know in advance that something is a divine command in order to recognize it as my duty, is the *revealed* religion ...; in contrast, that religion in which I must first know that something is my duty before I can accept it as a divine injunction is the *natural* religion.

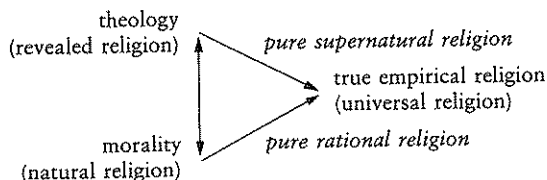
In revealed religion, then, morality conforms to theology, while in natural religion theology conforms to morality (see *Kr. d. U.* 460 and *Education* 477/184). Kant goes on to distinguish between two types of natural religion, only the first of which would be reductive in the strict sense. He contrasts the “naturalist”, who “denies the reality of all supernatural divine revelation” with the “pure rationalist”, who “recognizes revelation, but asserts that to know and accept it as real is not a necessary requisite to religion” (*Religion* 154–55/143).

Although in the first paragraph of this section (*Religion* 153–5/142–3) Kant never advocates any of these views, in the next paragraph he describes the position of the pure rationalist (which does not entail eliminative reductionism) in a way that clearly suggests his sympathy for it. The rationalist, it seems, has read the first *Critique!* For he “must ... restrict himself within the limits of human insight”, yet without dogmatizing, as does the naturalist (and the strict reductionist). He then contrasts his position¹⁶ with “pure supernaturalism”, which would tend towards a rather different form of strict reductionism: its proponent “holds that belief in [revelation] is necessary to the universal religion”, because human duties are *nothing but* God’s revealed will. For Kant “the question at issue” is whether the pure rationalist or the pure supernaturalist position is correct.

After making this “subjective” distinction between different ways of conceiving of the “inner possibility” of religion, Kant makes another, “objective” distinction between the “characteristics” of a religion which determine how it is to be “shared widely with others” (*Religion* 155/143). The main characteristic of “the *natural* religion” is that “everyone can be convinced [of its truth] through his own reason”, whereas that of “a *learned* religion” is that “one can convince others only through the agency of learning”. Only the former can qualify as “the universal religion”, because only it can be spread to *all* men, regardless of their educational status. He points out, however, that a religion such as Christianity might be “*objectively* a natural religion, though *subjectively* one that has been revealed” (*Religion* 156/144).

Seen in its proper context, Kant’s definition of religion suggests the following picture of the synthetic relationship between theology, morality and religion:

¹⁶ That pure rationalism is Kant’s position is further suggested by the fact that he repeatedly refers to his own task as that of discerning the nature of the “religion of *pure reason*” (see e. g., *Religion* 110/100). Moreover, Kant “recognizes revelation” in the sense that he devotes a whole section of Book Three (109–114/100–105) to the task of discerning the “authentic” principle for interpreting any document which purports to be revealed by God.



A “revealed” religion is one which takes theology (or some form of revelation) as its sole basis, rejecting the need for any special aid from reason. A “natural” religion is one which takes morality (or some form of reason) as its sole basis, rejecting the need for any special aid from revelation. In truly Critical fashion, Kant rejects both extremes (the former being too dogmatic, the latter being too skeptical) in favor of a more moderate view which *combines* them, forming the idea of an empirical religion which accepts the possibility of both natural religion (objectively) and revealed religion (subjectively). Only if objective priority is given to the former (i. e., only if it is not a “learned” religion), can an empirical religion be considered as a candidate for a truly universal religion.

Kant lends further support to this interpretation in *Ethics* 83 – 84 when he explains that “supernatural religion is not opposed to natural religion, but completes it. Natural religion is true but incomplete.” It is incomplete because “true religion” is *only inner*, yet usually involves some *outward* expression:

... there is no such thing as an outer religion. All [true] religion is entirely a matter of disposition; all *outward action* is either a *means to* or an *expression of the religion within us*: no outward act can be a religious act; acts of religion are within us, because true religion is purely a matter of disposition (*Ethics* 82 – 83, emphasis added).

Kant is here emphasizing the radically pure, or *transcendental* character of his special Critical perspective on religion: just as the first *Critique* lays the transcendental foundation for empirical knowledge and the second *Critique* lays the transcendental foundation for moral action, so also *Religion* lays the transcendental foundation for real (empirical) religion. However, the fact that the inner disposition must be *primary* does not mean that it can stand on its own. On the contrary, only the empirical religion which *combines* the outer and the inner in the proper way can be a universal religion. Accordingly, Kant leaves no doubt as to his position on the inadequacy of a *merely* inner religion in *Ethics* 102:

A pure religion ... consist[s] solely in dispositions which are directed towards God and imply morality. A mixed religion, in so far as it appeals to the senses, is one which is merely a means to morality. But as man is sensuous and the religious appeal to the senses has its uses, it can be said that man can have no pure religion.

This explains why, in spite of his emphasis on the primacy of true “inner” religion, Kant does not use the phrase “*reinen Vernunft*” in the title of *Religion*.

Once Kant’s perspectival distinction between theology, morality and religion is clearly understood, his insistence that morality is the *primary* basis of religion, while theology is *secondary*, can be recognized as a rather straightforward application of

his insistence on the "primacy of practical reason" in general: in Kant's System practical action always takes precedence over theoretical beliefs.¹⁷ This is why he rejects all theoretical arguments for the existence of God, yet claims that his *moral* argument is "the only one needful for religion" (*Kr. d. U.* 474), so that "the only theology of reason which is possible is one that is based upon moral laws" (664). However, it is a grave mistake to include Kant's moral argument for the existence of God as part of his theory of religion, as is so often done when the latter is viewed as a mere footnote to his moral philosophy (see notes 3 and 4 above). Not only does he never repeat the moral argument as such in *Religion*, but he clearly goes beyond the mere *possibility* of God which it guarantees (see e.g., note 24 below). The *faith* which is the proper domain of theology is added to the *knowledge* which arises out of our moral nature in order to give rise to *religion*, in which the reality of God plays a role it never could in the moral system on its own. And the result is that the ultimate fulfillment of the moral law itself becomes possible: "In religion all our morality ought to reach its fulfillment in respect of its object" (*Ethics* 78–79).

This perspectival interpretation of Kant's definition of religion puts it in a new light. When Kant says religion is the recognition of duties as divine commands, he is *not* secretly thinking "But we enlightened folks all know that they are actually nothing but human duties in disguise." Rather, he is implying that the only way to *make sense* out of man's universal experience of inwardly compelling duty, and the only way to imagine how the enormous task it presents to us can be fulfilled, given the factual reality of "radical evil in human nature" (*Religion* 19–44/15–39), is to view these duties as if they are commanded by God Himself (though, of course, this can never be a matter of *theoretical knowledge*). This is why he says we must view our duties as *divine* (not just human) commands: we must view them as being connected (via the moral law within us) to a higher Power outside us (though not outside Reason, lest they be heteronomous) or we will never be able to achieve their fulfillment. This fulfillment, according to Kant, is the heart and the hope of true religion.¹⁸

¹⁷ See *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 119–121.

¹⁸ Edwards (*Reason and Religion*, p. 42) argues that Kant's definition of religion renders invalid everything else he says about religion simply because it is a "persuasive" definition (i.e., one which merely stipulates the "true" or "real" character of something in order to alter, weaken, or reinforce some "attitudes and values"). As a result, Edwards completely ignores the fact that *Religion* is filled with *arguments* to support Kant's many claims, and that Kant presents his official definition not at the beginning of his exposition, but near the end! Moreover, the language of a "persuasive" definition, which Edwards borrows from Charles Stevenson (*Language and Ethics*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1944, p. 210), is *itself* a persuasive definition, since Edwards uses it to cast doubt upon the legitimacy of such definitions, and to divert our attention to *true* (i.e., "descriptive") definitions. So this distinction between types of definition ends up casting doubt upon its own validity (at least, as long as one believes, with Edwards, that the only "true" definition is a descriptive one)! For Kant, by contrast, to allow *only* descriptive definitions into the

III. *An Outline of Kant's System of Religion*

If the foregoing interpretation is correct, then the usual assumption, that *Religion* simply restates and expands the essentials of Kant's theory of morality in the second *Critique*, is clearly mistaken. Instead, *Religion* ought to be viewed as itself a kind of transcendental *Critique of Religion* – i. e., as an attempt to delineate the *boundary* between true religion and false religion by setting forth the *necessary conditions for the possibility of religious experience*. And this is, indeed, precisely what Kant does. When he explains this in the Preface to the second edition of *Religion*, he adds that his experiment will actually be twofold: first, to discover the rational conditions for the possibility of religion; and second to test one particular religious faith, viz. Christianity, to see how closely it conforms to these conditions. Assessing the success of the latter experiment would be too complex a task to attempt here. Kant's exposition is clear enough, however, so that a general look at the former will enable us to determine more precisely the extent to which Kant's rational system of religion is or is not reductive.

Religion is divided into four "Books", each of which develops one "stage" (as I shall call it) in Kant's systematic exposition of the nature of religion. The primary task of the first stage is to answer the question: Is human nature originally good or evil? Kant's answer is (as usual) that it depends on the perspective from which the question is asked. If the question refers to the *potential* which resides in every human being as a "living" (animal), "rational" (human) and "accountable" (personal) being, then we must regard human nature as originally good, because these characteristics naturally "enjoin the observance of the [moral] law" (*Religion* 26–28/21–23). However, if the question refers to the *actual* state of every human person in their first (and subsequent) moral act(s), then we cannot avoid the conclusion that an original ("radical") evil exists in human nature. This conclusion is necessary not only if we base our judgment on "what we know of man through experience" (32/27); in addition, "it must be apprehended *a priori* through the concept of evil" (35/31). Thus, Kant concludes, "we may presuppose evil to be subjectively necessary to every man, even the best" (32/27).

Kant's argument in stage one has not always been appreciated by his critics, who would rather gloss over it in order to emphasize the "good bits" (i. e., the bits about morality).¹⁹ Yet this two-sided answer to the question of human nature is as crucial to Kant's theory of religion as freedom is to his theory of morality, and as time

philosophy of religion would be tantamount to giving up everything distinctively philosophical in this discipline. What Edwards ignores is that a *transcendental* definition can be non-descriptive without being "emotive".

¹⁹ Ernst Cassirer discusses the negative reaction to Kant's doctrine of radical evil by his contemporaries in *Kant's Life and Thought*, pp. 391–92. He explains, for example, that "Goethe ... remarked bitterly in a letter to Herder that Kant has disgracefully 'slobbered on' his philosopher's cloak 'with the blot of radical evil, so that even Christ would be enticed to kiss its hem'."

and space are to his theory of knowledge. Kant is arguing that religion itself would not be possible if it were not true that human nature contains within it an intrinsically good purpose, and that the same human nature is nevertheless infected with an irresistible tendency towards evil. This tension sets the problem which all religion tries to solve. So, without these two conditions, religion would never have appeared. Evil is *necessary* to every man, and that is why morality alone is insufficient. If evil were not necessary, then we could realize the goal of becoming well-pleasing to God merely by remaining in the pure (moral) part of Kant's System. But in his religious system Kant insists right at the outset that we must recognize our inability to reach the goal in this way: we need more than mere morality, because nobody is perfect. We are all corrupted by radical evil.

The second stage in Kant's religious system responds to the initial limiting conditions set out in stage one by examining "the conflict of the good with the evil principle for sovereignty over man" (*Religion* 57/50). The question Kant is trying to answer in Book Two is: How can an *evil* person *become* good? The answer which interpreters have traditionally assumed Kant to be giving is that man becomes good by acting in a good way, by obeying the moral law. This, once again, is a subtle misconstrual of the solution Kant actually offers. How does an evil heart become a good heart? Kant summarizes his answer in *Religion* 45–47/40–3):

For despite the fall, the injunction that we *ought* to become better men resounds unabatedly in our souls; hence this must be within our power, even though what *we* are able to do is in itself inadequate and though we thereby only render ourselves susceptible of higher, and for us inscrutable, assistance ... But if a man is to become not merely *legally*, but *morally*, a good man (pleasing to God), ... *this* cannot be brought about through gradual *reformation* so long as the basis of the maxims [i. e., the "heart"] remains impure, but must be effected through a *revolution* in the man's disposition ... He can become a new man only by a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation ..., and a change of heart.

Kant is here making two main points. The first is that, no matter how good we are, we cannot be good enough to please God (i. e., to fulfill the moral law) in every one of our actions. "What we are able to do is in itself inadequate"! Then what is the importance of morality at all? Kant says that by acting morally we render ourselves *susceptible* of "higher and, for us [i. e., for bare reason] inscrutable assistance". Another way of saying the same thing is that *grace is a necessary condition of becoming good*. Kant supports this position explicitly in *Religion* 75–76/70:²⁰

Here, then, is that surplus ... over and above the profit from good works, and it is itself a profit which is reckoned to us *by grace*. That what in our earthly life ... is ever only a *becoming* (namely, becoming a man well-pleasing to God) should be credited to us exactly as if we were already in full possession of it – to this we have no legal claim ... Thus the decree is always one of grace alone ...

²⁰ Anyone who believes Kant is merely preaching a religion of good works must answer to his clear statements to the contrary, such as can be found in this and numerous other *Religion* passages!

Such a manifestation of grace occurs as a part of the conversion experience of the religious believer: even though we are not *fully* good, we are *regarded* as good by God. Kant almost seems to be defending the Lutheran position that man is saved by *grace alone, not by works!* This is slightly misleading, however, because he does not actually say "*not by works*"; rather, he says *both* works and grace are necessary. Good works are necessary from the moral perspective of practical reason; and grace is necessary from the non-moral perspective of theoretical reason. Kant's view is that, if salvation is going to happen, both of these requirements must be met.

The question this raises is: What is the proper *order*? From one point of view, grace must come first, because there is no way a person can erase the evil deeds he or she has already done, and evil is the first moral action performed by every person. God must take the initiative. But how does this happen? Kant says bare reason cannot answer this question. All we can do is to recognize the *space* left open by reason, which needs to be filled. Filling this space is not an optional extra, intended only for those who need a crutch; rather, it *must* be filled in some way by God's grace if man is to become well-pleasing to God. Naked reason cannot tell us the exact way in which this will happen. Only faith, as a complement to the inadequacy of our theoretical reason, can pave the way for such a disclosure.

Kant's theory of this "space" is expressed primarily in terms of what he calls the "archetype of perfect humanity". The grace of God, from the point of view of bare reason, can only be regarded as an archetype. By "archetype" Kant means that every human being has a kind of inner "space", ready and waiting to be filled by the grace of God. But nothing in our *reason* can *guarantee* the actual filling of that space. The problem, Kant says, is that we are not able to see clearly into the depths of the human heart — not even our *own* heart. So there is no way we can know for sure whether or not God has actually manifested his grace to us, or whether we have accepted it completely (see e. g. *Religion* 51/46, 67–69/61–62). We cannot tell for sure whether or not the "space" we have in our reason has actually been filled. So what can we do? Kant says what we *must* do is to adopt what he calls "practical faith".

In a nutshell, Kant's notion of practical faith says this: Try your best, and trust that God will do the rest. That is, do your moral duty as often as you can, follow the moral law in your heart, but never fool yourself into believing that this alone will save you, because you will always fall short. Kant stresses this idea time after time;²¹ and yet, whenever he says it, strict reductionist interpreters sweep his comments off to one side and surmise "Well, he must have been trying to please the governmental authorities of the established church, who were threatening to

²¹ See e.g. *Religion* 45/40–41, 52/47, 67 n/61 n, 71–76/65–71, 97–98/89, 100–101/92, 116–120/106–111, 171–72/159–60, 173/161.

cancel his work. He couldn't have believed *that!*"²² Yet this kind of selective interpretation is unjustified, particularly at this point, where Kant is expounding the very heart of his entire philosophical System.

We can therefore summarize Kant's argument in stage two as follows. Kant is saying that, although we can never make ourselves *worthy to be accepted* by God, we can make ourselves *worthy to be made acceptable* by God. This is the proper relationship, according to Kant, between good works and grace.²³ Doing good works — trying to live a good life — is the rational basis upon which we can conceive of ourselves as having received God's grace. For our *moral* action is based on the same disposition through which we open ourselves up to the possibility of having our *immoral* deeds covered up by God.

²² *Religion* was published just as the new king (Frederick William II) was tightening his grip on academia through a program of strict religious censorship. The idea of some interpreters, that in *Religion* Kant sometimes softens his real views, or writes with a twist of irony, in hopes of appeasing the authorities, is not only an unfounded insult to Kant's integrity, but would also indicate a profound inability on Kant's part to judge what would actually offend the authorities! For Kant was severely reprimanded for the views he expressed in *Religion*, which were interpreted as being subversive to the established Church's interpretation of Christianity. He responded by loyally promising the king he would never again publish or speak publicly on the subject of religion during his reign. After the king's death, he promptly resumed his public stance on religion, since his vow referred only to his duty as a servant of that particular king — a fortunate decision indeed for posterity, since *Conflict* provides an invaluable inside look at Kant's own understanding of how *Religion* ought to be interpreted. He explains and defends this decision in *Conflict* 5–11, and includes an explicit statement (9–10) indicating the seriousness with which he composed his writings: "I always pictured this judge [viz., the voice of God speaking through the conscience] as standing at my side to keep me not only from error that corrupts the soul, but even from any careless expression that might give offense."

²³ Kant himself actually provides in *Religion* 115–20/106–11 a compelling solution to the traditional problem of the conflict between faith and works. As we shall see, he distinguishes in stage four between *truly* good works (i. e., morally good actions) and works which are wrongly *believed* to be good because they are done solely on God's behalf (see e. g. *Religion* 106/97). Kant's response to Luther would have been to say he was right for rejecting the Catholic church's belief that works of the latter type (i. e., churchly activities) could be in themselves salvific, but wrong to "throw out the baby with the bathwater" by also rejecting the necessity of truly moral deeds. From man's point of view, the latter provide the proper basis for our *hope* in salvation, even though, with Luther, Kant agrees that they could never be sufficient from *God's* point of view (cf. note 21). Thus, the conflict between *truly* good works and *true* faith is only apparent, once we recognize their *perspectival* relationship (*Religion* 119/110): they "are not two principles which in themselves so differ that to begin with the one, or the other, would be to enter upon opposing paths, but only one and the same practical idea ... representing the archetype now as found in God and proceeding from Him [to which man responds with faith as the basis for good works], and now, as found in us [to which man responds with good works as the basis for faith], but in both instances as the gauge for our course of life. The antinomy is only apparent, since ... it regards the self-same practical idea, taken merely in different references [i. e., from different perspectives], as two different principles."

Up until this point Kant's religious system has been concerned only with the salvation of the individual believer. But in stage three he argues that "the victory of the good over the evil principle, and the founding of a kingdom of God on earth" (*Religion* 93/85) can occur only in the context of a *community*. Therefore, the questions to be answered in Book Three all revolve around the issue of the nature and justification of such a community, regarded as a necessarily *religious* institution. Why do we need such a community? Because when a converted person lives in close proximity to other people — even if these others are also trying to live good lives — they will inevitably have a corrupting influence on each other. The radical evil in their nature as human beings will still corrupt the goodness of the individual's deeds (*Religion* 93 — 94/85 — 86). (Presumably Kant is thinking here of inter-personal conflicts such as jealousy, selfishness, etc.) For this reason, people seeking to live a good life need to join together in the form of what Kant calls an "ethical commonwealth". In other words, we need to come together and make an agreement to cooperate, based on moral laws (95 — 98/87 — 89).

The strict reductionist interpretation of Kant stops at this point: it says the ethical commonwealth is Kant's description of how the unity of pure moral religion can come about. But Kant himself actually says the ethical commonwealth on its own is an *insufficient* basis for the realization of true religion. Why? Because the people who unite together in this way must work according to the *additional* assumption that the same Being, or the same Source, is at the root of their internally prescribed moral commands. And the only way to believe this is to believe there is a God who guides all of the members of such a group together.²⁴

On this basis Kant concludes that the ethical commonwealth will work only when it is viewed as an invisible "People of God" who come together under the idea of a *church*, each member of which receives in his or her own heart individual guidance from God. Ultimately, the level of cooperation between the people joined together in such a community will therefore be determined by the extent to which each person receives guidance from the same Absolute Being. Nevertheless, this need to rely on God for the final realization of man's highest good does not release man from responsibility. On the contrary, Kant stresses in *Religion* 100 — 102/91 — 93 that the true church must have a definite (archetypal) form through "*human*

²⁴ This argument, found in *Religion* 97 — 100/89 — 91, can be regarded as a kind of "religious proof" for the existence of God. Kant's argument can be paraphrased as follows: (1) it is a duty of the human race towards itself to promote the highest good; (2) no individual can achieve this goal alone; (3) therefore an *ethical commonwealth* is necessary; (4) in order to be *ethical*, the legislation binding the members together must be *internal* (not political); (5) we cannot see how it could be within *man's* power to unite the disposition of all people into such a whole; (6) anything the moral law commands must be possible to realize; (7) therefore, it is necessary to presuppose the idea "of a higher moral Being through whose universal dispensation the forces of separate individuals, insufficient in themselves, are united for a common end" (98/89).

organization", following (like everything transcendental) the pattern of the categories:

To found a moral people of God is ... a task whose *consummation can be looked for not from men but only from God Himself* [emphasis added]. Yet man ... must proceed as though everything depended upon him ... The true (visible) church is that which exhibits the (moral) kingdom of God on earth so far as it can be brought to pass by men. The requirements ... are the following: 1. *Universality*, and hence its *numerical oneness*; ... 2. Its *nature* (quality), *i. e.*, *purity*, union under no motivating forces other than *moral ones* ... 3. Its *relation* under the principle of *freedom*; ... 4. Its *modality*, the *unchangeableness of its constitution* ...

Kant concludes his system of religion in stage four by asking how we can determine whether or not a particular example of empirical religion is genuine. In order to distinguish between false religion and true religion, he offers the following principle:

I take the following proposition to be a principle requiring no proof: *Whatever, over and above good life-conduct, man fancies that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious illusion and pseudo-service of God.* I say, what man believes that *he* can do; for here it is not denied that beyond all that *we* can do there may be something in the mysteries of the highest wisdom that God alone can do to transform us into men well-pleasing to Him ... But is there not also perhaps a dizzying *illusion of virtue* ...? No! The disposition of virtue occupies itself with something *real* which of itself is well-pleasing to God and which harmonizes with the world's highest good. True, an illusion of self-sufficiency may attach itself thereto, an illusion of regarding oneself as measuring up to the idea of one's holy duty; but this is merely contingent" (*Religion* 170 – 173/158 – 161).

Traditionally, passages such as this have been interpreted along the lines of strict (eliminative) reductionism: Kant is believed to be saying that nothing besides morality counts, so we can throw away everything else. But this is not what he says! On the contrary, he explicitly states that we can never hope to behave well enough to "measure up" completely to the required standard. He is arguing that anything *completely detached* from morality is not part of true religion. Nevertheless, elsewhere in Book IV he explains that there is a proper place for non-moral aspects of religion, for things in our empirical religion which are related to *faith*, but are not in themselves morally good or bad. These do have a proper place as long as we keep them *attached* to morality, as long as there is a definite connection between such non-moral religious activities or beliefs and the moral core of religion. Thus Kant's principle entails that non-moral religious activity can be a legitimate part of the true (universal) religion only if it serves as a means for deepening or quickening a person's moral disposition.

The error against which Kant's principle is protecting is not that of admitting non-moral aspects into an empirical religion; rather it is that of reversing the priority of the moral over the non-moral, by viewing the latter not merely as the means to a moral end, but as themselves the objective condition for God's acceptance.

Hence whoever assigns priority to obedience to statutory laws, requiring a revelation, as being necessary to religion, and regards this obedience not merely as a means to the moral disposition but as the objective condition of becoming immediately well-pleasing to God, and whoever thus places endeavor toward a good course of life below this historical faith (instead

of requiring the latter, which can be well-pleasing to God only *conditionally*, to adapt itself to the former, which alone is *intrinsically* well-pleasing to Him) — whoever does this transforms the service of God into a mere *fetishism* and practises a pseudo-service which is subversive to all endeavors toward true religion. So much depends, when we wish to unite two good things, upon the order in which they are united! True *enlightenment* lies in this very distinction; therein the service of God becomes first and foremost a free and hence a moral service" (*Religion* 178 – 179/166 – 167).

Here Kant is not equating non-moral activities to false religion, and moral activities to true religion, as the strict reductionist interpretation would have it. Rather, he is describing *true religion* as the combination of these two elements in their *proper order*. From our point of view as human beings, morality is the first basis, the foundation of our building of religion, whereas faith and non-moral religious activities constitute the building itself. *False religion* is the belief that some theoretical (i. e., *non-moral*) belief or idea is the basis, the foundation, and that morality just comes as a kind of extra, second thing — or maybe even not at all. But if the priorities are right, then both the moral and the non-moral can cooperate as proper elements in true religion.

IV. Conclusion: Raising Morality to the Status of Religion

This more balanced way of interpreting Kant's intentions enables us to make an accurate evaluation of the extent to which his two experiments are successful. I believe both are far more successful than the traditional myth would lead us to believe. Unfortunately, an account of how Kant carries out his first experiment by arguing for the *details* of the four stages in his system of religion, and of how he carries out his second experiment by relating his theory to the Christian religion as a test case, is far beyond the scope of this article. My own conclusion, after carrying out such a detailed study of *Religion* (see note 11), is that the answers Kant gives to the wide range of questions which occupy his attention in *Religion* go far beyond the simple idea that religion is just morality in disguise.

A brief look at three issues of special importance can serve as a tantalizing *preview* of the implications of the perspectival interpretation of Kant's religious system outlined in section III. Kant's views concerning the divinity of Jesus, the efficacy of prayer, and the authority of the Bible as a divine revelation have typically been taken to be contrary, if not hostile, to the traditional Christian doctrines. Although Kant certainly does not *defend* the orthodox views, the strict reductionist interpretation has blinded many readers to the fact that he also does not *deny* the validity of such doctrines, but rather offers a new, more *moderate* explanation of their validity. In each case, his explanations of such doctrines promote (what I call) a kind of "liberating conservatism" and "conserving liberalism" (in opposition of the usual extremes of an exclusively conservative or liberal interpretation of Christian doctrine).

Thus, a careful examination of the first issue reveals that Kant never denies Jesus' divinity. On the contrary, he explicitly requires that this question be left open, to be decided by faith, not bare reason (*Religion* 63–64/57–58); nevertheless, he clearly outlines a "space" for such a divine nature in his theory of the "personified idea [i. e. the "archetype"] of the good principle" in man (60–62/57–58), and he even hints that Jesus' divinity could be interpreted in terms of his "disposition", in which "the ideal of goodness" was "displayed incarnate" (65–66/59; see also 128–29/119–20). Kant's criticism of the traditional view is directed primarily to those who emphasize Jesus' divinity to such an extent that his humanity (and thus his ability to serve as an example to all mankind) is neglected (63–64/57–58); but he also guards against the opposite extreme of dogmatically denying Jesus' divinity altogether.

Likewise, Kant never claims that prayer is merely an ineffective illusion which should be eliminated from true religion. On the contrary, he insists that the true "spirit" of prayer lies at the very heart of all true religion; for prayer serves to "fan into flames the cinders of morality in the inner recesses of the heart" (*Ethics* 99). His criticism of prayer as it is commonly practised is that an emphasis on the "letter" (i. e., on the *words* that are the uttered) can often lead a person to hold the false belief that the uttering of such words is, in itself, pleasing to God (*Religion* 194–98/182–86). All non-moral religious activities are treated in a similar way: they lead to false religion only if regarded as a *direct* way of serving God (103–106/94–97); if they are treated as an *indirect* type of service, intended "to induce in us a moral disposition" (*Ethics* 99), then they are not only valid, but can be vital to true religion (*Religion* 192/180–81).

Finally, Kant never intends to deny the reliability of the Bible as a divinely revealed guideline for the faith and practise of the true Church. On the contrary, he stresses that *some* text is necessary, and that *this* text (i. e., the Bible) has proven its value by repeatedly serving as a vehicle for awakening man to true religion (*Religion* 106–107/97–98); moreover, he carefully explains how its moral content can assure us of its divinely revealed character (112/102–103). His criticism of the common belief in divine revelation is directed mainly against those who regard rational belief in the *theology* contained in a particular book as the necessary condition for pleasing God, so that "learning" and "scholarship", rather than practical faith and good life-conduct, inevitably come to be regarded as the most important elements in religion (112–14/103–105). Although an exhaustive study of the way in which Kant defends this and each of the above doctrines would reveal some clear differences between his views and the views of *both* conservative and liberal theologians, his position is nevertheless remarkably compatible with that of many open-minded Christians.

Our general overview of *Religion* has given us plenty of evidence for concluding that Kant does insist on maintaining a *necessary connection* between morality and religion, and in that loose, explanatory sense, he does indeed *reduce* everything religious to the level of morality. In other words, morality clearly is for Kant the

pure (and hence, necessary) *core* of all true religion. But as we have seen time and time again, he does this because he recognizes that only if morality is *raised* to the status of religion will it be able to fulfill its own goals! Far from requiring the *elimination* of all non-moral elements, Kant's approach rather *guarantees* their potential value by rooting them in the only human soil in which non-moral religious beliefs and practises can grow and flourish.

Did Kant therefore reduce religion to morality? Perhaps the best way to answer this question is with another question. *Did Jesus and the writers of the Bible reduce religion to morality?* Our answer to the latter question ought, I believe, to be the same as our answer to the former. For Kant's view of religion is essentially the same as, for example, the prophet who asks:²⁵

With what shall I come to the Lord and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my first-born for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

²⁵ *Micah 6:6-8*. Quoted from *New American Standard Bible*, Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, Inc., 1960.