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KANT'S THEOCENTRIC METAPHYSICS

de

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Does Kant destroy the possibility of theology ? Does he seek to undermine its legitimacy, or limit it to a merely negative path, by abolishing its metaphysical foundation ? Does he substitute for metaphysics a positivistic theory of scientific knowledge which not only denies any hope of attaining knowledge of the transcendent, but also denies scientists themselves any true knowledge of the world as it is ? Does he seek to undermine organized religion and the religious experience of countless individuals by reducing these to nothing but morality ? The answers given to such questions will depend on what one believes Kant intended to accomplish in constructing his philosophy. Unfortunately, they have been answered all too often in ways that go directly against Kant's own expressed intentions.

Many theologians, especially since Ritschl and the "back to Kant" movement, have tended to give affirmative answers interpreting Kant "as an antimetaphysical moralist" (B1:655) . On the basis of the "fact-value" distinction which Kant's philosophy appears to support, such neo-Kantians believed that if theology (like any other form of speculation) is to survive, it must cut all ties with metaphysics and perhaps even, following Barth's lead, with philosophy as a whole. Whatever view on the relation between theology and philosophy a person holds, anyone who interprets Kant in this way is sure to agree with Cupitt that "we who live after Kant must walk the negative way" (C4:57). Collins adopts this position in C1:183 when he portrays Kant as "destroying every philosophy of God" and as arguing that "(n)atural theology has no possibility of providing us with true knowledge about God and should be abandoned".

Philosophers too have often agreed in assessing the Critique of Pure Reason (Kt4), at least, as "the most thorough and devastating of all anti-metaphysical writings" (W2:38). Shortly after the publication of the first Critique, Mendelssohn labelled Kant the "all destroyer"; and since then many have followed him in regarding Kant as "the arch-destroyer in the realm of thought", putting forward" destructive, world-annihilating thoughts" (H3: 1o9). Gilson extends this judgment to the whole of Kant's philosophy, maintaining that "Kant... had no metaphysical interests of his own" (G3:31o). Since "a new philosophical cycle was to begin" (220) with Kant's thoroughgoing "rejection of metaphysics" (229). Gilson regards any of Kant's theories or statements which border on the metaphysical as superfluous nonessentials which he merely borrowed "from hearsay" . Findlay sums up this tendency rather concisely: "It is usual nowadays to think of Kant as some sort of incipient positivist, always verging towards a belif in the total non-significance of ideas lacking all empirical illustration" (F1:3).

Not all philosophers and theologians, however, interpret Kant's intentions so negatively. Findlay himself goes on to say that, even though "Kant's theory of knowledge...has aspects that can with justice be called 'positivist', it is not at all positivist in its account of the necessary underpinnings of such knowledge" (F2:5); "Kant's theory of knowledge cannot, therefore, be called positivist, though it is quite right to see something like positivism in his account of what we can effectively know"(9). Barth agrees that it is wrong to view Kant as "a kind of supersceptic", or as the "all-annihilating one"; for his criticism is always intended as "an affirmation of reason... Kant both has and demands an almost unconditional faith in reason" (B1:27o-1; cf. W6:16). England adds that it is "only the validity of a certain type of metaphysics" which Kant denies (E1:2o7), for "what is really implied in the critical position is...the substitution of an immanent metaphysics for the older transcendent metaphysics" (113-4). And Wood goes so far as to suggest that "Kant himself was in many ways...an 'existentialist' theologian"(W6:150)!

Numerous of Kant's own comments could be construed as defending a positivism of some sort. For example, he urges us "to believe that we have approximated to completeness in the empirical employment of (a) principle only in proportion as we are in a position to verify such unity in empirical fashion" (K14: 72o, emphasis added). If this is positivism, however, it is far from straightforward; for he continues with the caveat: "a completeness which is never, of course, attainable". Moreover, when Kant turns away from such empirical considerations, his position becomes explicitly nonpositivistic. For exemple, he argues against scepticism in the same way one could argue against the use of the (unverifiable) principle of verification as the basis of positivism. To assert "that there is and can be no a priori knowledge at all", chides Kant, "would be like proving by reason that there is no such thing as reason" (Kt7:12).

A popular myth concerning Kant's development, which helps to breed such misconceptions about his true attitude towards metaphysics, is that he started out as a typical Wolffian rationalist, and only began formulating his "Critical" principles after being jarred by Hume out of his rationalist complacency. Yet a careful and open-minded reading of Kant's early (so-called "pre-Critical") works yields quite a different impression : "From the beginning he made no attempt to hide his dislike of the compact mass of Wolffian doctrine" (V2:3); rather, his lifelong goal was to discover and follow "the correct philosophical method and by means of it to construct an eternal metaphysics" (2;see also G4:63). A good exemple comes in Kt2:71(229), where Kant announces (in 1763) that he has "sought in vain from others" for an adequate philosophical method to replace "the imitation (or rather the aping) of the mathematician", which "has on the slippery ground of metaphysic occasioned a multitude of...false steps". Moreover, as I have argued in P7, by 1766 (fifteen years before the publication of Kt4) Kant had already shown his awareness (in Kt3) of the crucial difference between "speculative" and "Critical" metaphysics, and of his desire to concentrate his attention on the latter. His philosophical "panacea", then, "was not discovered by a sudden stroke of intuitive genius but (was) allowed slowly and painfully to reach ripe elaboration" (V2:3; see also M3 and W4).

Kant expresses his true attitude towards metaphysics quite clearly in a number of explicit statements throughout his

writings. In Kt3:367-8(112-13), for example, he confesses:

> Metaphysics, with which it is my fate to be in love, although only can I boast of any favours from her, offers two advantages. The first is that it serves to solve the tasks which the questioning mind sets itself when by means of reason it inquires into the hidden qualities of things. But here the result only too often falls below expectation...
>
> The other advantage is more adapted to human reason, and consists in recognizing whether the task be within the limits of our knowledge and in stating its relation to the conceptions derived from experience, for these must always be the foundation of all our judgments. In so far metaphysics is the science of the boundaries of human reason. And... this use of metaphysics...is at the same time the least known and the most important, and...is obtained only late and by long experience.

In a letter written at about the same time (1766), Kant reveals a similar position:

> I am far from regarding metaphysics itself, objectively considered, to be trivial or dispensable; in fact I have been convinced for some time now that I understand its nature and its proper place in human knowledge and that the true and lasting welfare of the human race depends on it...(K1:1o.67(Z1:55)).

The significance of early stage in Kant's development, and the nature and extent of the influences of Hume, are thoroughly discussed in P7. For our present purposes it will suffice to say that Kant did not see the first Critique as a denial of his love of metaphysics, but as its truest and most secure foundation. For in a letter written just after its publication in 1781 he explains that this book "includes the metaphysics of metaphysics".

Such claims suggest quite clearly that Kant saw his contribution to metaphysics in terms of neither positivistic empiricism nor "pure rationalism"; instead, he sees himself as offering - to borrow one of his own favourite expressions -

"a third thing". The label most often used to denote Kant's synthesis between empiricism and rationalism is the easily misunderstood title, "transcendental idealism". But this phrase properly refers to just one aspect of his philosophy. A more general and inclusive title would be to call it a "System of Perspectives". Interpreting Kant's philosophy in terms of the "principle of perspective" enables us to account for the potentially confusing recurrence of both empiricist and rationalist (as well as other) elements in his philosophy.

If Kant was neither a straighforward positivist nor a traditional rationalist, the question yet remains how he intended his philosophy to relate to theology. As far as methodology and terminology are concerned, Barth is largely correct to say Kant "was purely a philosopher and his philosophy is not in the least dressed in the garb of theology" (B1:339). Indeed, as Sykes points out, Kant wrote an entire essay (Part I of Kt11) "the whole object of (which) is to demonstrate the necessity of an institutionalized rivalry between theology and philosophy..." (S3:100). But "theology" in these instances refers for Kant only to what is more accurately called "biblical studies" or "revealed theology", a discipline which Kant himself, even in his book on religion, never practised (see Kt1o:8-11(7-1o). Once the meaning of the word is widened to include any serious, scholarly study of God, religion and related subjects, his philosophy can be seen in many respects to be "theocentric" in orientation. By "theocentric" I do not mean that Kant adopted the view that our knowledge of God must serve as the basis of or centre for all other types of knowledge. On the contrary, I mean that the problems surrounding our understanding of the nature and reality of God served as the driving force of his philosophy (see below).

Prior to Kant most philosophers used theology - and in particular the implications of God's existence (which many believeed they had proved) - to bridge gaps they were unable to bridge by philosophical means alone. Two obvious examples are Descartes' assumption that God's existence guarantees that "regarding objects which are clearly and distinctly represented to it by the understanding, I can never be deceived" (D1:4,119), and Berkeley's theory that objects which are not being perceived by any subject can be said to persist

only because they are being perceived by God. Kant, however, severly criticizes such an approach:

> To have recourse to God...in explaing the arrangements of nature and their changes is...a complete confession that one has come to the end of his philosophy, since he is compelled to assume something of which in itself he otherwise has no concept in order to conceive of the possibility of something he sees before his very eyes.(Kt7:138).

This removal of God from his traditional place in the "gaps" of philosophical inquiry is commonly interpreted as an example of Kant's positivistis and antitheological disposition. What is often ignored by such interpreters is that, as I argue elsewhere (see P1 and P3: 126-134), Kant replaces this traditional assumption with that of his famous, or infamous, concept of the "thing in itself". He has a number of reasons for doing so, among which are the preservation of the integrity of philolophy and the protection of theology from its sceptical and agnostic critics. For he regards the thing in itself as the unknowable question mark of philosophical inquiry (see P2); God is freed to play a far more important and determinant role. There is a sense in which God transcends even the thing in itself, ad so, for Kant, is radically unknowable. But there is another sense in which God is immanent: indeed, this rich concept of "a living God" (Kt4: 661) forms the very heart of Kant's entire philosophical project. (In other words, as I argue in P8, a real (though mysterious) God- not just an "idea" of reason - is the central focus towards which Kant's entire System points). The interplay between these two aspects of his concept of God constitutes a valuable contribution to theology, for which he has rarely, if ever, been given full credit.

Although it is true that Kant always spoke primarily as a philosopher, it is also true that "the Critical philosophy left his basic beliefs untouched" (W4:143) and that the three "ideas" which guided his entire philosophical endeavour, viz., "God, freedom, and immortality" (e.g., Kt4:xxx; Kt7:3-4; Kt8:473), are all primarily theocentric in their orientation. Thus it should come as no surprise that the concept of God "was constantly recurring throughout the various stages of (Kant's) intellectual development" (H4:13). The inordinate attention interpreters usually give to the arguments in the Transcendental Analytic of the first Critique ironically veils the fact the Kant intends Kt4 "to clear the way for a positive account of

what he regards as the correct theology for human beings" (A1:31o). Even Heine, who views Kt4 as "the sword that slew deism in Germany" (H3:1o7), agrees that Kant's criticism of the traditional proofs for the existence of God "forms one of the main points of (Kt4)"(H3:115), and that we ought to "recognise everywhere visible in (Kt4) his polemic against these proofs" (116). Unfortunately, he believes Kant was trying to prove that "this ideal...being, hitherto called God, is a mere fiction" (115) - a view which is thoroughly refuted in P1O.

Wood is one of the few interpreters to acknowledge and develop the constructive, theocentric tenor of Kant's philosophy. He says in W6: 17:

> Kant is fundamentally unable to conceive of the human situation except theistically... For Kant's real aim is not to destroy theology but to replace a dogmatic theology with a Critical one: to transform rational theology from a complacent speculative science into a critical examination of the inevitable but perpetually insoluble problems of human reason, and a vehicle for the expression of our moral aspirations under the guidance of an autonomous reason.

He clamis, quite rightly, that "there is widespread misunderstanding of Kant's ideas" concerning his criticism of the proofs for God's existence (1O). Moreover, Kant's Lectures on Philosophical Theology (Kt5) show, according to Wood, "that (even) the traditional theology was to a large extent compatible with Kant's critical philosophy" (W6:149). Indeed, Kant's concern for and influence on theology extended to numerous empirical det ils: not only does Barth credit him with having "understood what the idea of a Church was" and as having also "understood what grace was" (B1:339), but Sykes regards him "as one of those who prepared the way for the fragile advances of the Second Vatican Coucil" (S3:1o3) - three theological accomplishments of no small merit!

Kant himself leaves no doubt as to the theocentric orientation in his understanding of metaphysics. In 1763 he writes that "the most important of all our cognitions" is "THERE IS A GOD", and that it is so that it is in no danger of being refuted by metaphysical speculation (Kt2:65(219)). In 1770 he wrote to his friend Lambert, explaining that the purpose for fixing the principles and limits of knowledge is "so that these principles could not be confusedly applied to objects of pure rea-

dom and immortality is repeatedly stressed by Kant: "Aetaphysics has as the proper object of its enquiries three ideas only: God, freedom, and immortality" (Kt4: 395n); "metaphysics has engaged so many heads up til now and will continue to engage them not in order to extend natural kno wledge..., but in order to attain to a knowledge of what lies entirely beyond all the boundaries of experience, namely, God, freedom, and immo rtality". (Kt6:477)). And in Kt9:292 he emphasizes the theocentric orien tation of all metaphysics even more explicitly: "The supersensible in the word 1(the spiritual nature of the soul) and out of the wordl (God) hence immortality and theology, are the ultimate ends towards which metaphysics is directed."

Kant also makes it clear in numerous places that his own task is ultimately constructive with respect to theology and religion, just as it is for metaphysics in general. His famous claim "to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith" (Kt4:xxx) certainly implies something of this sort (but see also Pl:442-444), especially when it is seen in context. For a large portion of the second edition Preface to Kt4 is devoted to clarifying that "all objections to morality and religion" have been "for ever silenced" by this critique of reason's powers. Elsewhere in Kt4 he explains that theology, morals and religi which correspond to these three ideas, respectively, are "the highest ends of our existence" (395n; see also 494, 656). And in the last few pages of the Critique he concludes that, "although metaphysics cannot be the foundation of religion , it must always continue to be a bulwar of it", and that a Critical metaphysics "prevents the devastations of (speculation)...in the field of morals as well as in that of religion" (877). In the Critique of Practical Reason (Kt7) he therefore continue his task of preventing "the possibility of making theology merely a magic lantern of phantoms" (141), Even at the end of his life, in Kt12:22.63 Kant reminds us of the theocentric orientation of his philosophy: "The highest level of the trancendental philosophy...lies in this twofold: 1. What is God? 2. Is there a God?" (as quoted in S2: 117). Moreover, if Kant's own testimony is not evidence enough, "his friend and biographer, Jachmann" informs us, as Greene notes, "that, in private conversation with his friends'the philosopher and the man spoke out in undeniable testimony to an inner feeling and a genuine conviction (of God's existence) ; and that'in the true sense of the wo he was a worshipper of God."

Copleston argues against the common trend in both theology and philosophy according to which philosophers such as Heidegger and theol

gians such as Barth stand willingly back to back, facing opposite directions. He urges "that an adequate understanding of the Christian faith requires philosophical reflection, and that it is not facilitated by a wholesale rejection of metaphysics" (C3:53). Taking into account the theocentric orientation of Kant's philosophy may help to reverse this trend, which is traceable in both disciplines to various misinterpretations of Kant. The theologian and the philosopher might then be more willing to stand face to face; for Kant destroyed the old parent-child relationship of theology to philosophy not in order to make them complete strangers, but rather to enable them to work side towards a common goal. "The ultimate aim" of such cooperation, Smith suggests, is "to overcome the emptiness and formality of philosophy and to frustrate the obscurantist and parochial tendencies in theology" (S1:8).

Learning to read Kant's philosophy always in the light of its theological and religious implications can be particularly helpful in fulfilling this task because he is respected almost universally by philosophers as one of the great philosophical thinkers in the history of Western philosophy - if not the greatest, Indeed, many would agree that "Kant, in modern times, has replaced Aristot as a kind of intellectual reference system" (G1:135). Likewise, the number of theologians and philosophers of religion who acknowledge Kant's achievement is so large as to render it hopeless even to attempt to draw up an exhaustive list. Many theologians would agree with MacKinnon's view that Kant is "surely the supreme German philosopher" (M1:135; see also M2:22-6 and L1:16). Even Gilson, who has fundamental disagreements with Kant, regards him as the primary philosophical alternative to Thomas Aquinas for the Christian (G2:114). What Barth says of Kant's influence on nineteenth-century theologians would apply to most (non-Barthian) theologians in the twentieth century as well: "He stands by himself...a stumbling-block and rock of offence...,someone determinately pursuing his own course, more feared than loved, a prophet whom almost everyone even among those who wanted to go forward with him had first to re-interpret before they could do anything with him" (B1:267).

If indeed Kant is the primary figure in the modern Western philosophical traditon, the theologian can hardly ignore him. For, as Wood suggests: "To face up squarely to the problems of the tradition, as Kant did, remains by far the most straightforward and intellectually honest way for a modern theologian to discharge his philosophical responsibilities"(W6:151). To interpret Kant in a way that is philosophi-

cally acceptable and yet leaves open a legitimate field in which the theologian can work (see e.g., Part Four of P11) would therefore effectively establish much-needed common ground between philosophy and theology.

But the respect Kant evokes from philosophers and theologians is not the only reason for recommending a theologically-conscious way of reading this over-worked philosopher. An even more important reason stems from a problem we acknowledged near the beginning of this article Kant is far too frequently interpreted in a one-sided fashion, especial by those who (conveniently) claim that large portions of his work are irrelevant to or inconsistent with the "truly Kantian" material. Because of the confusion this creates, especially for anyone whose primary concern is not philosophical, many theologians and philosophers of religion have ignored or repudiated the importance of Kant. A typical example is Flew's book on the philosophy of religion (F3), which entirely ignores the relevance of Kant's views on the subject: he devotes only two paragraphs (5.44-5) to a brief descruption and trite criticism Rather than merely listing other works which make such a mistake, let us examine one case in slightly more detail.

Hartshorne's treatment of Kant is even more misleading than Flew because he gives the impression of being more knowledgeable. With Rees he voices the common objection: "Of all criticisms of philosophical theology, probably none has been so influential as those of Kant...(However,) Kant's criticisms depend, more than is commonly noted, on certain features of his own system which are now usually rejected" (H2: 142). They then severely misinterpret and trivialize, among other things Kant's doctrine of sensibility (147). As evidence of their failure to grasp the essential thrust of Kant's philosophy, they accuse him of being "imprisoned in the half-truths in which the monopolar prejudice, the neglect of the principle of polarity, is bound to result" (146). Each of these criticisms, however, and especially the latter, betrays an acceptance of an overly simplified or one-sided interpretation of Kant - an interpretation of the type which assumes that theologians who accept Kant must give up most or all of their endeavours. The implications of such a second-hand approach are brought out more clearly in Hartshorne's defense of the ontological argument (H1), which is itself based on a neglect of Kant's principle of perspective. Describing Kant as a "calamitously overestimated German philosopher"(221),

Hartshorne explicitly rejects Kant's Coperhican revolution (232), and evinces his neglect of Kantian methodology in general when he boldly states: "Unbelief (in God) is confusion or else belief is confusion. There is no third possibility" (135; but see P1). Such philosophers of religion and theologians remain unaware of-or at least, unreceptive towards-the true contribution Kant has made to their subject. This alone, if nothing else, calls for a fresh reminder of just what that contribution is, so that the doors of theological reflection can remain open even (or <u>especially</u>) for the Kantian-and, indeed, vice versa.

Our tentative answer to the question with which we began, therefore, is that Kant destroyed not so much the possibility of theology as that of the one-sided rationalist spirit of the Enlightenment, under which he himself had been nurtured. His genius, however, was to have done this without going to the opposite extreme of positivism. In the process of working out his new approach, he proposed numerous theories which are highly relevant to the theologian. (I have discussed some of these in P1 and P6-P10.) But because his theological interests are so deeply imbedded within his philosophy, and because the commonly accepted interpretations ignore this and other important emphases, such as the dependence of his arguments on the principle of perspective, it would be necessary to reinterpret his entire Critical System in the light of such issues (see P11) before bringing into full view all the details arising out of is thoroughly theocentric orientation.

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STRUCTURA LOGICĂ PRIMARA A CRITICII FILOSOFICE

de

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Constituirea sau autodeterminarea oricărei filosofii drept concepţie coerentă asupra existenţei cuprinde cu necesitate un moment negativ: limitarea sau, în anumite cazuri negarea valabilităţii concepţiilor filosofice anterioare.

Demersul teoretic prin care se realizează acest moment definitoriu pentru orice construcţie conceptuală orientată spre universal şi esenţial îl desemnăm prin termenul de critică filosofică.

Ţinînd de condiţiile intrinsece ale producerii concepţiilor filosofice demersul critic are un caracter imanent în sensul că el se regăseşte într-o formă latentă implicită chiar şi în acele sisteme sau viziuni totalizatoare care sînt expuse pur "pozitiv", adică fără vreo referire critică la alte încercări de acelaşi gen.

Tocmai această dublă necesitate internă (genetică şi de justificare) de a se raporta implicit sau explicit, parţial sau integral la un ansamblu divers de viziuni, sisteme şi orientări globale relevante, determină statutul epistemologic privilegiat al demersului critic în filosofie.

Legitimitatea cognitivă (şi aproape în egală măsură axiologică şi praxiologică) al demersului critic, înţeles într-un sens cît se poate mai larg (apropiat de cel etimologic, grecescul "Krinein" însemnînd a cîntări, a judeca, a examina), ca "element de discernămînt" (M. Florian), ca "spirit de exigenţă şi rigoare" (A. Riehl) este cel puţin de la Kant încoace unanim recunoscută. De altfel, spiritul critic, identificat de multe ori