

THE PARADOX OF INWARDNESS IN KANT AND KIERKEGAARD

Ronald Green's Legacy in Philosophy of Religion

Stephen R. Palmquist

ABSTRACT

Aside from bioethics, the main theme of Ronald Green's lifework has been an exploration of the relation between religion and morality, with special emphasis on the philosophies of Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard. This essay summarizes and assesses his work on this theme by examining, in turn, four of his relevant books. *Religious Reason* (1978) introduced a new method of comparative religion based on Kant's model of a rational religion. *Religion and Moral Reason* (1988) expanded on this project, clarifying that religious traditions cannot be reduced to their moral grounding. *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (1992) offered bold new evidence that Kant, not Hegel, was the philosopher whose ideas primarily shaped Kierkegaard's overtly religious philosophy; both philosophers focused on the problem of how to understand the relation between moral reasoning and historical religion. And *Kant and Kierkegaard on Time and Eternity* (2011) republished ten essays that explore various aspects of this theme in greater depth. I argue that throughout these works Green defends a "paradox of inwardness": principles or ideals that are by their nature essentially inward end up requiring outward manifestation in order to be confirmed or fully justified as real.

KEY WORDS: *Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, religion and morality, paradox, inwardness*

Those who know Ronald Green through his principal work as a bioethicist may be surprised to learn that his corpus also features no less than four books and at least thirty articles and reviews in an area that might seem at first to have little if any direct relation to his main field of

Stephen R. Palmquist (D.Phil., Oxford University) is Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Hong Kong Baptist University, where he has taught since 1987. His 170+ publications (translated into at least twelve languages) include over ninety refereed articles and book chapters, published in more than twenty-five countries. Among his eleven books are *Kant's System of Perspectives* (University Press of America, 1993), *Kant's Critical Religion* (Ashgate, 2000), *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy* (De Gruyter, 2010), *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (John Wiley & Sons, 2016), and *Baring All in Reason's Light* (Noesis Press, 2016). In 1999 he founded the Hong Kong Philosophy Café, now comprising four branches and over 800 members. Stephen R. Palmquist, stevepq@hkbu.edu.hk.

expertise: these other works deal with the ideas put forward by two of the most influential philosophers of religion, Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard. The connection, of course, is that Green's interest in these two philosophical giants focuses primarily on their understanding of the relation between morality and religion, so we might think of the two aspects of his expertise in terms of the distinction between applied ethics and pure ethics. I have elsewhere described his 1978 book, *Religious Reason: The Rational and Moral Basis of Religious Belief*, which employs an interpretation of Kant's view of morality and religion as a spring-board for introducing a new method of comparative religious studies, as one of three key works in the 1970s that established the foundation for what is nowadays sometimes referred to as an "affirmative" approach to interpreting Kant's philosophy of religion.¹

Kant has often been interpreted as a moral reductionist who claims that authentic religion is nothing but morality, so that all non-moral elements should be excised from religious traditions and persons who manage to be morally good without adhering to any historical religion are not missing out on anything essential. Later in this essay I shall be posing several questions and challenges to Green's way of portraying Kant, in hopes of prompting him to clarify whether he, too, thinks Kant was in any sense a moral reductionist. In any case, Green's second book on this topic, his 1988 *Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study*, makes abundantly clear that, on his own view, religion is rooted in a "moral point of view" in such a way that religious traditions *cannot* be reduced to this moral grounding. As early as the preface he clarifies, while commenting on examples from Chinese religions, "that while religion may be actuated by moral concerns, it is not reducible to a series of moral teachings" (1988, xiv).² What remains unclear is whether he sees himself as following or departing from Kant on this point.

Probably the most influential of Green's four books in this general area is the third, his 1992 *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, which set out ground-breaking evidence that the philosopher whose ideas primarily shaped and set the parameters for Kierkegaard's overtly religious philosophy was not Hegel, as had so often been assumed, but Kant. For both Kierkegaard and Kant the problem of how to understand the relation between moral reasoning and historical religion was the

¹ See "Editors' Introduction" to Firestone and Palmquist 2006, 15–30.

² On the next page Green adds: "Ritual is not reducible to moral instruction" (1988, xv). In a subsequent essay (Green 2000), he did tend to portray Kierkegaard as accusing Kant of moral reductionism. But that this may not be Green's own view of the matter was evidenced by the fact that he toned down this tendency when he revised this essay for its republication in Firestone and Palmquist 2006, 157–75. For a detailed defense of the non-reductionist status of Kant's philosophy of religion, see Palmquist 1992.

driving force of their theories of religion. And for both (as well as for Green, as I shall argue in the remainder of this essay), this problem proved to be so deeply rooted in human nature and yet so essential to our self-understanding that it can be regarded quite properly as an intractable paradox.

As if to remind his colleagues and students in applied ethics that he has always had one foot in the philosophy of religion (through his interest in pure moral theory), Green recently compiled ten of his essays on Kant and Kierkegaard into the 2011 book, *Kant and Kierkegaard on Time and Eternity*. In what follows I shall be dipping briefly into this and each of the three previously mentioned books, with a view toward demonstrating that the driving force behind this portion of Green's scholarly work—a force that surely served as a not-so-hidden debt influencing his work in applied ethics as well—is what I shall call the *paradox of inwardness*.

The paradox of inwardness—or paradoxes (for as we shall see, the paradox manifests itself in many different forms)—always exhibits the same essential features. A principle or ideal that is by its nature essentially inward ends up requiring outward manifestation in order to be confirmed or fully justified as real. While Kant tends to write in his purely moral works as if the categorical imperative is so utterly formal that no such manifestation is required—the form alone, and only the form, makes the moral law true and worthy of our commitment—a careful analysis of his *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793/94) reveals that a paradox of inwardness, which (in retrospect) seems uncannily Kierkegaardian, governs the entire exposition. Interpreters such as Gordon Michalson, who approach Kant's book with the expectation that Kant intends to provide a typically rationalist, logically consistent analysis of religion, are bound to come away with the impression that the sage of Königsberg was unable to decide on which side his allegiance lay whenever he discussed the interplay between specific historical religious traditions and what he calls “the religion of reason”³ (see Kant 2016, 12–13, 110, 112–14, 121–23, 135n, 152, 157–59, 162, 165). By contrast, Green's first book, picking up on the built-in paradox that we human beings experience within our own reason whenever we attempt to act upon choices we have made about what we ought to do, aptly dubs this phenomenon “religious reason.” Just to cite one of many examples of his acknowledgement of Kant's affirmation of the paradox of inwardness in this first book, he there writes that Kant's “own thinking on religion reveals a constant movement between various traditional theistic affirmations and what could be called a mysticism of reason—a profound regard for the internal voice of reason and conscience” (1978, 77). Part

³ Kant's word *Vernunftreligion* is also often translated “rational religion.”

One culminates with a table that enumerates seven points (some with detailed subpoints) in a Kantian account of religious reason (1978, 109), which are then applied in Part Two to several examples of historical religious traditions. My only criticism of Green's table, assuming we read it as an interpretation of Kant's *Religion* rather than as an expression of Green's own (Kantian) position, is that it says nothing at all about the crucial role symbolism plays in Kant's understanding of the healthy functioning of religion. Symbolism is the chief tool through which Kant applies the paradox of inwardness in *Religion*, so any attempt to examine religious traditions in a Kantian manner *without* a focus on their symbolic structure seems partial at best.

Shortly after the publication of *Religious Reason*, Green published an article that has been largely neglected by Kant scholars, presenting "A Kantian Perspective" on "Religious Ritual" (Green 1979). Indeed, I only became aware of this article recently, while preparing the final draft of my book *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Palmquist 2016a). Fortunately, I was able to graft in a few references to this important article, which bucks a common trend in Kant scholarship. Typically, anyone who writes about Kant's *Religion* is three times more likely to write about his theory of evil than about any other theme, twice as likely to write about his theory of the ethical community than about any of the remaining themes, and sure to write about Kant's theory of grace (or the alleged lack thereof) if they are not writing about either evil or the ethical community. Ignoring the convention whereby commentators tend to neglect the fourth and final of the four essays or "pieces" (*Stücken*), as Kant calls them, which constitute the book, Green's article examines Kant's interpretation of the Christian ritual of baptism, which Kant elaborates in a single paragraph just three pages before the end of his book.

In private correspondence with Green a few years ago, we toyed with the possibility of co-editing or co-authoring a book that would extend Kant's perspective on ritual more widely than one could accomplish in a single article. In the hope that something might someday come of those joint musings, I shall add a few words about this neglected work of Green's. His essay correctly recognizes that Kant's aim is not to reduce rituals such as baptism to *nothing but* a moral meaning, but to ensure that its practitioners do, at least, give it such a meaning; this is the *minimum core* of a rational theory of why initiation rites occur in virtually every form of religious tradition. Without taking sides on the contentious issue of infant baptism versus believer's baptism, Kant argues, in a nutshell, that baptism has the potential to be "a very significant festivity which imposes great obligation either on the inductee-to-be, if he is himself able to confess his faith, or on the witnesses who pledge to attend to his education in it, and it aims at something holy (molding a human

being into a citizen of a divine nation)” (Kant 2016, 199). Much of Green’s essay concerns an assessment of the Christian theological tradition and a demonstration that Kant’s moral interpretation—as well as his warning that baptism is not a “means of grace” despite the fact that some practitioners superstitiously believe they can use it to force God to “wash away all sins at once” (Kant 2016, 199)—is actually well represented in that tradition (Green 1979, 235–37).

So far so good. But here Green raises a criticism, against which I wish to speak in Kant’s defense: he complains that Kant displays a lack of awareness of the long and rich religious and theological tradition he is critiquing. First, the fact that Kant says nothing about the theological tradition regarding baptism does not mean he was unaware of it. For in the preface to the first edition of *Religion*, Kant argues that the domains of scholarship appropriate to the biblical theologian and the philosophical theologian must be kept carefully distinct, even though the two types of scholars should aim to “be united” (2016, 10) when it comes to the essential purposes of studying religion. I interpret Kant’s silence on the tradition not as evidence of his ignorance, but as evidence of his careful lack of presumption: he seeks to leave to the type of scholar whom Kant calls the “biblical theologian” the important task of filling in all the historical details relating to traditional theological interpretations of the symbolism of rituals such as baptism. Kant’s role as philosophical theologian is simple and direct: to insist that the moral meaning be kept at the core of what both types of theologians do; and this is precisely what he does in his short paragraph on baptism. Green’s criticism is well placed to the extent that Kant’s brief treatment of this ritual admittedly does nothing to highlight the profound way in which baptism symbolizes the paradox of inwardness—for example, by depicting the believer as dying (to time?) yet living (to eternity?). However, in Kant’s defense, he surely regarded this work of fleshing out the symbolism through dialogue with the historical interpretive tradition as the task of the biblical theologian. That is, for Kant to have done what Green does in his article, mining the theological tradition for evidence that baptism as traditionally interpreted often does serve as a profound moral symbol, would have been for him to stray into the domain of the biblical theologian, and this was something Kant believed would have been entirely inappropriate, given his firm belief in the separation of the sciences.

At first sight the title of Green’s second book in this series, *Religion and Moral Reason*, might give the impression that he is backing away from his initial radical claim, that reason is *essentially* religious and as such has a paradox at its very heart; for he now refers to “moral reason” rather than “religious reason.” Yet his Introduction explains otherwise. He begins by outlining the “three essential elements” that constitute the “deep structure” of all religions: first, religions all involve adopting “the moral point of view”; second, they formulate beliefs “affirming the reality of moral retribution”; and third, they also formulate various

“transmoral’ beliefs that suspend moral judgment and retribution when this is needed to overcome moral paralysis and despair” (1988, 3). As it turns out, each of these elements involves paradox to some extent—though “not overt self-contradiction” (1988, 4). Green’s first illustration is the “familiar paradox of the moral life,” whereby “self-denial and self-restraint are conditions of human happiness and self-fulfillment.” He then wastes no time in praising “Kant’s pioneering effort to develop systematically the paradoxical truths underlying the moral life” (1988, 5).

Let me pause here to offer another mild critical reflection on Green’s claim regarding the deep structure of (what I prefer to continue calling) *religious* reason. In the spirit of Carl Jung’s claim that patterns of wholeness always come in fours, so that threefold patterns always conceal within them a “missing fourth”—a claim, incidentally, that Jung adapted from Kant’s deeply rooted trust in architectonic logic, where synthesis always exhibits itself in threefold patterns and analysis in fourfold patterns⁴—I suggest that a fourth candidate for the deep structure of religious reason is its culmination in what I am here calling the paradox of inwardness. Interestingly, in *Religious Reason* Green had already provided his own version of a fourfold structure, but one with a more explicitly Kantian grounding: he there portrays reason as having distinctly theoretical, prudential, moral, and religious employments (1978, 4). The fourth employment arises directly out of the paradoxical impasse that occurs between the second and third employments: “Religious reason arises because of an important conflict between prudential and moral reason, and it represents reason’s effort to bring its own program to a coherent conclusion” (1978, 4). Admittedly, Green proposes a different distinction here than in *Religion and Moral Reason*. My point is only that I would have liked to have seen a more explicit effort to synthesize the two sets of distinctions, such that the “deep structure” examined in the second book in this series might have also exhibited a fourth element that would similarly draw the other three to their proper culmination. Again, I suggest this fourth element would have been the feature that drives Kantian religion to border on the mystical: namely, the paradox of inwardness.

I turn now, very briefly, to what is widely regarded as Green’s most substantial contribution to Kant scholarship to date—his demonstration of the extent to which Kant’s writings influenced Kierkegaard, sometimes in ways

⁴ See, for example, Kant 2001, 82–83 (197n in the Akademie pagination). In Palmquist 1993 (especially Chapters III and VII–IX) I examine in considerable detail how the hints Kant provides in this important footnote work themselves out in the structural divisions he tends to make in his main Critical works. In Palmquist 2000 I then extend this to an examination of the structural divisions in Kant’s *Religion*.

that Kierkegaard seems to have been intent on keeping hidden. In the wake of Green's ground-breaking study, it would be difficult to deny that, if Kierkegaard is the father of theistic existentialism, then Kant surely is one of its grandfathers. But without commenting on any of the detailed arguments presented in *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, I shall limit my comments on this book of exacting scholarship to the observation that the book's argument leads to a supplementary question that, to the best of my recollection, Green does not address in the book itself: What exactly is the status of Kierkegaard's Kant? That is, does Kierkegaard portray Kant's philosophy of religion accurately? Or could it be that Kierkegaard's "hidden debt" extends even further than Green so boldly proposes and that some of Kierkegaard's supposed reactions to Kant were actually first proposed by Kant himself? If I am correct in claiming that the paradox of inwardness is the foundation stone of Kant's *Religion*, then some such intensification of Green's argument begins to seem plausible.

Green's turn to bioethics occurred in the mid-1990s, shortly after his publication of *The Hidden Debt*. Interestingly, in *Religion and Moral Reason*, apparently prescient of this impending turn, he states that his interest in the philosophy of religion is "scientific," and then (1988, xi, xii), compares his work in tracing the "deep structure" of religion and morality to that of "a molecular biologist investigating the mechanisms of genetic inheritance." (Remember, those words were published in the decade prior to Green's turn to bioethics!) At the risk of pressing this point too far, I suggest that the most profound expression of the paradox of inwardness may well come not in the realm of religious reason *per se*, but in the realm of sexual ethics. For not only is the human expression of sexual love highly paradoxical, inasmuch as the sex act is an essentially external phenomenon yet one that involves the bodily organs and fluids of two persons interpenetrating each other in the most intimate manner, but also its natural outcome (pregnancy) presents precisely the inverse paradox: pregnancy is an essentially internal phenomenon within a woman whose bodily fluids become those of the developing fetus, yet this new life developing within her is somehow independent of her own. The ethical issues surrounding sex and pregnancy are so extraordinarily acute precisely because they bring us closer than any other human experiences to the core of what makes us who we are.

Perhaps this example of the paradox of inwardness helps to explain how the two main areas of Green's scholarly career are actually united at the deepest level. Indeed, it is not insignificant to note that both Kant and Kierkegaard included reflections on these very issues in their writings on morality and religion. Kant, for example, seems to claim at one point in *Religion's* first "piece" that the propensity to evil begins its influence over a person through an act of "free volition" that occurs during

pregnancy (see Kant 2016, 21–22)⁵—a view that Green the bioethicist might not find so palatable. Similarly, Kant devotes a lengthy footnote to a treatment of the virgin birth that might seem disingenuous, at least to readers who are unaware that the paradox of inwardness is at the forefront of Kant’s concern: far from rejecting the doctrine outright, as a traditional reading of Kant-the-arch-rationalist would require, Kant-the-Critical-mystic⁶ tells us that this doctrine “is an idea of reason accommodating itself to a moral instinct, as it were, that is difficult to figure out and yet also not to be denied” (2016, 80n).

Even more dramatically, Kierkegaard devotes serious consideration to Kant’s proposals, especially in *The Concept of Anxiety* (2014), where he discusses at length the question of how the origin of sin and anxiety relates to sex and pregnancy.⁷ My impression is that in his work on bioethics Green has not treated the approaches that Kant and Kierkegaard take on these issues as seriously as he might have treated them. Perhaps this is because their views appear outmoded to many modern readers. Nevertheless, the form of their approach, insofar as both thinkers are so deeply cognizant of the paradox of inwardness, may be more instructive than Green has acknowledged in his work up to now. I believe a similar prefiguring of Kierkegaardian themes relating to love and passion could be shown to exist in comments about love, sex, and hereditary sin that Kant scatters across *Religion*. Why did Kant leave these themes

⁵ Admittedly, this interpretation depends on how Kant’s German is translated at this point. In Palmquist 2016a, I translate the key passage as follows: “But since the first basis for the adoption of our maxims, which must itself always lie in turn in free volition, cannot be a fact that could be given in experience, the good or the evil in the human being (as the subjective first basis for the adoption of this or that maxim in regard to the moral law) is called innate merely in *this* sense, that it is laid at the basis (in earliest youth, up to [the point of] birth, back) prior to any use of freedom that is given in experience, and thus is presented as present in the human being simultaneously with birth—[though] not exactly as having birth as its cause.” The phrasing of the second parenthetical clause suggests Kant is referring here to pregnancy: the very *earliest* stage of “youth” that proceeds “up to” birth.

⁶ See Palmquist 2016b. My argument there (and in Palmquist 2000, chapters II, X, and XII) is that, although some of Kant’s most caustic remarks about mysticism are directed against a certain type of mystic, his whole philosophy can be regarded as a foundation for a new type of appreciation for religious experience, which I call “Critical mysticism”—a position that takes on board the absolute need for such experience to enhance rather than detract from our moral nature.

⁷ See, for example, Kierkegaard 2014, 88: “In the moment of conception, spirit is furthest away and for that reason the anxiety is the greatest. In this anxiety, the new individual comes into being. In the moment of birth, anxiety culminates a second time in the woman, and that instant the new individual enters the world.” Here Kierkegaard is explicitly examining that period of earliest youth between conception and birth to which Kant alluded (see footnote 5).

relatively undeveloped? Once again, he would have regarded such further development, at least in its religious application, as the task of the biblical theologian.

As proof to the academic world that he has not stopped thinking about these pure philosophical issues during his decades-long sojourn into the increasingly intricate controversies of twenty-first-century bioethics, Green's most recent book on Kant and Kierkegaard highlights the paradox of inwardness in its very title: for there are no two words that better express this paradox, arising as it does when the knowable and the unknowable intersect, than "time" and "eternity." In a single essay I cannot do justice to the range of topics covered by the ten articles reprinted in that volume, so here I will merely select for closer examination several comments Green makes in his Introduction. These comments bring to the fore a concern I have had about Green's work ever since I first became acquainted with *Religious Reason* as a graduate student at Oxford in the 1980s. The concern is that, whereas on the one hand much of his work on Kant accurately and adequately acknowledges that Kant really was interested in affirming religion, not just an ethical surrogate thereof, on the other hand Green occasionally makes passing statements or generalizations about Kant that suggest he is more amenable to a reductionist reading of Kant than I, at least, would have hoped.⁸

In the Introduction of *Kant and Kierkegaard on Time and Eternity*, Green comments on chapter five, entitled "Kant: A Debt Both Obscure and Enormous," correctly pointing out that "Kant saw a role for divine grace," but claims that "he set aside as not being helpful for our moral salvation questions regarding its mode of operation" (2011, 16). This common impression is based on an incomplete understanding of the central goals of Kant's *Religion*. As I argue (Palmquist 2010, 2016a), Kant is self-consciously avoiding entering the fray on discussions relating to biblical theology; the goal of what he calls his "second experiment" is not to defend one theology of grace over another, much less to set aside *all* such theologies "as not being helpful for our moral salvation," but to provide a moral hermeneutic that *any* such theology *must* employ, if the answers it provides to the questions of the mode of grace's operation are to *be* helpful (Kant 2016, 12). Kant never denies that theologies of grace can be and often are intensely helpful

⁸ Along these lines, as mentioned above (see footnote 2), when preparing to reprint Green 2000 as a chapter in Firestone and Palmquist 2006, Green edited his text in such a way as to clarify the questionable statements, resulting in a more nuanced reading of Kant's approach. However, when he later reprinted that same essay again, as Chapter 4 in Green 2011, he used the older, unedited version of his text, thus retaining certain questionable claims about Kant's alleged biases.

to people in overcoming the debilitating effects of sin, or “radical evil” as Kant calls it, on our moral decision-making ability. His critique of all theologies of grace insists not that they be abandoned altogether in favor of a rarefied “religion of pure reason” that cannot be instantiated empirically, but only that those who adhere to a particular theological “answer” to the enigma of grace must do so with a profound awareness of the limiting effects of the paradox of inwardness. That is, we may be saved by grace through faith; but to affirm this subjective conviction as if it were an external fact is to transcend the limits of the power of human reason, and religious believers who do this almost always experience moral *disempowerment*, meaning that the theological doctrine ends up having exactly the opposite of its intended effect. Kant insists that the religious person who turns a blind eye to the paradox of inwardness and affirms a tenet of religious faith as if it were objectively true, rather than a symbolic expression of one’s subjective hope, thereby destroys the humility that makes them worthy to receive whatever grace God may be offering in the first place.

Green continues his introductory summary of “Kant: A Debt” by claiming that “Kant offered an entirely conceptual solution to our problem of defective moral willing.” According to Green’s Kant: “We overcome our past moral mischoices merely by thinking our way out of them: by basing our hope on the reasonable possibility of its [i.e., salvation’s] availability to one who yearns for it” (2011, 16). I see two problems with this portrayal of Kant’s position. First, while it may be an accurate account of Kierkegaard’s reading of Kant, it is a caricature of Kant’s actual approach in *Religion*. For Kant’s actual strategy in *Religion* is not primarily conceptual and argumentative, but symbolic and hermeneutic. Indeed, this—dare I say, Kierkegaardian?—feature of his text is precisely what frustrates many commentators who find it difficult to reconcile this book with the rest of Kant’s corpus. Throughout *Religion* Kant never states or even hints that we can save ourselves through our own mode of correct thinking. Rather, he casts significant doubt on this possibility, consistently acknowledging that our plight is so dire that “supernatural cooperation” may be needed in order for human beings “to become good or better,” because the problem of “defective moral willing” is by definition intractable by human reason alone (2016, 44). That is one of the key messages of Kant’s book: religion arises as a response to the gap that opens up between our awareness of reason’s weakness and our awareness of our own inability, entirely through our own rational powers, to satisfy the need that arises out of that weakness. This gap expresses itself in many ways, but always as a manifestation of the paradox of inwardness.

My second reservation about the foregoing quote from *Kant and Kierkegaard on Time and Eternity* is that, while Green is quite correct to say that, according to Kant, our hope in salvation requires us to understand “the reasonable possibility of its availability,” that availability is not contingent on our *yearning* for salvation. Quite to the contrary, in the fourth piece Kant goes to great pains to warn against the religious delusion that comes from the mistaken impression that our yearning is what pleases God. Instead, Kant’s position, though paradoxical, is clear: the only basis for reasonable hope of salvation from the universal human condition of sin or radical evil is a revolution in the very basis of our maxim-formation, in the part of our volitional capacity that Kant calls our *Gesinnung*, which I translate as “conviction.”⁹ If God is going to save a human being, Kant argues, we must assume that God will do so on the basis of the holiness of our moral conviction. The problem is that we ourselves do not have a clear view of this elusive part of our nature, because it exists in an eternal (or noumenal) dimension; for this reason and this reason alone, Kant argues, our hope as to whether or not we have experienced a change of heart can be based only on an honest assessment of own firm resolve in following the dictates of the moral law as this resolve manifests itself in real, spatiotemporal deeds—that is, in what Kant calls our “lifestyle.”¹⁰

Green rightly objects to the position he attributes to Kant: “If evil is a free and logically unnecessary event of this degree of seriousness, its remedy cannot be a reasonable presumption of the possibility of divine support. Such presumption would not only limit God’s freedom to act . . .; it would also reduce the gravity of our initial free choice” (2011, 16). If my interpretation is accurate, then Kant is innocent of this logical flaw in argumentation. For Kant never claims that the *remedy* for evil is “a reasonable presumption of the possibility of divine support.” The remedy for evil is the wholesale conversion of an evil heart to a good heart, a change which might require God’s prevenient grace or at least God’s assistance in removing potential obstacles as we firmly resolve to make the change. Kant’s claims regarding “reasonable presumption” are consistently and humbly directed toward our *knowledge* of our own moral

⁹ The time-honored translation of Kant’s *Gesinnung* as “disposition” was replaced by “attitude” in Werner Pluhar’s 2009 translation of Kant’s *Religion*. In Palmquist 2015, I defend my use of “conviction” as having the advantage of being clearly volitional, as opposed to these other options being more metaphysical and psychological, respectively. For a summary of that argument, see Palmquist 2016a, 519–20.

¹⁰ Kant’s term *Lebenswandel* is typically translated as “way of life” or “life-conduct”; but careful attention to the context of Kant’s usage of this term suggests that he has in mind something very close to what we nowadays refer to as a person’s lifestyle. For a defense of this translation, see Palmquist 2016a, 526–28.

and spiritual state before God, never—as Green suggests, I think unfairly—as a proud attempt to usurp control over God. Indeed, Kant’s whole discussion of “pseudoservice” in the fourth piece of *Religion* is directed against nothing more than the “religious delusion” that we human beings are in any way capable of determining what God does or does not do with respect to our eternal destiny. Kant’s claim is not that by trying hard to be good, we force God to save us; this reductionist interpretation runs entirely contrary to the whole tenor of his argument in the much-misunderstood fourth piece. Rather, his claim is that, given the moral make-up of human beings—as beings who are on the one hand animals yet on the other hand possess a “personality” that condemns us to choose our own destiny—the best we can do is to trust that God has given us the moral law so that we might obey it and that if God does exist in any form other than as the voice of conscience, then God’s most likely mode of judging us will be moral.

If I am right about the approach to morality and religion in Kant’s *Religion*, then far from going too far in claiming that Kierkegaard relied on Kant, it turns out that Green’s masterly assessment of the Kant-Kierkegaard relationship may not have gone far enough. For in that case, Kierkegaard was not merely responding to Kant by saying “No” to his prioritization of reason over history; he was also taking up the very paradox of time and eternity that Kant himself had enshrined as the true core of human religiosity, and he was expanding it into a full-fledged theory of what it means to be religious. In other words, Kierkegaard’s “ethical stage of life” may be an accurate portrayal of the moral agent Kant describes in *Groundwork* (Kant 2012) and the second *Critique* (Kant 1997), but the religious person who is the focus of Kant’s *Religion* is surely someone who has already entered into Kierkegaard’s third, “religious stage of life.” Indeed, while it may be true that “Kant has no philosophy of human emotional and erotic love” (Green 2011, 23), he does provide numerous clues for such a philosophy, especially in *Religion*, and these clues are to a large extent what Kierkegaard picks up and transforms into what he calls “Religion B.”

Up to now this essay has focused on the task of providing an overview of and reflections on Ronald Green’s impressive work on Kant and Kierkegaard and their influence on our understanding of the relationship between religion and morality. In conclusion, let me be more direct and ask, though still in a spirit of friendship: Is Green’s Kant a moral reductionist when it comes to religion, or not? Moreover, did Kierkegaard portray Kant fairly in the person of (for example) Judge William, or is there room in an accurate reading of Kant’s *Religion* to acknowledge at least a foretaste of Kierkegaard’s more well-developed paradox of inwardness?

Regardless of how Green may answer these concluding questions, he is to be congratulated for a lifetime of devoted scholarly work that has

been so influential to so many and in so many different ways. As I am confident that he has no intention of putting aside scholarship during his retirement from teaching, but is actively considering where and how to devote his scholarly energies in the coming years, I shall dare to end, as a friend and fellow American but also as a colleague (albeit, one who resides safely out of reach, on the other side of the world), by challenging Green to consider going back to his scholarly starting point—although perhaps not all the way back to his doctoral dissertation on population growth! I encourage him to go back to his seminal reflections on the deep structure of religious reason that shows its influence so pervasively in human cultural traditions, both religious and secular. Especially now, as we are already over halfway through the second decade of the twenty-first century, apparently non-religious traditions such as those developing through the use of social media are sorely in need of Green's insightful analysis. However, I dare to recommend that such analysis will fare better if it is accompanied by a more intentional focus on the paradox of inwardness as it is already present (though so easily overlooked) in Kant and (more overtly) in Kierkegaard.

REFERENCES

- Firestone, Chris L., and Stephen R. Palmquist, eds.
 2006 *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.
- Green, Ronald M.
 1978 *Religious Reason: The Rational and Moral Basis of Religious Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 1979 "Religious Ritual: A Kantian Perspective." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7.2 (Fall): 41–53.
 1988 *Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 1992 *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
 2000 "Kant and Kierkegaard on the Need for a Historical Faith: An Imaginary Dialogue." In *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, edited by D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin, 131–52. London: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press.
 2011 *Kant and Kierkegaard on Time and Eternity*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel
 1997 *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 2001 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- 2012 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 2016 *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Revised and edited in Palmquist 2016a.
- Kierkegaard, Søren
- 2014 *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation.
- Palmquist, Stephen R.
- 1992 "Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?" *Kant-Studien* 83.2: 129–48.
- 1993 *Kant's System of Perspectives: An Architectonic Interpretation of the Critical Philosophy*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America.
- 2000 *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- 2010 "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance." *The Journal of Religion* 90.4 (October): 530–53.
- 2015 "What Is Kantian *Gesinnung*? On the Priority of Volition over Metaphysics and Psychology in Kant's *Religion*." *Kantian Review* 20.2 (July): 235–64.
- 2016a *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- 2016b *Baring All in Reason's Light*. Aurora, Colo.: Noesis Press.