Could Kant's Jesus Be God?

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ABSTRACT: Although Kant had a high regard for Jesus as a moral teacher, interpreters typically assume that his philosophy disallows belief in Jesus as *God*. Those who regard Kant as a moral reductionist are especially likely to offer a negative construal of the densely-argued subsection of his 1793 *Religion* that relates directly to this issue. The recent "affirmative" trend in Kant-scholarship provides the basis for an alternative reading. First, theologians *must* regard Jesus as human so that belief in Jesus can empower believers to become good. Second, theologians *may* refer to Jesus as divine by identifying his *disposition* as exemplifying the "archetype of perfect humanity." Third, Judeo-Christian history poses an empirical problem that theologians can solve by interpreting Jesus's divinity according to the schematism of analogy. While this does not constitute a robust (identifiably Christian) *doctrine* of Jesus's divinity, it does provide clear guidelines for formulating such a tenet of historical faith.

1. KANT'S APPARENT REJECTION OF JESUS'S DIVINITY

FEW IF ANY PAST PHILOSOPHERS have had more influence on contemporary theology and philosophy of religion than Immanuel Kant. Among Christian philosophers and theologians this influence has tended to be negative, primarily because Kant's criticism of the traditional arguments for the existence of God appears to many to be an attack on theology, if not also on religion. Against this interpretation I have argued elsewhere[1] that Kant's rejection of the traditional proofs is a necessary first step in his systematic construction of what amounts to a thoroughgoing, philosophically viable foundation for Christian theology. As Kant puts it in his *Lectures on Ethics*:

> In religion the knowledge of God is properly based on faith alone. . . . [So] it is not necessary for this belief [in God] to be susceptible of logical proof. . . . [For] sophistication is the error of refusing to accept any religion not based on a theology which can be apprehended by our reason. . . . Sophistication in religious matters is a dangerous thing; our reasoning powers are limited and reason can err and we cannot prove everything. A speculative basis is a very weak foundation for religion.[2]

[1]Stephen R. Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives* (Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2000); see Part Two (especially Chap. IV) and Appendix III.

[2]Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. L. Infield (London UK: Methuen, 1930), pp. 86–87. Aside from this text, Kant's *Religion* book (see n4 below), and the first *Critique* (see n24 below), references to Kant's writings will be included in the main text, citing the volume and page number(s) of the standard Berlin Academy edition (1902–). Unless otherwise noted, translations are taken from the corresponding volume of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*.

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As is well known, Kant argued that the only way to counteract this potentially harmful tendency was to demonstrate that God's existence (or non-existence) is not an issue that can be decided by theoretical reason (i.e., by logical proof), but ought to be grounded in the faith-based realm of practical reason (i.e., supported by moral argumentation).

One of the main reasons that Kant's moral argument for God's existence[3] has failed to impress many Christian philosophers and theologians is that, when Kant himself goes on to apply his Critical principles to religion, especially in his 1793 book, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*,[4] he appears to reduce religion to nothing but morality in disguise. For a moral reductionist, we do not need to be religious as long as we try our best to be morally good; the only value religion may have is to encourage people to be moral, and it often fails to accomplish even that. This reductionist interpretation of Kant's *Religion* stood almost unopposed until the early 1990s, when a non-reductionist alternative was proposed in a way that opened up the possibility for a thoroughgoing re-assessment of Kant's philosophy as profoundly affirmative with respect to religion in general and to Christianity in particular.[5] According to this alternative, Kant's *Religion* argues that, because human beings inevitably fail in their attempts to be moral, morality must be *raised* to the level of religion in order to accomplish its goals. The traditional, reductionist interpretation was correct in portraying Kantian morality as the core determining feature in the meaning of human life, but it was radically mistaken to claim that Kant portrays human beings as having any hope of fulfilling that goal *without* experiencing the moral empowerment provided by a healthy religion.

In the past two decades this alternative has opened up into a whole new path for contemporary philosophers of religion, offering a theologically and religiously affirmative way of interpreting Kant as a philosopher for whom religion was not merely an optional extra.[6] Although the early precursors of this new Kant, writing in the 1970s (i.e., Allen Wood, Michel Despland, and Ronald Green), have all focused

[3]The literature on what Kant calls the moral "postulates" in the second *Critique* (i.e., the claim that one must assume God's existence and some form of immortal life in order to preserve the rationality of one's choice to live a moral life) is immense. For an analysis of the argument and a discussion of what is at stake, see my book, *Kant's System of Perspectives: An Architectonic Interpretation of the Critical Philosophy* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1993), VIII.3.B, and *Kant's Critical Religion*, Appendix IV.3.

[4]Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar with Introduction by Stephen R. Palmquist (Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 2009); hereafter abbreviated as "*Religion*." Pluhar's literal translation of Kant's word *Stück* as "Piece" to label the four main divisions of *Religion* is superior to alternatives such as "Book" or "Part" inasmuch as it highlights Kant's likely reason for choosing this unusual word: the book's four essays were originally to be published as separate journal articles, or "pieces." Kant uses "*Stück*" to refer explicitly to a journal issue in *Religion* 23n.

[5]See my article, "Does Kant Reduce Religion To Morality?" in *Kant-Studien* 83 (1992): 129–48; revised and republished as Ch. VI in *Kant's Critical Religion*. Having given a pre-publication draft of that article to John E. Hare when he served as a keynote speaker at a conference held at Valparaiso University in June 1991, I was pleased to find him defending essentially the same arguments several years later in *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1996), chap. 2.

[6]For the earliest published account of this path and its possible consistency with Christianity, see my article, "Immanuel Kant: A Christian Philosopher?" in *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 65–75. I offer an updated summary of the same position in Section 1 of "Kant's Religious Argument for the Existence of God—The Ultimate Dependence of Human Destiny on Divine Assistance," *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009): 3–22.

more energy on other fields than on developing the implications of their moderately affirmative readings of Kant for theology and religion, more and more younger scholars have taken up this task with each passing decade.[7] Recent books on Kant's philosophy of religion are at least as likely to adopt an affirmative approach as the old, reductionist interpretation that sees Kant as attempting to replace religion with nothing but morally good works. Thus, Peter Byrne's *Kant on God* (2007) begins by calling attention to the affirmative approach as a new alternative that must be considered by contemporary interpreters who wish to understand Kant's philosophy of religion;[8] he grapples with it throughout his book, though he refuses to abandon entirely the old way of reading Kant.

While the affirmative theological implications of Kant's critique of rational theology, as well as his own seriousness in proposing a "pure rational religion" as an empowering supplement to "bare" morality, are coming to be appreciated more and more widely, Christian philosophers and theologians still tend to remain skeptical regarding Kant's usefulness to theology in general and to Christian religious belief in particular.[9] Surely the biggest hurdle is that interpreters of both persuasions (i.e., reductionist *and* affirmative) tend to portray Kant's position as positively excluding any belief in an actual savior—especially a Christian savior, a God-man (see n9). For anyone with a theology grounded on Jesus's divinity, this is a roadblock that has seemed impossible to overcome. Kant's philosophy leaves no room for a savior, it is often claimed, even though no philosophy was ever more in need of one than his.[10]

[7]For a collection of essays by fourteen scholars who adopt this affirmative approach to varying degrees, see Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist, eds., *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2006). Firestone subsequently appears to have had second thoughts on the extent to which Kant's view of religion merits affirmation (cf. n9, below). For my response, together with an assessment of the limits and dangers of taking the "affirmative" label too seriously, see my article, "To Tell the Truth on Kant and Christianity: Will the Real Affirmative Interpreter Please Stand Up?" in *Faith and Philosophy* 29 no. 3 (July 2012): 340–46.

[8]Peter Byrne, *Kant on God* (Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2007). On p. 2, Byrne cites my *Kant's Critical Religion* and Hare's *The Moral Gap* as the two best representatives of this new hermeneutic.

[9]For example, although Hare's *The Moral Gap* is grounded on a primarily affirmative reading of Kant's *Religion* (see n5 above), he still regards Kant's attempts to (as he puts it) "translate" Christian doctrines into moral terms as failing in many cases. A more optimistic assessment is sketched in Chris L. Firestone, "Kant's Two Perspectives on the Theological Task," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2 (2000): 63–78. More recently, however, Firestone and Nathan Jacobs present their book *In Defense of Kant's* Religion (Bloomington IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008) as a ground-breaking application of the affirmative approach to the text of Kant's *Religion*, yet their portrayal of Kant's view of Jesus is surprisingly close to that of traditional interpreters. Despite donning the cover of their book with Salvador Dali's moving "Crucifixion" painting, they downplay most of what commentators typically take as allusions to Jesus, preferring to regard the role of religious symbolism as no more than "Christic imagery"—and not in any deep, religiously significant sense of symbolism, for "this imagery is just that—imagery" (p. 154). Moreover, they take Kant's "turn to the prototype" (i.e., "archetype" [*Urbild*]) in the Second Piece, the focus of our concern in the present essay, not to be about Jesus at all, but "to constitute a transcendentally chastened form of Platonic idealism" (p. 155; cf. pp. 221–26 and n13 below). For a detailed critique of their position, see my article, "Cross-Examination of *In Defense of Kant's* Religion," *Faith and Philosophy* 29 no. 2 (April 2012): 178–80.

[10]Of the many articles and books that have been written on this theme, some of the most influential are: S. B. Thomas, "Jesus and Kant: A Problem in Reconciling Two Different Points of View," *Mind* 79 (1970): 188–99; Peter Carmichael, "Kant and Jesus," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 33 (1973): 412–16; and Vincent A. McCarthy, *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant,*

Defenders of the affirmative interpretation have argued persuasively that Kant intended his criticism of the traditional proofs for the existence of God to prepare the way for a more religiously authentic foundation for religion, that Kant himself was not a deist (much less an atheist) but a theist, that he had a profound respect for Christianity as the best of all "historical faiths," and that Kant himself defended new, morally-focused interpretations of a variety of Christian doctrines. But can this new Kant go so far as to affirm belief in Jesus Christ as Son of God, without contravening the basic principles he defends in his official, Critical writings? Most significantly, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* sets strict limits for human knowledge (or "empirical cognition"), requiring an "intuition" (i.e., some sensible input) to be synthesized with a "thought" (i.e., some conceptual processing) before we can say that we know something, and concludes on this basis that the key metaphysical ideas of God, freedom, and immortality are all necessarily unknowable, because we lack any intuitive content that would confirm their objective reality. Could a Kantian go so far as to affirm the divinity of Jesus without contravening this fundamental principle of Critical humility? I am not aware of any affirmative interpreter up to now who has gone this far, yet my purpose here is to demonstrate that the answer is (at least a qualified) *yes!*

The primary passage where Kant provides clear philosophical guidelines for how theologians should deal with this issue comes in *Religion*, the Second Piece, Section I, Subsection B, where Kant examines the role of empirical examples in a rational religion. The First Piece advanced a quasi-transcendental argument to establish that human beings are, by nature, radically evil.[11] The task of the Second Piece is then to explain how religious belief can revolutionize a person's disposition, so that this evil basis for ethical decision-making may become good again. Section I of the Second Piece considers the logical basis for belief in grace,[12] while Section II reviews the historical basis. Subsection A of Section I argues that a change of disposition (or "heart") is possible only if a person takes cognizance of an "archetype of perfect humanity" that exists in all human beings and yet cannot be explained by bare reason apart from the assumption that it has a divine origin.[13] Given our evil nature, this

Hegel, and Schelling (Macon GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1986). I respond to the former two articles in "Four Perspectives on Moral Judgement: The Rational Principles of Jesus and Kant," *The Heythrop Journal* 32 (1991): 216–32. I respond to McCarthy in detail throughout *Kant's Critical Religion*; for my response to McCarthy's portrayal of Kant's Jesus, see especially pp. 194–95n, 204n, 209n, 217n.

[11]I defend this interpretation of the First Piece in "Kant's Quasi-Transcendental Argument for a Necessary and Universal Evil Propensity in Human Nature," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 261–97.

[12]I defend this understanding of the overall task of Section I of the Second Piece in "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Problems with Divine Assistance," *The Journal of Religion* 90 (2010): 530–53.

[13]For a thoroughgoing analysis of Kant's claim that the archetype has a divine origin, see Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's* Religion, chap. 6. Somewhat perplexingly, as mentioned above (see n9), they claim that Kant was thinking primarily of Plato in constructing the argument of this section and that his conclusions should *not* be taken as references to Jesus. While a dialogue with Plato might have been at the back of Kant's mind as he constructed this argument, his frequent quotations from and allusions to the Bible in this section, together with his explicit claim in the second edition Preface (*Religion* 11–12) that he would be taking his examples intentionally from the Christian Scriptures as a test case throughout the book, suggest that Firestone and Jacobs have (at best) reversed the relative importance of Plato and Jesus.

archetype can be viewed as a free gift of divine grace, provided we can solve three ethical difficulties that arise for anyone who chooses to believe in grace—solutions Kant provides in Subsection C. As I have explained and defended these solutions elsewhere (see n12), I shall not repeat those arguments here.

Later, in the long Section VII that concludes Division One of the Third Piece of *Religion*, Kant appeals to this same archetype to resolve a peculiar "antinomy of faith." This antimony echoes the theological debate over whether faith precedes good works or good works precede faith. What is noteworthy for our purposes, and against recent affirmative interpreters who prefer not to view Kant's references to the archetype as applicable to Jesus (see n13), is that in making this appeal Kant not only refers to the archetype, but also explicitly highlights its empirical manifestation in Jesus (*Religion* 119): "in the appearance of the God-man, the proper object of the saving faith is not [his empirical, human nature], but the archetype that lies in our reason," for they are "one and the same practical idea," proceeding "in one case insofar as it presents the archetype as located in God" and "in another case insofar as it presents it as located in us, but in both cases insofar as it represents it as the standard for our way of life."[14] Kant is here reminding his reader of the argument that, as we shall see, he had already presented in the portion of *Religion* and that will be our main focus.

Between Subsections A and C of the Second Piece's Section I, Subsection B argues that *some* empirical example of this archetype of perfection must be *possible*, and that each person must seek to *become* such an example, if faith in this archetype is to have a saving influence, even though our attempt will inevitably only approximate the goal of perfection. In the second half of Subsection B, however, Kant pauses to reflect on whether or not a religious person could be justified in asserting that a *specific* historical person has exemplified this archetype more completely than all others. Although Kant never explicitly mentions his name, he is obviously thinking here of the Christian doctrine of Jesus as the Christ, the God-man. Any attempt to take a stand on Kant's view of Jesus's alleged divinity therefore hinges on a proper understanding of this passage.

In the next two sections I shall examine the two paragraphs (and a long footnote) of Subsection B where Kant reflects on this issue. My goal will be to determine the accuracy of the prevailing assumption that Kant is here rejecting the plausibility of affirming the divinity of an alleged God-man. In §2 I examine Kant's *warning* to religious believers, that belief in Jesus's divinity may be ethically dangerous if it either eclipses our recognition of Jesus's humanity or in any other way creates a gap that results in our inability to regard Jesus as a morally empowering example. As we shall see, Kant recommends not that we abandon any belief in a God-man, but that *if* we choose to adopt such a belief despite the ethical danger that accompanies

[14]For a detailed examination and critique of Kant's argument in Subsection VII of the First Division of the Third Piece, see Philip L. Quinn, "Saving Faith from Kant's Remarkable Antinomy," *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 418–33. Unfortunately, Quinn does not recognize the extent to which Kant is willing to take seriously a belief in Jesus's divinity; as a result, he underestimates the power that Kant's resolution of this issue can contribute to real Christian belief. I present a more affirmative interpretation in "Kantian Redemption: A Critical Challenge to Christian Views of Faith and Works," *Philosophia Christi* 9 (2007): 29–38.

it, we must do so in a particular way that preserves its potential for moral empowerment. In §3 I examine the crucial, but often-neglected footnote Kant appends to this passage, outlining a way of believing in doctrines, such as the divinity of Jesus, that prepares the way for his subsequent claim (in Section Two of the Second Piece, and elsewhere) that the history of religions points to Jesus as the single most plausible example of divine intervention in human history.[15] Finally, §4 identifies what epistemological status Kant would ascribe to a Christian's affirmation that Jesus is divine, in order to preserve it as a *legitimate* assertion, and assesses whether this suffices for the purposes of Christian faith.

2. BELIEF IN JESUS'S DIVINITY: THE MORAL DANGER AND ITS ANTIDOTE

The first (and longer) of the two paragraphs that we are considering in this section begins with a hypothetical reference to "a truly divinely minded human being, who through his teaching, way of life, and suffering had provided in himself the *example* of a human being pleasing to God" (*Religion* 63). Kant's hypothetical tone is in keeping with his practice, throughout *Religion*, of never referring to Jesus by name, but only by descriptions, and of never *assuming* the truth of Christianity but rather seeking to explain what its doctrines must mean from a philosophical perspective, *if* one chooses to believe them. As we shall see in §3, Kant later affirms the second part of his hypothesis, that this person "brought about through [his perfect example] an immensely great moral good in the world through a revolution in humankind." Nevertheless, he warns, this on its own does not give us a sufficient reason "to assume in [Jesus] anything other than a naturally begotten human being," for the Gospels depict Jesus as feeling the same kind of moral obligation that we feel and experiencing the same sense of human frailty that accompanies it.

Consistent with the principles established in the first *Critique*, whereby logical argument can neither prove *nor disprove* God's existence as an item of theoretical knowledge, Kant adds that the necessity of regarding Jesus as human does not require that we "absolutely deny that he might also be a supranaturally generated human being." The problem with viewing Jesus as divine is that it "can gain us nothing for a practical aim" (*Religion* 63)—i.e., it cannot provide us with any ethical empowerment to live a better life ourselves. Kant offers two reasons to back up this claim. First, "the archetype on which we base this appearance [of Jesus's perfection] must yet always be sought in ourselves," and we know that "we are natural human beings." As he argued earlier in Subsection B, we can recognize the appearance of perfection in the Gospel account of Jesus's life only because we share with Jesus

[15]The interesting question of whether Kant would allow for other, equally valid, historical examples of the archetype is beyond the scope of the present study. On the one hand, Kant's insistence that *every person* must strive to be such an example would suggest an affirmative answer; yet Kant's assessment of the history of religions seems to suggest that, up to now, Jesus alone has accomplished such a feat. For a discussion of Kant's stance on religious pluralism, see Brandon Love, "Kant's Religious Perspective on the Human Person" in *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy*, ed. Stephen R. Palmquist (Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 563–72.

the inner archetype that makes perfection possible—the archetype whose nature and necessity Kant expounded in Subsection A. Second, "the existence of this archetype in the human soul is already incomprehensible enough by itself" (63–64)—indeed, Kant already ascribed a supernatural origin to it in Subsection A—so "one does not exactly need to assume it . . . as also hypostatized in a particular human being." Although Kant is clearly advising caution at this point, he is not claiming that Jesus *cannot* be regarded as divine, but that bare reason (i.e., reason unassisted by any historical faith) does not *constrain* us to regard Jesus as divine.

In the remainder of the first paragraph Kant argues that, whereas theoretical reason is inconclusive on this issue, practical reason *does* offer us some clear guidelines. First, regardless of whether or not we ascribe divinity to Jesus, we *must* regard him as *fully human* (*Religion* 64): "raising such a holy one above all frailty of human nature would . . . stand in the way of applying the idea of this holy one practically to our emulation of him." Kant's dire warning to anyone who dares to believe Jesus is divine is that such a belief tends to encourage what he later (in the Fourth Piece) calls false religion (or "pseudoservice" of God), especially if we assume Jesus had "an innate, unchangeable purity of will" that "would make any transgression absolutely impossible for him" (64). We may pay lip-service to his humanity by thinking of Jesus as "fraught with the very same needs and thus also the same sufferings, with the very same natural inclinations and thus also the same kind of temptations to transgression as we are," but if we believe his *will* was supernaturally and incorruptibly pure, his "distance from the natural human being would thus in turn become so infinitely great that the divine human being could no longer be set up as an *example* for the natural human being." If Jesus cannot serve as an example, then belief in him cannot be morally empowering, but will only tend to increase one's susceptibility to self-deception, as a result of the radical evil that was shown in the First Piece to be a necessary and universal characteristic of human choice (see n11 above). In particular, if the believer takes the ascription of divinity as an indication that Jesus did not participate in the "frailty" that, as Kant argued, is a universal condition of human nature, then believers may readily give in to their inclinations, persuading themselves that they cannot be expected to live up to Jesus's high standard, because unlike him, they are subject to the blight of radical evil.

Any *rational* human being who held such a view of Jesus would say: give *me* "a completely holy will" (*Religion* 64) and let *me* have certain knowledge that "the entire eternal splendor of the kingdom of heaven" that was once mine will be mine once again when I die, "and I will take upon myself all sufferings—however severe they may be, even to the most ignominious death—not only willingly but also with cheerfulness, since I see the splendid and near outcome before me with my eyes." Because *we* do not see ourselves this way in our earthly life, the belief that *Jesus* had this nature and saw it in himself during his earthly life, and that he "willingly divested himself" of this nature "to save ["unworthy people"] from eternal perdition," would at best "attune our mind to admiration, love and gratitude toward him." Such a belief might make us good slaves, but not moral agents newly empowered to please God through our life conduct. Religious believers might still believe that they ought to achieve the same perfection that the God-man achieved; but because

ordinary human beings do not enjoy the advantage of possessing an already perfected divine nature, the Jesus viewed in this way "could *not* be presented to us *as an example* for imitation," nor "as proof of the practicability and attainability for us of so pure and exalted a moral good." In other words, a theology that interprets Jesus's divine nature as something that sets him apart from the rest of humankind transforms Jesus into a savior who ceases to function as a morally-empowering example of how we ought to live; he serves instead as an unattainable ideal who is most likely to be *idolized* and is thus bound to be harmful to the believer's moral development.

In the second of the two paragraphs that we are considering from Subsection B, Kant changes his tone entirely: having warned the reader not to view Jesus's nature in a way that would compromise the potential for moral empowerment that could come from affirming that a human being had attained perfection, Kant goes on to suggest how one might understand the New Testament's claim that Jesus was God in human form. In this paragraph Kant seems to have in mind a variety of Scripture verses, such as Colossians 1:15: "He is the image of the invisible God." (Significantly, Jesus's own words in the Gospels are notoriously elusive on this matter: the evangelists often portray him as *alluding* to his divine nature, but never as coming right out and stating that he is God in any metaphysically unique sense.[16]) Kant points out that Jesus, being both "divinely minded" yet "properly human," could "talk about himself truthfully as if the ideal of the good were exhibited bodily in him," provided such claims refer "only to the disposition which he makes the rule of his actions" (*Religion* 65). If Jesus was an entirely natural human being, then like the rest of us, he could not view his own disposition directly. Kant frequently emphasizes our ignorance, even of the maxims that arise out of our own inner disposition (e.g., 20). Therefore, according to Kant, "he cannot make it visible as an example for others by itself"; the only way he can exemplify his good disposition is by putting it "before their eyes only outwardly, through his doctrines and actions" (65).

References to Jesus's divine nature in the Gospels may be interpreted not as a claim that Jesus is somehow different and unique among human beings, but rather as a challenge to others to find in Jesus's actions anything that might contradict a good disposition. Such a claim, Kant reasons, proceeds "in conformity with fairness" (*Religion* 66), serving primarily as a safeguard against hypocrisy. Jesus's claim to have a divine nature "is completely valid," Kant affirms, as long as we interpret this as an appeal to "the purest disposition" and provided his conduct exhibits "no proofs of the opposite"; for such good conduct "is a duty for everyone anyway." Those who believe in such a gospel will thereby be declaring that they too have a duty to make *their* disposition "similar to" Jesus's disposition; and this applies to "all human beings at all times and in all worlds, before the supreme justice." Theologians need not assume that, by alluding to his own divine nature, Jesus was setting himself apart from the rest of humanity. Rather, his goal may have been to

[16]See e.g., John 8:58; 10:30–33. Jesus's clearest allusions to his own divinity occur mainly in John's Gospel; the Synoptics typically use the more cryptic term "son of man."

show his followers the secret of moral empowerment: radically evil human beings can become good only by calling upon the divine archetype of perfect humanity that God has placed into the heart of *every* human person, just as Jesus did.

Kant concludes this final paragraph of Subsection B with one of the clearest of his several apparent affirmations of vicarious atonement through belief in a human being who has attained the ideal of a perfect (and therefore, divine) disposition (*Religion* 66): interpreting Jesus's divinity in the manner suggested above requires religious believers to appeal to "a justice that is not ours insofar as the latter would have to consist in a way of life conforming completely and unfailingly to that disposition."[17] Empirically imperfect believers must somehow "appropriate" Jesus's divine disposition "for the sake of" their own disposition, when the latter is still oriented toward evil. Belief in Jesus thereby unites a person's disposition "with the disposition of the archetype," resulting in salvation. The task of "making this appropriation comprehensible" (i.e., demonstrating that it lies within the bounds of a religion of bare reason) is the focus of Subsection C, where Kant proposes solutions to three "difficulties" that call into question the "objective reality" of the archetype. But as I have examined Kant's arguments in that section elsewhere,[18] we need not extend the present analysis to cover that quite distinct discussion. Suffice it to say that when Kant later attempts to demonstrate how vicarious atonement can be consistent with divine justice (74–75), he again insists not that a divine-human savior is metaphysically *impossible*, but that affirming such a theological dogma is practically dangerous, unless one can do so in a way that preserves the believer's own responsibility for moral self-improvement. In order to elucidate this apparently paradoxical position (i.e., that an article of historical faith might be worthy of assent even though it is theoretically only *possible* and is likely to be practically dangerous, if not interpreted in a very special manner), let us turn now to a discussion of the role of *symbolism* in Kant's religious theory.

3. JESUS'S DIVINITY AS A SYMBOL FOR INTERPRETING THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

To the end of the first of the two paragraphs examined in §2, above, Kant appends a lengthy footnote that contains an important clue as to his stance on the issue of

[17]Reading this passage at face value, as an apparent affirmation of vicarious atonement, appears to conflict with passages such as *Religion* 72, where Kant seems to reject any belief in vicarious atonement. The standard reading of both passages is to see Kant as interpreting atonement as a problem regarding the relationship between the "old" (pre-conversion) and the "new" (post-conversion) person. As such, Kant's reference to "another" in the passage quoted here might not be a reference to Jesus, but to the "new man" that exists (at least potentially) in each and every religious believer, as viewed from the perspective of the "old man." I have commented on the proper interpretation of Subsection C, where Kant presents and attempts to resolve three "difficulties" in affirming the claims presented in Subsections A and B, in "Kant's Ethics of Grace." In a nutshell, Kant's dire warning in *Religion* 72 regarding the danger of believing in vicarious atonement need not be read as an absolute rejection of its theoretical possibility, but rather as a *practical* warning regarding the danger that it poses to the believer's ethical well-being if he or she treats it as a theoretical fact instead of as a practical symbol. That way of reading *Religion* 72 would render it consistent with the way I am interpreting the concluding statements in Subsection B.

[18]See "Kant's Ethics of Grace."

Jesus's divinity. The footnote explains why and how he will go on, in later sections of *Religion*, to affirm Jesus as a key figure in the religious history of humankind, a man who effected such an extraordinary moral revolution as to suggest that divine intervention might have taken place.[19] Kant calls attention to "a limitation of human reason" (*Religion* 64n) that comes into play whenever we identify "any moral worth" in an action (65n): "in order to make suprasensible characteristics graspable to ourselves, we always need a certain analogy with natural beings." This is why angels are typically considered to be lower "on the moral scale" than human beings, even though they have holy wills: they do not have to struggle with this human limitation. Likewise, "in order to make God's love for humankind graspable to us in terms of its degree," the Bible must attribute to God "the highest sacrifice that a loving being can ever perform" (i.e., death). Theoretical reason cannot comprehend "how an all-sufficient being can sacrifice something of what belongs to his bliss and rob himself of a possession." Nevertheless, even though such an attribution transcends the bounds of bare reason, Kant concedes to the theologian that rational religion "cannot dispense with" this "*schematism of analogy*," as a means of elucidating the moral meaning of a concept such as God's love.

Kant's subsequent distinction, toward the end of this footnote, between the use of such analogies as a theoretical tool enabling us to attribute certain features to the object and their use as a heuristic device that counteracts our inability to cognize an object in any other way, must be kept firmly in mind here, if we are to avoid misunderstanding just how far Kant would allow a believer to go in affirming Jesus's divinity. (This limit of the status of Kant's affirmation of the possibility of Jesus's divinity will be examined in more detail, in §4.) Kant makes a similar point in the third *Critique* (5:461), where he warns against the legitimacy of proofs that provide subjective (or merely "aesthetic") grounds for assent rather than objective (or "logical") grounds, because in the former case "the understanding is bewitched but not brought to conviction." The same thing occurs when symbols are interpreted literally: a person's understanding is bewitched by the beauty of the symbol and thereby persuaded to assent to a proposition on insufficient grounds. By contrast, when a symbol is interpreted properly, its function is not unlike that of what Kant calls a "*focus imaginarius*" (A644/B672)—i.e., "a point from which the concepts

[19]In *Religion* 128, for example, Kant associates the suddenness of Christianity's rise from Judaism with the fact that Jesus "announced himself as one sent from heaven, while at the same time declaring, as one worthy of such a mission," that "moral faith" (i.e., the religion of bare reason) "is the only saving faith." Then, after living a life "conforming to the archetype of the only humanity pleasing to God, he is presented as going back again to the heaven from which he had come" (128–29). Kant then points out that, from the standpoint of *historical faith*, "the perhaps supraterrestrial rank of this person, was indeed in need of confirmation through miracles." But from the moral standpoint, we "can dispense with all such documentation of its truth." Note that Kant here does not state that for the religion of reason Jesus is not divine; he states that in order for the philosopher to view Jesus as divine, one need not appeal to miracles, as if they could constitute historical proof of what must be an essentially rational (moral) claim. Kant's claim in the paragraphs examined in §2, above, that the revolutionary effect that Jesus had on the moral evolution of the human race could just as well have been accomplished by someone who was completely human, should be understood in this same vein. In both contexts Kant is not denying Jesus's divinity, but only reminding us that historical proof is not a requirement of moral faith. Kant's account of just what this special manner of presentation entails is found in the footnote to be examined here in §3.

of the understanding do not really proceed, since it lies entirely outside the bounds of possible experience," but which "still serves to obtain for these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension."

At *Religion* 105, for example, Kant points out that a real, empirical church "needs . . . a certain church form, resting on experiential conditions, that is in itself contingent and manifold and hence cannot be cognized as duty without divine statutory laws." In the case of Christianity Kant apparently regards the doctrine of Jesus as the God-man as one of those symbols of faith that (when it functions properly) provides the believer with "something *tenable in sensibility*" (109). Here, as echoed at various points throughout *Religion*, Kant says such symbols are *necessary*, due to the weakness of human nature: employing "some experiential confirmation" of one's moral faith is "a need which one does actually have to take into account if the intention is to *introduce* a faith universally."[20]

Understood in its proper context, the schematism of analogy is another term for the hermeneutic of *moral symbolism* that forms the core of Kant's theory of religion; as such, Kant warns that we must carefully distinguish it from the "*schematism of object-determination*" (*Religion* 65n), introduced in the first *Critique* (which extends our cognition and thus constitutes scientific knowledge of objects). To assume that religious language employs the latter kind of schematism amounts to "anthropomorphism" and "has (in religion) the most disadvantageous consequences": purely theoretical interpretations of theological dogmas deceive believers into thinking that they can *know* God in a manner that transcends any consideration of good life-conduct; the moral empowerment that ought to accompany genuine religious belief is thereby bound to be impaired. As Kant repeatedly argues throughout *Religion*, the legitimacy of religious beliefs (which for Kant means their tendency to empower rather than to obstruct the believer's moral development) depends on how a believer *interprets* them. We must therefore keep constantly in mind that to "*schematize* (make a concept graspable through analogy with something sensible)" does not enable us to "*infer* (and thus *expand* a concept)" (65n) in a way that provides knowledge that the concept belongs to supersensible reality as such.

Although he does not explicitly make the connection in the footnote we are considering here, Kant implies that the tendency of biblical theologians and/or religious believers to view Jesus as divine stems from the same need of reason that gives rise to the schematism of analogy: "we necessarily require a schema for a concept to make the concept understandable to ourselves" (*Religion* 65n); what this typically involves, according to a comment Kant adds in parentheses, is to "support it with an example." But in religion, just as in science (and here Kant cites

[20]*Religion* 109. My claim about Kant's view of Jesus's divinity closely parallels Pasternack's interpretation of how Kant understands God as the "Wise Author" of nature. See Lawrence Pasternack, "Regulative Principles and 'the Wise Author of Nature,'" *Religious Studies* 46 (2010): 1–19, especially p. 14, where he quotes Kant's statements that the concept of a Wise Author is "a merely subjectively appropriate concept for the constitution of our cognitive faculty" (5:437), and that the appeal we make to this concept "cannot justify any objective assertion" (5:395); "we cannot make any objective judgment at all, whether affirmative or negative, about the proposition that there is an intentionally acting being as a world-cause (hence an author) at the basis of which we rightly call natural ends" (5:400).

an example from botany), we must regard the schema as a requirement for us to *grasp* a concept, not as a requirement that *must* apply literally "to the thing itself." Fully understanding this hermeneutic point makes it obvious that, even though he has made clear that there can be no *positive* theoretical evidence compelling us to believe that Jesus is divine and that certain practical dangers inevitably accompany such a belief, Kant has no overriding objection to a Christian upholding such an assertion. Quite to the contrary, as noted above, he later explains why we *must* clothe the bare religion of reason with *some* such historically-grounded beliefs, if it is to fulfill its function of empowering us to be good. Accordingly, in Section Two of the Second Piece, he interprets the coming of Jesus in the context of the Jewish theocratic state as an event of such incredible unlikelihood that it at least suggests some manner of divine intervention.[21] Later (in *Religion*, Fourth Piece, Part One, Section One), after presenting a general overview of the wide-ranging consistency between Jesus's moral principles as expressed in the Gospels (mainly Matthew) and his own moral philosophy, Kant claims that Jesus has introduced "a complete religion" (162) in an "intuitive" form, providing "an archetype to be emulated," and with a touch of wry humor, praises him for doing all this *without appealing to scholarship*.[22]

Exploring the many other references and allusions to Jesus throughout Kant's writings is beyond the scope of this study. The foregoing analysis of the core passage dealing with this issue provides ample evidence that, although some of his comments in this passage regarding Jesus's alleged divinity can easily be read negatively, these relate only to extreme and dogmatic forms of such belief: the tendency of some Christians to pretend they can ignore their moral duty, provided they ingratiate themselves in slavish worship to a Christ-image, eclipses the belief's potential for genuine moral empowerment, causing it to function instead as a self-deceptive excuse to avoid good life-conduct. The remaining question, to be addressed in the concluding section, is whether Kant's affirmative hermeneutic of moral empowerment, as applied to the possibility of asserting Jesus's divine nature, is robust enough to satisfy the requirements of biblical theologians and actual religious believers. Determining the latter will require us to examine what epistemological status Kant thinks such an assertion has.

[21]In *Religion* 78–84 Kant portrays Jesus's coming as a symbol of the good principle effecting a revolution at the very moment when the evil principle appeared to be at its strongest. He writes that "there appeared all at once a person whose wisdom was purer still than that of the philosophers hitherto, as though it had come down from heaven. And he also proclaimed himself, in regard to his doctrines and example, as indeed a true human being, but yet as an envoy of such an origin that he, in his original innocence, was not also comprised in the compact that the rest of humankind . . . had entered into with the evil principle" (80). The crucial point of the story rests in the historical fact that "the principle appeared in an actual human being who was an example for all others" (82), even though we must interpret the story morally in order to view it as a victory for the good principle, rather than as a failure (81). This, like other passages where Kant affirms Jesus as capable of being regarded as *the* example of the divine archetype in human form, should not be taken merely as an inference to the best explanation, as this would count for Kant as a probabilistic version of theoretical belief, which goes against Kant's whole approach to theology and religion.

[22]I offer an independent defense of the consistency of Jesus's and Kant's moral principles in "Four Perspectives on Moral Judgement."

4. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL STATUS AND RELIGIOUS POWER OF AFFIRMING JESUS'S DIVINITY

Two questions naturally arise for any theologically-minded Christian who wants to assess this affirmative interpretation of Kant's claims about Jesus's divinity. First, does Kant's way of justifying an assertion of Jesus's divinity do enough real work to satisfy Christians in general, and Christian theologians in particular? Second, what is the epistemological status of a person's assertion of Jesus's divinity, if one adopts Kant's guidelines? To answer these questions, we must cast our net beyond the few paragraphs that occupied our attention in the foregoing two sections, relating this issue to some of the broader themes in Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy.

First and foremost among these broader themes is the distinction Kant makes in the Prefaces to *Religion*, between the two "experiments" (*Versuchen*; literally, "attempts") that he conducts in this book. Much of the first Preface concerns the distinction between the "philosophical theologian" and the "biblical theologian" (*Religion* 8–11): these two types of scholars, Kant argues, each have their own proper boundaries and aims, which ought to be conceived as complementary rather than contradictory to each other. Whereas biblical theology properly regards Scripture as the authority that shapes its reasoning, philosophical theology

> must have complete freedom to spread as far as its science reaches, provided that it stays within the bounds of bare reason and, to confirm and elucidate its propositions, [it] employs history, languages, books of all peoples, even the Bible—but only for itself, without carrying these propositions into biblical theology and seeking to alter the latter's public doctrines, which are the cleric's privilege. (9)

Toward the end of the first Preface (10), he explains that "the sciences gain from separation solely insofar as each first amounts to a whole by itself and only then the experiment [*Versuch*] is made for the first time to consider them as united."

The second Preface begins by clarifying that the "experiment" that Kant is conducting in *Religion* is actually *twofold*: first (and most obviously) he *attempts* to construct a philosophical system outlining the conditions for a religion of "bare reason"—*bloßen Vernunft* being the same phrase used in the title of *Religion*. What is less obvious, he now clarifies, is that *Religion* also conducts a

> second experiment, namely, to start from some supposed revelation and, by abstracting from pure rational religion (insofar as it amounts to a self-subsistent system), to hold the revelation as a *historical system* up to moral concepts in a merely fragmentary way, and to see whether this system does not lead back to the same pure *rational system* of religion as a system independent and sufficient for religion proper—not indeed with a theoretical aim (under which must be included also the technically practical aim of instructional method as a doctrine of art), but still with a morally practical aim—inasmuch as religion proper, as an a priori rational concept (that remains after omission of everything empirical) has its place only in this reference. (12)

Here Kant informs us that, whenever he makes use of Scripture or addresses issues relating to the doctrines and rituals of Christian tradition throughout the pages of *Religion*, his intention will not be to construct a biblical theology—that is the exclusive task of the biblical theologian—but only to comment on the potential that he sees for "unity" between philosophical and biblical theologians on the relevant issues. With this in mind, it would be unfair to assess Kant's position on the basis of whether or not it constitutes, all on its own, a *foundation* for Christian theology; Kant did not see that as part of his task. Rather, the question should be this: Has Kant demonstrated that a sufficient "space" exists, within the religion of bare reason, for the "clothing" of Jesus's divinity to be "worn" by Christian theologians (and ordinary believers) in a philosophically respectable way?

This distinction between the two experiments in *Religion* holds the key to a proper understanding of Kant's position on Jesus's divinity. If we take Kant at his word, then he has no intention of dictating to Christians any position whatsoever as to whether or not *Scripture* (or any other form of divine revelation) *justifies* a belief in Jesus as God in human form as *historical fact*. That many (if not most) Christians regard their assertion of Jesus's divinity as if it were an empirical fact is irrelevant to Kant's position. As he warns in the above-quoted passage, even his second experiment has no "theoretical aim" that would be in the least relevant to the "instructional method" that clerics might use to convey Christian doctrines to the laity. If we take his claim at face value, then the position Kant adopts on Jesus's divinity serves *solely* as a comment on the practical (i.e., moral) empowerment that such a belief must provide for a person who affirms the "religion of bare reason" that Kant expounds.

As it turns out, Kant had already taken a stand on this issue almost a decade earlier, in Section II of the *Groundwork*, where he offers a comment on Jesus's divinity that provides a helpful context for interpreting the significance of the passage from *Religion* that we have considered above. He writes (4:408–9) that the worst approach to morality is to try

> to derive it from examples. For, every example of it represented to me must itself first be appraised in accordance with principles of morality, as to whether it is also worthy to serve as an original example, i.e., as a model; it can by no means authoritatively provide the concept of morality. Even the Holy One of the Gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is cognized as such; even he says of himself: why do you call me (whom you see) good? none is good (the archetype of the good) but God only (whom you do not see). But whence have we the concept of God as the highest good? Simply from the *idea* of moral perfection that reason frames a priori and connects inseparably with the concept of a free will. Imitation has no place at all in matters of morality, and examples serve only for encouragement, that is, they put beyond doubt the practicability of what the law commands and make intuitive what the practical rule expresses more generally, but they can never justify setting aside their true original, which lies in reason, and guiding oneself by examples.

The passage from *Religion* 63–66, examined in §§2–3 above, can be regarded as an extended elaboration of the position first proposed in this paragraph of *Groundwork* II.

Here we see clearly that Kant's primary concern is that Christians who believe Jesus was divine (insofar as they wish to be Kantians) should avoid the mistake of assuming that Jesus's historical life therefore serves as an empirical *definition* of what morality requires us to do. If a person recognizes what Jesus did as "divine" (a possibility that, as we have seen, Kant is willing to countenance), then this can be consistent with the dictates of practical reason only if we recognize that we are judging Jesus's historical life according to its consistency with a pre-existing moral principle (or "archetype," as Kant calls it both in the above *Groundwork* passage and in *Religion* 61f). That Jesus's historical acts, as such, cannot "authoritatively furnish the conception of morality" is illustrated even by Gospel writers themselves, when they report Jesus's reluctance to allow others to call him "good" in the passage that Kant quotes (see Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19).

This paragraph from *Groundwork* II allows (at least implicitly) for the same affirmation of Jesus's divinity that I have argued can be found in *Religion* 63–66: Kant is not arguing that it is *irrational* to believe that a person whose actions appear to be completely consistent with a moral disposition is "divine" (or "good"); rather, he is affirming that such a belief can have a genuine practical use by providing "encouragement," inasmuch as it can "put beyond doubt the feasibility of what the law commands" by making "visible that which the practical rule expresses more generally." The only restriction that Kant places on those who portray a historical person as divine/good is that they must not use any facts about this person's historical life to excuse them for "setting aside their true original, which lies in reason." In other words, affirming the existence of a God-man is morally acceptable if it empowers a person to live a moral life after all; it is unacceptable if we mistakenly believe that by merely copying what that person did (or, even worse, by merely relying on that person's goodness), we too can be moral.

We are now in a position to consider the relevance of another aspect of Kant's broader philosophical framework, this time grounded in his theoretical philosophy—namely, his distinction between the different forms of assent: knowledge, opinion, and belief. The nuances of this distinction and its wide-ranging implications have recently prompted far more attention from Kant scholars than we can devote to it here.[23] Fortunately, the crucial aspect of the distinction, as far our topic is concerned, is (as Kant himself puts it) "readily grasped" from the main passage where Kant introduces it in the first *Critique*:[24]

> Taking something to be true, or the subjective validity of judgment, has the following three stages in relation to conviction (which at the same time is valid objectively): *having an opinion, believing*, and *knowing. Having an opinion* is taking something to be true with the consciousness that it is subjectively *as well as* objectively insufficient. If taking

[23]See especially Leslie Stevenson, "Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge," *Kantian Review* 7 (2003): 72–100; Andrew Chignell, "Belief in Kant," *Philosophical Review* 116 (2007): 323–60; and Lawrence Pasternack, "The Development and Scope of Kantian Belief: The Highest Good, The Practical Postulates and The Fact of Reason," *Kant-Studien* 102 (2011): 290–315.

[24]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), A822/B850.

> something to be true is only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called *believing*. Finally, when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient, it is called *knowing*. Subjective sufficiency is called *conviction* (for myself), objective sufficiency, *certainty* (for everyone).

Our foregoing discussion of Kant's position on the divinity of Jesus makes abundantly clear that nothing that he says on this topic has any relevance to the *historical* or factual (objective) question of whether or not Jesus "really is" properly described as God. A matter that is held to be true on such *objective* grounds would count as what Kant here calls "knowledge," and our decision to assent or withhold assent to any alleged *historical* knowledge is properly based on *testimony*.[25] Kant would freely admit that anyone concerned with upholding Jesus's divinity as a doctrine of historical faith may proceed in this manner. But since Kant's question concerns Jesus's disposition, and this transcends the bounds of the objective world as we know it, his position on the issue at hand must be one of either belief or opinion.

If Kant's cautious affirmation of the possibility of regarding Jesus as divine is merely an admission that religion within the bounds of bare reason allows a person to hold the *opinion* that Jesus is God, then this would obviously not be sufficient to satisfy any serious Christian, much less those biblical theologians who regard Jesus's divinity as essential religious doctrines. Moreover, viewing such assent as an opinion would imply that the doctrine of Jesus's divinity actually *fails* to accomplish what the second experiment set out to test on behalf of pure rational religion. However, as I have demonstrated in §§2–3, Kant's position is stronger than this. For his central claim, that one who ascribes divinity to Jesus based on his *disposition* (*Gesinnung*) must fully recognize that every human being is equally capable of adopting this *same* disposition, amounts to raising the affirmation of Jesus's divinity to the status of a *belief*.[26]

[25]See Axel Gelfert, "Kant on Testimony," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14 (2006): 627–52; and Joseph Palencik, "Kant, Testimony, and the Basis for Empirical Knowledge," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52 no. 4 (2012). For historical faith, such testimony-based arguments (precisely the sort of arguments that tend to be favored both by popular Christian writers, such as C. S. Lewis, and by academic philosophers of religion, such as Richard Swinburne) may be not only appropriate, but *essential*. Kant's point is not that such testimony is absolutely irrelevant, but that it is irrelevant to *moral* faith, serving no other purpose than to bolster one's *historical* faith—a matter that he believes the philosophical theologian should leave to the biblical theologian, as the proper defender of all such theoretical aspects of a historical faith. For Kant, the testimony of a community of persons who have had a similar subjective experience that justifies them in affirming a given belief can carry an objective-like weight for someone who has not had such an experience, even though none of the individuals concerned has an objective justification for holding such a belief.

[26]According to Pasternack, "The Development and Scope," an affirmation of Jesus's divinity would not count as a "belief" in Kant's most technical or "official" sense—only the "fact of reason" (i.e., the moral law itself) achieves that high honor. However (as Pasternack admits), even the postulates of God and immortality do not count as a "belief" in this strong sense of the term; for these, Pasternack suggests the new term "derivative belief." But Pasternack's argument is circumstantial, in the sense that Kant himself is hardly as consistent in using the term *Glaube* in Pasternack's strict sense as Pasternack makes him out to be. In any case, for anyone who accepts Pasternack's attempt to refine Kant's position, my claim would be that Kant affirms Jesus's divinity as capable of being legitimately held as a *derivative* belief.

One can therefore assert that Jesus is divine, without contravening any principles of Kant's Critical philosophy, provided we understand by this assertion that the believer is just that: a *believer*. In other words, Kant is not rejecting the doctrine of Jesus's divinity so much as challenging Christians always to remember that they do not have positive (scientifically verifiable) *knowledge* that objectively *proves* the divinity of Jesus. He is therefore warning that even the biblical theologian's attempt to demonstrate Jesus's divinity on historical (or Scriptural) terms risks being detrimental to their morality, unless one's historical faith is already firmly grounded in the religion of moral reason. As such, he is at the same time affirming the genuinely *religious power* that can be gained by asserting that a God-man, understood as a living symbol of human perfection, really did live at a specific time in a specific place in human history. For taken in this way (i.e., as a symbolic *belief*), it provides all the evidence we need to form a subjective *conviction* that we, too, are capable of living a good life.

Is this good enough for the Christian? Yes and no. It is good enough *if* we keep in mind that Kant is attempting to influence ordinary religious believers (see *Religion* 14) without usurping the role of the biblical theologian (see n25 above); the furthest thing from his mind (especially in view of the risk of censorship that was facing him, and did eventually eclipse his ability to write on matters of religion, not long after the publication of the second edition[27]) was to make *pronouncements* on matters properly dealt with by biblical theologians. If we keep in mind these hermeneutic clarifications, then Kant's position on the divinity of Jesus is so entirely consistent with a balanced understanding of the biblical portrayal of the life, teachings, and nature of Jesus that contemporary theologians and philosophers of religion, whether Christian or otherwise, can only benefit by taking it seriously.[28]

[27]For a general discussion of the influence the king's censorship had on Kant, see my Introduction to Pluhar's translation of *Religion*. In my article (co-authored with Steven Otterman), "The Implied Standpoint of Kant's *Religion*," *Kantian Review* 18 no. 1 (forthcoming, 2013), we discuss the role played by an anonymous book review of the first edition of *Religion* in the king's censorship of the second edition. Kant responds to the book review briefly but inadequately in the second Preface and (as we demonstrate) in several of the footnotes added in the second edition.

[28]An earlier version of this paper was presented at the international conference on "Contemporary Philosophy of Religion Eastern and Western Contexts," held at Hong Kong Baptist University in February of 2009. My thanks to the various participants in that conference who provided helpful feedback, as well as to Lawrence Pasternack, Brandon Love, Joseph Koterski, and two anonymous referees for their comments on previous drafts.