

Book Reviews

FIRESTONE, CHRIS L., and JACOBS, NATHAN. *In Defense of Kant's Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. 296 pp. \$65.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

This latest contribution to the recent “affirmative” trend in interpreting Kant’s *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* aims to resolve “the most common conundrums forwarded by Kant’s critics” (234), primarily those expounded by Nicholas Wolterstorff, Philip Quinn, and Gordon Michalson. Adopting a courtroom metaphor, part 1 pits six “witnesses for the defense” (Palmquist, Wood, Green, Davidovich, Reardon, Hare) against five “witnesses for the prosecution” (McCarthy, Ward, Quinn, Wolterstorff, Michalson) to elucidate the “metaphysical motives behind *Religion*” (chap. 1) and uphold its “philosophical character” (chap. 2). The “debilitating conundrums, paradoxes, and even outright contradictions” exposed most extensively by Michalson (chap. 3) nevertheless constitute an “indictment of *Religion*” (234). Part 2 adopts an interpretive approach, “until this volume, untried” (234), that resolves each problem through “a holistic and linear interpretation” of *Religion*’s four “Books” (their word for Kant’s *Stück*; hereafter “piece”), highlighting Kant’s “transcendental analysis of the moral disposition via pure cognition” (233). Though strikingly successful in achieving its polemical goal, this problem-centered approach suffers from inconsistent exegesis: new interpretive insights and ingenious responses to several influential, previously unanswered criticisms appear interspersed with glaring lacunae, giving readers an incomplete picture of other interpreters, if not also of Kant.

Part 1’s impressively balanced coverage of secondary literature naturally tends toward excessive generalization in comparing competing positions. To avoid being misled, readers must remember that the authors cite other scholars selectively, as building blocks to achieve the book’s goal of answering specific criticisms of Kant. Offering minimal feedback on other interpreters’ ideas, the authors (accurately) summarize those portions of each interpreter’s position that constitute a “brick” in their building. This strategy’s effect on part 2 can be illustrated by the authors’ treatment of the work I know best, my book *Kant’s Critical Religion [KCR]* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

As evidence against Vincent McCarthy’s skepticism regarding Kant’s metaphysical intentions, the authors summarize my work on the origins of Kant’s Copernican revolution in Emanuel Swedenborg’s mystical writings (19–28). Focusing on this peripheral argument, they only briefly sketch *KCR*’s central arguments about *Religion*—arguments that often either prefigure or challenge their interpretations in part 2. Their gloss on my detailed exegesis is that discussing its “idiosyncrasies” (24) “would take us well beyond the confines of the required testimony.” Employing *KCR* for one narrow (and legitimate) purpose, to counterbalance McCarthy, they overlook striking correspondences between my holistic, linear interpretation of *Religion* as a coherent transcendental system (*KCR*, chap. 7) and their own arguments in part 2. They disagree with quotes from the relevant chapter (154, 177) only because they completely misrepresent their context. Ignoring such overlapping themes enables them boldly to portray their interpretation as the first ever to present *Religion* as a coherent transcendental system. *KCR*’s (unacknowledged) argument is that Kant unveils an explanatory gap in each stage of his “first experiment” (constructing a system of rational religion); reason encounters “needs” associated

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with each gap (e.g., understanding how vicarious atonement occurs—a point the authors claim other interpreters never acknowledge [e.g., 243, 255; but see *KCR* 458–64]) and appeals to empirical religion to satisfy these needs. The authors conveniently portray my work as excusing paradoxes and conundrums as part of Kant’s “mysticism,” yet *KCR* attributes mysticism neither to Kant nor to *Religion*, whose purpose was explicitly rational.

The authors stake their claim to novelty (234) on three strategies introduced in chapter 4. First, they define “*Erkenntnis*” (“cognition”) as getting “something in mind” (110), while “pure cognition” adds a “possible rootedness . . . in reason” (112). Yet for Kant, cognizing (unlike mere thinking) requires synthesis with an intuited object. Thinking becomes pure cognition only when accompanied by pure intuition. Overlooking this important nuance enables the authors to draw bold conclusions about Kant’s arguments, especially in *Religion*’s second piece, where they find alleged “cognitions” of ideas that proceed from God’s being. Unfortunately, they consistently read their special meaning into Kant’s text: of the eleven occurrences of *Erkenntnis* (and variants) in *Religion*’s second piece, none corresponds to the authors’ strange use of “cognize/cognition.” They may be correct that the prototype constitutes a metaphysically substantive pure cognition; but by grounding their explanation in a weak understanding of Kantian epistemology, the authors are unlikely to convince those with worries about how Kantian “God talk” is possible.

Second, the authors claim Kant’s “second experiment” (assessing Christianity vis-à-vis rational religion) occurs only in *Religion*’s fourth piece. Others see Kant weaving his two experiments throughout *Religion*, devoting one major section of each piece to each experiment (*KCR*, chaps. 7–8). The authors’ main textual evidence for their alternative approach is Kant’s claim (*Religion*, 156) that he will now “test” Christianity. His expressed “intention” is to “present the Christian religion in two sections: first, as a natural religion, and then, second, as a scholarly religion” (157); does this not refer to both experiments, first rational/natural religion, then historical/ecclesiastical Christianity? The authors accept the standard assumption that *Religion*’s second preface introduces both experiments (e.g., 114); however, Kant there refers only to the second experiment, having introduced the first at the end of the first preface. The changes made throughout the second edition are therefore the best clue to identifying where and how Kant performs his second experiment. Unfortunately, the authors consider no such counterevidence to their novel theory. Instead, they omit discussion of whole sections of *Religion* without explanation (the four general comments, section 2 of the second piece, etc.)—sections not closely related to the interpretive conundrums they aim to resolve. Their treatment of the second and third pieces focuses almost entirely on each piece’s first part; ignoring or (for the third piece, division 2 [205–8]) briefly summarizing passages that conduct the second experiment makes this second claim to novelty appear more plausible than it is. Their assumption weakens both experiments: the fourth piece no longer plays a substantive role in the first experiment, by explaining how to serve God in any church (Christian or otherwise); and historical Christianity takes on a largely negative appearance, losing the one-to-one correlation with the tenets of rational religion that Kant highlights throughout *Religion* (cf. *KCR*, chap. 8).

Third, the authors claim novelty for their account of the “disposition,” understood as “the enduring moral ontology of the human being” (122). They rightly point out (123) that *Religion*’s answer to the question of hope “takes

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Kant's transcendental philosophy beyond the practical question of merely *doing* good to the teleological question of what it would mean to *be* good." But their claim that *Religion* fills a "lacuna" (119) in the critical philosophy, by explaining how a person's temporal acts can have "continuity," comes perilously close to the traditional portrayal of *Religion* as merely supplementing Kant's ethics. Moreover, it curiously neglects that Kant's ethical writings already elaborate his dispositional philosophy. Chapters 5 and 6 interpret Kant's theory of humanity's good predisposition and propensity to evil as a development of Aristotle's anthropology and his theory of the prototype as a development of Plato's anthropology. While these claims offer intriguing new lenses for reading Kant's text, they require far-fetched assumptions that Kant was influenced by trends whose heyday was a century or more before *Religion*'s publication. Rather than enhancing our understanding of Kant's text, such lengthy diversions distract attention from the book's main goal, defending *Religion* against charges of incoherence.

Chapters 7 and 8 contain the book's best exegesis, analyzing arguments from *Religion*'s third and fourth pieces. Lessing (Kant's contemporary) becomes an effective backdrop for understanding Kant's treatment of Christianity as a vehicle for rational religion in both pieces, strangely (but correctly) contradicting the authors' claim that the second experiment appears only in the fourth piece. Because the interpretive conundrums prompting the book's main polemic arise mostly in the first and second pieces, these closing chapters focus on interpreting Kant's text coherently, conveying numerous insights to this end.

Wolterstorff's foreword rightly praises the authors' success in providing "conclusive evidence" for a literal reading of Kant's religious affirmations, yet hopes for a still better alternative, worrying that "the Kant that emerges is too strange" (xii). Alternatives are available: correct the flaws arising from this book's three novel strategies, and what remains is a worthwhile, sustained (and successful) attack on the conundrums popularized by Michalson, Quinn, and Wolterstorff—thereby contributing significantly to the affirmative approach to Kant interpretation that has been steadily growing for several decades.

STEPHEN PALMQUIST, *Hong Kong Baptist University*.

GREGORY, ERIC. *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. xv+417 pp. \$45.00 (cloth).

Eric Gregory's *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* has two aims: first, to recast debates over modern liberalism as debates over the political implications of the Augustinian legacy and, second, to rationally reconstruct Augustine's ideas in order to address the question, Which themes from the Augustinian tradition "when combined in the right way, would give the most adequate normative account of the responsibilities and virtues of citizens, leaders, and institutions in a liberal democracy?" (1–2). The book seeks to offer not a new interpretation of Augustine but rather an account of Augustinian love as providing a motivational basis for participating in liberal democratic politics along lines that Gregory calls "Augustinian civic liberalism" as represented by contemporary feminists, liberationists, and civil