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# Historical and Pure Religion: A Response to Stephen Palmquist\*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the preface to the second edition of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant parses out options for engaging a discussion between two kinds of faith: the first option is *historical religion*, which draws its doctrines from a particular, historical revelation (a posteriori), whereas the second option is *pure religion*, in which one self-legislates moral principles (a priori) “abstracted from experience.”<sup>1</sup> What makes something pure, according to Kant, is that it is concerned with those elements in the supersensible dimension of experience (the “intelligible,” or consciousness) that must be added to phenomena in order for us to understand. In the case of pure religion, it is concerned with the conditions of possibility (i.e., the capacities) for the individual’s a priori self-imposition of moral principles independent of appearances within a community of autonomous agents that encourages doing one’s best (i.e., an invisible kingdom of God). In short, pure religion is concerned with the capacities that make us moral beings.

Kant begins with an assumption: we can view a religion that is based on historical revelation as a more comprehensive notion of faith that contains pure religion within it. If this were possible, pure religion’s compat-

\* I am deeply grateful for the generous and insightful comments by this article’s anonymous readers that have significantly strengthened this article’s content.

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); hereafter cited parenthetically in the text and in the footnotes as *Religion*. We must be careful with the notion of abstraction from all experience, since the opening paragraph of the second edition to the first critique is “There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with [sense] experience” (i.e., there is no abstraction without sense perception at some point; *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965], B1; hereafter cited as *Pure Reason*). The issue, then, is not sense experience or abstraction (without sense experience), but, rather, to what degree reason’s limits are acknowledged with respect to what it adds to sense experience in abstraction. In our case, are the “timeless choices” added to experience hypothetical (speculative) or categorical (the constitutive categories of the understanding and moral principles)?

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ibility with historical religion would include a role for revelation in pure religion. However, Kant contrasts the a posteriori, dogmatic abstractions grounded in revelation by historical religion with the a priori, self-legislated abstractions of pure religion. He concludes that, rather than pure religion's compatibility with revelation, all they could have in common are the capacities of practical reason or the narrower circle. In short, pure religion excludes the a posteriori revelation of historical religion, but the core of historical religion absent revelation is pure religion.

In other words, we can get from historical, revealed religion to pure religion, but we cannot get from pure religion to historical religion. Therefore, the concentric circle hypothesis claims that we can take historical religion as leading to *an adequate form* of pure religion. Such a pure religion would not only be compatible with historical religion but also one and the same: "not from a theoretical point of view," which would be grounded in historical appearances, but "under the guidance of moral concepts," which are independent of appearances (*Religion*, 40). The unity of historical and pure religion is a shared morality, not a shared historical revelation.

Kant immediately adds, though, that, were an identification not possible in this manner between our forms of religion, we would have to choose between two further options: third, we would have two religions (a historical and a pure religion) in the same person or, fourth, we would have a religion and a cult. Two religions in the same individual would be "inconsistent" (Kant says it *is* inconsistent, not that it *could be* inconsistent; *Religion*, 40). However, a cult, unlike pure religion, is not an end in itself but has value only as a means to whatever end the historical religion claimed for the individual/humanity. In other words, a cult is only concerned with the hypothetical (historically contingent) as a mere means to an end. Pure religion is concerned with the categorical (underived from historical circumstances) in terms of the capacity for and the self-legislation of ends (moral principles) in themselves.

Kant then employs the famous analogy of oil and water. Were we unable to find a common moral element between historical and pure religion, we would have the situation of the two religions being ever again shaken together like oil and water. Eventually they would separate, and oil (the categorical and pure religion) would rise to the top in separation from the water (the hypothetical and historical religion).

Kant opens the next paragraph by saying that a combination of the two religions is possible without encroaching on the biblical theologian's territory, and he points to the first preface to justify his claim.<sup>2</sup> However, in the first preface we learn, again, that what is capable of being shared between historical and pure religion is not any doctrine about what God can

<sup>2</sup> On the difference between "field," "territory," and "domain," see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University

or cannot do (to be sure it includes that God *is*). On the contrary, pure religion is grounded in the interdependence of two causalities: (1) creative freedom and (2) the efficient causality of nature under the “mystery” of the givenness of the conditions for any and all experience (*Religion*, 35).<sup>3</sup> In other words, if there is something in common between historical and pure religion, it is not what God does or might do. The opening lines of the first preface could not be more clear in this respect: “So far as morality is based on the conception of the human being as one who is free but who also, just because of that, binds himself through his reason to unconditional laws, it is in need neither of the idea of another being above him in order that he recognize his duty, nor, that he observe it, of an incentive other than the law itself. At least it is the human being’s own fault if such a need is found in him; but in this case too the need could not be relieved through anything else: for *whatever does not originate from himself and his own freedom* [e.g., assisting grace] *provides no remedy for a lack in his morality*” (33, emphasis added).

Stephen Palmquist’s 2010 contribution to the *Journal of Religion*, “Kant’s Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Grace,” represents a new attempt to shake up the oil and water, but to the advantage of the water (historical religion).<sup>4</sup> He approaches Kant’s *Religion* with the dogmatic assumptions of grace from a particular historical religion (i.e., Christianity)<sup>5</sup> and makes the claim that Kant upholds “salvation by grace alone (noumenally)” without fostering “moral laziness.” As a result, Kant explains “how a person can believe in divine grace, even salvation by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, without becoming unethical” (“Ethics of Grace,” 552). Palmquist’s conclusion is that “properly understood, belief in grace *is . . .* the goal of Kant’s whole argument in *Religion*” (553).

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Press, 2001), 61–62; hereafter cited as *Judgment*. Kant has tipped his hand in favor of pure religion in the third critique because it is only in the domains of theoretical reason (nature) and practical reason (freedom) that we “legislate” (but do not create) laws. A “territory,” in contrast, is only capable of such legislation, but we can have conceptualization only with respect to the domains of nature and freedom. A territory, then, is a realm of speculation.

<sup>3</sup> “Creative freedom” is the issue at issue of the third antinomy (that between material determinism and freedom) in *Pure Reason* (B472–73). Kant describes the capacity of freedom as a creative, nonmaterialistic causality of the agent (B575–76, 580). This antinomy is at the heart of philosophical theology’s “precarious position” (see Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 35; hereafter cited as *Groundwork*) for which there is nothing on earth or in heaven that indubitably grounds the human condition (i.e., we live and act by faith [*Fürwahrhalten*]). For a discussion of Kant’s notion of freedom (and free will) in contrast with other understandings, see “Freedom! What’s it good for?” at <http://www.criticalidealism.org>.

<sup>4</sup> Palmquist, “Kant’s Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Grace,” *Journal of Religion* 90, no. 4 (2010): 551 (hereafter cited as “Ethics of Grace”).

<sup>5</sup> It is clear that Palmquist writes of Christianity, since his attempts at including other theological systems of grace are a patchwork and are not organic to either his text or his interest.

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Kant acknowledges that grace as a particular case of miracles is possible since neither can be disproved nor proved.<sup>6</sup> However, whether or not we accept grace or miracles would be dependent not only on the presence and veracity regarding the report of the particular empirical phenomena but also on the general consequences of our accepting special acts of grace and miracles for our religious capacities. When it comes to special acts of grace and miracles, it is precisely the consequences that their reality would entail for our moral lives (pure religion) that make them questionable for Kant.

Following a summary of Palmquist's thesis that grace according to Kant is based on "Noumenal ignorance," I provide a different reading of Kant by means of these steps:

1. Sketching Kant's "methodological skepticism" that shifts knowledge claims from "objective" contents to what is "subjectively" necessary in order to make any content claim in the first place.
2. Establishing the significance of humanity's creative freedom as the "final end of creation/nature" for Kant.
3. Situating evil in the position of an inclination (not an ontological status) of creative freedom. Creative freedom is good because we are not human without it. Evil as an inclination can be broken but not eliminated.
4. Claiming that, as the material world is a causal order because it involves laws, so, too, creative freedom is a causal order that involves laws. The former function blindly and mechanically. The latter must be self-legislated, or else they would contradict freedom. Creative freedom and its self-legislated laws are the necessary conditions for any and all morality.
5. Taking morality to be concerned with our acting on the basis of a principle because it is right and not because it serves one's interest.
6. Suggesting that neither God nor nature determine an individual's creativity.
7. Portraying religious hope not as anchored in grace but in the ineradicable presence of the capacity of creative freedom that allows one always to begin anew—no matter one's moral corruption.
8. Measuring morality not by that over which we have little or no control (consequences) but by one's internal disposition.

<sup>6</sup> Kant acknowledges a role for general grace as the source of the conditions and capacities for morality, but special acts of grace that turn moral improvement into passivity are rejected. See Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten in Werke in sechs Bänden*, 6 vols., ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 6:309. Kant questions the role of miracles in *Religion* (186n) and makes clear that belief in miracles undermines the very moral capacity that makes us religious (81, 98–99). See also the extensive discussion of miracle in *Metaphysik Mrongovius in Vorlesungen von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, vol. 6, suppl. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983), esp. 874–75.

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The following list summarizes the contrast between Palmquist's Noumenal, historical religion and a reading of Kant's pure religion:

Palmquist	Another Kant
Religion is <i>historical</i> religion based on particular revelation	Religion is <i>pure</i> religion based on the universal gift of moral capacity that can neither be derived from nor reduced to the senses, which can be the core of any and all historical religion
Grace is a divine gift without an account of the "ground" of humanity's moral capacity to which grace would add	Grace is speculative opinion, neither subjectively nor objectively sufficient, that undermines morality, which in turn is the internal, self-legislation of a noncodified moral order.
Religion reduced by Kant to "mere" morality if no Noumenal (divine) perspective	Religion is necessary for any and all human experience and anchored in the Noumenal gift of the capacity of creative freedom
"Exclusive Christology" of morally perfect individual as the historical archetype of the Logos external to the individual	"Inclusive Christology" of possible, universal, internal, moral improvement by which it is impossible to determine the moral status of an other
Christ is to be imitated	Morality, when at all, is at best served by examples, never by imitation, which only fosters discouragement
Religious hope: concerned with the speculative opinion (neither subjectively nor objectively sufficient) of "parerga" of religion (i.e., based on ignorance as in Pascal's Wager; leads to personal torment)	Religious hope: Concerned with the mystery (subjectively sufficient) of <i>pure</i> religion (i.e., the capacity of goodness that is creative freedom can never be lost and remains the condition for any and all possible moral transformation)
Substitutes God's hypothetical decisions (as divine "timeless choices") for humanity's categorical decisions	Embraces humanity's categorical capacity to create and add things (as "timeless choices") that are not otherwise found in phenomenal reality
Moral improvement is concerned merely with the individual	Moral improvement is communal (involves Kingdom of Ends and culture that promotes the goodness of humanity) and is concerned with the improvement of the species as an open-ended process

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Morality measured by external consequences (consequentialism)

Alternative: philosophy or religion (literal anthropomorphism, which we must embrace speculatively)

Moral perfectionism made possible by God

Morality measured by internal moral disposition known only to the individual (deontology)

Alternative: none between pure philosophy and pure religion—religion is concerned with the regulative ideas of God, freedom, and the soul with respect to moral improvement in this life (symbolic anthropomorphism at most, which we embrace as a necessary assumption)

Moral improvement made possible by extraordinary capacity given by God to humanity as the “final end” of creation/nature

### PALMQUIST’S THESIS

Palmquist’s reference to “warring parties” echoes a general theme among Anglo-American dogmatic theologians with respect to Kant’s project (“Ethics of Grace,” 552). We are told that there is only a simple option between a moral philosophy without religion and a moral philosophy as real religion with special grace.<sup>7</sup>

However, Kant’s pure religion can only be portrayed as a moral philosophy without religion by someone who has a preconceived doctrinal notion of what religion must be. In the present case, the preconceived doctrinal notion with respect to religion includes the understanding that morality is measured by one’s actions and their consequences (over which we may

<sup>7</sup> Palmquist writes, “Throughout most of the history of Kant interpretation, the Sage of Königsberg has been portrayed either as a philosopher without any serious interest in religion or as one who sought to bolster an essentially secular moral philosophy by reducing religion to nothing but ethical conduct” (“Ethics of Grace,” 530). In his introduction to *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (trans. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009]), Palmquist suggests the same: “*Religion* . . . leads some (especially antireligious) readers to view the book as merely an extension of Kant’s ethics, intended to reduce all religion to morality” (xx). See Norbert Fischer, “Reduktion der Religion auf Moral? Gregor Leonhard Reiner O.Praem (1756–1807): Sein Lebensweg und seine Präsentation von Kants philosophischer Religionslehre,” in *Kant und der Katholizismus: Stationen einer wechselhaften Geschichte*, ed. Norbert Fischer (Freiberg: Herder, 2005), 283–302. Kant’s philosophical theology (his title) has received new but dramatically different attention by professional theologians in the Anglo-American and German worlds in the last few years. In the Anglo-American context, Kant tends to be portrayed either as “entangled in conundrums” (see Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Conundrums in Kant’s Rational Religion,” in *Kant’s Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], 40–53), a “recovering Fundamentalist” (Palmquist), or as a closet “consequentialist” (Palmquist, Firestone, and Jacobs). However, Kant’s entanglement in “conundrums” turn out to be the consequence of his explicit critique of cherished theological doctrines. Turning Kant into a recovering Fundamentalist allows one to solve the conundrums by invoking inscrutable grace to solve all of our personal weaknesses as

have little or no control) rather than one's principles (over which we do exercise control). Explicitly in light of (Latin) Christian dogmatic theology, in order for a religion to be real, it must include a historical revelation with respect to original sin, Christology, miracles, special acts of grace, and a doctrine of the eternal soul—none of which are capable of proof or disproof, Kant agrees, in experience.<sup>8</sup> Palmquist's reflections here do not engage original sin (although the way he reads "radical evil" might be for

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well as our skeptical doubts, whereas turning Kant into a closet "consequentialist" proposes that at the end of his reflections Kant rejects his emphasis on a morality without self-interest to be concerned with the success (understood in terms of the consequences of one's actions) of the individual's moral efforts.

In Germany, Andreas Urs suggests that as recently as 1999, Norbert Hinske could appropriately complain in a foreword to Aloysius Winter's *Der andere Kant: Zur philosophischen Theologie Immanuel Kants* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2000) "that [Kant's] philosophy of religion remains a barely cultivated field" (my translation). Urs maintains that the speculative philosophy of religion of German Idealism and the radical critique of religion in the nineteenth century both eclipsed Kant's philosophy of religion and left it in the background." See Andreas Urs, "Neuerscheinungen zu Kants Religionsphilosophie," *Philosophische Rundschau* 54 (2007): 31–53, esp. 32. Since 1999, there has been both renewed historical and theological interest in Kant's philosophical theology. This renewed interest stretches from Norbert Fischer's work on the nineteenth-century Gregor Leonhard Reiner's insistence that Kant did not reduce religion to morality to more recent work (by, e.g., Otfried Höffe and Saskia Wendel), employing Kant's reflections, that rejects the currently popular neurobiological proposal (of Gerhard Roth and Wolf Singer) claiming that humanity's "freedom" is an illusion. Magnus Striet defends Kant from Nietzsche's claim that Kant turned philosophy into a servant of religion as well as from Karl Barth's charge that Kant was an unequivocal opponent of religion. Several authors have recently suggested that Kant's conception of humanity as an extraordinary causal power in the world is appropriate for a Christian theology. This is most profound and radical in the work by the Roman Catholic circle in Munster around Thomas Pröpper that includes Georg Essen (in Nijmegen); Essen ("Abschied von der Seelenmetaphysik: Eine theologische Auslotung von Kants Neuansatz in der Subjektphilosophie," in *Kant und die Theologie*, ed. Georg Essen und Magnus Striet [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005], 187–223) calls for a rethinking of the Chalcedon formula of hypostatic union on the basis of Kant's understanding of the nonsubstantial nature of human identity and Kant's destruction of dogmatic-speculative metaphysics. Christoph Hübenenthal, also in Nijmegen, proposes that a strict notion of autonomy in Kant's sense of creative freedom is by no means irreconcilable with the Christian faith. Maximilian Forschner, in Erlangen, emphasizes Kant's claim in the preface to the second critique that the concept of creative freedom serves as the "cornerstone of the entire structure of a system of pure . . . reason" and that "all other concepts (God and immortality), which otherwise are mere indefensible notions . . . obtain in and through freedom their enduring significance and objective reality" ("Freiheit als Schlußstein eines Systems der reinen Vernunft. Transzendente und praktische Freiheit," in *Kants Metaphysik und Religionsphilosophie*, ed. Norbert Fischer [Hamburg: Meiner, 2004]: 131–59, quote at 132; my translation).

In contrast to such insights into the radicality of Kant's project as a source of constructive new reflections for breaking open the dogmatism of Christian theology, Andreas Urs ("Neuerscheinungen," 40) suggests that "Firestone's and Palmquist's work (*Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006]) provides a valid overview of the current 'affirmative' interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion in the English speaking world. [However,] in their fundamental tendency, the . . . interpretations are more ready to fill in the ditch between Christian theology and Kant's philosophy of religion in contrast to what is done in similar German publications. As a consequence, Kant's critical approach loses its bite."

<sup>8</sup> For a description of the differences between Greek and Latin Christianity, see Douglas McGaughey, *Christianity for the Third Millennium: Faith in an Age of Fundamentalism and Skepticism* (San Francisco: International Scholars, 2001).

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him a metaphor for original sin) and the eternity of the soul. What he does focus on is the role of special acts of grace (a form of miracle) and the “moral archetype,” which he reads Christologically as “the internal presence of a divine Word (Λόγος), or ‘archetype,’ [that] can empower religious believers to return the good principle to its rightful place of sovereignty over the will” (“Ethics of Grace,” 536). In this piece, then, Palmquist identifies grace and Christology along with their dependence on a divine “timeless choice” (grace) as characteristics of any real religion so that, were we to conclude that Kant rejected special acts of grace and Christology, he would be engaged only in a merely moral philosophy distinct from if not antithetical to religion.

Palmquist argues that we find *real* religion (i.e., in fact, historical religion) in Kant’s project when we see that there is a “dual perspective” that drives Kant’s reflections on religion. There is a human “phenomenal” perspective, and there is the divine Noumenal perspective.<sup>9</sup> Palmquist’s thesis is that from the phenomenal perspective humanity would have no justification for moral laziness as a consequence of embracing special acts of grace from the Noumenal perspective.

Palmquist identifies three ethical difficulties with respect to special acts of grace that could be taken to lead to moral laziness. Moral laziness could result from (1) “believers in grace tell[ing] themselves they are ‘saved,’ yet . . . continue to behave . . . as morally deficient,” which would suggest that *God* (the Noumenal) *turns “a blind eye to real evil . . . encouraging religious people to continue doing evil”* (“Ethics of Grace,” 538); (2) Palmquist’s point with respect to the second ethical difficulty is unclear since it is formulated with a question, but he seems to be saying: Absolute certainty that one had received divine assisting grace would mean that “God could not ‘unsave’ such persons” (539), which would mean that, once having received such certainty of grace, one could not lapse to a preconversion sinful state and that, therefore, one would be tempted not to be vigilant in one’s moral efforts; (3) The third way that grace might encourage moral laziness is that “believers might think they are no longer responsible for their preconversion life” (539). Palmquist’s claim is that “the depth and power of . . . [Kant’s] solutions have never been fully appreciated” and that “I [Palmquist] shall fill that gap” (540):

Kant’s response to all three difficulties is grounded in a perspectival understanding of what religious belief entails: to be both genuinely religious and fully rational, a

<sup>9</sup> Palmquist appears to be collapsing “noumenal” and “Noumenal.” The “noumenal” for Kant applies to the human, intelligible, supersensible or conscious dimension of experience; the “Noumenal” would apply, then, to God. In the second preface to *Religion*, Kant employs the distinction between *virtus phaenomenon* and *virtus noumenon*, whereby the former applies to the “legalisms” of dogmatic, historical faith in contrast to the latter that is concerned with “duty” or morality (see *Religion*, 41).

person must believe in a God who perceives the spatiotemporal details of human beings' lives as a completed whole, from a "noumenal" [*sic*] perspective unavailable to human beings. By contrast, we human beings are limited to the "phenomenal" perspective, whereby we perceive only specific deeds and choices in isolation from the totality that makes up a person's moral life. By remembering that they cannot have knowledge of the noumenal and that human judgments regarding a person's ethical condition must be based on only phenomenal evidence, religious believers can effectively protect themselves against [the three ethical difficulties that would otherwise lead to moral laziness]. (540)

The price for Palmquist's solution to the ethical difficulties associated with special acts of grace is not only a dogmatic metaphysical dualism, the dualism of the Noumenal (God) and the phenomenal (humanity), but also a profound skepticism, which Palmquist uses to justify belief. This is not a use of skepticism to identify the subjective conditions of possibility for experience and understanding, as Kant uses skepticism.<sup>10</sup> Rather, Palmquist uses skepticism to justify belief in the objective reality and activity of God. What he claims to be a "considerably richer" reading of special acts of grace in Kant turns on the formula: Noumenal ignorance is what prevents us from phenomenal moral laziness (552).

Specifically, Palmquist's solution to the first ethical difficulty (541), as well as to the second difficulty, consists of a version of Pascal's Wager, which, in the face of the epistemological limits to human reason, the overwhelming phenomenal evidence of humanity's depravity, and doubt about salvation, argues that our ignorance justifies our belief in assisting grace. Since we can only experience the phenomenal (human existence in this world), according to Palmquist, belief in the Noumenal (God and God's special acts of grace) can be turned into a "reasonable" wager in favor of grace. Palmquist's solution to the second ethical difficulty (542) is the same as for the first since by claiming that, even when the phenomenal evidence encourages us to doubt whether or not we are saved, we can be confident that God in a Noumenal timeless decision cannot unsave us, but our actual ignorance of the Noumenal requires that we continue with our moral efforts since the goal of focusing on continual progress is not certainty of salvation but to guard against moral laziness. "Belief" in (i.e., ignorance with respect to) grace as Noumenal is precisely the basis for religious hope, according to Palmquist since the phenomenal evidence of our moral progress is always questionable.

When it comes to satisfaction for evils done in the past, the third ethical difficulty (543), Palmquist invokes Kant's discussion of the "pain" felt by the "new" person following moral regeneration as (a) the phenomenal indication of one's having, in fact, embraced the "good principle" while indicating as well that (b) one is clearly aware of one's continued imperfection.

<sup>10</sup> Kant calls this "methodological skepticism"; see *Pure Reason*, B451, B513–14, B535, B767.

Hence, the grace that comes through “imitation of Christ” helps us to account for the pain of continued imperfection and to hope for continued moral improvement (if not perfection) for ourselves. “Kant is suggesting . . . that the empirical evidence that a person has been morally receptive to the atoning work of Jesus (or any other theological basis for divine grace) is that the person must seek to conduct his or her life in a manner that amounts to the *imitation of Christ’s sufferings*” (545, emphasis added).

Satisfied that there is a Noumenal solution based on ignorance to what only appear to be “phenomenal” ethical problems with the theological acceptance of special acts of divine grace, Palmquist turns to the core logical element of his thesis: Kant’s notion of the “mysterious, ‘timeless’ choice.”<sup>11</sup> Palmquist writes, “Noumenal acts of timeless choice, Kant claims, must be presupposed to explain both how our disposition can start out evil and how a conversion to the good is possible” (547). He invokes Kant’s assertion that the solution to morality is “suprasensibly [*sic*] based (i.e., noumenal)” to argue that moral transformation can make “practical sense . . . only if we appeal . . . to the religious symbolism of an archetype” (550). Note that Palmquist writes of the “suprasensible,” whereas Kant speaks of the “supersensible” (intelligible) ground of morality.

In short, according to Palmquist, the change in moral disposition that results in the “new” person is a decision in the Noumenal as an example of a timeless choice to embrace the “suprasensible” [*sic*] moral archetype, which turns out here to be in fact an exclusive (rather than Kant’s inclusive) Christology, that now serves as the speculative, metaphysical model for imitation by the individual to accomplish her/his personal phenomenal transformation (551). As elements of Noumenal choice, both the moral archetype and radical transformation remain for us as an event of Noumenal timelessness, which can be known only by God (543), but nonetheless, phenomenally, the individual can act on the belief that that timeless choice has occurred (551). The implication for Palmquist is that it is God who makes these timeless choices, not the individual. Hence, “by forcing [the Christian] to admit ignorance of how grace [the timeless choice] operates,” believers are empowered in their confidence that “they have received grace *on the phenomenal evidence of their changed life conduct*” (551, emphasis added). We shall see that Palmquist’s emplotment of “Noumenal ignorance” in a narrative of grace can be seen to rob humanity of its religious responsibilities by eliminating or at least compromising the very capacity that it is meant to aid.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> We will see below that Kant speaks of “mystery” with respect to subjectively necessary element of experience incapable of objective proof (i.e., belief), whereas Palmquist is using “mystery” here to express a speculative opinion.

<sup>12</sup> See Kant, *Religion*, 72n.

## Historical and Pure Religion

### ON CRITICAL IDEALISM, SKEPTICISM, AND BELIEF

The three ideas of pure reason (god, cosmology/freedom, the soul), which are the heart of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, are at the core of Kant's understanding of pure religion as practical reason, as well. Since they are "regulative" ideas or assumptions, they are incapable of proof or disproof in the senses, but, in order for us to make sense of our experience of phenomena—and this is precisely their anchor in experience—we must necessarily embrace them "as if" true if we are to have the experience that we do have. In short, Kant's methodological skepticism turns the sting of skepticism into the search for necessary conditions for experience.

There are two links between pure reason and practical reason (morality) that confirm we are moral beings at least with respect to the capacity to be moral: (1) the very nature of Critical Idealism and (2) what Kant calls in the second critique the one "fact" of reason: creative freedom.<sup>13</sup> First, what is Critical Idealism? Critical Idealism reverses the focus of skepticism. It is not that skeptical ignorance requires strategies for establishing *objective* realities, but skeptical ignorance instructs us about necessary *subjective* conditions of possibility that make it possible for us to experience the appearances. Whatever objective certainty we can arrive at with respect to nature occurs through the identification of *necessary* subjective conditions of possibility.<sup>14</sup>

Cartesian skepticism calls all perception and reflection into doubt because our senses trick us, our dreams are as clear and distinct as our waking states, a malevolent deity might be tricking us with what appear to us even as the most certain of concepts, mathematics, and all perception is merely a series of mental judgments that cannot be absolutely confirmed in the senses because we cannot get outside of our minds. Descartes for his part had argued for an "objective" transcendental, Rationalist order to experience: Employing the ontological argument and an argument on the basis of the idea of perfection not capable of coming from an imperfect human being, God not only exists, according to Descartes, and is not only perfect, but He also wouldn't/couldn't deceive us. As a consequence, we are supposed to be confident that our sense perceptions are anchored in a true, objective order.

Critical Idealism, to the contrary, turns the focus of human knowledge 180 degrees away from our ability to make claims about objective content either with respect to the physical world in itself or with respect to God

<sup>13</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 142–43, 210 (hereafter cited as *Practical Reason*); see also *Judgment*, 349.

<sup>14</sup> This engagement of skepticism offers a profound response to postmodernism and deconstruction in Critical Idealism's epistemological strategy, but it is beyond the scope of this article.

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himself (i.e., what he can or cannot do). However, the certainty that was undermined by our skepticism about objective content is more than made up for by necessities, the necessary conditions of possibility, that are required for us to be able to be skeptical in the first place.<sup>15</sup> For example, Kant says that in order to be able to doubt sense experience, we must necessarily have an experience of empirical intuition (sense perception of appearances—not of things in themselves). Given the way that physical objects are next to, above, and below one another spatially as well as sequentially, our very experience of their appearances means that we must necessarily be able to experience the pure intuition of space and time. We experience phenomena *in space* and *in time*; in other words, we experience the effects of space and time, but we do not experience space and time themselves in the senses. We must add pure intuition of space and time to empirical intuition (sense perception). By adding these two pure intuitions of space and time, we have a grid for “placing” phenomena. This grid comes from the fact that, with respect to sense perception, different spaces are simultaneous, not sequential whereas different times are sequential, not simultaneous.<sup>16</sup>

Kant points out that we must add such crucial elements to appearances in order to make any sense of experience. The classic example of such a synthetic exercise is the Copernican Revolution itself, which requires that we deny our senses on the basis of our mentally adding (by means of “synthetic judgment”)<sup>17</sup> a model of what must necessarily be the case in order to account for the truth of those deceptive appearances (i.e., that the sun is standing still and we’re moving at some 1,000 miles per hour). In other words, we can know that the sun is not moving only by denying our senses and by adding an a priori synthetic judgment (a mental model of the solar system) to account for the appearances of empirical intuition. Methodological skepticism is the first step toward true knowledge rather than the basis for a “leap of faith” to an objective, causal power and judge beyond our experience as some “external” reality over against us that is capable of assisting our moral efforts.

<sup>15</sup> See Kant, *Pure Reason*, B791–95, where Kant reminds us that skepticism affects only the dogmatist who has decided in advance of all experience what the objective content of knowledge has to be (e.g., religion has to do with grace and justification by faith) rather than understand the role of a priori synthetic judgment demanded by the appearances.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, B47.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, *Pure Reason*, B10, distinguishes between analytic and synthetic judgments: In *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (968), Kant distinguishes an analytic judgment as “elucidating” (*ein Erläuterungsurteil*) in which the predicate is already contained in the subject from a synthetic judgment as “amplifying” (*ein Erweiterungsurteil*) in which the predicate adds something not contained in the subject. In a footnote (*Pure Reason* B201n), Kant distinguishes between two kinds of synthesis. *Nexus* finds something in common to a set of phenomena; *compositio* adds something to the phenomena. An a priori synthetic judgment is concerned with synthesis in the sense of *compositio*, not necessarily *nexus*.

### THE CAUSALITY OF CREATIVE FREEDOM AND THE FINAL END OF CREATION/NATURE

Kant's claim with respect to pure religion is not that our empirical failures confirm our moral depravity and weakness that, in turn, would justify our appeal to special acts of grace. On the contrary, our transcendental capacities that are known to us only because we experience a phenomenal world within profound limits establish the necessity of our being autonomous, moral beings. Humanity, he claims in the third critique,<sup>18</sup> is the "final end" of creation/nature. How arrogant. Nothing appears to be more contrary to phenomenal experience. The empirical evidence both of material determinism and of moral depravity suggest that Schopenhauer was correct,<sup>19</sup> we are not masters of our own house, and his conclusion is confirmed by the three "masters of suspicion," Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Furthermore, at least weekly, we are provided another confirmation that some other cherished mental capacity is located in and reducible to some region of the brain on the basis of fMRI scans. The phenomenal evidence seems to be overwhelming that we are the product of blind physical causality. Why on earth would Kant ever arrive at the conclusion that it is precisely our freedom that makes us the "final end" of creation/nature except as an arrogant, imperialistic European?

An answer hinges on the second link between pure and practical reason. Whereas the first link is that it is not phenomenal content but necessary, transcendental conditions of possibility that establish what we can know, the second link between pure and practical reason is precisely one of those necessary transcendental conditions: freedom in the sense of a creative capacity not reducible to the blind determinism of physical causality. Kant defends a positive meaning of freedom as *freedom-for* self-legislated goals above (but never separate from) the blind determinism of nature in contrast to the negative meaning of freedom as *freedom-from* nature's causal order and social constraints. Specifically, freedom here is concerned with our ability to initiate a sequence of events that nature cannot accomplish on its own. It neither means "individualistic autonomy" independent from all tradition and institutions nor merely the ability to make choices. Freedom means creativity.

Kant calls freedom from physical determinism the one "fact of reason." This is not because freedom, somehow unlike God and the soul, is provable in the senses. He explicitly denies our ability to prove or disprove free-

<sup>18</sup> Kant, *Judgment*, 297–301. See also Kant's reflections on humanity as the end of creation/nature four years earlier in *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 6:90–91, and two years earlier in *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre* (Leipzig: Frans, 1817), 125, 171–72.

<sup>19</sup> See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1966), chap. 19.

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dom.<sup>20</sup> Kant points out in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (59) that all attribute freedom of the will (creative freedom) to themselves since, without freedom, we would be mere marionettes and automatons.<sup>21</sup> However, as a cause, freedom is experienced only as an effect, not directly in itself. It is impossible for us to prove or disprove our creative freedom precisely because as a cause freedom is inaccessible to the senses and our conviction with respect to its reality must be added to our experience of appearances. We judge its presence by its effects both on the basis of our actions and foremost on the basis of our necessary capacities.

Because all that we can experience are appearances, not substances and causes, we must claim the assumption of creative freedom as necessary in order for us to understand our experience and ourselves:

The human being, who . . . regards himself as an intelligence [i.e., a supersensible being], . . . puts himself in a different order of things and in a relation to determining grounds of an altogether different kind when he thinks of himself as an intelligence endowed with a will, and *consequently with causality* [emphasis added], than when he perceives himself as a phenomenon in the world of sense (as he also really is) and subjects his causality to external determination in accordance with laws of nature. Now he soon becomes aware that both can take place at the same time, and indeed must do so. For, that a *thing in appearance* (belonging to the world of sense) is subject to certain laws from which *as a thing* or a being *in itself* it is independent contains not the least contradiction; that he must represent and think of himself in this twofold way [not as a dualism but as two sides of the same coin], however, rests as regards the first on consciousness of himself as an object affected through the senses and as regards the second on consciousness of himself as an intelligence, that is, as independent of sensible impressions in the use of reason (hence as belonging to the world of understanding). (*Groundwork*, 61)

It is precisely because we experience the noumenal (not Noumenal) dimension of the in itself of things and the self, not in the senses but in the intellect, that we are able to distinguish between a “world of the senses” and a “world of the understanding” (58–59). Kant opens section 3 of the *Groundwork* with the claim that experience is constituted out of two forms of efficient causality that constitute our one world of appearances: “*Will* is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it, just as *natural necessity* is the property of the causality of all nonrational beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes” (52). Once again, then, what Kant means by freedom is humanity’s (and it would necessarily be true of all rational beings) ability to initiate a sequence of events that physical nature on its own

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Kant, *Practical Reason* 244, and *Pure Reason*, B586.

<sup>21</sup> See Kant, *Practical Reason*, 206, 248.

could never accomplish. Without this capacity, we are not human, and it is precisely this capacity that makes us capable of morality.

### RADICAL EVIL PRESUPPOSES CREATIVE FREEDOM

Freedom as a form of efficient causality is the necessary condition of possibility for free choice. Were we incapable of initiating a sequence of events that physical nature could never accomplish on its own, we would not have the ability to choose between options good and evil maxims/*Hänge*.<sup>22</sup> This has crucial implications for Kant's invocation of the distinction between "capacities" (*Anlage*) and "inclinations" (*Hänge*) in *Religion* in order to account for "radical evil." Radical is employed here in its etymological sense: "root." Radical evil is not an ontological status of moral corruption. That there is a root of evil constitutive of the human condition, which can never be conquered only "broken" (97), does not place evil in the position of the ultimate ground of humanity's capacities. On the contrary, were it not for the ultimate (good) ground of creative freedom, there could be no inclination to good or evil maxims (i.e., the proper prioritizing of the supersensible over the sensuous or improper prioritizing of the sensuous over the supersensible). Because creative freedom is the ultimate condition of possibility for our phenomenal experience of inclinations (*Hänge*), it is an inalienable and irreplaceable good. Creative freedom is not only ontologically good (60, 64, 65, 66, 98), since without it we couldn't be human, but also it can never be eradicated as long as we exist ("for through no cause in the world can he cease to be a free agent") (63).

Creative freedom is the ontological, supersensible, and noumenal capacity possessed by humanity that makes us, if not an exception, then to an extraordinary degree different from everything else that we encounter in the world. When Kant calls humanity the "final end" of creation/nature, he does not mean that we have some phenomenal superiority among and over other phenomena but that we possess a noumenal superiority of a capacity for which we are morally responsible. As the "final end" of creation/nature, though, we are not removed from natural necessity.<sup>23</sup> Were we entirely independent of natural necessity and their appearances, freedom would be blind, and it would be nothing but a void and impossible concept.<sup>24</sup> He adds, nonetheless, that this means that freedom belongs to the noumenal "thing in itself" accessible only in the individual's supersensible dimension of experience: "Consequently, if we wish still to save it [freedom], no other

<sup>22</sup> See Kant, "II. Concerning the Propensity [*Hang*] to Evil in Human Nature," in *Religion*, pt. 1.

<sup>23</sup> It is because our profound dependence on the physical order that leads Kant to stress in the third critique that our attempts at explanation of any event should always commence with physical laws before engaging in any kind of causal explanation beyond physical laws. See *Judgment*, 259, 284, 286, 296; *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 869.s.

<sup>24</sup> Kant, *Pure Reason*, B75, and *Practical Reason*, 201.

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course remains than to ascribe the existence of a thing so far as it is determinable in time, and accordingly its causality under the law of natural necessity, merely to appearance, and to attribute freedom to the same being as a thing-in-itself [beyond time (i.e., as timeless choice)].<sup>25</sup>

### TWO ORDERS OF LAW

We are not moral beings simply by birth. We become moral beings by exercising capacities inherited at birth. However, if our causal capacity of creative freedom was not extraordinary enough to establish humanity as the “final end” of creation/nature (as a capacity, of course, that must be properly developed and applied), there is yet a crucial analogy to physical phenomena that further elevates humanity to the level of moral beings. Again, these necessities account for what Palmquist has silently presupposed: that we are capable of, and responsible for, moral effort.

There is more to the paradoxical necessity that is freedom than its extraordinary form of efficient causality. On the basis of an analogy to nature and our experience of dreams, we can believe that freedom does not mean mere “spontaneity,” “indeterminacy,” and mere “capriciousness.”<sup>26</sup> There are two orders that we must necessarily assume given our experience of appearances and that we must embrace on the basis of an “as if”:<sup>27</sup> the physical order governed by physical laws,<sup>28</sup> and the moral order governed by moral laws.<sup>29</sup> Kant suggests that the value of dreams is that they present us with the option of clear and distinct experience without order to remind us of the value of approaching our experience in the world *as if* it in fact was ordered by physical and moral laws.<sup>30</sup> The grasp of both orders comes from the “spontaneity of the understanding” (i.e., timeless choice), with its application of a priori concepts because neither order is given with the appearances to which they apply.<sup>31</sup>

We can neither prove nor disprove that these two invisible orders govern our experience in reality, but it makes all the difference in the world if we in fact do seek, as the animal that can, both a physical and a moral order to

<sup>25</sup> Kant, *Practical Reason*, 201.

<sup>26</sup> See Otfried Höffe, “Methodological or Dogmatic Determinism,” in *Can Virtue Make Us Happy? The Art of Living and Morality*, trans. Douglas R. McGaughey (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 219–24.

<sup>27</sup> See Kant, *Pure Reason*, B646–47, B842.

<sup>28</sup> See Kant, *Judgment*, 22, and *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 860, 869.

<sup>29</sup> See Kant, *Pure Reason*, B576, B578.

<sup>30</sup> See Kant, *Pure Reason*, B520–21, and Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be able to come Forward as Science*, trans. Paul Carus (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 34, and *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 927.

<sup>31</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Über die von der königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften Preisfrage: Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnizens und Wolffs Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?* [Fortschritte], in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 3:608.

guide all that we do. If we wish to be “successful” in the physical world, we have to discern and conform to the laws of nature as well as to the moral law. The laws, however, are not written on the phenomena. They are graspable only by means of a priori synthetic judgments that we must add to the phenomena.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, if we wish to be “successful” (not necessarily in terms of self-interest, though) with our creative freedom, we have to discern and conform to the moral law. As with the physical law, the moral law is not given with phenomena (nor can it be externally legislated) but can only be self-legislated in the supersensible dimension of the noumenal in an act of creative freedom.

### ON INTEREST AND THE MORAL LAW

If the moral law is in any way heteronomous (imposed from some other source than the self), then it would not be self-legislated merely because it is right (categorical), but it would be self-legislated because it satisfies my interest (hypothetically)—my seeking to please the heteronomous source of the law. Although I can never be sure that I am not motivated by interest,<sup>33</sup> nevertheless, I can impose the self-expectation that I *not* be driven by interest.<sup>34</sup> This is precisely the intent of the “universal law” form of the categorical imperative: to rein in self-interest, not to insist that one in fact does act on a universal principle.<sup>35</sup> However, as soon as miracles, grace, and imitation of a historical example (e.g., Jesus as the Christ) enter on the scene, the individual is immediately distracted from the moral principle merely because it is right to be concerned that she or he please the author of miracles, grace, and the historical model for her/his personal benefit. This entirely undermines the moral capacity that the miracle and grace are meant to encourage.<sup>36</sup> Kant could not be more dismissive of the consequences for our moral capacity as a result of groveling before God that such special acts of grace and miracles would lead to when he writes, “Apart from a good life-conduct, anything which the human being supposes that he can do to

<sup>32</sup> See Ernst Cassirer’s discussion of *Funktionsbegriff* as functional concepts (not intellectual substances) in *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1944), 356, 363, 471–72, 504, as well as his discussion of the new turn in Enlightenment epistemology from the mere descriptively analytical to the *resolutiv* and *kompositiv* in *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2007), 9–21.

<sup>33</sup> See the opening of sec. 2 of Kant, *Groundwork*.

<sup>34</sup> The theme that morality is not governed by self-interest is one that Kant applauds in Frances Hutcheson. See the second treatise of Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. In *Two Treatises: I. Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design. II. Concerning Moral Good and Evil* (London: Darby, Bettesworth, Fayram, Pemberton, Rivington, Hooke, Clay, Batley, & Symon, 1726).

<sup>35</sup> See Kant, *Groundwork*, 40.

<sup>36</sup> See Kant, *Religion*, 98–102.

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become well-pleasing to God is merely religious delusion and counterfeit service of God.”<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore and in contrast to Palmquist’s exclusive Christology of imitation mentioned above, Kant emphasizes the value of examples but not imitation in morality. Kant writes in *Groundwork*: “Imitation has no place at all in matters of morality, and examples serve only for encouragement . . . but they can never justify setting aside their true original, which lies in reason.”<sup>38</sup> Later he writes, as well: “Even in religion . . . , each must derive the rule of his conduct from himself, because he also remains responsible for it himself and cannot shift the guilt for his transgressions onto others. . . . [Even an example of virtue] does not make the autonomy of virtue out of one’s own original idea of morality (a priori) dispensable or transform this into a mechanism of imitation.”<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously with the “I can” of freedom is the “I should” of the moral law, and Kant says ever again: “If I should, I can.”<sup>40</sup> We are precisely the animal that can exercise creative freedom and that can be morally responsible for that capacity, and that ability in itself constitutes the incessant call to moral effort. We are not moral beings because we *must* be. We are moral beings because we *can* be.

There is no radical evil that could eliminate our causal capacity to choose good over evil since the causal capacity that makes good and evil choices possible in the first place is inalienable and prior to the alternative of good and evil themselves. Creative freedom in itself is noumenally good since it is what makes us human beings and not mere mechanical automatons. If we could eliminate the capacity of creative freedom, then we would eliminate the very conditions of our being moral, and it would eliminate a remarkable capacity, which to be sure Kant recognized as dangerous,<sup>41</sup> from the natural order. However, simply because we have a necessary capacity does not mean that we necessarily will exercise it properly

### ON MYSTERY, OPINING, BELIEVING, AND TIMELESS CHOICES

A “mystery,” Kant tells us can be “divinely dispensed” or a “pure faith of reason” (*Religion*, 140). It is only a maxim of pure religion to hold to the second form of mystery otherwise we succumb to the danger of anthropomorphism and to a servile faith (143). It is not enough that something be merely “inscrutable” (*unerforschlich*) in order to count as a mystery (140).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>38</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Kant, *Judgment*, 164.

<sup>40</sup> See (already in 1775) Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie*, ed. Werner Stark and Manfred Kühn (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), xxii–xxiii, as well as *Religion*, 66, 69n, 70, *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, xxiii–xxiv, and *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 6:439.

<sup>41</sup> In *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie* (177), Kant acknowledged that this capacity gives us the potential to destroy nature.

Kant repeats here in *Religion* what he articulated already in the first critique, the distinction between “mystery” from “opining”: a mystery is an element of believing in which there *is* a subjective sufficiency for the conviction, but we are not able to establish it objectively whereas opining has neither a subjective nor an objective sufficiency (i.e., ground) for its conviction. “*Opining* is such holding of a judgment as is consciously insufficient [*unzureichend*], not only objectively, but also subjectively. If our holding of the judgment be only subjectively sufficient [*zureichend*], and is at the same time taken as being objectively insufficient, we have what is termed *believing*. Lastly, when the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively, it is *knowledge*.”<sup>42</sup>

Speaking of what he calls the mystery of timeless choice, Palmquist writes, “if conversion involves a change of disposition, and if its noumenal nature means that only God has unobstructed access to the human disposition, then . . . how could a ‘change’ in this ‘timeless’ aspect of our nature have an effect in the phenomenal world? Kant’s argument appears to be as meaningless as the worst examples of scholastic hairsplitting; if we read this as an attempt to construct a theology of grace, he might as well be asking us to decide how many angels can stand together on the head of a pin.”<sup>43</sup> Palmquist might benefit from a new look at Pseudo-Dionysius.

In *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius describes angels as the purely rational “messengers” of God who mediate between God and the created world. They are not material but spiritual beings, and in Pseudo-Dionysius and scholastic theology they are part of an anthropomorphic system that views “universals” (concepts) as the thoughts of God. However, the scholastic question is not hairsplitting. Since universals are immaterial, indivisible, hence, immeasurable, they can have no size; yet, there can be no understanding without them. An infinite number can be on the head of a pin. The scholastic question is not asking for a specific number, it is illustrating the illimitableness of transcendental experience. Not only are concepts illimitable (hence, “infinite”), they are inexplicably noumenal, “timeless,” yet available for us as rational beings.

Kant rejects the Transcendental Realism of Rationalism,<sup>44</sup> but all experience of the categorical (the acts of freedom) involves an introduction of something “timeless” to that which is experienced in time. To be sure, the “timeless” categorical can only be experienced in relationship to sequence (i.e., in time); yet, the categorical itself is “timeless” and the choice to apply

<sup>42</sup> “Insufficient” and “sufficient” refer to the logical issue of the principle of sufficient reason (*Satz vom zureichenden Grund*) that is dependent upon the degree of causal necessity governing appearances. See Kant, *Pure Reason*, B246–56. On knowledge, see Kant, *Pure Reason*, B850; and see Immanuel Kant, *Logik*, in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 3:ix.

<sup>43</sup> Kant, “Ethics of Grace,” 543–44.

<sup>44</sup> See Kant’s discussion of idealism, “Refutation of Idealism” and “General Notes on the System of the Principles,” both in *Pure Reason*, B274–B294.

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the categorical is a “timeless” act of creativity. This is the heart of the third antinomy in the first critique: How can mechanical necessity and creativity be reconciled?

Without succumbing to the literal anthropomorphism of Pseudo-Dionysius and scholastic theology or taking the space here to argue, as does the Neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer, for the “functional” rather than the metaphysical (substantial) nature of concepts,<sup>45</sup> Kant’s insistence on the “timeless choice” of the moral transformation of the individual is no more a choice made by the Noumenon (God) than God or nature decides the individual’s synthetic application of the grid of categorical concepts in a moment of understanding or application of creative freedom in light of moral maxims in conformity with the three forms of the categorical imperative.<sup>46</sup> In order to be the kind of species that we are, human beings must understand and create in the world. The fact that there is a “timeless choice” involved does not mean that the Noumenon (God) has understood or acted through us in some heteronomous sense. Such a claim would completely undermine Kant’s understanding of the epistemological and moral project that is humanity.

FOR WHAT MAY WE HOPE? OR WHAT MAKES MORALITY RELIGIOUS  
FOR KANT?

Kant says that *Religion* provides the answer to the third of his four famous questions: What can I know? is concerned with the “metaphysics” of theoretical reason (understanding); What should I do? is concerned with the “metaphysics” of practical reason (morality); What can I hope for? is the question of religion;<sup>47</sup> and What is humanity? is the question of anthropology.<sup>48</sup> In fact, just as the structures (not the phenomenal content) of reason are universal to all humanity and constitute “one reason,”<sup>49</sup> so, too, Kant can speak of “one religion”<sup>50</sup> based on humanity’s capacities (not the differences that are the consequence of the application of those capacities) as the animal that can be moral—without being politically incorrect with his judgment of “one reason” and “one religion.”

Palmquist claims that Kant grounds hope in an objective God and special acts of grace.<sup>51</sup> Such an understanding of hope, according to Kant, belongs to the “parerga” (a “secondary occupation”/*Nebengeschäfte*) of religion

<sup>45</sup> See Ernst Cassirer, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1910)

<sup>46</sup> See Kant, *Groundwork*, 31, 38, 39.

<sup>47</sup> See Kant, *Pure Reason*, B833.

<sup>48</sup> See Kant, *Logik*, 448.

<sup>49</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 4:311.

<sup>50</sup> See Kant, *Religion*, 33n, 113, 116, 136n, Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf*, in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 6:225n, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, 301, 315, and *Über Pädagogik*, in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 6:758.

<sup>51</sup> Palmquist, “Ethics of Grace,” 530, 542.

(*Religion*, 72). Kant concludes his general remarks at the end of part 1 in *Religion* with what are devastating consequences for Palmquist's embracing of these parerga in terms of their being the real goal of Kant's reflections on religion. He distinguishes among enthusiasm; superstition; illumination; and thaumaturgy (note the escalation in speculation associated with this hierarchy) to conclude:

the summoning of the *effects of grace* belongs to the last class [i.e., thaumaturgy—"sheer aberrations of a reason that has strayed beyond its limits, indeed for a supposed moral aim"] and cannot be incorporated into the maxims of reason, if the latter keeps to its boundaries; nor, in general, can anything supernatural, because all use of reason ceases precisely with it.—For it is impossible to make these effects *theoretically* cognizable . . . because our use of the concept of cause and effect cannot be extended beyond the objects of experience, and hence beyond nature; moreover, the presupposition of a *practical* employment of this idea is wholly self-contradictory. For the employment would presuppose a rule concerning what good we ourselves must *do* (with a particular aim [in mind]) in order to achieve something; to expect an effect of grace means, however, the very contrary, namely that the good (the morally good) is not of our doing, but that of another being—that we, therefore, can only *come by* it by *doing nothing*, and this contradicts itself. Hence we can admit an effect of grace as something incomprehensible but cannot incorporate it into our maxims for either theoretical or practical use.<sup>52</sup>

If our hope is not grounded in the parerga, what is the hope that pure religion offers humanity? The hope consists of our confidence that the capacity of creative freedom, which is not of our creation, will make possible a radical transformation of our moral disposition in order for us to improve in our moral efforts—something that we can never prove (or disprove).

If a human being is corrupt . . . how can he possibly bring about this revolution by his own forces . . . ? Yet duty commands that he be good, and duty commands nothing but what we can do. The only way to reconcile this is by saying that *a revolution is necessary in the mode of thought but a gradual reformation in the mode of sense*. . . . That is: If by a single and unalterable decision a human being reverses the supreme ground of his maxims . . . (and thereby puts on a 'new man'), he is to this extent . . . a subject receptive to the good; but he is a good human being only in incessant laboring and becoming; i.e., *he can hope* . . . to find himself upon the good . . . path of constant *progress* from bad to better . . . ; and to this extent the change can be considered a revolution. For the judgment of human beings, however, who can assess . . . only by the upper hand they gain over the senses in time, the change is to be regarded only as an ever-continuing striving for the better. (68, emphasis added in part)

<sup>52</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 72–73. Kant does not say here that its consequence is that we will do nothing (i.e., be morally lazy) but that we come by grace by doing nothing.

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This hope is driven by what is subjectively morally necessary by the very conditions that make us moral beings (it is a mystery), not by a speculative claim about an objective parousia capable of supplementing our efforts (which would be an opinion):

We cannot start out in the ethical training of our conatural moral predisposition to the good with an innocence which is natural to us but must rather begin from the presupposition of a depravity of our power of choice in adopting maxims contrary to the original ethical predisposition; and since the propensity to this [depravity] is inextirpable with unremitting counteraction against it. Since this only leads to a progression from bad to better extending . . . [indefinitely (*ins Unendliche*)]. . . . Assurance of this cannot of course be attained by the human being naturally, neither via immediate consciousness nor via the evidence of the life he has hitherto led, for the depths of his own heart (the subjective first ground of his maxims [i.e., creative freedom]) are to him inscrutable. Yet he must be able to *hope* that, by the exertion of *his own* power, he will attain to the road that leads in that direction. (70–71, emphasis added in part)

This hope brings a confidence that our intelligible (supersensible) revolution is what makes us well-pleasing to God here in this life, not the necessary perpetuation of the soul in the “next” life.<sup>53</sup>

How can this disposition count for the deed itself, when this deed is *every time* . . . defective? The solution rests on the following: According to our mode of estimation [under temporal conditions of the senses] . . . the deed, as a continuous advance *in infinitum* from a defective good to something better, always remains defective. . . . But because of the *disposition* from which it derives and which transcends the senses, we can think of the infinite progression of the good toward conformity to the law as being judged . . . to be a perfected whole even with respect to the deed (the life conduct). (84–85)

Although concerned with human capacities and effort, this is religion because freedom is a “regulative idea” of reason (a matter of belief) along with God and the soul, which are not “constitutive concepts” of theoretical reason. This is religion because it understands God to be the ultimate condition of possibility for any and all experience and morality and is a

<sup>53</sup> Although Kant also says that no religion can be conceived without faith in the afterlife (*Religion*, 131), the claim is not that there necessarily is an afterlife (something along with grace, miracles that is incapable of proof or disproof) but that any religion that would deny the afterlife would be claiming to know something that we cannot know and that, more importantly, whatever content such an afterlife would involve would have to encourage our moral effort in this life. Otherwise, we would be more concerned about what is in our interest for the next life than with doing the right thing because it is right (doing precisely what is well-pleasing to God) even though it may be contrary to our interests. If there is an afterlife, the only role it can play in terms of pure religion is to be a confirmation of our *worthiness* of it through our moral effort in this life. See Kant, *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 774–77, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1974), 149, and *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, 130, 133.

belief in God based upon the subjective necessity of God (in belief) as the ultimate cause of nature and the highest good achievable in the world.<sup>54</sup> It is not religion based upon theoretical reason (knowledge) or mere speculative opinion and wishful thinking about objective realities. It is religion not on the basis of literal but rather symbolic anthropomorphism that understands God *κατ' ἄνθρωπον* by means of reflecting judgment,<sup>55</sup> not according to speculative, determining judgments with respect to what God is and can do *κατ' ἀλήθειαν*.<sup>56</sup> It is religion because the capacity of creative freedom is what constitutes the “final end” of creation/nature. When we fail with our moral efforts, therefore, we are not only denying our moral capacity, but we are also truncating what the created order is capable of accomplishing only because we are ourselves creating agents.

That the human being is called to a good life conduct [*Lebenswandel* here actually means “moral conduct” or “moral transformation”] through the moral law; that, through an indelible respect for this law which lies in him, he also finds in himself encouragement to trust in this good spirit and to hope that, however it may come about, he will be able to satisfy this spirit; finally, that, comparing this expectation with the rigorous command of the law, he must constantly test himself as if summoned to accounts before a judge—reason, heart, and conscience all teach this and drive us to it. It is presumptuous to require that more be made manifest to us [through particular, historical revelation], and *if this were to happen, we must not regard it as a universal human need*.<sup>57</sup>

Far from making grace the goal of his understanding of religion, Kant is grounding our hope in an open-ended process of moral improvement (which in fact applies to the species and not to the individual)<sup>58</sup> in the radical moral transformation of our creative, noumenal capacity that is the condition of possibility of that species' improvement. Only if we are to embrace radically once and for all this capacity of freedom in terms of its making it possible for us to select good maxims are we capable of true moral transformation compatible with it.<sup>59</sup> This constitutes the very hope of religion that we are always and already capable of exercising this creative freedom in light of good maxims—although we cannot prove (or disprove) it. Any other influence would be heteronomous and undermining of the very

<sup>54</sup> See Immanuel Kant, “The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason,” in *Practical Reason*, 227–34.

<sup>55</sup> Kant acknowledges (*Prolegomena*, 97) that the elimination of anthropomorphic language would be the end of religion and morality, but he insists that such anthropomorphic language is permissible only as symbolic, not as dogmatic.

<sup>56</sup> See Kant, *Judgment*, 327, and *Fortschritte*, 645.

<sup>57</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 145 (emphasis added).

<sup>58</sup> For the species argument, see Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, 683–84, *Über Pädagogik*, 702, *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, 92, 102, and *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 6:35–37.

<sup>59</sup> See Kant, *Religion*, 28.

capacity we must embrace in order for us to be moral beings seeking moral improvement.

The logic of our moral capacity can be described as follows: Our creative freedom is a gift not of our own creation and is ontologically good since without it we would be mere automatons driven by the blind mechanisms of nature and would not be the species (the “end of creation/nature”) that we are. Nonetheless, Kant is sanguine enough to acknowledge that this creative freedom is a mystery (as a subjectively sufficient belief, not as speculative opinion) incapable of proof or disproof in the senses. Furthermore, moral maxims presuppose creative freedom.<sup>60</sup> There can be no categorical self-legislation of a moral principle to govern our actions were we not to some degree independent of (but never separable from) physical necessity. In short, moral maxims are analytic with respect to the a priori synthetic, regulative idea of creative freedom.<sup>61</sup> The mystery of faith is, How can our ontological, creative capacity, inseparable from the option of evil maxims and corrupted by habitual actions inclined to evil maxims, be so radically transformed that it prioritizes good maxims over evil maxims? Kant is saying that our ability to fulfill our role as the moral “end of creation/nature” rests upon the possibility that this radical, subjective transformation of our moral disposition can occur although it remains a mystery how. This necessary possibility is precisely the ground of religious hope. We are concerned here with a genuine belief because it is subjectively necessary if objectively incapable of proof rather than with a mere speculative opinion.

### CONSEQUENTIALISM OR DEONTOLOGY?

There is one final assumption that is ubiquitous in Palmquist’s reading of Kant that requires response. Palmquist is reading Kant as an ethical consequentialist, not deontologically.

Palmquist’s argument anchors knowledge with respect to our moral status exclusively in phenomenal evidence. For example, here are two claims by Palmquist: (1) “Religious believers must always assess the eternal status of their disposition by *appealing to life conduct*, for this phenomenal perspective . . . is *the only means we have for obtaining evidence* of whether or not we have been transformed by God’s grace” (“Ethics of Grace,” 542, emphasis added); (2) “Belief in . . . (prevenient!) grace empowers a good hearted person to continue *the struggle toward phenomenal perfection*” (553, emphasis

<sup>60</sup> See Kant, *Practical Reason*, 119n.

<sup>61</sup> See the discussion of moral principles as *analytic* when viewed with respect to the *synthetic* capacity of creative freedom in Christoph Hübenthal, “Autonomie als Prinzip: Zur Neube-gründung der Mortalität bei Kant,” in *Kant und die Theologie*, ed. Georg Essen und Magnus Striet (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005); and Gerhard Schönrich, “Zählung des Bösen? Überlegungen zu Kant vor dem Hintergrund der Leibnizschen Theodizee,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 47 (1992): 207–23.

added).<sup>62</sup> In short, Palmquist insists that moral improvement is something phenomenally measurable and that we are capable of perfection. Such a claim is difficult if not impossible to reconcile with a Kantian deontological ethic, which speaks of the ethical as a kingdom of the (invisible) heart and makes no claim to eliminate evil (only to break its hold on humanity) but calls for incessant moral improvement by individuals.<sup>63</sup> Moral judgment occurs by reason, not by appearances.<sup>64</sup> Whether or not one has acted on a self-legislated moral principle, which is the element in morality over which we have control<sup>65</sup>—we don't have control over the consequences—is not something observable (it is precisely not phenomenal) by any other person and is known only to and in the supersensible dimension of the individual her/himself,<sup>66</sup> who is the most strenuous judge of the individual.<sup>67</sup> In other words, not only can we not “identify moral perfection in another (Jesus)” as Palmquist claims we can,<sup>68</sup> which would involve access to his internal self (and we cannot even know our own internal selves),<sup>69</sup> but also no external model (i.e., external standard) that we might imitate can be of value to our ethical lives.

However, if we make empirical evidence the litmus test of our moral status, we reverse the hierarchy of our understanding. All understanding, including moral understanding, occurs not with respect to the phenomena alone but as a consequence of our adding things in reason that are not there in the senses.

When it comes to his moral theory supplemented by grace, Palmquist is defending a pre-critical epistemology grounded in and by phenomena in terms of observable moral improvement. In short, he is substituting a consequentialist (“sensible”) for a deontological (“supersensible”) ethic.

<sup>62</sup> Kant proposes in the *Groundwork* (50) that nothing in the senses or the idea of perfection can lead one to morality since neither is “immediate” but only offer incentives; hence, both are heteronomous.

<sup>63</sup> See Kant, *Religion*, 175: “There is . . . a practical cognition, which though resting solely upon reason and not in need of any historical doctrine, yet lies as close to every human being, even the simplest, as though it had been literally inscribed in his heart.” In fact, Kant only sees the alternative here that we either do direct service to God through the moral law or we do indirect service to God through slavery where actions as means that have no moral value whatsoever are erroneously taken to be in themselves morally good (171–72).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 48n.

<sup>65</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen*, in Weischedel, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, 4:641.

<sup>66</sup> See Kant, *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie*, 333–34, as well as *Religion* (81–82), where Kant acknowledges that we can never obtain an “entirely reliable cognition of the basis of the maxims which he possesses, and of their purity and stability,” which is precisely why we must hope.

<sup>67</sup> *Religion*, 145, and §4 of sec. 4: “Concerning the Guiding Thread of Conscience in Matters of Faith” (*Religion*, 178), whereas God as judge would eliminate freedom (*Practical Reason*, 150).

<sup>68</sup> See Palmquist, “Ethics of Grace,” 538.

<sup>69</sup> Kant, *Pure Reason*, B83, B152–15, B147–49, B334, B404, B429, B561.

### CONCLUSION

Placing our confidence in divine grace rather than trusting in the presence and power of our creativity would cripple our hope in the very capacity that makes morality possible in the first place. We can know that we have this (and other) supersensible capacities because the appearances we have in the senses instruct us that these supersensible capacities are necessary assumptions in order for us to experience the appearances as we do. Our hope is that our capacity of creative freedom, so tarnished by its habitual embrace of evil maxims as it is/might be, can undergo a radical transformation that makes it possible for us to embark on a path of moral improvement that eventually in principle is capable of elevating the entire species.

Palmquist's theology of ignorance leaves us not with divine grace empowering moral effort, but with psychological torment and the crippling of our own moral efforts. We could easily be distressed that we have been abandoned by God because of the ambiguous phenomenal evidence of moral development, and divine grace would shift the focus of our moral effort away from "doing what is right because it is right" to "pleasing the author of grace to obtain His benevolence."

Rather than our limits justifying the speculative opinion that special acts of divine grace are needed for our moral perfection, Kant proposes that we embrace reason's limits in the belief that they make moral effort not only necessary but also possible because those limits confirm the live option of radical transformation to select good maxims, despite our moral "depravity," as a should that we can accomplish. Furthermore, we should encourage one another as fellow members of the kingdom of ends (and not mere means) and as proponents of moral culture to properly exercise these capacities not out of self-interest but because it is morally right. Kant views humanity as the "kingdom of ends" to be synonymous with the Kingdom of God,<sup>70</sup> and he distinguishes culture "promoting the will" from the mere "culture of skill."<sup>71</sup> In short, Kant's moral theory, while insisting on autonomy and the self-legislation (not heteronomous, external imposition) of moral principles, is not individualistic but communal.

We are moral beings because we can be, not because we must be. What we can do is make moral effort out of hope, not despair, over the evidence to the contrary. Only a god would claim to be able to do so perfectly.

<sup>70</sup> Kant, *Religion*, 138–39.

<sup>71</sup> Kant, *Judgment*, 299.