

Biographical Notes of Authors 2

***The Contemporary Theological Project***

Can Marx's Critique of Religion be Freed from its Fetters? 4

*Jan Rehmann*

***Articles***

Sacrifice, Reformed Theology and Economic Structures 15

*Johan Pieters*

Theology in the Context of Science – Western and African Aspects 30

*Peter Barrett*

What is Enlightenment?: A Response to Balcomb's Call for the Retrieval  
of 'Participation' 50

*Douglas McGaughey*

Rules of Reciprocity and Survival in Negotiating *Ubuntu* at the Central  
Methodist Mission in Johannesburg 73

*Elina Hankela*

Beyond Verhey: Reading and Using the Bible in Christian Bioethics 90

*Manitza Kotzé*

Contemporary Challenges to Christian Ecotheology: Some Reflections  
on the State of the Debate after Five Decades 105

*Ernst M. Conradie*

***Book Reviews*** 123

Editorial Board 2013 128

Index to JTSA Issues 145-147, 2013 131

# What is Enlightenment? A Response to Balcomb's Call for the Retrieval of 'Participation'<sup>1</sup>

Douglas McGaughey

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## ABSTRACT

In contrast to Tony Balcomb's portrayal of the western tradition as a victim of Enlightenment, instrumental reason that *separates* humanity from the world and leads to all the ills of cultural and economic imperialism and environmental degradation to justify a "retrieval of '*participation*'" that overcomes all dualisms and implicitly eliminates exploitation, oppression, and persecution, this paper calls for a re-examination of Kant's understanding of Enlightenment to "retrieve" dignity grounded in humanity's creative capacity, which makes us *necessarily*, morally responsible for our actions. It is argued that the supersensible dimension of humanity provides a theological framework that constitutes the "African spirit" shared by all.

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## Introduction

In "The Metaphysics of Participation – Exploring an Idea whose Time has Returned" (*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 145, March 2013), Tony Balcomb proposes that the "dominant" western paradigm for understanding the world since the Enlightenment has been a dualistic, Subject-Object model that *separates* humanity from its multiple situations or contexts, from others, and from the world. Characteristic of the western paradigm, he suggests, is an estrangement that the west has sought to overcome by instrumental reason: the objective calculation, prediction, manipulation, and, above all, control over phenomena. Balcomb, then, proposes that everything before the Enlightenment shared a very different epistemological model: that of (organic) *participation* in one's context, with others, and the world, in contrast to Enlightenment *separation*. In a final step, Balcomb proposes that the "return to participation" through the "Phenomenological tradition", Process Thought, and Postmodernism is equivalent

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1. This paper owes a profound debt with respect to its content and its formulation to the informed, critical eye of James R. Cochrane. I am deeply grateful for his suggestions and corrections but, foremost, for his role as constructive conversation partner over decades.

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to a return to the African spirit, one that, remarkably, turns out to be the spirit of Chalcedon's Christian trinitarianism.

What follows examines and critiques this all too common (i.e., this is not an ad hominem attack of Balcomb) but in fact inadequate portrayal of the western tradition, the African spirit, and Christian triumphalism. These reflections focus on Balcomb's portrayal of the Enlightenment to point out: 1) that there is far more to the Enlightenment than a dualistic Rationalism/Empiricism in need of saving "Participation"; and 2) that the dialectical structure of subject-object or of self-other (thesis-antithesis) as resolved by the synthesis of participation is a tempting but dangerous turn to a mystical and, at worst, speculative homogeneity, one that not only cavalierly blurs important distinctions in the tradition but also comes close to committing intellectual suicide. Finally, I will suggest that the "spirit" that comes out of Africa, rather than being an ontological claim about the "unity of all things", is the spirit of humanity's supersensible capacities to use symbols in order "see things that are not there" in phenomena, allowing us by means of individual (and communal!) immaterial understanding to transform and create reality in ways that nature cannot do on its own. This "spirit" does not, by some ontological necessity, turn the human being into a monstrous tyrant who rejects God and excuses its domination of others and nature because it has this power; rather, it reminds us that it is precisely because of these capacities that we human beings are (morally) responsible for our actions as individuals and communities. The challenge (and paradox) of our humanity is not that we must be moral, but that we *can* be. It is our choice as individuals and as communities to decide whether or not we want to be mere animals or responsibly cultivate those extra-ordinary, spiritual capacities that we possess as human beings that make us quintessentially, *possible* moral beings. This "spirit" is not tied to any particular culture or ontology, much less any particular, historical revelation, and, as a consequence, it is the "spirit" that both liberates and requires moral responsibility in the exercise of its freedom.

Let me begin with Balcomb's view on the Enlightenment, an all too popular one. Given that it is a metaphor, the fact that there is disagreement over the meaning of Enlightenment is no surprise. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,<sup>2</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno took Enlightenment to mean knowledge in a rationalist and instrumentalist sense. Reason and its technical application define Enlightenment for them. Horkheimer and Adorno were seeking an explanation for the 'resurgence of barbarism' in the Third Reich (racism, people, native country, blood, and land [Aryanism, *Volk*, *Heimat*, *Blut*, and *Boden*]). In part, at least, their argument is

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2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982). See Otfried Höffe, "1. Aufklärung", in *Kants Kritik der praktischen Vernunft. Eine Philosophie der Freiheit* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2012), 4-27.

that the following constitutes the “Enlightenment” dialectic: instrumental reason (the thesis), a rejection of the elitist character of such knowledge (the antithesis), and a resultant barbarism (the synthesis). This very dialectic can be observed to be driving Balcomb’s reading of the Enlightenment; but it comes at the cost of another kind of “barbarism”—not of racism, people, native country, blood, and land, but through the promotion of “participation” of a kind that ironically tends to eliminate reflective judgment.<sup>3</sup>

Balcomb, like many, many others, has come to view the delusionary assumption of epistemological power and its supposed superiority by so-called ‘enlightened’ humanity as the explanation of all kinds of imperialisms: colonial, cultural, religious, economic, and so on. Technological instrumentalism, in particular, is viewed as the defining mark of an elitist, ‘enlightened’ society. As a consequence, the Enlightenment becomes both epistemologically and culturally a convenient straw-man for all human-caused disasters. Enlightenment, in a nutshell, means human arrogance; it is a dis-ease of ‘the West’, or more generally, ‘the First World’.

Although one cannot (and would not want to) control a metaphor, what one can do is question whether or not there are other meanings to Enlightenment than this all-too obvious and derogatory narrative?<sup>4</sup> It is just too easy, for example, using such a broad paintbrush of Enlightenment reason as rationalism and instrumentalism, to view Kant, erroneously, as the arch-villain of the Enlightenment worldview.

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3. In addition to the usual meaning of this metaphor today, I use *reflecting* judgment in Kant’s technical sense: the capacity to *seek out* a conceptual scheme for understanding phenomena. Reflecting judgment is distinguished from *determining* judgment in that the latter does and the former does not possess a conceptual grasp of given phenomena. See “Introduction IV. On the Power of Judgment as an a priori Legislative Faculty” in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 66f. Kant stresses that even determining judgments were originally reflecting judgments (see *ibid.*, 74). Two points need to be underscored: Kant explicitly rejects “Rationalism” (see “Refutation of Idealism” in *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR), translated by Norman Kemp Smith [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965], B 274–287), and his notion of “rationality” is quite different from our current use of it. “Rational” here is the same as “spirit” and means “supersensible order” or all that humanity must *add* to given phenomena in order to understand and act. It includes the schemas of concepts (as open-ended determinations of a *a priori* synthetic judgment, not some system of Rationalism’s Platonic ideas) and the various capacities of judgment that include determining, reflective, and aesthetic judgment (i.e., all those necessary elements that consciousness adds to phenomena in order to understand, to act, and to take responsibility for its actions). In other words, “rational” is not limited to being logically consistent, although an important criterion for rationality is internal coherence. However, this internal coherence does not mean “a ‘Rationalist’ internal logical system” as if something that could somehow stand alone, independent of phenomena but is concerned with “supersensible coherence” in the sense of the fitting together of the conditions of possibility of a *a priori* synthetic judgments with themselves and with phenomena.
4. Besides Balcomb’s reading of Enlightenment in this way, see also, for example, John McCumber, *On Philosophy: Notes from a Crisis* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013).

After all, did he not elevate reason even above God,<sup>5</sup> and did he not call us ‘to do our duty<sup>6</sup>?’ Kant’s deontological (duty) ethic is too frequently viewed as a driving imperative that imposes European Enlightenment imperialism on the world, as the clearest expression of a view that the ‘enlightened’ have a duty to elevate the remainder of humanity into the light of “true” knowledge.

This paper seeks to dispel this common but rather mistaken reading of Kant; even more, it seeks a retrieval of Kant’s project precisely as perhaps the only constructive alternative to rationalism, instrumentalism, deontology (popularly conceived), and the speculative metaphysics of ‘participation’ that Balcomb calls for. It will employ Kant’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* and his *Mutmaßliche Anfang der Menschengeschichte (Conjectural Beginnings to Human History)* to suggest that Kant’s notion of *pure* religion (in contrast to *historical* religion) can appropriately be said to have originated in Africa (as odd as that might seem at first glance), and that the human species can yet benefit from this “African spirit” rather than subordinate itself to any particular cultural or inculturated religious tradition (e.g., for Balcomb, Christianity).

## Background

The rationalist Enlightenment was long underway when Kant wrote his *What is Enlightenment?* in 1784, three years after the publication of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. This is a clue that Kant’s essay is already a *critique* of the popular notion of Enlightenment in his own day.

Pierre Bayle began publication of his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* already in 1695. Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert began the *Encyclopédie* project in the 1740s. 1713 had already seen the publication of the first German weekly paper, *Vernünffler (The Subtler*, though in German the root word is ‘reason’), under the pen of Johann Mattheson. Devoted to opening the door to truth, it was influenced by two London publications, the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*. These publications were followed by what one could call a flood of transient, yet influential papers: 200 in England, 20–25 in Spain and France, and more than 100 in Germany.<sup>7</sup> With their emphasis on tolerance, and a propagation

5. This is Karl Barth’s claim in *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte*, 5th ed. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 40, 53–56, 85–86, 100.

6. See Kant’s insistence, for example, that “Duty is certain; however, whether or not something particular from God is a duty is ‘highly uncertain’”. [McGaughey’s translation] (*Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der Bloßen Vernunft*, Vol. IV of Immanuel Kant. Werke in sechs Bänden, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 822n).

7. See Holger Böning, *Der Musiker und Komponist Johann Mattheson als Hamburger Publizist. Studie zu den Anfängen der Moralischen Wochenschriften und der deutschen Musikpublizistik* (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2011).

of a humanist and educational vision with an orientation on this world rather than the next, their insights were grounded in principles of reason. Particularly the clergy viewed these publications as a threat to their proclamations, as well as to pious, edifying literature generally.

We will see, though, given the nature of Kant's 'Copernican Revolution', that his notion of *sapere aude* ('dare to know' for oneself) has a far different meaning than 'liberating truth through empirical knowledge' (which, in turn, was taken by too many to mean a challenge to all notions of tradition, including church doctrine). In sum, when it comes to Kant's understanding of Enlightenment, we are confronted today with what I call *metaphor interference* on a grand scale. Without care, we are susceptible to assuming that he meant with his terminology merely what his contemporaries meant by it or, anachronistically and more problematically, that he meant with his terminology what we mean by it today.

## The Kantian Copernican Turn and *Limited Reason*

'Everyone knows' that the Copernican Turn (henceforth, CT) consists of the claim that the earth is not the centre of the universe/solar system. The significance of this turn for the Enlightenment is frequently taken to be that Christian theology was discredited because the earth and humanity were no longer to be understood as at the centre of a divine plan for reality.<sup>8</sup> Kant, however, saw in the CT something more profound: it places humanity squarely in the centre of an *epistemological universe*.<sup>9</sup>

This contains important inferences. First, as far as we can discern, we are the only species capable of denying its senses on the basis of perceptible certainties by appealing to an imperceptible, symbolic system -- in this case, mathematics. Second, and equally significant, the truth of the CT is not about the empirical. Quite to the contrary, its truth denies the apparent truth of empirical experience (i.e., that the sun revolves around the earth). Third, for Kant, this turn to the symbolic order of the imperceptible is no simplistic turn to Rationalism!

Kant, who taught physics and mathematics in addition to philosophy, understood that the CT (like the law of gravity and physical laws generally) is something imperceptible. If we wish to accurately understand the solar system

8. Of course, Christian theologians don't need geocentrism to defend Church doctrine. The fact that the earth is not the centre of the physical universe is no threat to an omniscient, divine plan. It merely underscores the omnipotence of that plan.
9. This is pointed out by Ernst Cassirer: "Modern philosophy and modern science [...] had to prove that the new [Copernican] cosmology, far from enfeebling or obstructing the power of human reason, establishes and confirms this power." *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, reprint, 1944 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 15.

and physical events, we need to add imperceptible elements to the phenomena in order to understand them at all. In fact, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is precisely his attempt to identify all that is imperceptible, and *necessary* (but not in itself sufficient, of course), for us to understand phenomena. Crucially, though, the imperceptible and *necessary* elements here do not consist of traditional, (Platonic) rationalistic metaphysics. Although understanding involves a distinctly (if not uniquely) human activity of *adding things that are not there in the phenomena*, those things that are added are not capricious human constructions. They are *necessary* not because they can be proved to be part of an invisible, absolute order independent of and over against the empirical world, but because without their *assumption* we could *not* experience phenomena as we do, at all. Kant labeled such *additions* the work of *a priori* synthetic judgment.

On the surface, this seems either to embrace Rationalism or, if one rejects Rationalism as Kant did, to open the door to wild speculation contrary to the spirit of rationalist and instrumentalist Enlightenment. On these grounds the Vienna Circle rejected the notion of *a priori* synthetic judgment,<sup>10</sup> arguing that if humanity necessarily has to add things to phenomena to understand them, then how does one decide what is appropriate and what is inappropriate to add? Is not Kant either engaged in self-delusion (denying that he is a Rationalist) or imperialistically imposing his own, subjective and capricious, elements upon reality while calling them *a priori* synthetic judgments?<sup>11</sup>

Kant could indeed be dismissed as a Rationalist were he to claim that *a priori* synthetic judgment involves a system of ideas absolutely independent of phenomena, or as a relativist were he to claim that we capriciously add *a priori* synthetic elements to phenomena. He does neither. Instead, for him humanity's dependence upon what he calls empirical intuition (i.e., sense perception) for any and all understanding indicates the clearest acknowledgement of the *limits to reason*.<sup>12</sup> In short, without empirical perception, it would never occur to us that there was anything remotely like *a priori* synthetic judgment. What we add to the phenomena in *a priori* synthetic judgment is not an absolute system of Platonic

10. See Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, and Hans Hahn, "Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung -- der Wiener Kreis", in *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung, Sozialismus und Logischer Empirismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 89–95.

11. This is not the place to discuss the metaphor interference associated with the term 'synthesis', but one must at least observe that the Vienna Circle failed to distinguish (as Kant does distinguish) between synthesis as 'nexus' (Rationalism) and synthesis as 'compositio' (Critical Idealism). See *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's Press, 1929), B201\*.

12. Kant's famous aphorism in this respect is: "Thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions [sense perception] without concepts are blind." *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's Press, 1929), B 75. This is a theme that he underscores ever again in the first critique. See, as well, A 95, A 349, B 87, 148, 267, 295, 298, 314, 349, 517, 640, 649, 667, 707, 730, 737, 747, and 795.

ideas independent of experience because the limits to reason make it impossible for us to determine the metaphysical status of our concepts. Nonetheless, a concept is *necessary* to the extent that it fits into our grasp of a coherent order of concepts and facilitates understanding of the phenomena. This would be a strange form of Rationalism indeed (*if Kant were a Rationalist*) since Kant's conceptual order is *necessary but intrinsically open-ended*, capable of revision where internal coherence and the phenomena demand it.

For example, when Kant speaks of religion within the limits to reason, he is not forcing religion into a framework imposed by absolute reason, as one might conclude given the title of his book, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen [Limits] der bloßen Vernunft (Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason)*. Here he is concerned, rather, with a subjective genitive (reason's limitations) rather than an objective genitive (reason's sovereignty over everything else). Kant reminds us over and over that *all reason is limited*. Among those limits, in addition to the *objective*, physical world that is necessary for any and all perception, are the (to be sure, non-Rationalist) *necessary, subjective conditions for the exercise of reason* in the first place.

Now the term *necessary* also invites metaphor interference. It is easily confused for *determining*. Turn on a water faucet, and water will necessarily flow: in other words, the flowing water is *determined* by the faucet having been turned on. Instead, we must distinguish between necessary and sufficient, not between determination and indeterminacy. Something can be a necessary condition for an event, but not be sufficient to account for the event (e.g., a car is a necessary condition for an automobile accident, but it is not sufficient in itself to cause the accident).

However, unlike *objective*, physical necessity, Kant's *subjectively necessary conditions* are not rationalistically deterministic. In short, the *subjectively necessary conditions for understanding are not sufficient for understanding*. Unlike Plato's notion of learning as *recollection (anamnesis)*<sup>13</sup> of what one has always and already known but forgotten, knowledge consists in coming to discern what the necessary conditions for understanding phenomena are. Understanding, as far as we know *within our limits*, is impossible without prior experience of phenomena. Yet, we must learn how properly to exercise the necessary conditions for understanding if we are to understand anything.

This is the crucial, brilliant insight that drives Kant's entire project. Rather than knowledge resting upon empirical evidence (over which, with rare exceptions, we can endlessly quarrel) or metaphysical certainties (which are in fact always speculative), knowledge is grounded in non-Empirical and non-Rationalistic, *imperceptible necessities* for knowing anything at all. Thus, knowledge consists

13. See *Meno* 85d-86b and *Phaedo* 65-67.

in identifying those universal elements that we must both *assume* and *add* to the phenomena – the latter, of course, being *already given*. Although it ‘sounds like’ Rationalism (here we have another example of potential metaphor interference) but is not, what saves these elements from (an imperial) relativism is precisely that they are universal, characteristic of all human beings—indeed, a mark of being human. Critically, this is not a claim of absolute, metaphysical certainty, but a heuristic claim of assumption. If there is anything like rational consciousness (and without rational consciousness there is no understanding), then it must involve *the assumption* of these necessary elements — everywhere and at all times, for all human beings (or all rational [= critical], sentient creatures capable of denying their senses).

We need to be careful here. The claim of universality is not based upon either empirical evidence or metaphysical certainties because the universal elements of which we speak are imperceptible assumptions that must be *added* to phenomena. Again, though, without the assumption of rationality and its universal, imperceptible conditions of possibility, there can be no understanding. Should we conclude that there is nothing like rational consciousness (i.e., nothing like universal, imperceptible necessity), then there would be no basis for us to seek understanding of phenomena whatsoever. We would reduce ourselves to intuitive, instinctual animals for which laws of nature are meaningless because we would be incapable of grasping them any more than other animals do.

Can we *prove* that these necessary elements apply everywhere and at all times? No! However, again, if we do not assume that they do, then we cannot claim to understand (i.e., we are incapable of understanding) anything. It is helpful to remind ourselves here that even the laws of physics are incapable of proof (or disproof) that they apply everywhere and at all times. Nonetheless, if we assume that they do, we find ourselves able to understand phenomena in ways that would simply be impossible were we to assume that they do *not* apply everywhere at all times.

Kant’s CT is no elevation of humanity above God to say what God can and cannot be or do, as Barth claimed. Rather, the CT acknowledges the limits to human perception and to reason, even as it acknowledges our dependence upon conditions of possibility that are not of our creation (this includes the universe, of course). Kant affirms that God unequivocally exists, as the symbol for the origin and unity of all that is. Yet, he explicitly warns against our asserting any predicates to God because doing so *denies the limits to reason and elevates humanity to divinity*.<sup>14</sup> In other words, his identification of the inadequacies of the traditional arguments for God (the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments [see CPR, B 620-658]), as well as his own moral argument (see CPJ, 308-331), do not

14. See *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1974), 311, 355-56.

prove that God does not exist.<sup>15</sup> God is a necessary assumption (i.e., a necessary *belief*); but it is important to note that this is not the anthropomorphic God of Chalcedon, and that any arguments for God say more about us and our limits than they can say anything about God.<sup>16</sup> What do the arguments say about us? They say that humanity is in the middle between Empiricism and Rationalism, that we are required to approach both only with heuristic assumptions arrived at out of what we experience *ourselves* as capable of doing: understanding phenomena and acting on the basis of what we necessarily add to the phenomena. In short, our capacities, our understanding or reason, and our actions are all limited -- even with regard to our grasp of the laws of physics.<sup>17</sup> Yet, astonishingly, we are the species with the power to destroy nature.<sup>18</sup>

### A Special Capacity: Autonomous Freedom

In addition to the domain of physical causality for which we can grasp (i.e., supply our understanding of) physical laws governing the phenomena, there is another domain of causality governed by its own laws. However here, too, as with the terms ‘Enlightenment’, ‘reason’, ‘synthesis’, and ‘deontology’, we encounter metaphor interference. Mere use of the term ‘autonomy’ does not mean that Kant is speaking of what we now often mean by autonomy (independence from any and all authority). Autonomy comes from αὐτόνομος, which literally means ‘giving the law to oneself’.

In the context of his discussion of freedom, autonomy is concerned with that domain of experience that is not blindly determined by physical laws. We are capable of doing things that nature could never accomplish on its own. This creative freedom, though, involves far more than the mere production of artifacts. It involves all that we must *add to* phenomena in order to understand and to act. This is the meaning of “autonomy” in Critical Idealism. It includes all *a priori* synthetic judgment and not merely unique, external action. In short, we are free

15. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), B 669.

16. Kant reminds us in Religion, 141, that “Our concern is not so much to know what he [God] is in himself (his nature) but what he is for us moral beings ....”

17. Far from being trapped in a Newtonian universe or Euclidean geometry, Kant explicitly acknowledges the open-endedness of our grasp of any and all laws. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 508, 641, 684, 708, 720, 786, and 862; *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird Auftreten können*, AA 04: 284-285, 352; *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*, AA 04, 473.

18. Kant identified the destructive power of our limited capacities already in his lectures on morality in 1774/5. See *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie*, (1774/1775), edited by Werner Stark and Manfred Kühn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 177.

in the Kantian sense to the degree that we are self-determining – that we possess capacities not reducible to physical determinism.

Self-determination, however, is not in-determinism. Self-determination is deliberate, and we give ourselves permission for it each time that we act. This permission occurs on the basis, in addition, of our holding ourselves accountable to a (non-physical) law that we have autonomously ‘given to ourselves’ at the moment of action. The only law that is compatible with such creative freedom, in fact, is a self-legislated (autonomous) law because any necessary imposition upon us of an *external* (heteronomous) law would be a denial of our freedom. On these grounds, we must distinguish among physical, civic, and moral laws. In contrast to self-legislated moral laws, both physical and civic laws are imposed upon the individual. Physical laws function automatically, whereas civic laws function on the basis of fear.

The very reality of the civic law suggests that there is a difference between liberty and freedom. The civic law restricts our liberty for the sake of ensuring confidence in a social order that (presumptively) is devoted to our well-being. Violation of this socially imposed, legal order can lead to physical restraints (e.g., monetary fines, incarceration, and even execution). In other words, the civic law governs our liberty within a social contract. However, neither the physical nor the civic law can guarantee justice. Justice requires a citizenry that is both free from physical determinism (i.e., able to do things that nature cannot do on its own) and subordinate to a self-imposed/self-legislated (i.e., autonomous) moral law—since we can do everything proper according to the civic law and still perpetrate great injustice. This is a moral law, then, that transcends, and must ground, any particular, civic law.

The clearest indicator that I can act on the basis of a self-legislated moral law is the fact that I can act *on the basis of a principle that is contrary to my self-interest*. Whereas I must be capable of doing something that nature cannot accomplish on its own in order to act contrary to my self-interest, I can neither prove nor disprove that I possess this extra-ordinary efficient causality or that the moral principles upon which I act are valid in all situations and at all times -- any more than I can prove that the physical laws of nature are valid in all situations and at all times.

The *fact* that I experience myself capable of acting on a principle contrary to my self-interest provides a double, indirect confirmation of autonomous freedom. First, acting contrary to one’s self-interest in a situation makes one excruciatingly aware of a kind of personal, moral responsibility tethered to something greater than the self that is unlike any other kind of experience. Second, simultaneously (indicating the inseparable circularity of freedom and morality), the need for a principle other than an understanding of physical and civic laws illuminates the presence of autonomous freedom itself as the *necessary* condition of possibility

for the self-legislating of the moral law.

Kant described this double confirmation as the closest we can come to a ‘fact of reason’.<sup>19</sup> Kant writes: “Reason is never in immediate relation to an object, but only to the understanding; and it is only through the understanding that it has its own [specifically] empirical employment.” (CPR, B 671) Put differently, understanding is anchored in empirical intuition (sense perception), but reason, according to Kant, is concerned with those elements in addition to the categories of the understanding that understanding must presuppose as *regulative ideas*, which, in turn, are *necessary* for understanding to function as it does. The three ideas of *pure* reason presupposed by the understanding, according to Kant, are God, freedom, and the soul. None of these ideas of reason is capable of proof or disproof because they cannot appear in the senses. Nonetheless, although the pure, regulative idea of creative freedom is incapable of empirical proof and, therefore, is not technically a ‘fact’, we cannot deny that we possess it and still remain human – hence, freedom is the close that we can come to a ‘fact of reason’.

Kant summarizes our autonomous freedom and moral responsibility by saying:

Here ... we see philosophy put in fact *in a precarious position* [emphasis added], which is to be firm even though there is nothing in heaven or on earth from which it depends or on which it is based. Here philosophy is to manifest its purity as sustainer of its own laws, not as herald of laws that an implanted sense or who knows what tutelary nature whispers to it, all of which -- though they may always be better than nothing at all -- can still never yield basic principles that reason dictates and that must have their source entirely and completely a priori and, as the same time, must have their commanding authority from this: that they expect nothing from the inclination of human beings but everything from the supremacy of the law and the respect owed it or, failing this, condemn the human being to contempt for himself and inner abhorrence.<sup>20</sup>

In short, Kant is not talking about liberty and the questioning, if not rejection of, any and all authority. Rather, he is talking about autonomous, creative freedom

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19. See *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1974), 36–37 and *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 342. See especially, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 3-4: “The concept of freedom ... constitutes the foundation stone of the entire structure of a system of pure, even of speculative reason, and all other concepts ... that as mere ideas have no bearing to this [freedom], are connected to it and obtain with and through it existence and objective reality ...

However, of all the ideas of speculative reason, freedom is also the only one of which we know its possibility *a priori* without actually perceiving it because it is the condition of the moral law, which we know.” [McGaughey’s translation] In the footnote here Kant writes: “... freedom [is] however the *ratio essendi* of the moral law; however, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom.” [McGaughey’s translation] In the ‘Remarks’ to §6 in the same text, Kant writes: “He [the individual] judges ... that he can do something because he is conscious that he should, and [he] recognizes within himself freedom, which without the moral law would remain unknown to him.” [McGaughey’s translation] See as well, Otfried Höffe, *Philosophie der Freiheit*, 151-52.

20. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 35.

and personal responsibility (central to ‘liberation,’ not liberty). The distinction between liberty and freedom/liberation places Kant’s call to *sapere aude* in an entirely different light. Daring to think for oneself means daring not to be a mere animal driven by instinct and mere appetites or a human being governed merely by unquestioned external demands and obligations to obtain status and prestige in the eyes of others. Daring to think for oneself means daring to act *as if* one is creatively free and *as if* there is a moral order governing that creative freedom. Daring to think for oneself means that morality is not something that one *must do* but something that only a human being (or any other rational being) *can do*. As we shall see, this has direct relevance to the freedom not just of oneself, but of others too, indeed, of all.

## Hypothetical and Categorical Imperatives

The distinction between what we *must* and what we *can do* is by no means trivial because it is the key to our be(com)ing human. As much as our creative freedom takes us *above* nature, it by no means takes us *out of* nature. To confuse the two is why, from the perspective of Kant’s Critical Idealism, morality is frequently misunderstood as the mere successful negotiation of a natural, social world.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, Critical Idealism is concerned with the goodness of one’s deeds in the world. Morality, however, is based not on external, moral acceptance of us by others, but on an internal, change of thought (*die Umwandlung der Denkungsart*).<sup>22</sup> One has control over one’s selection of the moral principle to govern one’s actions, but importantly, one does not have control over the consequences.<sup>23</sup>

There is, then, a difference between *necessities* imposed upon us by our external world and *necessities* that are self-imposed. The former are called heteronomous, *hypothetical necessities*, whereas the latter are called autonomous, *categorical necessities*.<sup>24</sup>

21. Evolutionary biologists like Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) and neuroethicists like Patricia Churchland in *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) define morality in terms of this *consequentialist* notion of success in one’s environment. By such a definition, every drug lord, mafia boss, and criminal conspiracy would be happy to talk about morality.
22. Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, 698–99.
23. See *Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen*, vol. IV of *Immanuel Kant. Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 635–43.
24. See *Groundwork*, 25. On the distinction between *hypothetical* and *categorical*, see *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, vol. III of *Immanuel Kant. Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 201; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 22; and *Kants Leben und Lehre* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 249.

With respect to hypothetical necessities, there are two kinds: technical and pragmatic.<sup>25</sup> Technical necessities are required for the accomplishment of a physical task. For example, to successfully build a house, one must start with a solid foundation. One does not start by hanging the roof in the air. Pragmatic necessities, on the other hand, are concerned with what Kant calls our ‘personal welfare’. An example would be a career choice. If I wish to be a lawyer, it is necessary that I pass the bar exam, not a driver’s license exam to operate an 18-wheeler.

Yet, neither kind of hypothetical necessity is capable of determining whether or not an individual is going to subject her-/himself to them. An individual must decide to build a house or pursue a career. To the degree that such a decision is the consequence of autonomous freedom (an ability to do something that nature cannot do on its own), the decision is *categorical* and independent of its physical (or socio-cultural) circumstance.

When it comes to *categorical* decisions, we are then confronted with a different kind of necessity: an entirely self-imposed, or *autonomous* necessity. This necessity is governed by its own laws, the moral laws. When speaking of ‘moral’ laws, however, we must again be careful of metaphor interference. These moral laws are not simply subjective, any more than the physical laws of technical, hypothetical necessity are subjective -- even if both kinds of laws have to be added to the phenomena by the individual if s/he is to understand and to act properly. In other words, although we do not create these laws, we are the only species (as far as we know) that is capable of employing them. To be able to act successfully and properly at all, we have to act *as if* there were these two complementary systems of law,<sup>26</sup> though we cannot prove the universality of either.

How do we determine a categorical law when, unlike the physical law, there is nothing in the phenomena themselves (the hypothetical) that establishes the validity of the law? Clearly, the determination cannot be established by or from our *situation*, for then the moral law would be hypothetical and heteronomous, not categorical. We can (although we are not obligated to) employ the three forms

25. See *Groundwork*, 27.

26. I prefer ‘complementary’ rather than ‘compatible’ since autonomous, creative freedom is capable of destroying nature, not simply capable of fitting into nature. On several occasions, Kant points out that wherever there is efficient causality, there is a lawful order. Again, this is not because we can unequivocally prove such a lawful order since we only experience in the senses the effects of causality, not the causes themselves. Nonetheless, the lesson of dreams is, at least, that clarity and distinctness of perception is no guarantee of order, and dreams allow us to distinguish two domains of phenomena for which we can assume lawfulness: the physical world and autonomous freedom. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, B520–21; *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1783), 34, and ‘Metaphysik Mrongovius,’ in *Kant’s Vorlesungen von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, vol. VI, *Ergänzungen II* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1983), VI, *Ergänzungen II*:927.

of the categorical imperative to test our moral law, viz.: 1) act on the basis of a law that you would want to be universal *as if* it were a law of nature (i.e., do not act purely out of self-interest); 2) treat the other and oneself as ends and never as a mere means; and 3) acknowledge the dignity of the other (view the other as an autonomous, creative being).<sup>27</sup>

Note that our self-expectation to act on the basis of a moral law is *not* grounded in proving that there is a universal moral law. It is grounded in our autonomous, creative freedom, which we can use with an intention to do good or evil (pure self-interest).<sup>28</sup> This is what requires of us that we self-legislate the principles that are to govern our actions. Again, we encounter the limits to reason: we cannot be morally perfect, but we can do our moral best.

## A Culture that Promotes the Will, not merely a Culture of Skills

In light of Kant's emphasis on autonomous, creative freedom, it is easy to conclude that he was only concerned with the self-determination of the individual, and that he not only rejected all external authority over the individual but also leaves the individual isolated from anyone else, from any community, with the whole weight of moral responsibility on her/his shoulders. We have already seen that human autonomy has to do with creative freedom and not mere liberty from traditional authority. Yet the rejection of heteronomous morality seems to leave the individual in a personal vacuum. Here Kant surprises us, once again, however.

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant distinguishes between a 'culture of skills' and a 'culture that promotes the will'.<sup>29</sup> The 'culture of skills' is Kant's label for what Rousseau calls 'second nature' (i.e., all that humanity creates 'on top of' nature). It is the culture that we admire in terms of literature, architecture, the arts, and commerce.

The notion of 'culture that promotes the will' confronts us, once again, with possible metaphor interference. This is not the 'will to exercise power' over nature or others. A culture that 'promotes the will' is devoted to cultivating humanity's '*aptitude*' as moral beings who must self-legislate the principles to govern their behavior. Furthermore, this 'culture' is no heteronomous, moral finger wagging;

27. These three forms of the categorical imperative are found in Section II of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

28. We touch here on Kant's claim that humanity is "radically evil". However, the radicality of evil points to a *necessary capacity*, not to an *ontologically, corrupting condition*. We are capable of choosing to act on the basis of an evil principle, but we are not required to do so by nature. See the discussion of capacity (*Anlage*) and inclination (*Hänge*) in *Religion*, Part I, "II. Concerning the Propensity [*Hang*] to Evil in Human Nature."

29. See *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 299.

it is a culture that reminds the individual of her/his ‘aptitude’ that constitutes a choice to be(come) human. This culture reminds and supports us in doing what we *can do* (i.e., be a moral being), unlike any other species, so far as we know at least. However, a ‘culture that promotes the will’ knows that it cannot determine what the individual *must do*, or put differently, autonomous morality cannot be legislated by the heteronomous civic law (for, to remind one, it stands above any civic law as the guarantor of justice that the civic law itself cannot guarantee).

Moral culture supports the individual’s assumption of moral responsibility for her/his actions especially when that responsibility requires acting contrary to one’s self-interest. Kant articulates this culture as an ‘invisible kingdom of ends’ to which all human beings belong but which we are free to ignore. It is the task of the ‘culture that promotes the will’ to remind and sustain the individual of this set of extra-ordinary aptitudes and to encourage the use of one’s extra-ordinary capacities for the sake of the universal good—that which transcends self-interest for the sake of all.

## What is Enlightenment?

We are now in a position to take up Tony Balcomb’s (and other’s) judgment on ‘the Enlightenment’ with a view to showing its inadequacy in its own terms, and as a preliminary to indicating why it is not helpful to theological thinking in general or African theology in particular. Balcomb opens his article with the claim from Paul S. Fiddes:

Only by bringing together being as relation, and knowing as participation, will we begin to overcome the view of the human subject stemming from the Enlightenment, in which observation is the basic paradigm of knowing [which] means that knowledge takes the form of subjecting objects to the control of our consciousness, as things that can either literally be seen with the eyes or ‘seen’ with the mind [which] is thus exalted as master of all it surveys.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to Balcomb’s take on the Enlightenment and in order to gain access to a notion of Enlightenment anchored in the creativity that drives liberation and is at the heart of the significance of the African spirit that makes us all human, we are better served by examining Kant’s notion more carefully. Kant famously defines the Enlightenment in the opening lines of his essay as

... man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance. This immaturity is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one’s own mind without another’s guidance. Dare to know! (*Sapere aude.*) ‘Have the courage to use your own understanding,’ is therefore the motto of the enlightenment.

30. Balcomb, “Metaphysics of Participation”, 18.

Kant ends his essay with:

We observe here as elsewhere in human affairs, in which almost everything is paradoxical, a surprising and unexpected course of events: a large degree of civic freedom appears to be of advantage to the intellectual freedom of the people, yet at the same time it establishes insurmountable barriers. A lesser degree of civic freedom, however, creates room to let that free spirit expand to the limits of its capacity. Nature, then, has carefully cultivated the kernel within the hard husk--namely the urge for and the vocation of free thought. And this free thought gradually reacts back on the modes of thought of the people, and men become more and more capable of acting in freedom. At last free thought acts even on the fundamentals of government and the state finds it agreeable to treat man, who is now more than a machine, in accord with his dignity.

As much as these passages at first glance appear to define Enlightenment in terms of independence from all external authority (family, tradition, religious, political, and so on), we are now able to avoid the metaphor interferences they contain. The ground of Enlightenment is dignity (i.e., autonomous, creative freedom), not liberty (i.e., questioning, if not rejection of, any and all authority). Proper exercise of one's autonomy occurs with respect to two law-governed domains: theoretical reason (the physical world), and practical reason (morality). Autonomy is thus *inseparable* both from the physical world of efficient causality, and from an invisible 'kingdom of ends' that needs a 'culture that promotes the will' so that the individual cultivates and exercises her/his highest aptitude, self-legislated moral responsibility for one's actions. Autonomy is thus a mark of the human being not as an isolated, atomic individual, but as 'embodied' and 'relationally' so.

Just as Kant distinguishes between a culture of skill and a culture that promotes the will, and between *historical* religion (based on revelation) and *pure* religion (based on practical reason),<sup>31</sup> so too, he distinguishes here between an external 'husk' (of civic freedom) and a 'carefully cultivated kernel' of morally accountable, free thought. These distinctions are all connected, and indicate how central a role religion plays in Kant's project. Practical reason *is* religion for him, rooted in our dignity, and provoked by our creative freedom for which we are accountable to ourselves and to others.<sup>32</sup>

The 'barbarism' that is the antithesis to this Kantian thesis of Enlightenment is not merely a world that rejects reason (in Kant's sense) as a culturally, elitist tool

31. See the second preface to *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, edited and translated by Allan Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

32. One could even, without misrepresenting Kant, say 'accountable to God' as well, as long as this is understood not in terms of some anthropomorphic image or substantive description of God, but as a regulative idea of the indescribable unity of the whole without which we cannot imagine to what it is that we are accountable.

and thereby turns to the mythologies of people, native country, blood, earth (*Volk, Heimat, Blut, und Boden*), and mystical participation; it is also a world where there is no grasp of the invisible order of physical laws and moral laws much less a species capable of moral improvement. Why is it a kind of barbarism? Because we then end up being driven by little more than animal appetites or, equally problematic, by the mere human pursuit of status and prestige in the eyes of the pack/clan,<sup>33</sup> and this excoriates the aptitude to act on the basis of moral principles because they are right and not because they serve self-interest.

## Beyond Rationalism's Dualism and Participation

With Kant's understanding of the Enlightenment, we are in a position to see why many prejudices about Kant's notion of Enlightenment are in fact trapped in metaphor interference, that is, in a misunderstanding of it that allows easy over-generalizations and a misplaced attack.

The Enlightenment is taken by Balcomb (and others) to be shaped by Cartesian dualism for which "'Real' reality is not what our experience tells us but what our [scientific (Balcomb's insertion)] minds tell us. And [*sic*] our scientific minds operate not on the basis of involvement *in* the world ... but on the basis of detachment *from* the world".<sup>34</sup> "The only form of God that can be conceived of in the Cartesian framework is Deism -- the notion of a distant Originator that [*sic*] has no direct involvement in the world."<sup>35</sup> The route to avoiding Cartesian dualism, he suggests, is to embrace 'participation', which means "turning to the theology of the Patristic Fathers, Thomas Aquinas, Eastern Orthodoxy, the mystical traditions, Process Thought, and panentheism"<sup>36</sup> to overcome all dualities between the self and world and separations of the self over against its world.

Kant is portrayed here as caught in the Cartesian dualistic framework because his notion of 'representation' means that "... we can never get to the thing itself".<sup>37</sup> Since Balcomb insists that reality is holistic, he accuses Kant of circular reasoning ("begging the question") because representation requires a participatory

33. Pursuit of "status and prestige" is what Kant labels "humanity" in contrast to our "animality" (mere physical appetites) and "personality" (doing the right thing because it is right and not because it merely serves our self-interest). See *Religion*, 50-52.

34. Balcomb, "Metaphysics of Participation", 25.

35. Balcomb, "Metaphysics of Participation", 26.

36. Balcomb, "Metaphysics of Participation", 26. For a discussion of "participation" in early Christianity, see Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

37. Balcomb, "Metaphysics of Participation", 27.

connection between what is represented and abstract reasoning -- hence, “denotes a weak level of participation”.<sup>38</sup> Such weak participation is contrasted with oral cultures in which “... *language has high participative value* [emphasis added] because of the ontological connection between [*sic*] all things. Words have agency. They can be used not simply to depict or represent but to create and produce”.<sup>39</sup> Balcomb concludes:

Modern rationalism, the creation of the secular, the disenchantment of the universe, and disengagement has brought about a kind of disinterested detachment in which the role of language is mainly to do with making oneself understood on a rational level than bring reality into being. The neoplatonic forerunners of the western worldview had a different understanding of the participatory value of language. Instead of emphasis being put on the Kantian inaccessibility to the thing in itself, the emphasis was on the relationship between the [invisible (Balcomb’s insertion)] form or essence of the thing and the [visible (Balcomb’s insertion)] expression or manifestation of the thing.<sup>40</sup>

Balcomb takes his understanding of ‘participation’ from Simon Oliver’s laudable, ‘nondualistic’ reading of Plato according to which:

... the realm of the Forms and the realm of becoming are ‘interwoven’ in such a way that the visible, created realm which [*sic*] we inhabit perpetually ‘borrows’ existence from the Forms (and ultimately the Form of the Good) which [*sic*] are more real, eternal and stable. Plato uses many words to describe this relationship: *mixis* (mixture), *symploke* (interweaving), *koinonia* (coupling), *mimesis* (copying), *methexis* (participation). All of these preclude any sense that the realm of becoming is autonomous.<sup>41</sup>

However, leaving aside that all of this language claiming to deny ‘the realm of becoming’ as autonomous is figurative, so that one is only, speculatively, screaming louder, offering little more than what amounts to a dogmatic, holistic, metaphysics in contrast to dualistic reality, we have here not only an understanding of language that can lead to all kinds of (speculative) agencies because language alone creates and produces, but also an extraordinary collection of diverse orientations collected under the banner that, if they reject Enlightenment dualism, they must all be saying the same thing: participation.

For example, Balcomb proposes that animism represents a version of ‘pre-Enlightenment’ participation. Balcomb is drawing his understanding of animism, apparently, from Tim Ingold,<sup>42</sup> rather than the work of E.B. Tylor, who established

38. Balcomb, “Metaphysics of Participation”, 27.

39. Balcomb, “Metaphysics of Participation”, 27.

40. Balcomb, “Metaphysics of Participation”, 27.

41. Balcomb, “Metaphysics of Participation”, 27–28. The quote comes from Simon Oliver, “Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: From Participation to Late Modernity”, in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, edited by John Milbank and Simon Oliver (London: Routledge, Abingdon, 2009), 19.

42. Tim Ingold, *Being Alive -- Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

the terminology in the 19th century. To be sure, *animus* means ‘soul’ in the Latin,<sup>43</sup> but Tylor’s animism is precisely the opposite of Ingold’s “shift ... away from the concept of life existing in entities ... with boundaries”.<sup>44</sup> Tylor’s animism is anchored in an analogy to the human ‘soul’ to propose that all physical bodies have animating, intentional spirits.<sup>45</sup> The analogy is as follows: I experience myself as an invisible, intentional agent manifested through my body. Although I cannot experience directly the invisible, intentional agent of any other person, I can draw an analogy from another person’s physical body that it is reasonable to conclude that s/he also is an invisible, intentional agent indirectly manifested through her/his body. The analogy proceeds from other persons to animals, to plants, and concludes by extension to inorganic bodies as a ‘reasonable’ leap. The point: *animism* fragments the world into individual agents and it is in fact profoundly dualistic because it involves the notion that the ‘trickster’ is a spirit that has changed bodies. Clearly, then at the least, animism is not one thing, and the classic formulation of animism is structured on the very rationalistic dualism that Balcomb claims it avoids. Balcomb can only putatively assert what he means by *animism*, but he cannot claim to know what animism *really* means. There will always remain a speculative remainder over which one can quarrel given the figurative nature of language.

More significant than the capricious lumping together of heterogeneous traditions and points of view under the homogeneous label of ‘participation’,<sup>46</sup> which leaves us incapable of making distinctions between and among things and delivers us over to all kinds of fanciful linguistic fictions for explaining experience, is the far too facile manner in which Kant is subsumed under Enlightenment described as ‘modern rationalism’.

Balcomb offers us, actually, a somewhat simplistic, classificatory framework of dualism and participation in which all pre-Enlightenment thinkers are identified as participatory, and ‘*the project of western civilization*’ of the post-Enlightenment is defined in terms of dualistic rationalization -- with the exceptions, it appears, of panentheism,<sup>47</sup> Weber, Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, the Frankfurt

43. This is acknowledged by Balcomb. See “The Metaphysics of Participation – Exploring an Idea whose Time has Returned”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 145 (March 13 2013), 32.

44. Balcomb, “Metaphysics of Participation”, 32.

45. See Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, *Religion in Primitive Culture*, vol. 2 of *Primitive Culture*, The Library of Religion and Culture (New York: Harper and Brothers, Harper Torchbooks, 1958).

46. For a far more nuanced discussion of ‘participation’ that does not overlook the differences within Patristic Theology alone, much less place such diverse thinkers as all of Patristic Theology, Augustine, Aquinas, and Process Thought all in the same pot, see Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*.

47. In *Philosophers Speak of God*, reprint, 1953 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix, 1963), the pantheists, Charles Hartshorne and William Reese, provide a detailed analysis of the history

School, Benjamin, Marcuse, Fromm, Habermas, the ‘Romantic reaction against rationalism’, and ‘a host of others’.<sup>48</sup> Given all of these exceptions to *the* dualistic rationalization project of western civilization, one wonders whether there is any such monolithic project at all. In any event, most of these authors would surely be surprised, if not shocked, to hear that their work in some sense constituted “... the essential truth of Christian theology which [*sic*] is predicated on an outgoing God who astonishes us by participating in creation, in birth, in death, and in resurrection”.<sup>49</sup>

Rather than finding the solution to rationalization in the form of participatory, unreflective ‘openness’,<sup>50</sup> we might be better served by Kant’s Critical Idealism that entirely avoids speculative, Rationalist or Empirical metaphysical claims to focus on necessary conditions of possibility for any and all (i.e., universal) human experience and *moral responsibility*.

## The African Spirit and Liberation

These universal conditions of possibility provided Kant with the ‘certainty’ of necessity for his claim in *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* (*Conjectural Beginnings to Human History*) that human history is by no means independent of, but it also does not begin with, merely biological markers (what we

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of western philosophy as a contrast to pantheism, which is entirely contrary to Balcomb’s claim that pantheism represents the common, ‘participation’ metaphysics of pre- and non-Enlightenment thought.

48. Balcomb provides this list. See “The Metaphysics of Participation”, 32-33.

49. Tony Balcomb, “The Metaphysics of participation”, 34.

50. Balcomb quotes Ingold, again: “If science is to be a coherent knowledge practice, it must be rebuilt on the foundation of openness rather than closure, engagement rather than detachment ... Knowing must be reconnected with being, epistemology with ontology, thought with life.” “The Metaphysics of Participation”, 34. ‘Openness’ is Balcomb’s reading of Heidegger’s notion of *aletheia*: “For Heidegger, a being has to be existentially open to the world in order for ‘objectively present things [to] become accessible in the light or concealed darkness’. Such open-ness (Gk: *aletheia* – ‘clearing’) makes it available to illumination and the existential experience of objects.” (“The Metaphysics of Participation”, 32). Balcomb, and Ingold, appear to be confusing Heideggerian themes. ‘Openness’ in the sense of ‘world openness’ has to do with what Heidegger calls ‘state-of-mind’ (*Befindlichkeit*) (see *Sein und Zeit* [Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1979], 137), not *aletheia*. *Ἀληθεία* means ‘truth’, not ‘clearing’, and Heidegger makes an etymological reading of the Greek (*α-λανθάνω*: un-covering; dis-closed) as a more appropriate notion of truth than correspondence between a judgment and its referent. According to Heidegger, the truth of Being is an event of un-concealment. This reading of truth as *ἀληθεία* in light of the root *λανθάνω* (concealed) is not new with Heidegger. See Otto Willmann, *Geschichte des Idealismus. Band I: Vorgeschichte und Geschichte des antiken Idealismus*, reprint, 1894 (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1973), 188–89, and Paul Natorp, *Philosophische Systematik* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000), 376.

identify today as the significance of our upright posture, thumb usage, brain size, etc.). Human history began, according to Kant, where humanity's extra-ordinary creative freedom (to employ *a priori* synthetic judgment and to produce unique artifacts) and moral responsibility first emerged *on the basis of biology*. In Kant's language of 18<sup>th</sup> Century biology,<sup>51</sup> humanity occurs as a process of *epigenesis*<sup>52</sup> "on top" of its physical capacities. This would mean that human history began where the 'light' of Enlightenment first illuminated human actions a very long time before the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This illumination is by far nothing permanent that ensures humanity's steady moral progress, but it is what makes liberation in the broadest and most expansive senses of the term possible.

Kant can say that only humanity is capable of liberation (Enlightenment), and this comes from the cultivation of a culture "that promotes the will" in the sense of fulfillment of our species' extra-ordinary moral capacity. Until we exercise our moral capacity, we possess the ineradicable condition of dignity but not yet the accomplished status of 'personality' (doing the right thing because it is right and not merely because it serves our self-interest) that takes us beyond (but never escapes) from our mere 'animality' (basic needs and drives) and 'humanity' (what Kant called seeking status and prestige in the eyes of others).

The human being's 'spirit' that clearly emerged first in Africa consists in all of those imperceptible capacities (Kant called them 'supersensible' capacities) that are irreducible to physical causality or physical phenomena that, as far as we can discern thus far, only humanity possesses to the degree that allowed Kant to speak of humanity as the "goal of nature".<sup>53</sup> However, humanity as the "goal of nature" does not involve, as once again metaphor interference might encourage,

51. The Darwinian insight that new species emerge from *already existing* species is not found in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, German discussion, but the language of evolution (as preformation) and epigenesis (that more is involved in development than mere physical processes) was. Kant by no means invents this language. He reported that Johann Nicolas Tetens' two volume *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung* (Leipzig: M.G. Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1777) was well-read and on his desk as he wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Tetens argued for the combination of evolution and epigenesis to understand humanity. See *Philosophische Versuche*, II: 445, 465, 497, 479, 500, 512, 515, 519, 521, 526, 535, 536, 537, 548, 549. Volume II is devoted to the theme of "*Selbthätigkeit und Freyheit*" ("Self-Activity and Freedom"). Tetens had already defended (over against Wolff's "causal monism") the notion of freedom as its own causality. Tetens also has a significant discussion of that which consciousness must add to phenomena (what Kant calls *a priori* synthetic judgment), as well. See *Philosophische Versuche* I, 136, 139, 156, 162, 164, 220, 224, 226, 235, 299, 303, 305, 321, 325-27, 437, 512-13.
52. Epigenesis is found in contemporary biology, as well. See E.O. Wilson's latest, revolutionary, book *The Social Conquest of Earth* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2012) in which he emphasizes precisely the significance of the kind of creative freedom identified by Kant to understand humanity and breaks from William Hamilton's "kin selection" model and Richard Dawkins' "selfish-gene" explanation of human development.
53. See *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 293-297.

a crass anthropocentrism that places nature merely in our service to be exploited as we please.<sup>54</sup> Humanity is the ‘ultimate end’ of nature because of our capacities, not because we exercise those capacities correctly. In this respect, the spirit to which we are indebted from Africa is a spirit that consists of all the supersensible, creative and morally responsible capacities that, because they establish our dignity (without guaranteeing that we will live up to it), we must individually exercise and cultivate as a person and as a species in order to rise above our mere animal nature or self-interested inclinations. This ‘African spirit’ is what accompanied the human species out of Africa, and it remains an unsurpassable achievement that, paradoxically, must be achieved ever again by each of us in every generation and place as we dare to think for ourselves and embrace Enlightenment.

The ‘African spirit’ is the spirit of *pure* rather than *historical* religion.<sup>55</sup> Once again, metaphor interference can intrude to take ‘pure’ here to mean metaphysically essential, stripped of all cultural differences given that *historical* religion refers to all that is historically *accidental* to a religious tradition, that is, all that is an accretion of particular times and contexts. However, Kant’s notion of *pure* by no means sets up a contrast between metaphysically essential and historically accidental. The concept ‘pure’ simply refers to those *necessary* elements of experience (*a priori* synthetic judgments) that cannot appear in the senses. As a consequence, Kant identifies *pure* religion as the universal core of all religious traditions because it is concerned with the imperceptible, universal conditions of possibility for us to be(come) moral persons/communities. In short, rather than religion elevating a particular *historical* religion (e.g., Christianity) to the status of the one, true religion (as does Balcomb), *pure* religion calls us to see beneath all phenomenal manifestations of any culturally specific religion to discern the universal capacities of humanity, which make us moral beings not because we *must* be but because we *can* be. *Pure* religion puts us, as Kant said above, in a precarious position, indeed!

54. See especially Otfried Höffe’s observations on the “subjugation of nature”: “Here in Kant comes ... what at first glance is a provocative even an offensive claim, namely, that humanity is permitted ‘as far as in his power ... to subjugate all of nature’ ... [However,] a second look nullifies the offense: First, the notion ‘entire nature’ includes humanity and its internal nature. Second, this permission isn’t granted to humanity as such but solely to the individual as a moral being. As a consequence, the subjugation is not permitted to be capricious, not to mention despotic and exploitative, but is to transpire exclusively within the parameters of morality. Furthermore, ... permission for the subjugation [of nature] is tied to the governing responsibility of what is itself a ‘highest goal’ [of nature], the final goal that consists of humanity as a moral being. Kant challenges this moral being (humanity) to seek moral transformation of his dual nature, not only [her/his] external, natural nature but also [her/his] internal, reflective nature. The very minimum consists in the requirement that one succumb to no influence from this dual nature that contradicts humanity as the final goal of nature as a moral being.” [McGaughey’s translation] *Philosophie der Freiheit*, 436-37.

55. For a discussion of this distinction by Kant, see the second preface to *Religion*.

## Conclusion

Critical Idealism shifts our focus from ‘what can we know in order to act’ to a concern for ‘what does our action teach us about what we *necessarily* can know?’<sup>56</sup> On the one hand, given the limits to reason, any attempt to arrive at metaphysical certainties (e.g., ‘participation’) is incapable of proof (or disproof). On the other hand, given the limits to reason, we are able to identify conditions of possibility and capacities *that are necessary* in order for us to experience phenomena as we do. In short, the issue is not ‘what is correct, much less what is absolutely correct, knowledge’, but, rather, ‘what is responsible action?’ *That* is the key to the Enlightenment as Kant has it, and that is radically, decisively different from the idea of the Enlightenment that Balcomb (along with others) offers. We are the only species (certainly, with respect to degree), so far as we can tell at this point, that possesses the conditions of possibility and the capacities to initiate, consciously and intentionally, a sequence of events that nature cannot otherwise accomplish on its own. Rather than speculate over what we can know of traditional metaphysics or ontology, we best fulfill our extra-ordinary status by encouraging one another to self-legislate the moral principles to govern our creative potential. It may rightly be termed the universal task of ‘liberation’, for it embraces no particular groups or human beings, no particular cultures or traditions, no particular times and places, but all, for the sake of all.

Balcomb wants to believe ‘participation’ is the metaphysical key to experience and knowledge. He is surely entitled to that belief. However, participation is neither what he *necessarily* must believe nor certainly not what he *necessarily* should. What we need, then, is not a re-discovery of speculative, ubiquitous participation and or unfettered linguistic fictions to explain our experience but Enlightenment based upon *necessary conditions of possibility and necessary capacities!* Grasping that point more clearly, including its huge significance for human dignity and freedom/liberation, in acting with responsibility for ourselves and accountable for what we do with and to others (including the environment that sustains us), might serve theology, including African theology, better than what we are being offered in the somewhat diffuse and vague idea of participation.

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56. This is a paraphrasing of Fichte’s aphorism in “Die Bestimmung des Menschen”, in J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe, der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag (Günther Holzboog), 1981), 265: “We act not because we know, but we know because we are required by definition to act; practical reason is the root of all reason.”

