



Was Kant Anti-Semitic? With an “Addendum on Duty” by is licensed by Douglas R McGaughey under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

## Was Kant Anti-Semitic? with an “Addendum on Duty”<sup>1</sup>

“It is a peculiar habit of our capacity of attentiveness to focus precisely on that which is flawed about someone else; and to do so unintentionally: to focus on the missing button on the coat of the other, or the gap in the teeth, or on an acquired speech defect and, consequently, to cause consternation in the other but also to debase ourselves in the process. – When in general it is a good thing, it is also not only proper but also wise to overlook the fault of the other and yes, to overlook even our own joy [in the matter]. However, the abstracting of this capacity involves a mental strength that can only be acquired by practice.” (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* AA VII: 132)<sup>2</sup> (Trans. McG)

### Abstract

On this side of the Shoah, the discovery that Kant appeared to connect euthanasia with Judaism is horrific and deeply disturbing. However, with Kant nothing is as it simply appears to be. A careful reading of Kant discloses anything but a call for the physical annihilation of a social group, Jews. Kant speaks of Judaism’s voluntary (by no means from self-hatred) but gentle, spiritual death – *as an historical* religion, not as the violent murder of persons. He envisions that Judaism *along with all other historical forms of religion* will one day be renewed *by a “pure”* (or core) religion grounded in the dignity of all persons and a community committed to the internal commonweal of God to encourage moral effort. This God is no highest Being (*ens summum*) among beings but the Being of all beings (*ens entium*), as the unconditional condition of possibility for any and all reality and the origin of both the physical order that governs nature and the moral order that governs creative freedom. This core religion behind or above historical religion by no means removes humanity from history but is precisely what encourages humanity to exercise its incredible creative capacity in the world, responsibly.

### Introduction

There appears to be a broad consensus that Kant was not only racist but also, specifically, antisemitic. Kant’s purported antisemitism is founded upon escalating claims

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<sup>2</sup> Introductory citation without the last two sentences was used by August Lewald in his story, “The Missing Coat Button” (“*Der abgerissene Knopf*”) from *Ein Menschenleben*, Vol. I. (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1844): 86.

from his merely a “*product of his age*”, to preparing the ground for the Shoah, to preaching the extermination of the Jews. Representatives of the three options can be named. 1) As the inescapable “*product of his age*”: Jürgen Habermas refers to Kant’s racism in *Der gespaltene Westen* as if it was a self-evident given in light of the attitudes of his day<sup>3</sup>; at the “Immanuel Kant 1724 – 2024. A European Thinker” conference sponsored by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (May 27-29, 2019), no one contradicted Marcus Willaschek’s judgment that Kant was both racist and antisemitic.<sup>4</sup> 2) As one who helped prepare the ground for the Shoah: Walter Jens used Kant’s metaphor *euthanasia of the Jews* to point to a general desire for the elimination of the Jews among Germans prior to the Shoah; Helmut Hornbogen employed the *euthanasia of Judaism* metaphor in his *Tübinger Dichter-Häuser* to label the formation of the dark clouds that led to the horrors of the Shoah. 3) As the preacher of extermination: Franz Rosenzweig and Michael Mack claim that Kant called for the euthanasia, meaning physical elimination, of the Jews.

There are problems with this spectrum. I take the following steps to address them: The notion of what it means that Kant’s merely a “*product of his age*” needs no clarification. What needs explanation are the claims that Kant was as an antisemitic foreshadower of the Shoah and, even more extreme, that he actually called for the physical extermination of the Jews. Central to the latter claim is Rosenzweig’s and Mack’s assertion – also thoroughly questionable – that Kant was a “dualist” who saw no value in the particularities of history because he is taken to champion the maintenance of an intellectual purity uncontaminated by the impurities of history.

I first deal with and reject the notion that Kant’s transcendental consciousness is a version of Cartesian dualism, then turn to examine the content and context of Kant’s use of the metaphor “*euthanasia of Judaism*” in the *Conflict of the Faculties*. This, in turn, requires an account of Kant’s view that there is a “pure” moral religion as the “one” religion *at the core* of all “historical” religions. This core religion involves a conversion of “historical” religion to discover the creative potential and responsible agency of its core. “Pure” (or the core of) religion will be examined in terms of the question “What can we hope for”? Finally, I explore Kant’s use of the metaphors of *euthanasia* and *death far beyond the reference to Judaism*, which he applies not just universally to historical religions but also to pure reason, morality, philosophy, and the physical sciences.

To remind the reader, when Kant speaks of “pure” as in “pure” morality or religion, he means the same as when he speaks of “pure” with respect to reason (e.g., the *Critique of Pure Reason*). It means, as Eisler notes, “free from all elements of experience, from perception, from sensory phenomena, generally [...] in which there is no mixture with the empirical”.<sup>5</sup> “Pure” thus means neither “uncontaminated”, nor “superior”, nor “separated” *from the sensory and empirical* but refers instead to the imperceptible conditions of possibility of our experience **in the world**. In what follows, I use “core religion” to avoid the common misunderstandings that come with the term “pure”, but still in the sense that there can be no core moral religion without “historical” religion (just as there can be no

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<sup>3</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *Der gespaltene Westen. Kleine Politische Schriften X* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004): 144 and 164.

<sup>4</sup> On Kant’s purported racism, see McGaughey, “Was Kant a Racist?” with Addendum on South Sea Islanders – Rejection of Slavery, Colonialism, the Inhumane Treatment of Animals, and Wanton Destruction of the Environment” at <https://criticalidealism.org> (6 November 2019).

<sup>5</sup> From Rudolf Eisler’s entry on “rein” in the on-line Kant-Lexikon: <https://www.textlog.de/33195.html> (6 November 2019).

experience of core or pure reason without empirical experience of phenomena in the natural world).

### **An Anecdote that Raises Doubts: Mendelssohn in Königsberg**

Moses Mendelssohn visited in Königsberg in the summer of 1777 arriving on July 24<sup>th</sup> on his way to Memel (now Klaipėdia, Lithuania).<sup>6</sup> Mendelssohn had corresponded already with Kant for some ten years prior to this trip. After visiting his brother-in-law, Joseph Gugenheim, in Memel, Mendelssohn stayed in Königsberg for 10 days (August 10-20, 1777). Baron Karl Abraham of Zedlitz, Prussian Minister of Education, had asked Mendelssohn to meet with Kant to discuss his recommending someone from Kant's circle for the vacancy of a Professorship in Halle with the ulterior motive that possibly Kant himself would be interested. Kant reported in his letter to Marcus Herz of August 20, 1777, that Mendelssohn attended two of his lectures.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Steffen Dietzsch, *Immanuel Kant. Eine Biographie* (Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 2003): 167-168.

<sup>7</sup> When it comes to the only written account of Mendelssohn's visit, we are confronted with an example of the hermeneutic consequences of shaping a narrative without careful attention to contexts. In his paper "Jewish Philosophy after Kant: The Legacy of Salomon Maimon" (Chapter 4 of *The Cambridge Companion of Modern Jewish Philosophy*, ed. by Michael L. Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press]: 53), Paul Franks reports on the visit by Moses Mendelssohn to Kant's classroom in 1777: "Kant is said to have silenced the students' anti-Semitic jeers by greeting the great Jewish philosopher [Mendelssohn] with a show of respect." He cites as his source Simon Dubnow's *Weltgeschichte der [sic.] jüdischen Volkes* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1929), 24-25. In the second edition of Dubnow's work, the account is found in Vol. 3 of the *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Publishing House Ltd., 1971): 23-24. At least in the second edition, Dubnow quotes what he calls a "portrayal by a contemporary of the encounter" (*von einem Zeitgenossen stammende Schilderung der Begegnung*) without citing his source. The source is August Lewald's short story, "The Missing Coat Button" ("*Der abgerissene Knopf*"), in his collection of stories *Ein Menschenleben, Erster Theil* in Vol. 1 of *Lewald's Gesammelte Schriften. In einer Auswahl* (Leipzig, F.M. Brocchhaus, 1844): 99. Kant himself wrote to his Jewish student, Markus Herz, on August 20, 1777 (*Briefwechsel 1747-1803*, 2nd ed. [AA X: 211]), that Mendelssohn visited his classes twice, but Lewald only speaks of one classroom visit.

Franks' one sentence summary is technically correct to Dubnow's/Lewald's account, but Franks has cropped the original story by jumping from the students' jeers at Mendelssohn's entrance into the classroom before the lecture to the silence that came over them when Kant warmly greeted Mendelssohn at the end of the lecture. The implication is that Kant intended to silence the students' "anti-Semitic" jeers. That may be the case, but examination of the context in which the story is embedded raises serious concerns: 1) Franks unquestioningly allows Dubnow's citation to stand as an eyewitness account of the scene provided by a "contemporary" when, Lewald wasn't born in Königsberg until 1792; 2) Franks and Dubnow, by ignoring, Lewald's original literary genre for the classroom visit, entirely overlook the significance of the students' jeering that Lewald was concerned to portray, namely, the folly and hurt of both the other and the self by judging people merely on the basis of appearances; and 3) Dubnow frames the story with the thesis that it illuminates in a "virulent bright light" ("*grelles Schlaglicht*") the crass anti-Semitism of his day despite the "cultural renewal" ("*kulturelle Erneuerung*") of Judaism that occurred with the 18th Century Enlightenment, whereas Franks by contrast emphasizes the warmth of Kant's reception of Mendelssohn.

In Lewald's original, literary depiction of the encounter, Lewald rebukes the students' jeering not only of Mendelssohn but also of a student, clearly poor because of his "improper" attire, and even of Kant's servant, "Old Lampe", whenever he occasionally appeared in the classroom. On this side of the Shoah, the reader of Lewald's bare account torn out of context is immediately judged to be disturbingly anti-Semitic, and we should be glad that that is the case because we should be immediately attentive to anti-Semitic sentiment. However, we should also be careful that our assumptions don't prohibit our grasp of Lewald's purpose in writing an account of Mendelssohn's visit to Kant's classroom. In Lewald's case, his story is a powerful affirmation of Kant's condemnation of any and all judging of a book by its cover. When it comes to

In the first of his twelve-volume collection of stories, *Ein Menschenleben* of 1844, August Lewald published a literary account of Mendelssohn's visit to Kant's lecture on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August.<sup>8</sup> The thematic core of the story is structured around the lead-in quote used above from Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (AA VII: 132) in which Kant describes the human habit of focusing one's attention negatively on the anomalous when perceiving the other to the detriment of the other and the self: in short, *on the silliness and danger of judging negatively on the basis of appearances alone*.

Lewald tells the story of the attendance in Kant's lectures on anthropology by a young man of little means and an underprivileged education, who later in the story inherits great wealth from a relative out of America and for whom Kant is portrayed as having played a key role in arranging the young man's marriage into a privileged family of Königsberg.

As was apparently the custom of the day, according to Lewald, the students greeted the young man in the classroom with cries of derision because of his common dress. In confirmation that this was the habit of the students to deride and scorn the unexpected visitor in the classroom, Lewald describes the same reaction of the students to someone whom they knew very well, Kant's servant, "Old Lampe", when he on occasion would enter the classroom. Lewald's third example of unreflecting, negative judgment based exclusively on the anomalous of appearances is his account of Mendelssohn's visit to Kant's lecture (Lewald only mentions one lecture):<sup>9</sup>

[...] a small stooped Jew with a goatee and a large hump entered the lecture hall with anxious, tiny steps, stopped, and stood not far from the doorway. As was common [for the students who arrogantly greeted anyone not "fitting into" their conception of who belonged and who didn't belong (insertion McG)], mockery and derision broke out that initially led to loud cries; but to everyone's surprise the stranger stayed put with a rigid calmness as if constrained. As an expression of his determination to wait for the professor, he made his intentions unequivocally clear by occupying a vacant seat. He was approached and asked what he wanted, and he answered briefly and politely that he wished to stay in order to meet Kant.<sup>10</sup> The ruckus ended only with Kant's entrance into the classroom. His lecture diverted the attention of everyone to other things, and one was so spellbound, so sunk in the sea of new ideas that everyone long since forgot the appearance of the Jew until, at the end of the lecture, he pushed through the crowd of students to the lectern with an intensity in stark contrast to his earlier composure. Initially, the students hardly noticed him, but then scornful laughter broke out. However, the laughter immediately gave way to silenced admiration because Kant, after a momentary

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Kant himself, his appreciation of Mendelssohn is clearly and unequivocally expressed by his letter to Markus Herz.

<sup>8</sup> It is possible that Lewald is reporting an account from an eyewitness. It is just as possible that he has created the account as an illustration of humanity's "peculiar habit" of seeing only the negative in "anomalous" appearances.

<sup>9</sup> Not wanting to be a spoiler, I leave it to the reader to look at Lewald's fourth example of the role of the anomalous appearances on reflection. It is an example of how the anomalous can give rise to thought in a positive manner. See "The Missing Coat Button": 132-140.

<sup>10</sup> The impression from Lewald, then, is that Mendelssohn did not meet with Kant when he initially passed through Königsberg on his way to Memel. Presuming that Lewald's narrative is correct that the reason for Mendelssohn to attend the lecture was that he wanted to make Kant's acquaintance, the discussions about Halle would have happened after August 18<sup>th</sup>.

look of great regard and exchange of a few words, warmly shook the stranger's hand and then embraced him. The word spread like wildfire through the crowd: 'Moses Mendelssohn! The Jewish philosopher from Berlin!'; and respectfully the students formed two rows as the worldly-wise men exited the hall passing between them holding hands.'<sup>11</sup> (Trans. McG)

This story has all the markings of a didactic legend, to be sure extremely important, were it not for Kant's letter of August 20, 1777, to Marcus Herz, his Jewish student whom Kant had chosen to be the official respondent at his "Inaugural Dissertation" in 1770:

Today Mr. Mendelssohn, your worthy friend and mine (for so I flatter myself), is departing. To have a man like him in Königsberg on a permanent basis, as an intimate acquaintance, a man of such gentle temperament, good spirits, and Enlightenment - how that would give my soul the nourishment it has lacked so completely here, a nourishment I miss more and more as I grow older! I could not arrange, however, to take full advantage of this unique opportunity to enjoy so rare a man, partly from fear lest I might disturb him . . . in the business he had to attend to locally. Yesterday, he did me the honor of being present at two of my lectures, *à la fortune du pot*, as one might say, because the table was not prepared for such a distinguished guest... I beg you to keep for me the friendship of this worthy man in the future.<sup>12</sup> (Trans. McG)

The quote from *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, the fact that Markus Herz was asked by Kant to be the official respondent to his "Inaugural Lecture", and the letter to Herz of August 20, 1777, certainly already raise some serious doubt about Kant's purported anti-Semitism.

### Placing Kant on an Antisemitic Spectrum

Of course, it remains that there is a spectrum of anti-Semitism on which Kant is placed, and this deserves serious consideration.

1) The notion that Kant is a "*product of an age*" simply assumes that it would have been impossible not to be antisemitic in Kant's age because "everyone" was. However, there is nothing about Kant's Critical Idealism (see footnote 27 below) that suggests that he was merely a "*product of his age*". On the contrary, his very notion of "critique" (not analytical "criticism") calls for a Copernican Turn away from all speculative conclusions arrived at by "subreption" (the mere assumption that the way one thinks is the way the world is<sup>13</sup>) as well as away from the siren call of honor and status in the eyes of others that stands at the core of the notion of a "*product of his age*".<sup>14</sup> To superficially judge the

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<sup>11</sup> August Lewald, „Der abgerissene Knopf“ in *Ein Menschenleben*, Vol. I. (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1844): 98.

<sup>12</sup> *Briefwechsel 1747-1803*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (AA X: 211).

<sup>13</sup> Subreption is a crucial theme for Kant already in 1770 (11 years before the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*) in his "On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World (Inaugural Dissertation)." (AA II: 413).

<sup>14</sup> See Kant's account of humanity's three capacities (*Anlagen*) of "animality" (sensuous needs and interest), "humanity" (status and prestige in the eyes of others); and "personality" (a responsible being) in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (AA VI: 26-28). In contrast to Mack, Kant explicitly states that it is not possible to eliminate the first two. They can be used inappropriately but not eradicated (*ibid.*, AA VI: 28).

Other as inferior and sub-human or even non-human on the basis of appearances and empirical traditions to “fit in” to popular sentiment would be to take the appearances to be “the things in themselves” and to make status and prestige Kant’s personal aim – these, Kant unequivocally, consistently, and incessantly rejects.

2) That Kant was part of an escalating chorus that established the ground for an acceptance that there could be an extermination of the Jews is suggested by Walter Jens, the beloved professor of General Rhetoric (a chair created especially for him) in Tübingen:

An open and consequent antisemitism unchecked by any refutation – if we exclude Richard Wagner – didn’t exist prior to the establishment of the German Reich (1871): but surely indignation, rejection, revocation of promises, subjugation to incessant tabooing, as well as that insidious obliviousness that is manifest above all by demanding ever again of those waiting, what long since had been acknowledged – the euthanasia of Judaism (Kant).<sup>15</sup>

(parentheses around “Kant” from Jens)

Helmut Hornbogen recounts that the Jewish author, Berthold Auerbach, experienced the effects of this pre-1871 antisemitism already as a 12-year old when, on his way home from neighboring Horb, he was “[...] beaten, bound, and gagged and – symbolically crucified [...]” by a group of young men from Horb.<sup>16</sup> In 1824, though, Auerbach received tremendous moral support from his Nordstetten neighbors who took revenge on Aueberbach’s tormenters by driving them from the village. Nonetheless, Hornbogen himself employs Kant’s reference to the “euthanasia of Judaism” in the context of the economic crisis of 1873 and the “Antisemitism Controversy”<sup>17</sup> of 1879-1881 in Berlin, initiated by the conservative historians Heinrich von Treitschke and Theodor Mommsen, which spread the term “antisemitism” (employed by the journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1879) across Germany. Cumulatively, so Hornbogen, these were the dark clouds that Berthold Auerbach saw forming at the end of his life; the clouds which were to become Auschwitz.<sup>18</sup>

3) Michael Mack uses the same metaphor to claim that Kant and “German transcendental philosophers preached the ‘euthanasia of Judaism’ [...]”.<sup>19</sup> Mack thinks that he knows why Kant preached the euthanasia of Judaism. Like Franz Rosenzweig, he takes Kant to be a Cartesian dualist who acknowledged an unbridgeable gap between mind and body and *championed the liberation of mind from the sensuous body*. According to both Mack and Rosenzweig, Kant insists not only that there is an unbridgeable dualism between Transcendental Consciousness and Nature but also an unbridgeable dualism of “social” models, between “heteronomy” (externally imposed imperatives) and “autonomy” (internally imposed imperatives). They claim that Kant viewed “the Jews as the embodiment of heteronomy”.<sup>20</sup> Mack and Rosenzweig thus take “[...] Kant’s notion of

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<sup>15</sup> Helmut Hornbogen, *Tübinger Dichter-Häuser. Literaturgeschichten aus Schwaben*, 3rd. Ed. (Tübingen: Verlag Schwäbisches Tagblatt, 1999): 194-202 and 305-313.

<sup>16</sup> See Hornbogen, *Tübinger Dichter-Häuser*: 195.

<sup>17</sup> See [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berliner\\_Antisemitismusstreit](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berliner_Antisemitismusstreit) (Wikipedia 5 Nov. 2019).

<sup>18</sup> See Hornbogen, *Tübinger Dichter-Häuser*: 312-313.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew: The inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003): 109 (Parentheses from Mack); see 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

freedom to mean *liberation from reliance on* empirical conditions.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in their view Kant’s “[...] categorical imperative works without any consideration for the specific context in which a moral actor finds himself or herself.”<sup>22</sup> In short, the “[...] *Kantian notion of autonomy [...] demands that the individual abandon any meaningful relation to the external world.*”<sup>23</sup> This leads them to conclude in a way that clearly fuels religious tension among what Kant calls “historical” religions (in contrast to “core” religion). Mack agrees with Rosenzweig that “[...] the categorical imperative institutes a modern Western version of Islam,”<sup>24</sup> quoting from Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*:

[...] the word act in Islam means the practice of obedience.... [*sic.*]  
 This straightforward, obedient piety is based on a free self-denial ever laboriously regained. And [*sic.*] it finds an exact counterpart, strangely enough, in the secular piety of more recent times which freely confirms [conforms? (insertion McG)] to universal law. The ethics of Kant and his followers, for instance, as well as the general consciousness, sought to evolve such a piety.<sup>25</sup>

### A Dualist?

I now turn to consider some of the claims about Kant that emerge in the spectrum of conclusions regarding his anti-Semitism, beginning with the argument that he is a dualist. I will also turn, again, to his views on cultural stereotypes. Most importantly, I then consider how he used the metaphor of euthanasia, which clearly has nothing to do with the physical extermination of the Jews any more than Kant’s use of the metaphor with respect to pure reason, morality, philosophy, and/or the physical sciences is a call for their physical extermination.

Kant seeks nothing less than an understanding of the world within the limits of finite reason and not, as Rosenzweig and Mack claim, an escape from the world. Whereas his epistemology (theoretical reason) does turn one’s focus away from mere appearances in order to ground understanding and knowledge in *a priori* elements that one must *add to* perception,<sup>26</sup> it does not involve a turning away from experience.<sup>27</sup> This distinction

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, 28-29 (emphasis added).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 119 (emphasis added).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>26</sup> This is the insight of Kant’s claim that analytic judgment is distinct from *a priori* synthetic judgment. Analytic judgment he calls *explicative* (*erläuternd*) whereas *a priori* synthetic judgment is *ampliative* (*erweiternd*) because it *increases* understanding beyond the mere appearances. See *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (AA IV: 266) and *Metaphysik Morongovius* (XXIX): 968. In the *Opus postumum* (XXII: 555), Kant points out that analytic judgment is “distributive and logical” in contrast to synthetic judgment, which is “collective and general experience.”

<sup>27</sup> See *Critique of Pure Reason* B1: “There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience. For *how should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into action did not objects affecting our senses partly of themselves produce representations*, partly arouse the activity of our understanding to compare these representations, and, by combining or separating them, work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience?” (emphasis added); and B 671-672: “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 [specific] empirical employment. It does not, therefore, create concepts (of objects) but only orders them, and gives them that unity which they can have only if they be employed in their widest possible application, that is, with a view to obtaining totality in the various series. The understanding does not concern itself with this totality [of reason], but only with that connection through

between appearances and transcendental consciousness is taken too frequently, as with Mack and Rosenzweig, to be a form of Cartesian dualism – as if in question are two kinds of substances standing over against one another with one contaminating the other. However, Kant specifically warns against this conclusion in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (AA IV: 293):

I have myself given this my theory the name of transcendental idealism,<sup>28</sup> but that cannot authorize anyone to confound it either with the empirical idealism of Descartes [...] or with the mystical and visionary idealism of Berkeley [...] *My idealism concerns not the existence of things* (the doubting of which, however, constitutes idealism in the ordinary sense [Kant’s comment]), *since it never came into my head to doubt it* [the existence of things]; *but it concerns the sensuous representation of things* [...] (emphasis added) (Trans. Cambridge University Press [CUP] edition)

Equally important, the activity of consciousness *adding things* to appearances in theoretical reason in order to understand them is often taken to mean that Kant’s epistemology is “constructivist” in the sense of knowledge about the world is merely a subjective creation. That would suggest that Kant is throwing the barn doors open to every and any kind of (wild) epistemological speculation, which could give legitimacy to every capricious construction of “reality”. On the contrary, Kant reins in such speculations by demanding attention to the *a priori universal, subjective, and necessary* elements in consciousness without which there is and can be no perception of an external world or (responsible) agency in it<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Kant’s moral project (practical reason) is grounded in an imperceptible cause that is not, and can never be, given directly in perception but that is, nonetheless, inseparable from, and complementary to, physical causes. This causality is

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which, in accordance with concepts, such a series of conditions come into being. Reason has, therefore, as its sole object, the understanding and its effective application. Just as the understanding unifies the manifold in the object by means of concepts, so reason unifies the manifold of concepts by means of ideas, positing a certain collective unity as the goal of the activities of the understanding [...].

<sup>28</sup> He also called it “Critical Idealism” which he preferred over “Transcendental Idealism”: “[...] there is [...] a critical or transcendental idealism, when one assumes that the appearances in themselves are nothing, although simultaneously with them there is something actual, unknown as their ground” (*Metaphysik Mrongovius* XXIX: 928) See *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (AA IV: 294). See also *On a Discovery, whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason is to be Made Superfluous by an Older One* (1790) (AA VIII: 210) where Kant expresses a preference for the title “Critical Idealism”.

<sup>29</sup> These *a priori* elements of transcendental consciousness include *theoretical reason*: the “pure” intuition of space and time and the application of an appropriate scheme of internal concepts and physical “lawfulness” to the set of phenomena one seeks to understand. This lawfulness is incapable of proof/disproof but is a necessary assumption (*a priori* synthetic idea) in order to even begin any search for understanding of the physical world. Kant, however, speaks of only one “absolute” law, and that is the moral law that can and must necessarily be self-legislated. See *Metaphysics of Morals* VI: 462-463. In addition, the elements of transcendental consciousness include *practical reason*: with its the *ratio cognoscendi* of moral principles and the *ratio essendi* of creative freedom above but never separate from nature, the latter of which along with God and cosmology constitute the three ideas of pure reason that are obligatory, regulative ideas (assumptions) in order for transcendental consciousness to be able to experience a world as it does. On *ratio cognoscendi* and *ratio essendi*, see *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V: 4\*) and “A New Exposition of the First Principles of Metaphysical Knowledge.” AA I: 392 and 395. On the capacity (*Anlage*) of autonomous freedom (*Wille*) as the condition of possibility for the inclination (*Hang*) for a choice (*Willkür*) between evil and good moral maxims/laws, see *Religion* (AA VI: 44-46); on the distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür*, see *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA VI. 213).



our ability consciously and intentionally to initiate sequences of events to bring about things that nature on its own could never achieve.<sup>30</sup> Fully acknowledging that causal explanations, including this notion of *autonomous freedom*, are something that we *add to* perception in order to make sense of appearances, Kant recognizes that the crucial causality of *autonomous freedom*, as the case with all other understanding of causality, is incapable of proof or disproof.<sup>31</sup> In order to defend freedom as in “accord with right reason,” Kant places causal explanations into the broadest of contexts – the unifying totality that is both imperceptible reason and the perceptible world,<sup>32</sup> which in his “Transcendental Method” that concludes the *Critique of Pure Reason* he calls the “architectonic of pure reason”. There can be no understanding of causes without our confidence that human agency as well as the world constitute an ordered comprehensive unity or totality even though it is impossible for us consciously to grasp this totality. Nonetheless, Kant emphasizes,<sup>33</sup> there must necessarily be only “one” reason and “one” world because multiple rational systems and worlds would be incapable of coherent understanding.

He formulates the position of the transcendental philosopher in his *Opus postumum* (AA XXI: 76) as follows:

We must remind ourselves here that we are concerned with finite, not infinite spirit. Finite spirit is that which is engaged as nothing other than passive, which only reaches the absolute through limits and only *to the extent it receives, acts, and forms matter*. Such a spirit will combine the

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<sup>30</sup> In other words, one doesn't *achieve* one's freedom (that would be liberty); rather, one *exercises* one's freedom (that is creative, autonomous freedom “above” but never separated from nature). Liberty (misleadingly labeled freedom) as something that must be achieved has been defined at least since Hegel as “freedom-from” social traditions and institutions. However, from the perspective of autonomous freedom as “freedom-for” we can be as well if not more tenaciously unfree because of our sensuous appetites and desire to achieve status and prestige in the eyes of others. The exercising of one's “personality”, which is the exercising of autonomous freedom under the guidance of self-legislated, moral principles, does not (and cannot) require the elimination of the appetites or the ignoring of status and prestige, but personality is concerned to rein in our appetites and to recognize that status and prestige in a system of timocracy in which others define and shape one's desires. See *Religion* (AA VI: 26-28) as well as McGaughey, “Freedom on This and the Other Side of Kant” in *Natur und Freiheit, Akten des XII. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, hrsg. v. Violetta L. Waibel, Margit Ruffing und David Wagner (Berlin/Boston, 2018): 1959-1966 presented at the XIIth International Kant Congress in Vienna, Austria, September 21-25, 2015. Both an off-print and an unabridged version of the paper are available at <https://www.criticalidealism.org> (6 November 2019).

<sup>31</sup> See *Critique of Pure Reason* B 586. Where there is no proof, there can be only defense. See *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (AA IV: 459): with respect to freedom “nothing is left but defense, that is, to repel the objections of those who pretend to have seen deeper into the essence of things and therefore boldly declare that freedom is impossible.”: “[...] [Y]ou feel yourself to be free; do not concoct a notion of this freedom which is out of accord with right reason. To act freely is to act in accordance with one's desire and [...] in conformity with conscience. And this indeed is not excluded by the law of determining reason.” (AA I: 403)

<sup>32</sup> This is by no means a hegemonic totality over which one has “control” or which can be imposed upon another. Totality here refers to coherence, not comprehension.

<sup>33</sup> Kant proposes that there is one God (reason's unity) just as there's only one World (understanding's unity) in *Opus postumum* (AA XXI:24): “There are not multiple gods any more than multiple worlds but ‘One’ God and ‘One’ World. Transc. Cosmol[ogy]: and transc. Theology (Cosmotheology). Not a highest Being (*ens summum*) but the Being of all beings (*ens entium*).

“The entirety of things (*omnitude*/totality) is, therefore, not yet (!) presented as a whole of combined objects (distributive or collective: in other words, a logical or real unity).” (Kant's parenthetical remarks) (Trans. McG) [“Distributive is the unity of the insight of understanding with respect to perception in contrast to the collective unity that is created by reason” (from Eisler's *Kant Wörterbuch*)]

drive to form (or to the absolute) with a drive to matter or limits, which are the condition without which it (finite spirit) cannot possess or satisfy the former [spiritual] drives. Whether and how far in the same being the two opposing tendencies [of form and matter] can coexist is, to be sure disconcerting to the metaphysician but not to a transcendental philosopher. – The latter *by no means seeks to explain* the coexistence on the basis of the possibility of things *but is satisfied with establishing a grasp by means of which the possibility of the possibility* [die Möglichkeit der Möglichkeit] *of experience is conceived*. Because neither experience any more than this tension can be possible absent absolute unity, *transcendental philosophy postulates both concepts with complete warrant as both constituting obligatory conditions of experience without needing to be concerned further about their unity.*<sup>34</sup> (emphasis added) (Trans. McG)

Mack proposes that Kant’s “core” moral religion, then, refers to a moral law and its conditions of possibility independent of, *and separate from*, its empirical conditions, but Kant views core religion as morality’s freedom “above” the material conditions of life as *irreducible to, yet never separate or independent from, its empirical conditions*. For Kant, morality has only one purpose: responsible agency in concrete, historical situations *based on universal, human dignity that is grounded in the ineradicable autonomous freedom of* (and the possible responsible agency of) *each individual*.

In short, there is no dualism in Kant. He does not draw the philosopher, the individual, or society out of the historical world of responsible engagement with its particularities in the name of “universality”. His Transcendental Method of the “discipline”, “canon”, and “architectonic” of reason (the concluding, Part II of the *Critique of Pure Reason*) calls for the most serious questioning of all conclusions drawn exclusively on appearances alone – **although there can be no skepticism inseparable from appearances**, and without skepticism we would never need to consider what *a priori* elements are necessary for us to experience this (or any other) skepticism. In fact, Kant is the philosopher who proposes a century before Marx that “Philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, but it is important to change it” while having added the crucial caveat: “and to do so responsibly.”

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<sup>34</sup> Kant as a metaphysician, however, was concerned about their unity. The goal toward which the *Opus postumum* aimed was precisely to give an account of the role of “nothing”, which is not no-thing (!), but bridges the gap (*Kluft*) not between nature and freedom, which is the capacity of reflecting judgment unpacked in the Critique of Judgment, but between the subjective elements within transcendental consciousness that make it possible for us to understand nature as a unitary system (physics). See *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (XXIX: 960), and “A New Exposition of the First Principles of Metaphysical Knowledge” (AA I: 397-398). In the *Opus postumum*, Kant writes (AA XXII: 408): “The transition [*Übergang*] is no “jumping over a gap”: “The transition consists of the subjective conditions of apprehension (empirical) combined with the apperception (*a priori* synthetic) that constitute physics as a system. It also consists of the principles for the investigation of nature insofar as these themselves constitute a whole.

“Here, *with the transition from one territory to another, one is not concerned with a continuum, but there is a gap* [*Kluft*] *between them over which a bridge is constructed that must unite both banks out of a priori principles*. – These are principles of the possibility of experience in the sense of affecting, moving forces (hence, subjective and thereby objective) in a system out of empirical data [...The transition] is a science in itself, which contains its formal principle a priori and its subsumed elemental concepts as its material, which are required for the experience of nature as a system and [thereby] for grounding physics as an empirical, natural science in a system.” (AA XXII: 243-244) (emphasis added) (Trans. McG).

## On Cultural Stereotypes

Before turning to Kant's use of the phrase "*euthanasia* of Judaism", we should engage briefly a passage in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* that invokes a derogatory stereotype when referring to Jews to make a point about misanthropy. A general comment about the *Anthropology* and the term "pragmatic" is in order beforehand, though.

One of the greatest barriers to entry into Kant's work is what I have come to call "metaphor interference" (anachronistic reading). The reader assumes that what we currently take a metaphor to mean is exactly what Kant meant by the term. One can create a long list of such terms that contribute to great misunderstanding: autonomy, freedom, synthesis, reason, pure, metaphysics, self-legislating, etc., and among these metaphors are "history", "anthropology", and "pragmatic".

In *Reflections on Moral Philosophy*, Kant calls empirical knowledge "pragmatic". (AA XIX: 284) and contrasts it with practical reason. Kant speaks of the "pragmatic" as concerned with "teaching cleverness" (*Lehre der Klugheit*) and rules of cleverness" (*Klugheitsregeln*) (AA XIX: 104), which are the direct result of "arbitrariness"/liberty (*freie Willkühr*), not "free will"/autonomous freedom (*Wille*) (AA XIX: 171). Free will (*Wille*) is the capacity (*Anlage*) of autonomous, creativity "above" the blind causality of nature. Succinctly, "pragmatic" cleverness constitutes imperatives that lead to "welfare" (*Wohlfahrt*). Such pragmatic imperatives apply to "what everyone wants, not what s/he should do". (AA XIX: 104) In the *Groundwork* (AA IV 414 ff.), Kant distinguished between two types of hypothetical imperatives (technical and pragmatic), which in turn are to be distinguished from the categorical imperatives of practical reason.

Attention to terminology is important when one reads the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. The "Preface" to the *Anthropology* spells out what he is doing in the text. The term "pragmatic" means concern with the fulfilment of personal interest, and his use of the term here is intentional to make clear that "anthropology" is not "practical reason". His account of humanity from a pragmatic point of view is "historical" in a "broader" sense than either theoretical or practical reason (*Logic* AA IX: r41) and "phenomenological" in the sense of "descriptive", not "normative"!

He acknowledges from the beginning that he is dependent upon the reports of others, that is, he is not giving his personal account of peoples, but he defends his project by insisting that "anthropology" presupposes an "understanding of humanity". Without philosophy, "anthropology" is "nothing but fragmentary tapping in the dark without scientific understanding" (AA VII: 120). In other words: The reader must bring the insights of theoretical and practical reason as well as the reflecting judgment of aesthetics to his *Anthropology* – *not read them out of the text*. As a descriptive project, then, it should not be read as a set of moral conclusions about its subject matter. This is precisely confirmed by the far flung "negative" reports about all peoples, to which you refer, and it is important to point out that he is by no means partial to "Germans" (see for example, VII: 317-319). The *Anthropology* is a describing the "cleverness" that communities employ to pursue what they take to be their welfare and what the characteristic "wants" of a community are, not what the community morally should do. The latter comes not from anthropology's pragmatic point of view but practical reason.

The passage in the *Anthropology* that concerns us here is (AA VII: 205):

Craftiness, mischievousness, cunning (*versutia, astutia*) is the skill to deceive others. The question, though, is: Whether the deceiver must be cleverer than the person who is easily deceived with the latter being the stupid one? [...] It is true and clever that I no longer trust someone who has deceived me once; because his principles are corrupt. However, not to trust any others because one person has deceived me, is misanthropic. The deceiver is in fact the knave.  
(Trans. McG)

Then, in a footnote, Kant refers to the “Palestinians living among us” or Jews as possessing the reputation of being “a nation of deceivers”. Rather than supporting the stereotype, however, he says that such a claim is an “outlandish” generalization, just as is the claim that a people is “a nation of merchants”. He explicitly rejects the task of “moralizing” over deception and turns instead to address the historical circumstances in the eastern Mediterranean that led to the reputation of “a nation of merchants”.<sup>35</sup>

Here Kant is addressing a second form of misanthropy. Whereas the first is to judge a group (family, clan, tribe, religion, nation) on the basis of an individual’s (or a sub-group’s) corruption, the second is to judge a particular group on the basis of its exercising the cleverness of a culture of skills without a culture of morality. An example of the second form of misanthropy would be the conclusion that the diesel scandal in the German automobile industry demonstrates that all Germans are corrupt. Such a judgment is as outlandish as the misanthropic distrust of others on the basis of an individual’s violation of trust.

### **On the Euthanasia Metaphor**

Given the horrors of the Shoah and the testimony of such a broad spectrum of reliable interpreters about Kant’s purported racism and antisemitism, the easiest path to take in judging Kant is the one taken by Socrates’ prosecutors and the voting citizens of Athens: Where there is so much smoke, there must be fire. How can so many condemnations be wrong? Yet they can be! As one can read in Plato’s account in the *Apology* of Socrates’ self-defense at his trial, far more is involved in judging than what merely “meets the eye” of popular sentiment.

Besides taking Kant erroneously to be a dualist seeking escape from the world and ignoring the historical context of experience, Rosenzweig and Mack also suggest that Kant was calling for the physical euthanasia of Jews. We will see, however, that their employment of Kant’s metaphor of *euthanasia* with respect to Judaism is not only taken entirely out of context but also is equally as distorted as is their understanding of *autonomous freedom*.

#### **I. What does Kant say?**

The “smoking gun” that supposedly demonstrates anti-Semitism taken to its fateful extreme is a passage from Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* (AA VII, 53):

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<sup>35</sup> To be sure, he overlooks the issue of the strict occupation bans against the Jews in Europe.

The *euthanasia of Judaism* is core moral religion with its departure from all statutory doctrines of which, nonetheless, some from Christianity (as a messianic faith) must be retained: however such a cult difference must also vanish and, accordingly, one at least accomplishes in spirit what one takes to be the resolution of the great drama of religious conversion on earth (the restitution of all things) because one finds only one shepherd and one flock. (emphasis added) (Trans. McG)

First, Kant defines *euthanasia* as “gentle death” (“*der sanfte Tod*”).<sup>36</sup> Yet, the “gentle death” of Judaism here does not refer to, or call for, the physical extermination of the Jews as persons or a group. One could claim that the call is for the “spiritual death” of Judaism, but that also is not what the passage says. In order properly to understand the passage, we must turn to the second preface to Kant’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.

## II. The Context of Kant’s Statement on the Euthanasia of Judaism

Before we do so, though, we must ask: What does Kant mean by Judaism? Kant takes Judaism to be a theocratic religion that establishes a nation-state to the exclusion of other nation-states. It is theocratic because it understands itself to have been established by God through the revelation to Moses of a particular law on Mt. Sinai for a particular people, the Jews. In other words, the foundational events of Judaism are sensuous and passive. The law has been given to the Jews that gives them a privileged status in the eyes of God. In short, Kant takes Judaism to be a “statutory” religion, which requires the most strenuous, historical (!) erudition and which elevates a privileged group to a position of religious authority. This, for Kant, is too limited.

Christianity, in Kant’s view, suffered a similar fate of succumbing to statutory religion under its leaders following the death of their founder. Its historical elements were recorded only after a generation had passed. “[...H]ence the authentication of those events must do without the corroboration of contemporaries.”<sup>37</sup> As a consequence, Christianity, too was transformed into a historically, passive, statutory religion. Kant proposes that the “core” of the Christian religion emerged out of the social world and erudition of Judaism but with this difference, that it “comes from the mouth of the first teacher not as a statutory but a ‘moral’ religion, capable of being grasped at all times and among all peoples with the greatest certainty *but without the need of erudition*.”<sup>38</sup> This “originating” teacher is no *exclusive* savior of individuals, alone able to cleanse the sins of the world by his death and resurrection. Rather, this teacher is an *inclusive* teacher, who represents *symbolically* the universal conditions of possibility available to all “rational” beings at all times and all places who seek the establishment of an imperceptible community, whose universal conditions can never be lost, only over-looked and/or forgotten. The purpose of this imperceptible commonweal of God is to encourage moral effort on the part of the only beings (so far as we’re aware) with the capacity to take responsibility for its agency.

In short, the *perfection* of the original teacher in this case is neither that of sinlessness as envisioned by Christian Dogmatics, nor that of mystical, perfect God-

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<sup>36</sup>See the “Doctrine of Virtue” of the *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA VI: 378).

<sup>37</sup> *Religion* (AA VI:167).

<sup>38</sup> See *Ibid.* (AA VI: 167).

consciousness as envisioned by Orthodox Christianity in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century and represented by Schleiermacher later in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, nor that of an objective representation of the unity of God and humanity as found in Hegel's 19<sup>th</sup> Century metanarrative of history. Rather, the *perfection* of the original teacher is that of *the "perfect" conditions of possibility* for there to be a moral species in the world at any time and in any place – not uniquely present at a historical point-in-time and geographical location. By ignoring these perfect conditions of possibility, we undermine ourselves – we are misanthropic.

In Kant's judgment the original leaders of the Christian community "prudently"<sup>39</sup> complemented (or compromised) the pure, moral religion of the founder of their religion with historical elements to promulgate the faith. The consequence, though, is that Christianity, like all other historical religions, has accrued a burdensome, external *husk* of historical claims and materials that have buried the imperceptible *kernel* of its existential faith, one devoted to the moral effort of all of humanity, not without vital communal elements of support but with the recognition that moral decisions must be taken by the individual in light of wide moral principles that can never be given in perception. Thus, writes Kant:

These founders of the *church* [...] took up those fortuitous means of advocacy into the essential articles of faith themselves, and either augmented them with tradition and interpretations, which acquired legal force from the councils, or authenticated them through scholarship. And (*sic.*) there still is no foreseeing how many alterations still lie ahead of faith because of this scholarship, or its extreme opposite, the inner light [Kant's critique of mysticism<sup>40</sup>] in which every layman can lay claim. And this cannot be avoided so long as we seek religion not within us but from the outside.<sup>41</sup> (Trans. CUP)

In addition and of crucial importance, the *wide, categorical, universal moral-principles* of religion are to be distinguished from *the narrow social rules and regulations* that each particular society must generate for the supervision of each society's social world.<sup>42</sup> Categorical principles stand "above" such "hypothetical", externally imposed, historical rules and civic laws that are (passively) imposed upon the individual. This is as true of externally "revealed" 'religious' rules and laws, as well.

That an imperceptible, spiritual meaning of religion grounded in categorical principles can subsequently be identified as the "core" of "historical" religions, says Kant,

[...] without ever and again greatly offending against the literal meaning of the popular faith is due to the fact that, long before this faith [in the literal meaning of texts (McG's comment)], the capacity [*Anlage*] to moral religion lay hidden in human reason [...] with] the final purpose of [reading of ...] holy books, or the investigation of their content, is to make better human beings [...]<sup>43</sup> (Trans. CUP)

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, (AA VI: 165-166. Kant uses the term "prudently" ironically.

<sup>40</sup> See footnote 78 below!

<sup>41</sup> *Religion* (AA VI: 167).

<sup>42</sup> See the *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA VI: 390-391).

<sup>43</sup> *Religion* (AA VI: 111).

Kant's description of the "historical" faith of Judaism can be summarized thus: 1) Positively, original sin "extended to a posterity which did not take any practical part in the deeds or misdeeds" of the "original parents", and the notion of a future life "was never an integral part of the legislation of Judaism; 2) negatively, all the externally imposed, theocratic commands that constitute a national "constitution" of Judaism "deal only with external actions; 3) Judaism "excluded the whole human race from its communion" (AA VI: 126). Kant also adds: 4) Judaism has no teaching of an afterlife, whereas in his view "no religion can be conceived without faith in a future life" (AA VI: 126). The question, of course, is what kind of afterlife does he include in the moral religion of reason?

Kant's claim is not that there necessarily is an afterlife (which, along with grace and miracles, is incapable of proof or disproof) but that it is necessary to presuppose an afterlife<sup>44</sup> because the successful effort of moral agency by humanity requires at least *the possibility* of an endless process. Therefore, 1) any religion that either denies or unequivocally affirms the afterlife would be claiming to know something that we cannot know, and, 2) more importantly, whatever content such an afterlife would involve would have to encourage our moral effort in this life.<sup>45</sup>

A comment on Michael Mack's reading of Kant and of Hermann Cohen is appropriate here. Mack (along with Rosenzweig, Cohen's student) has so twisted and warped both Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason* and Cohen's *Religion of Reason out of its Jewish Sources* [*Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*] that neither is recognizable. Mack turns Kant's "pure" religion into a religion of original sin that overcomes sensuousness by escaping from the material, that is historical, world, while he takes Cohen's *Religion of Reason* to be a project "correcting" Kant's core moral religion. In fact, what Cohen challenges is Kant's understanding of Judaism, not his understanding of moral religion. Cohen proposes that Kant's core moral religion is quintessentially also at the core of Judaism, precisely as Kant suggested. *In*

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<sup>44</sup> See Christian Wilhelm Flügel, *Versuch einer historisch-kritischen Darstellung des bisherigen Einflusses der Kantischen Philosophie auf alle Zweige der wissenschaftlichen und praktischen Theologie* (1796), 1 vol. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1982): 319.

<sup>45</sup> In contrast, if belief in the afterlife functioned in the sense of reward and punishment, we would be more concerned about what is in our self-interest for the next life when it came to our moral effort than with doing the right thing because it is right even though it may be contrary to our self-interests.

If there is an afterlife, the role it can play in terms of pure religion, then, is to be a confirmation of our subjective *worthiness of it through our moral effort in this life*. (See *Metaphysik Mrongovius* XXIX:774–77; *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V: 130); *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre* [*Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*] (Leipzig: Bei Carl Friedrich Frans, 1817):130, 133, as well as, *Religion* (AA VI: 66–68).

"Worthiness," however, is not an achievement by personal effort that places a demand on God of one's right to an *objective salvation in the next life*, but it consists in concentrating one's efforts on one's *subjective, moral improvement* in this life. In *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (XXIX: 776), Kant proposes that "[... Morality] is already given to us and requires no metaphysical principles and does not need to presuppose God and another world. However, moral motivation is strengthened when I see that there is God and another world. Moral laws present to us the perfect will of God and must precede theological [laws]."

In particular, the notion of the afterlife is a source of encouragement of moral effort in the face of the all too frequent advantages experienced by those who are immoral and unjust. (See *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (AA VIII: 120–121) This encouragement is grounded not in a teaching that the immoral and unjust will be unpunished but in a limitless continued moral improvement. (See *Religion* (AA VI: 122–123) However, Kant is clear that moral improvement is not so much defined as with respect to the individual but to the improvement of the species in time. (See *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (AA VIII: 115).

*short Cohen and Kant disagree over the portrayal of Judaism as a historical religion, not about any common, core moral religion.*<sup>46</sup>

Mack's rhetorical strategy is to begin his examination of Cohen's *Religion* with a mythic account that he has from Rosenzweig of "The Lost Manuscript" in which Cohen is supposed to have written: "[...] the anti-Semitic content of Kant's moral philosophy deeply hurt the neo-Kantian philosopher [Cohen]."<sup>47</sup> One cannot combat ghosts! However, a careful reading of Cohen sees that he offers primarily a correction to Kant's portrayal of Judaism. Kant's portrayal of Judaism would be anti-Semitic only if he were to view the Jewish people as non- or sub-human, and if his use of *euthanasia* with respect to the Jews meant physical extermination of a people. Neither is the case.

Above all, Cohen responds to Kant's summary of the elements of Judaism noted above, arguing that: 1) The notion of original sin is the result of the mistranslation of Genesis 8:21<sup>48</sup>; 2) Judaism's theocracy is not for the establishment of a nation-state but for the sake of universalism<sup>49</sup>; ; 3) Judaism exists "[...] less for the sake of itself as a nation as, far more, only as a symbol for humanity [...]. [P]articlar peoples are to strive for the single unity of humanity".<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> In his article, "Innere Beziehungen der Kantischen Philosophie zum Judentum" in the *Achtunzwanzigster Bericht der Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin* [N. 24, Artillerlestr. 14] (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1910): 41-61, Cohen attributes Kant's core views of "historical" Judaism to come from Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (a national religion) and Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* (natural religion) (41-42) – not from any detailed study of Judaism on his own.

Furthermore, whereas he criticizes Kant for misunderstanding the Jewish prophets to be "priests and soothsayers (*Priester und Wahrsager*) (43), when it comes to what Cohen takes to be the central theme of prophecy by the Jewish Prophets, Messianic hope, Kant is entirely in agreement (57-58).

Cohen structured his paper in part on the basis of Kant's three "ideas of pure" reason: God (and Morality) (51 f), Eternal Life (53 f), and Freedom (54 f), and he affirms with regard to all three that Kant and Judaism agree on "pure" religion (or what Cohen calls the "*Religionsphilosophie*" in contrast to "*Religionsgeschichte*") (60 f). Two quotes emphatically stress the commonalities between Judaism and Kant: "A philosophizing Jew feels the breath of home in Kant's world because, in this system that itself is grounded in the logic of science, ethics has priority. However, ethics is the life-principle of Judaism. Its religion wants to be, and is, a moral teaching. Love of God is knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is knowledge of the moral, final goal of humanity." (59-60) "With this final thought of the philosophy of history, Kant and Judaism stand together as one, once again: with their method as true philosophy and with their God as true religion." (61) (Trans. McG)

With respect to Kant's relationship to Jewish students and scholars, Cohen writes: "Although it could sound like confessional self-congratulation, I cannot fail to briefly mention how, back then, excellent minds among Jews felt themselves drawn to Kant. Even though when it came to this delicate issue, he embarrassed himself, he appears to have felt completely comfortable with his Jewish students." (59) (Trans. McG) He then refers to Kant's correspondence with Marcus Herz and to Jewish mathematicians.

<sup>47</sup> *German Idealism and the Jew*, 108.

<sup>48</sup> Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft*, 212. When one adds that Augustine mistranslated Romans 5:12 to ground his doctrine of original sin, we find mistranslations having devastating consequences. Despite claims to the contrary by Mack (see *German Idealism and the Jew*, 127, 113), the ground of "evil" for Kant is not sensuousness (*Religion*, [AA VI: 34-35]). In fact, experience is always the consequence of the combination of "content" (perceptions) and "form" (concepts) (See *Opus postumum* XXII: 552, 549-550). Furthermore, Kant is no proponent of "original sin". See *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (AA XXIX: 771), *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (AA VIII: 1-22), and *Religion* (AA VI: 19-20, 22, 35, 42-43). Kant explicitly says that the origin of evil remains inexplicable for us (*Ibid.*, AA VI: 43).

<sup>49</sup> Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Wiesbaden: Rourier Verlag, 1995): 293-295, 419, 421.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, AA VI: 295.



Cohen also notes with respect to Kant's fourth characterizing element, the afterlife, there is no consensus in Judaism over whether and what it is. For Cohen, though, "afterlife" is a metaphor for "the future" in contrast to "the past and present". Plato's "idealism" is concerned with the past and present,<sup>51</sup> he notes, whereas the "messianic" "idealism of the future" is the means by which "Israel" is a providential symbol for messianism. Along with the landmark of monotheism, "Israel's" notion of a "messianic future" for Cohen in fact constitutes the "first conscious expression of the contrast between empirical sensuousness and moral values",<sup>52</sup> and "For this reason, humanity [note: not just Judaism] can unequivocally call itself the ideal in contrast to the actual".<sup>53</sup>

Kant's historical portrayal of Judaism, as an historical account, can be challenged and must be challenged ever again skeptically because we only have access to appearances, not the causes or things themselves.<sup>54</sup> What Kant got "wrong" about Judaism as a historical religion, however, not only does not support a condemnation of Judaism but actually confirms Kant's central point concerning the presence of a common moral religion at the core of all "historical" religions.

Before turning to the second preface of *Religion* and its discussion of "pure" (core) and "historical" religion, though, we should examine *the context* of the quote about euthanasia in the *Conflict of the Faculties*. The overarching theme of the text is religious "conversion." Kant says directly that the issue at stake is not a general conversion of Jews to Christianity but a "conversion" that throws off the clothes of the old cultus (of any historical religion) that prohibit the emergence of the "true religious disposition" ("*wahre Religionsgesinnung*").<sup>55</sup>

An adequate grasp of what the "true religious disposition" means for Kant must also wait for an examination of the second preface of *Religion*, but Kant acknowledges the ground for his optimism regarding this "conversion" of religious disposition to be that the Jews are "an educated, well-mannered people, competent for exercising all the rights of citizenship, whose faith is able to be sanctioned by the government [...]" (AA VII: 53) (Trans. McG) Such language is far from language of condemnation much less a call for physical extermination of a segment of the human community. In other words, at issue here is not the historical appearance and character of, but the imperceptible conditions of possibility for, any and all religion.

The *euthanasia* of Judaism spoken of by Kant is, also, not something that occurs in "spirit", in contrast to in the flesh, but rather, a "euthanasia" freely (without external threat!) chosen and implemented internally by its own people, *not out of self-hatred but out of recognition of its highest, moral capacities*. Kant states explicitly in his *Preliminary Studies for the Conflict of the Faculties* [*Vorarbeiten zum Streit der Fakultäten*] AA XXIII: 443\*: "Euthanasia of Judaism is natural religion" ["*Die Euthanasie des Judenthums ist die natürliche Religion*"] (Trans. McG)].

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, AA VI: 360.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, AA VI: 291.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, AA VI: 291.

<sup>54</sup> This constitutes the methodological skepticism of the Copernican Turn described in the "Transcendental Method" in the *Critique of Pure Reason's* "Discipline of Pure Reason" at B 787-790.

<sup>55</sup> *Conflict of the Faculties* (AA VII: 52-53).

To be sure, we need here to be clear with respect to what is meant by “natural religion”. Kant by no means simply contrasts revealed and natural religion as if the former was merely supernatural and the latter merely empirical. Rather, for Kant at the core level of moral religion there is a “perfect harmony” between revealed and natural religion because there can be no core moral religion without the assumption of God as “creator and giver” (which is not anthropomorphic theism for Kant<sup>56</sup>) of the two coherent orders of autonomous freedom and nature.<sup>57</sup>

Further strengthening the point, the *euthanasia* attributed to Judaism in the *Conflict of the Faculties* is not limited to Judaism. It is the “gentle death” of *all* historical religion and applies just as well to Christianity and all other historical religions,<sup>58</sup> Kant suggests, “because one finds only one shepherd and one flock”. This “one shepherd and one flock” is not, as might be supposed, a reference to the need for all other religions to become “Christian” in the sense of conversion to historical Christianity. Rather, it is another example of what Kant means by the “Architectonic of Pure Reason.” Reality must be a unified, collective totality, not a mere aggregate of multiplicity:

The world has never seen something as animating of the soul, suppressive of self-love, and simultaneously elevating of hope as the Christian religion that elevated itself above Judaism. However, this elevation could be achieved only by being in accord with the religion of reason, which sanctions it. Without this [sanctioning by the religion of reason (McG’s comment)] everything would be fragmentary, an aggregation of morality and religious doctrine. Now there is a system that by means of totality announces itself with majestic respect.” (Trans. McG)<sup>59</sup>

If there is a historical religion that receives the brunt of Kant’s vitriolic attack, it is Christianity, not Judaism, as we will see below.

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<sup>56</sup> Although Kant acknowledges that we cannot escape “symbolic” (not literal) anthropomorphism, he warns frequently over the hubris, problems, and dangers of anthropomorphic theism. See *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (AA IV: 356) and *Religion* (AA VI: 168-169).

<sup>57</sup> Kant defines religion at *Religion* AA VI: 153 as: “the recognition of all our duties as divine commands” and distinguishes between revealed religion for which “I must first know that something is a divine command in order that I recognize it as my duty” (this is religion which requires a revelation) from natural religion for which “I must first know that something is duty before I can acknowledge it as a divine command”. However, he adds at AA VI: 155-156: “religion can be *natural*, yet also *revealed* [...] when human beings arrive at religion on their own through the mere use of their reason, even though they would not have come to it as early or as extensively as is required hence a revelation of it at a given time and a given place might be wise and very advantageous” because “everyone can [...] convince himself of its truth by himself and his own reason.” Therefore, a rationalist/naturalist “will never deny [...] nor will he ever contest either the intrinsic possibility of revelation in general or the necessity of a revelation as divine means for the introduction of true religion; for no human being can determine anything through reason regarding these matters.” (Trans. CUP) In short, Kant follows Lessing with respect to revelation: Revelation can save us time when it comes to discovering our role as moral beings in the world (§4 of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *The Education of the Human Race* (London Kegan, Paul Trench, Trübner, 1896)). Nonetheless, what the Bible says is not true because it is in the Bible, but what is true in the Bible is true because it is true independent of the Bible: “For the final purpose of [...] these holy books, or the investigation of their content, is to make better human beings [...]” (*Religion* AA VI: 111) See as well, Flügge, *Versuch einer historisch-kritischen Darstellung des bisherigen Einflusses der Kantischen Philosophie*, vol. II: 213-214.

<sup>58</sup> See *Religion* (AA VI: 135\*); Kant refers to historical religion, generally, as “dead in itself”. See *Religion* (AA VI: 111).

<sup>59</sup> *Vorarbeiten zur Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (AA XXIII: 92).

**An Analogy Illustrates the Universal Oneness of Religion:  
Historical religions are Related to the Core of Religion as the  
Inclinations of Radical Good and Evil (*Hänge*) are Related to Autonomous  
Freedom (*Anlage*)**

One can draw an analogy here between historical and core religion, and Kant's discussion of humanity's "radical" evil in *Religion*.<sup>60</sup> There, Kant distinguishes a primordial capacity (autonomous freedom) from a choice between two inclinations (good and evil). The introduction of this analogy of historical and core religion, to humanity's primordial capacity and the conditions necessary for self-regulation, accomplishes two tasks: It draws out implications of the importance of historical religions for understanding their common core, and it clarifies an all-too common, if erroneous assumption, that, when Kant speaks of "radical evil" he means humanity's moral depravity (in the sense of original sin).

In Part I of *Religion*, after having defined primordial capacities<sup>61</sup> (*Anlagen*) in Section I of *Religion*, and inclinations<sup>62</sup> (*Hänge*) in Section II, Kant limits his explicit discussion of "radical" inclination to "evil". However, the point he is making here is that the "root" (that is, radical) inclinations of humanity are toward BOTH "good" and "evil" principles for the governing of one's exercising of that capacity that is the ground of any and all action. This primordial capacity (*Anlage*) of autonomous freedom allows for the assumption of moral responsibility for one's agency, something we barely expect, if at all, from other species.

This ultimate ground of human agency as *Anlage* establishes human dignity as the one "right by birth"<sup>63</sup> and is an ineradicable, *amoral* good; this is *our capacity of autonomous freedom* consciously to initiate sequences of events that nature on its own could never accomplish.<sup>64</sup> It is good that we possess this capacity, for otherwise we could not be the species that we are capable of becoming. In contrast, good as the moral good of inclination (*Hang*) consists in deciding and acting on the basis of a good principle, and evil as the moral evil of inclination (*Hang*) in deciding and acting on the basis of an evil principle. Without the capacity (*Anlage*) of the good that is autonomous freedom, there can be no inclination toward either a good or evil moral principle to guide the agency of autonomous freedom. In turn, self-legislating *either* a good principle or an evil principle to govern our agency involves *our own* self-regulation of this amoral, good capacity (*Anlage*),

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<sup>60</sup> See Section "III The Human Being is by Nature Evil" in *Religion* (AA VI: 32-39).

<sup>61</sup> See *Ibid.*, (AA VI: 26). I take the translation of *Anlagen* as "capacities" to be more accurate than "propensities".

<sup>62</sup> See *Ibid.*, (AA VI: 29). Just as I prefer "capacities" for *Anlagen*, "inclinations" is the more accurate translation for *Hänge* rather than "predispositions". "Propensity" and "predisposition" carry the baggage of determinism, which couldn't be further from what Kant is describing about humanity.

<sup>63</sup> See *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA VI: 237-238).

<sup>64</sup> Autonomous freedom is neither the "liberty" to choose between and among already given options (*Willkür*) nor does it consist, as Hegel claimed, in the mere standing-over-against existing social institutions and practices. Rather, autonomous freedom is *Wille*: exercising of the will to initiate sequences of events that nature cannot accomplish on its own.

The faculty of desire whose inner determining ground [...] lies within the subject's reason is called the will [*Wille*]. The will is therefore the faculty of desire considered not so much in relation to action (as choice [*Willkür*] is) but rather in relation to the ground determining choice to action. The will [*Wille*] itself, strictly speaking, has no determining ground; insofar as it can determine choice, it is instead practical reason itself. (The *Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 213) (Trans. CUP)

In short, humanity's *a priori* and *universal*, transcendental capacity (*Anlage*), of autonomous freedom consciously to initiate sequences of events that nature cannot accomplish on its own (*not* autonomous in the sense of independence from cultural institutions), is distinguished from good or evil inclinations (*Hänge*) with the latter being contingent upon one's *particular* circumstances.

In Part I of *Religion*, Kant directly addresses *only the inclination (Hang) to an evil principle* to self-regulate one's autonomy. Although he maintains that human beings are "by nature" evil, he makes clear that "[...] the ground of this evil cannot be placed, as is commonly done, in the sensuous nature of the human being, and in the natural inclinations originating from it".<sup>65</sup> (Trans. CUP) What can be confusing, though, is that *he does not directly address here humanity's inclination to a good principle* and the idea that human beings are "by nature" good except to say that the *capacity (Anlage)* of autonomous freedom is ineradicably good because the ground of evil can "[...] not be placed in a *corruption* of the morally legislative reason, as if reason could extirpate within itself the dignity of the law itself, for this is absolutely impossible."<sup>66</sup> (Trans. CUP)

However, in the "General Remarks" at the end of Part I of *Religion*, he states explicitly that this goodness is incapable of "eradication or corruption".<sup>67</sup> (Trans. McG) Although never explicitly formulated in *Religion*, the unequivocal confirmation that Kant surely includes both the inclination to good principles as well as the inclination to evil principles as "radical" to humanity is found in the *Opus postumum* (AA XXI: 58): "*One is incapable of thinking of a primordial being as either morally evil or morally good (because both must arise out of freedom)*."<sup>68</sup> (Kant's parentheses) (emphasis added) (Trans. McG)

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<sup>65</sup> *Religion*, (AA VI : 34-35).

<sup>66</sup> *Religion* (AA VI : 35).

<sup>67</sup> *Religion* (AA VI: 45).

<sup>68</sup> The apparent failure to grasp Kant's distinction between "will" [*Wille*] as the *capacity [Anlage]* of autonomous freedom and "choice" [*Willkür*] as the *inclination [Hang]* to apply a good or an evil principle to govern one's decisions and agency combined with the apparent failure to grasp Kant's point that the "radical" inclination of humanity includes both (!) good and evil, leads Stephen Palmquist, Chris Firestone, Nathan Jacobs, and their followers to erroneously conclude that Kant understood humanity to be "radically corrupt" (trapped in original sin) and in need of grace. Although Palmquist maintains that I have distorted his reading, here are two references that justify my observations: 1) "[...] Kant defends a position he explicitly describes as expressing essentially the same meaning as the Christian doctrine of original sin" from "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance" in *Journal of Religion* 90/4 (2010): 533-534; and 2) Palmquist, "Kant's Quasi-Transcendental Argument for a Necessary and Universal Evil Propensity in Human Nature" in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 261-297 294, n 43. See as well, Firestone's claim that "[...] for Kant [...] human depravity becomes a radically destabilizing feature; it yields moral guilt, removes moral hope, and leads reason down the retrograde path of moral nihilism, *along with the eventual loss of human dignity*" [emphasis added] from "What can Christian Theologians Learn from Kant?" in *Philosophia Christi* 9/1 (2007): 7-19, esp. 13: The project that they propose turns what Kant calls the "*parerga*" to religion "[...] that do not belong with [religion] [...]. Reason, conscious of its impotence to satisfy its moral needs, extends itself to extravagant ideas *which might make up* [emphasis added] for this lack, though it is not suited to this enlarged domain." (*Religion* VI: 52) into central teachings of religion. Kant discusses each of the four *parerga* with two concerned with grace at the end of each of the four Parts of *Religion*. Palmquist, Firestone, Jacobs, et al. appear to be attempting to ground *pure* religion in a particular *historical* religion (e.g., "Christianity"), which is exactly the opposite of Kant's project. *Pure* religion existed long before Christianity. See Kant's *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*. AA VIII: 109-23.

As we have seen, Kant maintains that there is only “one” religion<sup>69</sup> not because one historical religion is superior to all others and should be embraced by everyone but because all historical religions have the same “core” moral religion as their essentially necessary condition of possibility (analogous to the *Anlage* of autonomous, creative freedom) to which, Kant proposes, all ought to “convert”.

Completing the analogy to *Anlage* and *Hänge*: the relationship of historical religion to the core of religion is analogous to the relationship between our inclinations to act on a good or an evil moral principle (*Hänge*) to autonomous, creative freedom (*Anlage*): the latter terms (the core of religion and creative freedom) are the condition of possibility for the former terms (historical religion and inclinations). Historical religions and personal inclinations are intended to serve *particular* desires of humanity, but they are ultimately grounded in the *universal*, shared, single capacity (*Anlage*) of autonomous freedom that is the condition of possibility for any and all inclinations and human creations.

Kant’s language of oneness is to be taken in the context of the “architectonic of pure reason” referred to above: there is only one God, one reason, one world, and one religion not because there is one “highest” God superior to all others, or one instrumental reason, or one political system, or one historically manifest religious institution to which all must conform. Rather, it is because any coherent understanding and responsible agency obligates us to presuppose a totality and a coherent (lawful) unity to any and all experience.

### III. On “Pure” Moral Religion

Kant succinctly formulates his understanding of the “core” of religion in the three-page, second preface to *Religion*.<sup>70</sup> Here he distinguishes between two “circles” of religion: a broader circle of the historical manifestation of institutional religion in all of its variety and a narrow circle *within the first circle* (that is, not outside of historical religion). This narrow circle he refers to as “pure” or the “core” of religion.

When it comes to the relationship between this “core” and “historical” religion, the valuation of them consists in one (moral religion) to be the condition of possibility of the other (historical religion). When the two are inverted and moral religion is claimed to be grounded in sensory perception (i.e., in revelation), then religion becomes *Afterdienst*,<sup>71</sup> whose socially acceptable translation is “counterfeit” or “secondhand” service but whose literal meaning is “ministration to the anus”.

In other words, when revelation is required for moral religion, religion as “pure” moral religion at the core of historical religion is turned into a mere means, rather than the goal, of religion.<sup>72</sup> Such an *Afterdienst* results in the ministrants’ “compulsory labor”

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<sup>69</sup> See McGaughey, “One World, One Reason, One Faith, but Many Religions: Religious Studies in an Age of Pluralism” at <https://criticalidealism.org> (6 November 2019).

<sup>70</sup> See as well, *Religion* AA VI:103-107.

<sup>71</sup> See *Religion* (AA VI: 165 and „Second Part – Concerning the Counterfeit Service [*Afterdienst*] of God in a Statutory Religion” AA VI: 167 ff).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

(*Fronddienst*), in which the church's activities are turned into a salvific faith (AA VI: 165): "A church grounded in [... *Fronddienst*] doesn't actually have servants (*ministry*), as one finds in [... "pure" moral religion], but commanding, senior officers (officials), who, when they [...] take themselves to be the only, competent exegetes of the holy scriptures, having deprived themselves of due worthiness as the ultimate exegetes of the pure religion of reason, demand that scriptural scholarship serve only the faith of the church." (Trans. McG)

"Pure" moral religion, it is important to add, is no mere *reduction* of religion to morality to the exclusion of all the sensuous elements of historical religion. Because this core of religion is concerned with humanity's highest capacities and their proper exercise, it embraces all of theoretical and practical reason and is concerned not only with the merely moral effort of the individual but with dependence upon the "givenness" of all of the conditions of possibility for experience and the assistance of a larger community that understands the significance of the imperceptible, commonweal of God for moral effort.

The totality of "transcendental reason" is necessary for pure moral religion, and transcendental reason includes not only theoretical (not merely instrumental!) reason and practical reason but also aesthetics (humanity's experience of beauty as well as the mathematical and the dynamical sublime). The conditions that make possible esthetic judgment (from the Greek *αἴσθησις*: perception) is precisely what unifies consciousness and appearances as a consequence and its capacity of reflecting judgment, which is the ability to seek out the scheme of concepts in appearances with which one is unfamiliar – in contrast to determining judgment, which is the imposition of an already possessed conceptual scheme onto phenomena.<sup>73</sup>

If all determining judgment is ultimately derived from reflecting judgment (AA V: 187) and transcendental consciousness is a set of imperceptible conditions for experience in the world that is dependent upon the "givenness" of empirical phenomena that demand understanding, then three implications follow for the core of religion: First, the core of religion is not a construction of either the individual or the community: second, it involves no achievement of a permanent condition and cannot be constrained to any particular historical religion; and third, it is always an open-ended task (*Aufgabe*) that must be learned and applied with ever new effort.

In short, "it takes a village" for moral religion to be cultivated in humanity. However, the task of this village is neither to wag a finger of external, ethical principles in determining judgment in one's face (heteronomous rules and laws that are imposed upon the individual from without) nor are the *categorical* imperatives of moral religion to be confused for the *hypothetical* imperatives of social rules and laws. The village is no visible community. It is an invisible community committed to the imperceptible commonweal of God that consists in a "kingdom of ends" in which persons are not mere means but ends-in-themselves by their very dignity.

The crucial difference between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is frequently overlooked.<sup>74</sup> Hypothetical imperatives are the "oughts" driven by interest for achieving a particular, technical goal or personal project in the world, which Kant thus

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<sup>73</sup> See the *Critique of Judgment* (AA V: 179 ff).

<sup>74</sup> For Kant's discussion of the difference between "hypothetical" and "categorical" imperatives, see the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (AA IV: 414-421).

defines, respectively, as “technical” and “pragmatic” imperatives. For example, technical, hypothetical imperatives are those that govern the building of a skyscraper or the driving of an automobile. Pragmatic, hypothetical imperatives are what govern the desire to practice a particular profession. If one wishes to build a skyscraper, one must (it is imperative) begin with the construction of an appropriate foundation. One does not begin by hanging the roof. In other words, the physical order imposes “lawfulness” upon the engineer that cannot be ignored if the engineer is to successfully supervise the construction of the skyscraper. Similarly, when it comes to driving a car, each society must develop its own civic laws to govern drivers (e.g. left-lane or right-lane driving). To be safe, the driver must (it is imperative for her/him) know the traffic signs and rules of the road for the society in which s/he is driving. The same is the case when it comes to practicing the pragmatic, hypothetical imperatives that govern a particular profession. One does not go to law school to become a medical doctor. Each society has its own rules for governing the practice of a profession, and it is imperative for the individual to conform to those rules/laws.

However, *hypothetical* imperatives are not *moral, categorical* imperatives! Hypothetical imperatives are driven by interests in a particular situation. Moreover, we all know that one can do everything properly according to social rules, conventions, and laws, and still be immoral and unjust. Even adhering to the letter of the civic or social law by no means is equivalent to being virtuous or just.

“Above” (transcending) hypothetical imperatives, then, are categorical imperatives, which are not derived from the empirical world or through sense perception (revelation), nor are they tied to the achievement of particular ends. To be sure, *whereas categorical imperatives might serve particular ends, they are driven not by an external “must”, rather, by one’s self-imposed sense of what “ought to be”*.

In sum, in contrast to hypothetical imperatives, categorical imperatives are not the “musts” that are required to accomplish particular goals. They are internally self-legislated principles that enable us to determine whether the particular goal we wish to achieve is one that we *ought* to achieve. Categorical imperatives are not found in the laws of the state or cultural conventions. They are not accessed through the senses but identifiable only by application of the imperceptible, categorical imperative’s three (!) forms as a litmus test for self-determining whether one ought to act on the basis of a principle. Kant formulated the three forms in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: 1) act on the basis of a principle that you would want to be universal *as if* it were a physical law, which is not an affirmation of any capriciously chosen principle to pursue my own interest but, on the contrary, a criterion that checkmates acting solely on the basis of personal interest (AA IV: 421); 2) Treat oneself and the other always as an end and never as merely a means to the achievement of one’s (or another’s) interests (AA IV: 429); and, 3) Acknowledge that the will of every rational being [transcendental consciousness] is a universally legislating will (AA IV: 431).

Categorical imperatives are what liberate humanity from the “tyranny” of public rules and social convention by insisting that it is possible for us to take a position “above” sensuous imperatives (revelation), public rules, and social conventions to decide what we *ought* to do on the basis of universal principles. Were we to take particular, hypothetical imperatives to be categorical moral imperatives, we would turn morality, Kant suggests, into tyranny either because morality is reduced either to materialism (so-called biological

morality<sup>75</sup> governed by the amygdala and oxytocin) or the application of every “narrow” hypothetical rule or norm is mistakenly taken to be the application of a “wide”, categorical imperative.<sup>76</sup>

#### IV. One Religion

Religion, following Kant, has to do with our highest capacity of autonomous, creative freedom and its conditions of possibility that make possible a life of moral effort under the encouragement of an invisible community of ends<sup>77</sup> (moral principles and persons). This communal character is expressed by a “culture that fosters moral effort”, a clear contrast to a “culture of skill” that merely values cleverness and self-interest above all else.<sup>78</sup> Such a culture of moral effort, though, is not a heteronomous culture that tells us what we must do, but one that encourages us to “do the right thing because it is right – not because it serves our personal interest.” Here we take a step beyond cultural relativism because the culturally relative (Rousseau’s “second nature”) is, precisely, the “culture of skills.”

Different cultures have developed the technical imperatives that govern what Rousseau called “second nature,” which is concerned with what humanity places on top of physical nature. However, Kant is not interested in this second nature per se. He is interested in the community that encourages the individual to exercise her/his highest capacity in a fashion *appropriate to* humanity’s being as an autonomous, creative agent in the world in fulfilment of its role as “the end of creation.”<sup>79</sup> This community is not only particularly located, but it also transcends any particular place or epoch. We can call it a “virtual” community.

Having transcended the culture of skills with the conception of religion as constituting the hope in the moral effort of humanity, Kant’s understanding of religion also transcends, but involves no mystical escape from,<sup>80</sup> all historically conditioned manifestations of religious faith. This allows him to make what appears to be the politically incorrect claim that there is only “one religion.”<sup>81</sup> This does not mean that all

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<sup>75</sup> See for example, Patricia Churchland, *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> See the *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA VI: 390-391).

<sup>77</sup> Kant writes in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (AA IV: 433): “The concept of every rational being that must consider itself as universally legislating through all the maxims of its will, so as to judge itself and its actions from this point of view, leads to [...] the] concept [...] of a commonwealth of ends.”

<sup>78</sup> On the distinction between the “culture of the will/moral improvement” and the “culture of skills”, see *Critique of Judgment* (AA V: 431-432).

<sup>79</sup> See *Critique of Judgment* (AA V: 426, 429-431).

<sup>80</sup> Already in his *Vorlesung über die philosophische Religionslehre*, ed. by Werner Stark and Manfred Kühn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004): 97, Kant spoke of mysticism as “self-annihilation”; see as well, Kant’s discussion of Plato’s mysticism in *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (XXIX: 950). In *Conflict of the Faculties* (AA VII: 54-58), he dismissively compared pietism and mysticism. In *The End of All Things* (AA VIII: 335-336), he called mysticism the “end of all understanding”; in *On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy* (AA VIII: 390), he called the mystical “the end of philosophy”; and in “*What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?*” (AA XX: 310), he had warned of three dangers: turning theology into Theosophy; moral teleology into mysticism; and psychology into “pneumatics”. See as well, Bernhard Jachmann’s *Prüfung der Kantischen Religionsphilosophie in Hinsicht auf die ihr beygelegte Aehnlichkeit mit dem reinen Maxtizismus. Mit einer Einleitung von Immanuel Kant* (1800) (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1999).

<sup>81</sup> See *Religion* (AA VI: 3\*, 101, 104, 107-108, 115); *Toward Perpetual Peace* (AA VIII: 367\*); *Conflict of the Faculties* (AA VII: 36;48); and *On Pedagogy* (AA IX: 496).



religions are equal “paths to God” or that all religions manifest themselves in some common set of doctrines, rituals, or institutional structure. Rather, the claim here is that the religious hope of humanity as the end of creation is shared universally as a set of capacities and conditions that guide human inclinations toward moral effort.

## V. Pure (or Core) Religion as the Conversion of all Historical Religions

We now can return to Kant’s statement on the *euthanasia of Judaism* to underscore that the conversion to “pure” moral religion is not limited to Judaism alone but involves a *euthanasia* of all historical religions. This conversion is not a physical death but a transformation of historical religions by converting them to serve the end that is the “pure” (or core) moral religion. Morality serves historical religion, rather than religion serving to encourage the moral effort of humanity, when religion consists of the imposition by a religious authority of hypothetical and heteronomous legalisms placed on the backs of individuals, legalisms that the religious authority asserts consists of the revelation of the “divine will”.

## VI. What can we Hope for?

Kant famously proposed four questions of humanity: 1) what can I know (theoretical reason); 2) what ought I to do (practical reason); 3) what can I hope for (religion); and 4) what is a human being (anthropology)?<sup>82</sup>

He suggests in the first preface to *Religion* that *our hope can only be that there is a connection between the categorical and the contingent, and that it is precisely this connection, which, among other elements, requires belief in (but no proof of!) God* (AA IV: 6\*).

Individuals and groups can and will, on occasion, act contrary to their self-interests in the name of higher moral principles. Yet, even when we act exclusively based on self-interest, our ability to do so illuminates the capacity of our practical reason to act morally. Stated otherwise, when humanity acts solely out of self-interest, it contributes, at least indirectly, to the possible encouragement of humanity’s moral effort by means of what Kant calls *unsocial sociality* (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*). Unsocial sociality constitutes that reaction in horror to the harm caused by merely self-serving agency by responding with constructive alternatives. It is a response that can be labelled the “cunning of reason” (but not in the Hegelian sense of the metanarrative of Spirit in history) to achieve the moral effort of humanity.<sup>83</sup>

Even when humanity acts out of mere self-interest, autonomous creative freedom and its categorical imperatives are at the core of all agency, whether positive or negative. In addition to hope in the connection between the categorical and the contingent, humanity’s hope consists of confidence in the indelible, “perfect” conditions of possibility of humanity’s moral agency because the conditions of possibility of its practical reason

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<sup>82</sup> The first three are found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 832-833); all four are found in the *Logic* (AA IX: 24-5).

<sup>83</sup> See the “Fourth Thesis” of Kant’s *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (AA VIII: 20-22).

can never be eradicated as long as one is living.<sup>84</sup> Every decision with respect to what one “ought” to do is a decision equivalent to the first time such a decision was ever taken.

Humanity’s hope, then, by no means constitutes an embracing of dystopia (humanity’s hope is not dependent upon merely its failures and the process of unsocial sociality) but on its originating capacities that can never be eradicated as long as there is such a rational species. These ineradicable capacities are what constitute the hope that is religion because the conditions of moral effort are ineradicable. Humanity’s hope is grounded in the species-marker of what it means to be a rational being and in the faith that our moral efforts will bring virtuous results.

## VII. Euthanasia of Pure Reason, Morality, Philosophy, Historical Faith, and the Physical Sciences

Kant employed the term “euthanasia” not only when speaking of Judaism (never when speaking of individual Jews who, like all human beings, are worthy of dignity because they possess the species marker of autonomous freedom) as a historical religion but also for “pure reason”, “morality”, “philosophy”, “historical faith”, and the physical sciences. Clearly, this suggests something different than we would think. In each case, he employs the term “euthanasia” or “death” in the sense of the internal effort of the self to exercise her/his highest capacities – it is NOT to call for an external agent or agents exterminating or destroying pure reason, morality, philosophy, historical faith, or the physical sciences. Because of its pertinence, this is worth unpacking fully.

**The euthanasia of Pure Reason and Morality:** In the *Critique of Reason* B 434 Kant writes that “skeptical despair” and “dogmatic [...] assertions” “[...] is the death of sound philosophy, although the former [skeptical despair] might perhaps be entitled the *euthanasia* of pure reason.” Pure reason includes both theoretical and practical reason, but Kant also speaks specifically of the death of moral reason (practical reason) when he observes that “[e]nthusiastic religious delusion [*Schwärmerei*] is [...] the moral death of reason without which there can be no religion, because, like all morality in general, religion must be founded on principles.” In his *On the Common Saying: ‘That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice’* (AA VIII: 285) he writes that intentionally discouraging moral effort because of humanity’s imperfection “is the death of all morality.”

However, Kant speaks not only of the death of practical reason, but he also of its *euthanasia*. In the Preface to the “Doctrine of Virtue” in the *Metaphysics of Morals* he writes: “[W]hen eudaimonia (the happiness principle) is established as precept rather than eleutheronomy (the principle of freedom and its internal legislation), the consequence is the *euthanasia* of all morality.” (parentheses from Kant) (AA VI: 378)

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<sup>84</sup> Kant speaks in *Religion* (AA XX VI: 44) of the lapsing “into [...] the absolutely *first* beginning of all evil] *through temptation*, hence not as corrupted *fundamentally* (in his very first capacity [*Anlage*] but, on the contrary, as still capable of improvement [...]) And so for the human being, who despite a corrupted heart yet always possesses a good will [*Anlage*], there still remains hope of a return to the good will [*Wille*, not *Willkür*] from which he has strayed.” Furthermore, Kant speaks of religious hope not in terms of receiving assistance but in terms of maintaining our moral attitude. (AA VI: 68-69) Kant speaks, as well, (AA VI: 101) of the hope/desire “that the commonweal of God come, that His will be done on earth”.

**The death of Philosophy:** In light of his frequent employment of the term *euthanasia* for death, to be sure, the “gentle” death, it is not to be overlooked that Kant spoke of the death of philosophy and of historical religion, generally, not just Judaism. Kant refers to the death of philosophy twice in *On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy*. At AA VIII: 385 he calls “mystical illumination” the “death of all philosophy” and at AA VIII: 405 he calls “slipping into delusionary [*schwärmerische*] visions [...] the death of all philosophy.”

**The death of Historical Faith:** In addition, Kant speaks of historical faith as the “death” in *Religion* (AA VI: 111): “Historical faith is the ‘death of itself’, that is, considered as creed, it contains nothing, nor does it lead to anything that would have a moral value for us.” (Trans.McG)

**The death of the Physical Sciences:** Finally, Kant does not limit labeling the “death” of a capacity just to what one calls the “Human Sciences” (*Geisteswissenschaften*). In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (AA IV: 544), he also speaks of the “death of the natural philosophy” when “movement” (we could say “energy”) in the natural or physical sciences is sought to be explained with the *a priori* synthetic judgment that “all matter is living” (*Hylozoism/Hylozismus*: from the Greek *hyle*/ὕλη [matter] + *zoe*/ζωή [life]).<sup>85</sup> Introduction of the erroneous, *a priori* synthetic judgment that matter is living would mean that matter is capricious and unpredictable with no amount of “observation and experiment”<sup>86</sup> able to determine order in nature.

Although Kant speaks of the euthanasia of pure reason and morality as well as the death of philosophy, historical faith, and the physical sciences, nowhere does Kant employ the language of *euthanasia* and *death* in the sense of calling for extinction.

## Conclusion

The Shoah constitutes an ungraspable and horrendous evil that only a species capable of consciously initiating events that nature cannot accomplish on its own is able to achieve. It was the slaughter of millions under the thoughtless opinion shared by all racists that one can determine merely by appearances and external traditions whether someone is a member of the human species. Questioning the judgment that Kant was an anti-Semite

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<sup>85</sup> See *Metaphysical Foundations of the Natural Sciences* AA IV: 544: “Life is the ability of a substance to act on the basis of an internal principle, [the ability of] a finite substance to change itself, and [the ability of] a material substance itself to decide, with respect to changing its state, to move or remain at rest. We know of no other internal principle of a substance able to change its state than desire and absolutely no other internal activity than thought along with that upon which it depends, feeling of attraction and repulsion and desire or will. However, these determinants and actions by no means belong to the representations of external sense and also, as well, by no means to the determination of matter as matter, Hence, all matter as such is lifeless.

[...When it comes to] understanding nature, it is necessary to know in advance the laws of matter as such and to clearly distinguish them from all other contributing causes before one combines them, in order to distinguish what and how they operate for themselves on their own. The possibility of an actual physical science rests entirely on the basis of the law of inertia (along with the law of the persistence of matter). The opposite of the first [that is, the law of inertia] and therefore the death of all physical philosophy, as well would by hylozoism.” (Trans. McG)

<sup>86</sup> Kant defines physical science in *Opus postumum* (AA XXII: 298): “Physics is the editing of perceptions as phenomena by means of observation and experiment in the research of nature. Physical science is, therefore, empirical knowledge as science, and only that which we introduce with respect to concepts (the combination of perceptions into a totality of experience) into this *complex* is its object.” (emphasis added) (Trans. McG)

(or a racist) is by no means an attempt to brush off the horrors of antisemitism and racism or to ignore the horrendous suffering and loss of limb and life that both have caused and continue to cause to this day.

It is never possible for one to draw a certain conclusion with respect to the thoughts of the other. We will never know whether or not, in his heart of hearts, Kant was an anti-Semite or a racist. Nonetheless, other than blind conjecture or predisposed malice, there is at least no solid textual evidence for concluding that Kant was either. If there is anyone who provides us with philosophical strategies for checkmating any attempt to demean the dignity of persons on the basis of external appearances (such as rituals, texts, practices, and physical characteristics), it is Kant with his theoretical and practical reason.

To employ his statement concerning the *euthanasia* of Judaism as preaching the physical extermination of a people is thus as much an unbelievable distortion as it is an anachronistic tearing (not to overlook tears) of the phrase out of its context. For Kant the metaphor refers to the conversion in spirit from historical forms to the core of any and all religion with absolutely no hint at physical violence. Furthermore, this sense of *euthanasia* that applies to all historical religions, including Christianity, not simply to Judaism.

Finally, Kant explicitly spoke of the *euthanasia* or (gentle) death not simply of Judaism but also of pure reason, morality, philosophy, historical religion, and the physical sciences. Nowhere does that suggest that they should or would “die” violently or be systematically exterminated by agents external to the individual.

There is only one overarching, existential question. *It is the question that has existed since the beginning of conscious time, and it is the question that is by no means limited to any one particular location.* Although the question has always existed, it has become actual at least since the human species emerged out of the organic brew of life on our planet because the question can only be asked at the particular time and space of its articulator.

The question is: “What good can come out of ‘Nazareth’?” “Nazareth” is a metaphor for “even the most irrelevant of locations”, and any and all good that can come from “even the most irrelevant of locations” arises because with the human species, at least, nature is not closed, and that includes our nature as social beings who must live with one another. It is possible for new things to occur (at least under the sun) because each and every individual, however constrained and no matter what physical and mental limitations s/he has, is capable of intentionally causing things to happen that nature on its own cannot achieve. We are not playing a zero-sum game, a nationalist game, a racist game, an economic game, a competitive religious game, or any other game than the game that has the goal of answering the question: “What good can come from Nazareth?” Each participant must find her/his own answer, but s/he can do so only with a community of supporting actors all of whom embrace autonomous freedom and its possibility of the assumption of responsibility of all agency! This is the profound challenge.

## **Addendum: On Duty**

Reading Michael Mack's account in *German Idealism and the Jew* of Kant's notion of duty, one finds the same kind of ideological distortion and misrepresentation that accompanied his account of Kant's supposed antisemitism. Kant's text is unrecognizable because the citations from it are torn out of context and framed by Mack's fantasies.

In fairness, it must be acknowledged that there was also a clear "Browning" (Nazification) of Kant in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that stressed the theme of duty (*Pflicht*) entirely out of context as framed by Nazi fantasies. The Nazi "Browning" of Kant is a sad example of the role of nationalism in philosophy, the Nazi's selectively choosing as their intellectual geniuses those they could ideologically or distortedly portray as "proper" German philosophers (e.g., Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Kant).

Kant anticipates and eclipses such blind kowtowing to (proper) intellectuals especially on the part of those who don't read the text. In reference to religious scriptures but applicable to the blind veneration of any author, he wrote (*Religion* [AA VI: 107]): "A holy book commands the greatest respect even among those (indeed, among those most of all) [Kant's parentheses] who do not read it, or are at least unable to form any coherent concept [...] from it; and no subtle argument can stand up to the knockdown pronouncement, Thus is it written." (Trans. CUP)

For Mack it is sufficient that, in his *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, Kant wrote: "[R]eason as much as you want and about whatever subject matter you choose, but obey!" Mack then suggests that the German term *räsonieren* "[...] in the context of Kant's critical philosophy [...] does not refer to the specific use of reason in relation to specific objects in the external world. Instead, it denotes the workings of autonomy [...]". Mack had written earlier: "[...] both homogeneity and autonomy refer to self-sufficiency and thereby to the indetermination by or *exclusion or annihilation of that which is perceived as 'other.'*" (emphasis added) Mack uses this dualist structure of autonomy and heteronomy to account for Kant's purported preaching the rejection and annihilation of Judaism as the "other." It is one's duty to obey!

Mack thus thinks he has the explanation for what Hannah Arendt calls "the banality of evil" as well as a clear source for it: German Idealism and, especially, Kant! However, unlike Mack, Arendt proposed that Eichmann had taken the wrong lesson from Kant. According to her, Eichmann took duty to refer to adherence to the civic law (found in the Part I, the "Doctrine of Right" in Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*) but he learned nothing from Part II, the "Doctrine of Virtue", which would have made it impossible to do what he did. The categorical imperative is unrecognizable because for Eichmann duty comes from external authority, the civic law, rather than having its ground in the dignity of humanity and the three forms of the categorical imperative (Section II of *the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*).

Contrary to Eichmann, Kant's understanding of morality is grounded in universality (not particular, self-interest), in not allowing oneself or treating the other as a mere means to someone else's or one's own ends, and, especially, in acknowledging that all human beings are equal self-legislators (not creators) of the universal principles they select to give themselves permission to do what they do. If there is anything certain about Kant's Critical Idealism, it is that there is no "us"/"them", "in"/"out", "spirit"/"matter" (or

even “subject”/“object”) dyadic structure that privileges one side of the dyad over the other! The “Architectonic of Pure Reason” in the final section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (concerned with “Transcendental Method”) underscores that experience, reflection, and responsible agency are a totality, not an aggregate of separate and distinct dimensions or elements.

### **What does Kant actually say we should “obey”?**

Mack quotes, entirely out of context, and interprets erroneously, one sentence in *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* that is part of the introduction to the theme of the exercising of autonomous freedom in public life. Enlightenment, Kant says here, means freedom in the sense of “[...] the least damaging of all that one might call freedom, namely: to employ publicly [...] reason in all its parts [a reference to theoretical reason, practical reason, and aesthetic judgment as a totality.]” (Trans. McG) (*Enlightenment* AA VIII: 36) Yet, he says:

Now, though, I hear the cry from all sides: “Don’t think!” The military officer cries out: “Don’t think, drill!” The tax official cries out: “Don’t think, pay!” The clergy cries out: “Don’t think, believe!” (Only a single ruler in the world says, “Reason as much and about all that you want but obey!”) [Presumably, this is a reference to Friedrich the Great (McG)]. *From all directions we have here the limiting of freedom.* What kind of limitation to freedom is obstructive of enlightenment, and what is not, but in fact encourages it? – I answer: the public use of one’s reason must be free at all times, and such public use alone can bring about enlightenment among people. The private use [of freedom] can be allowed frequently to be narrowly restricted without it resulting in hindering the progress of enlightenment. (*Enlightenment* AA VIII: 36-37) (emphasis added) (Trans. McG)

Kant immediately makes clear that he is talking about the exercising of reason in public and private on the part of the “erudite” (*Gelehrter*). Public use of reason in this case means: the schooled or scholar speaking out to a public audience. Private use of reason means: the exercising of a civic appointment or public office.

He then acknowledges that, for a society to function, it is necessary that some members of a public entity must be passive. The military officer, the educated citizen, and the clergyperson to a certain degree must perform the tasks expected of her/him. Otherwise, the social order could not function. Here one should obey, not think! However, Kant does not by any means call for blind, conscience silencing obedience. He immediately adds qualifications:

However, to the extent that this part of the “machine” is at the same time viewed as part of a larger, public entity, yes, even of a cosmopolitan order, when it comes to the quality of a scholar (*Gelehrter*) who appeals to a public on the basis of his own understanding: He can certainly think without the operations suffering for which he otherwise is called to be passive. (*Enlightenment* AA VIII: 37)

He addresses in greatest detail the example of the clergyperson in the exercising of her/his public office, who is expected to teach not according to her/his personal

convictions but must say that s/he is speaking in conformity with the expectations and in the name of the church. Nevertheless, if what s/he is expected to teach in the name of the church contradicts his inner conviction, s/he must (!) resign:

[... The clergyperson] will say: our church teaches this or that; here are the justifications that it employs. He seeks all practical advantages for his congregation from teachings that he himself cannot defend with full conviction, whose presentation he pledges himself to make because it is not entirely impossible that there is truth buried within it – in any event, however, at least nothing contrary to internal religion. *Were he to believe to have discovered the latter, then he could not perform his office in good conscience; he must resign.* (*Enlightenment* AA VIII: 38) (emphasis added) (Trans.McG)

In other words, as a clergyperson s/he is not free. Why? Because s/he is performing a task by the order of the institution s/he has agreed to serve. However, as scholar (*Gelehrter*) s/he Possesses “[...] an unrestricted freedom to employ his own reason and to speak out for himself. To expect that the guardians of the people (especially in religious matters) themselves should once again become immature is an absurdity that amounts to eternalizing absurdities.” (*Enlightenment* AA VIII: 39) (Trans. McG) By analogy, the same applies to the military officer, the tax collector, and any other person holding a public office. In terms of the performance of the tasks of the office, I must conform to the rules and expectations of the office. I must obey! However, that doesn’t place a muzzle on me, for I have an obligation as the incumbent of the office to serve the enlightenment of myself and those whom I ultimately serve, the citizenry.

Kant then asks if it is allowed that a church leadership should commit itself by oath to a set of unalterable symbols with the aim of maintaining a custodianship of naïveté over their congregations for all time? He answers:

I say: that is completely impossible. The establishment of a contract that would prevent forever all further enlightenment of the human species is absolutely null and void; even if validated by the highest authority, the Imperial Diet and celebratory peace treaties [...] That would be a crime against human nature [...] (*Enlightenment* AA VIII: 39) (Trans. McG)

Kant suggests that the people are the proof-stone as to whether or not a provisional restriction of liberty for the sake of a higher purpose has in fact fulfilled its purpose, and he defends the people’s right to petition for a change contrary to the wishes of the highest authority – in his case, the throne: “However, to establish for the duration of one generation an obstinate, religious constitution that prohibits all public skepticism as well as destroys and makes fruitless all progress in the improvement of humanity, with the consequence that the next generation is harmed, is absolutely not permissible.” (*Enlightenment* AA VIII: 39) (Trans. McG)

To be sure, an individual for his own person can delay learning what he needs to know for his own enlightenment, when only for a time; but to renounce enlightenment, even for himself still more for posterity constitutes a violation of the holy rights of humanity and to treat them with contempt. (*Enlightenment* AA VIII 39) (Trans McG)

Kant then proposes that the monarch cannot decide for her/his citizenry what salvation means because her/his lawful authority consists in her/his will being the expression of the entire will of the citizenry.

[... The monarch] can only permit his subjects to do what they find necessary for their own salvation; that doesn't concern him in the least. However, [it is his concern] to prevent, that not one person uses violence against another to hinder him from working on the definition and the advancement of salvation according to his abilities. (AA VIII: 40) (Trans. McG)

Does any of this remotely sound like Kant is saying: "Reason as much and about all that you want but obey!?" Absolutely not! Kant's discussion of duty is far broader than merely the performance of a public office. Above all, he speaks of the moral duty that is owed to oneself and (!) to others because that is the very task of practical reason. Furthermore, Kant subordinates theoretical reason (understanding of the world) to practical reason by demonstrating that autonomous, creative freedom is the highest capacity of a rational species – even higher than making sense of the world because practical reason is concerned with exercising responsible (!) agency in the world. This is entirely contrary to Mack's portrayal. The metaphor of "highest" by no means contains even the whiff of a suggestion that the exercising of practical reason takes humanity out of the world. Rather, the goal of practical reason is to "be in the world in the right way."

### **What is Duty and to Whom is it Owed?**

Contrary to Mack, then, duty for Kant is anything but a blind obedience to external authority. Obedience cannot be justified by claiming that the "transcendental" consciousness involves an escape from the concrete, messy empirical world to ignore responsibility to combat oppression and persecution of all kinds (for example, racism, sexism, ageism), the mistreatment of animals, and the destruction of the environment.

Kant gives many definitions of duty. One is found in *On the Common Saying: 'That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice'*. This is frequently employed by those who claim that Kant defends throwing a friend under the bus rather than lying but, as we will see, such a reading is equally entirely out of context. Kant wrote:

[...] in point of fact, *duty is nothing other than limitation of the will on the basis of acknowledging the possibility of a universal legislation of a maxim; no matter what its object or the goal [...]* When it comes to the question of the principle of morality [..., then,] the doctrine of a highest good can [...] be totally ignored and set aside [...], [and] the real issue is not concerned with one's concern about it [a highest good] but merely with one's concern for a universal morality. (*On the Common Saying: 'That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice'* AA VIII: 279-280) (emphasis added) (Trans. McG)

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant points out that duty involves three propositions. The first proposition: "[T]here [...] remains a law, namely to advance one's happiness, not from inclination, but from duty; and it is not until then that his conduct has its actual moral worth." (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* AA IV: 399) (Trans. CUP) (emphasis added) Second:



[...] an action from duty has its moral worth *not in the purpose* that is to be attained by it, but in the maxim according to which it is resolved upon, and thus it does not depend on the actuality of the object of the action [the determination of which is a judgment of theoretical reason and not in our absolute control (McG)] but merely on the *principle of willing* according to which – regardless of any object of the desiderative faculty – the action is done [...] [T]he purposes that we may have when we act, and their effects, as ends and incentives of the will, can bestow on actions no unconditional and moral worth [...] In what, then, can this worth lie [...]? It can lie nowhere else *than in the principle of the will*, regardless of the ends that can be effected by [...] action [...]: for the will stands halfway between it's a priori principle, which is formal, and it's a posteriori incentive, which is material, as it were at a crossroads, and since it must [...] be determined by something, it will have to be determined by the formal principle of willing as such when an action is done from duty [...] (CUP emphasis) (Trans. CUP) (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* AA IV: 399-400)

It is important to interject here, first, that Kant is not a consequentialist (that is, Utilitarian). He argues that we don't have complete knowledge of, or control over, consequences, but we do have knowledge of, and control over, the moral principle that we choose to give ourselves permission to act. Second, we should underscore where Kant locates the will (*Wille*, not *Willkür*): “halfway between its a priori principle, which is formal, and it's a posteriori incentive, which is material”. Here duty is clearly and inescapably concerned with accountability for one's concrete actions in the world!

Kant's third proposition of duty is:

[...] the conclusion from both previous ones [...]: “duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law. For the object as the effect of the action I have in mind I can indeed have inclination, but never respect, precisely because it is merely an effect and not activity of a will. Likewise, I cannot have respect for inclination as such [...] I can at most [...] approve of it [...] Only what is connected with my will merely as ground, never as effect [...] can be an object of respect and thus a command. Now, an action from duty is to separate off entirely the influence of inclination, and with it every object of the will; thus nothing remains for the will that could determine it except, objectively, the law and, subjectively, pure respect for this practical law [...] even if it infringes on all my inclinations. (Trans. CUP) (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* AA IV: 400)

The formal determination of duty Kant proposes also has three components: 1) duties for which there is no external legislative power; 2) the law of duty is not derived from action but is a maxim for action; 3) from which it follows that “ethical duty is wide, not narrow duty”. (*Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 410) (Trans. McG)

The material determination of duty involves both the doctrine of duty but also a doctrine concerning goals (also given as the second form of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork* [AA IV: 429]): “[...] a person is bound to think of himself as well as every other person as his end (*Zweck*) [... not as mere means]” (*Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 410) (Trans. McG)

With respect to the difference between the material and the formal in a principle of duty, Kant adds:

[...] not every obligation of virtue (*obligatio ethica*) is a duty of virtue (*officium ethicum s. virtutis*); in other words, respect for the law generally is not yet a determination of a goal of duty; because only the latter is a duty of virtue. – For that reason, there is only one obligation of virtue, but many duties of virtue: because there is [...] only one virtuous attitude to be satisfied as the subjective determining ground of his duty [...] Therefore, all classification of ethics is concerned with duties of virtue. Ethics, regarded formally, is the science that proceeds without any regard for being bound by possible, external legislation. (*Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 410) (Trans. McG)

In contrast, Mack gives only a fragment of Kant's understanding of duty: 1) he presents us with a formal element, minus universal principles, limited to "overcoming sensuousness" combined with 2) a fictitious heteronomous element of obedience to external authority. In dramatic contrast, the first two formulations of the categorical imperative in Kant's *Groundwork* constitute what Kant calls in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V: 4\*) the *ratio cognoscendi* of autonomous freedom, namely, 1) the formal, universal-law element (*Groundwork* AA IV: 421) and 2) the material ends, not means, formulation (*Groundwork* AA IV: 429) of the categorical imperative.

Mack takes freedom in Kant to mean "independence from material considerations" and, thereby, completely ignores the species-marker significance of autonomous freedom, which constitutes not only the capacity (*Anlage*) of personality inseparable from "animality" (sensuous appetites) and "humanity" (seeking status and prestige) but also grounds the "dignity" (the "worth", not to be confused for "market price") of all persons. The marker of a rational being is precisely the ability intentionally to initiate a sequence of events that nature cannot accomplish, otherwise, on its own. The suggestion that this freedom can and should ignore its material considerations is a misrepresentation bordering on intentional distortion. The consequence is that Mack also entirely ignores the significance of the third formulation of the categorical imperative (to view the will of every rational beings as a universally legislating will) (*Groundwork* AA IV: 431), which is the *ratio essendi* identified in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V: 4\*) that here is the moral law as "the principle of the autonomy of the will" (*Groundwork* AA IV: 433).

### **A More Appropriate Presentation of Kant's Notion of Duty**

In the "Doctrine of Virtue", Part II of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant has a succinct two-page summary of the meaning and centrality of duty for practical reason.

Virtue means a moral strength of the will. Nonetheless, this [moral strength] does not yet exhaust the meaning of virtue because such a moral strength could also be taken to apply to a holy (above-human) being for whom there would be no stymieing drive in opposition to its will; hence, with [such a holy being] eagerly doing everything in conformity with the law. Therefore, virtue is the moral strength of the will of a human being to conform to his duty: which is a moral coercion by his own self-legislating reason insofar as reason constitutes itself as a power of agency [in the world] in conformity with the law. – Virtue

is neither itself duty nor is it the possession of duty (because then, virtue would be experienced as an obligation to duty), but virtue demands and accompanies the command coming from a moral compulsion (in accordance with possible laws of internal freedom). Because moral compulsion ought to occur without any resistance, strength is necessary, to the degree that we can estimate it only with respect to the size of the obstacles that a person creates for himself by his own desires. As a brood of lawless attitudes, the vices are what he now must combat. This moral strength also constitutes the largest and solely true glory of warfare as courage (*fortitudo moralis*). It is also labelled authentic, namely practical, wisdom because it constitutes the final end of human existence on earth. – An individual is only free, healthy, rich, a monarch, etc., when he possesses this wisdom and can lose it neither by accident or fate because he possesses it himself, and he cannot lose the virtuousness of his virtue. (*Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 405) (Trans. McG)

Kant then claims that the fact that humanity is often not virtuousness is no contradiction of virtue, and that an “[...] anthropology, which issues from merely empirical cognition [description (McG)], can do no damage to an anthropology, which is established by an absolute, legislative reason. Humanity doesn’t possess virtue, but, rather, virtue possess humanity.” (*Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 406) (Trans. McG)

It is surely no coincidence that the term “virtue” does not appear in Mack’s *German Idealism and the Jew*; at least, it is not in the index and I do not trace it in the text. However, there is no duty without virtue for Kant, for “virtue possesses humanity” – even though humanity has the capacity (*Anlage*) of autonomous freedom that allows it to ignore virtue.

It is the task of moral culture (Kant’s term) to encourage one another not to ignore virtue but to exercise precisely those very capacities that make it possible for us to be/become human beings. How different history would have been had those who came after Kant thought with him and not against him. Had humanity truly understood Kant, there would have been at least far more resistance to war, and the atrocities of the Shoah and the other seven million lives lost in the death camps of WWII might not have occurred ... Our hope as a species rests in our inalienable, imperceptible, internal capacities (*Anlagen*) and in Kant’s version (not Hegel’s metanarrative version) of the cunning of reason: unsocial sociality – that views the failures of humanity to be the driving force turning us to engagement our skills as a species to do better, not in the sake of achieved consequences but in the sense of acting on the basis of wide, universal principles.

### **Examples of Duties Owed to Oneself and to Others**

Only a rational animal can recognize and act upon the difference between “can” and “ought”. Although that recognition must occur internally for and by everyone, fulfilling the promise of theoretical reason (what can be) and practical reason (what ought to be) requires more than an isolated subject. It requires both nature and a social order.

The social order is not simply a “culture of technical skills” that serves clever self-interests but also a “moral culture” anchored in “wide,” universal principles above self-interest. In the course of his corpus, Kant gives many examples of the moral duties owed to oneself and to the other. They serve to illustrate duty, and do not presume to be an

exhaustive list. Kant has eliminated the need to memorize lists of duties by providing the litmus test of the three formulations of the single, unitary categorical imperative. The categorical imperative allows us to immediately determine whether or not we are: i) acting merely out of self-interest (see *Groundwork* AA IV: 421), ii) allowing ourselves to be used or using others as mere means to any selfish ends (see AA IV: 429), or iii) acknowledging the dignity of the other regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin (see AA IV: 431).

Nevertheless, here are some of the examples of duties owed to ourselves and others of which Kant spoke: not allowing ourselves or treating the other as merely a means rather than an end, acknowledging the autonomous freedom (hence, dignity) of all other rational beings, not lying, not committing suicide, developing one's talents, responding to the suffering of others, not intentionally testifying falsely against another, keeping promises, not taking advantage of the inexperience of others, proper care of animals, ecological concern for nature (the material basis for all theoretical and practical reason), etc.

Kant himself confirms that it is not understanding based on external appearances (theoretical reason) but the internal capacity of autonomous, creative freedom with its moral responsibility that are the basis for respect. Again, from the "Doctrine of Virtue":

Remark: Given the title to what has just been discussed ["On Vices that Violate the Duty of Respect Owed to Other Persons"], it is clear that what has been said here does not so much extol virtues as, more importantly, condemns their contrary. However, this lies in the concept of respect [Achtung] that we are obliged to demonstrate toward others, which is only a negative duty. – I am not [!] obliged to venerate others, positively [!], by demonstrating my esteem for them (merely observable as people). The only respect to which I am obligated by nature is that which comes from the law as absolute (*reverere legem*) [i.e., the moral law because it alone is "absolute" and "unconditional"], and this, not to esteem others generally (*reverentia adversus hominem*) or to render some particular obligation to them, is the universal and unconditional duty owed to other persons, which can be expected from everyone as the original respect [Achtung] owed to all.

Other forms of respect, which need demonstration, that is, with respect to human nature [*Beschaffenheit der Menschen*] or the individual's particular circumstances, namely, age, sex, genealogy [*Abstammung*], strengths or weaknesses, or even the individual's status and prestige [*Standes und Würde*; "Würde" is not used here in the sense of human dignity from Section II of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, where it is absolute, not capricious], which in part are due to capricious dispositions, have no place and require no classification in the presentation of the first principles of the doctrine of virtue because here one is concerned only with the pure principles of reason. (*Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI 467-468) (Trans. McG)

Nonetheless, although respect in relation to the particular circumstances of age, sex, genealogy, strengths and weaknesses, as well as status and prestige, are not the concern of "pure principles of reason", that is, principles independent of particular circumstances, they do involve the respect that is "owed" on the basis of our obligation to venerate and champion one's own and the others' efforts at virtue that comes from

commitment to the moral law of duty. Hence, the expectation of respect is no obligation that one esteem others, generally. In contrast, acknowledgement of the dignity of others is a general obligation because it is grounded in a “pure” capacity of reason: autonomous freedom. In short, all persons have dignity (including Donald Trump); but not all persons are worthy of respect (especially, Donald Trump).

### **A Knock at the Door**

On this side of the death camps of WWII, it is no surprise that when the name Kant comes up, at some point someone says, “You know, Kant said that we should betray our friends,” and then proceeds to give an incomplete (!) and, hence, distorted account of the story of the “mad man” at the door from Kant’s *On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy* (AA VIII: 427). The point s/he believes s/he is making is that Kant’s duty not to lie leads to betraying a friend hidden in the house when asked by a murderer at the door, “Is your friend in the house?” Of course, we might immediately think of the Gestapo at the door where Jews are in hiding and find the invocation of duty here horrifying.

Almost always overlooked is that Kant gives two versions of the “knock at the door”. The second version is presented under the title “Casuistic Questions” in the “Doctrine of Virtue” in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (AA VI: 407). In this second account, the master of the house is the murderer, and he has told his servant to deny he is at home should “a certain man” (the authorities) come to the house. Whereas one is shocked over the “betrayal” of a friend or the protection of a murderous master, to reject Kant’s point and cease to continue reading leads to half-told versions of both accounts. Kant actually uses both stories as examples of the “liar” in the end being responsible for a murder.

The logic of both examples for Kant is: We do not have control over the consequences of our decisions/agency, but we do have control over the principle to govern our decisions/agency because it is the only thing that we can control.

To lie is to be inconsistent with oneself (*Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie*, 26, 67). It “causes harm” to the self by consisting in a “throwing away of the self” (172). It is the very destruction of one’s dignity (*Metaphysics of Morals* VI: 429) to make one a being of “less worth than a mere thing”, and it results in self-contempt – so long as one has developed the unthinking habit of suppressing the conscience that everyone has (*Metaphysics of Morals* AA VI: 438). However, higher than conscience is the decision taken in understanding for an unequivocal duty that one owes to oneself or the other (*Religion* AA VI: 186).

Unquestionably, in the case of the madman or the authorities at the door, there are other thematic elements that might be addressed: In addition to “betraying a friend” and “causing a murder” and in light of Kant’s claim that we have a duty to ourselves and the other to respond to his suffering, there is the not insignificant issue for the house owner: how can s/he respond meaningfully to address the madness of the madman? However, Kant’s examples in both cases are concerned with the question of whether it is acceptable on occasion to lie, not with the issue of protecting a friend or with the duty to respond to the suffering of the other. He proposes that, in light of the incalculability of consequences but the certainty of one’s self-legislation of a universal, moral principle (not merely a hypothetical imperative), not only is it unacceptable to lie but also that it can lead to disastrous consequences, even one’s culpability for murder – even the possibility of being confronted with charges of murder in a civil court when the liar is held responsible for the

consequences of her/his lie. In all the scenarios, the option of determining the morality of the situation on the basis of the consequences (over which one has no control), rather than on the basis of the moral principle of the agent (over which one has control), contradicts the claim that a lie is acceptable.

The issue at issue with lying, then, is not “do we lie?” any more than our acting solely on the basis of self-interest contradicts any categorical imperative. Everyone lies! Everyone acts on the basis of self-interest! The issue, though, is should we lie? There is only one animal, as far as we know, that is capable of even asking the question, and that is a rational animal with the capacity (*Anlage*) of autonomous freedom, the exercising of which s/he can hold her-/himself accountable “above” but never separate from the social world in which any and all agency is exercised.

Kant presents two more anecdotes in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V: 30) to illustrate: 1) that we have control over our “natural” appetites, and 2) that we don’t need instruction in order to recognize when a universal, categorical imperative is violated. The first anecdote is that of the construction of a gallows outside a brothel and the command given, on pain of hanging, that one not engage in sexual intercourse overnight. The chances are quite high that restraint over sexual appetite will be exercised. The second anecdote is that a ruler orders someone to testify falsely concerning a perfect stranger, at the cost of execution if he does not. There is universal abhorrence over command of the ruler to the lie. Five pages later, Kant suggests (AA V:35) that, should a good friend admit that he gave false testimony out of his holy obligation to seek personal happiness and his cleverness at obtaining his personal advantage by lying and maintains that he acted in conformity with true, human duty, then everyone would laugh in his face or be shaken in abhorrence.

In short, Kant insists that there is a profound difference between “dutiful action” and “actions out of duty”. The former is done to please an external authority, whereas the latter is done to please an internal authority, the only true duty.

In sum, the suggestion that Kant maintained that duty was owed, uncritically and passively, to God, nation, and master constitutes the greatest distortion possible of his account of practical reason. In the absence of the exercising of self-control over the wide, categorical principles to govern one’s action, one leaves oneself open to “the [tyrant] who wants to play master over humanity”.

### **What is Duty?**

Duty is the obligation to act on the basis of a self-imposed, internal, universal principle. It is possible because humanity (or any rational being) is capable of adding things to the world of appearances in order to understand the appearances (theoretical reason) as well as because humanity (or any rational being) is capable of consciously initiating sequences of events that nature cannot accomplish on its own (practical reason). It is the highest of which we are capable as human beings and even though nothing forces us to live up to that duty, the fact that we can is sufficient to ground it.

Any form of duty that is heteronomous, that is, imposed externally from without either through revelation, social pressure, or the state, are commands to “dutiful action”, not “actions of duty”. The difference is between the pursuit of status and prestige in the

eyes of some other and remaining true to as well as holding oneself accountable to one's own creative autonomous freedom.

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