

On Kant On the Idea(s) of God

Garth W. Green

Preview

In the following essay, I consider the character, and implications, of the idea of God in Kant's theoretical philosophy. I first consider the idea (or rather, 'ideal') of God in the Critique of Pure Reason, in which it is first established within the systematic structure of Kant's critical philosophy. In this context, I show that Kant recognized, depicted, and subjected to critique not one, but two such ideas or concepts of God: to evince this point, I examine the more thorough treatment of the concept of God contained in the Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion. I then suggest that the full significance of this critique can be comprehended by tracing its effects across the series of texts that constitutes Kant's philosophy of religion as a unified whole. Herein, I cannot accomplish such a synoptic view: the positive (practical) position of the "postulates" of God and the soul in the Critique of Practical Reason, and the "definition of the concept of religion" in Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, for example, will not be considered. Herein, I focus on the Conflict of the Faculties, through which late text I hope to advance a more ample critical context for this, Kant's redefinition and reposition of the (theological) idea of God, in both an intellectual and an institutional acceptance. While in the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant attacks rational theology as such, in the Conflict of the Faculties he attacks the rational and biblical theologian, and the place thereof both in an intra- and an extra university economy. This application, then, evinces the significance of Kant's idea of God as an element not only of his philosophy of religion narrowly construed, but also as an element of his philosophy of culture more broadly construed. In conclusion, I reflect on the importance of this second, broad acceptance of Kant's philosophy of religion for contemporary work in the field.

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In the following essay, I consider the character, and implications, of the idea of God in Kant's theoretical philosophy. I first consider the idea (or rather, 'ideal') of God in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which it is first established within the systematic structure of Kant's critical philosophy.¹ In this context, I show that Kant recognized, depicted, and subjected to critique not one, but two such ideas or concepts of God: to evince this point, I examine the more thorough treatment of the concept of God contained in the *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*. I then suggest that the full significance of this critique can be comprehended by tracing its effects across the series of texts that constitutes Kant's philosophy of religion as a unified whole. Herein, I cannot accomplish such a synoptic view: the positive (practical) position of the "postulates" of God and the soul in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and the "definition of the concept of

¹ *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. By Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1999). For Kant's treatment of the idea-ideal distinction, see A568, B596/A574, B602. I would like here to express my indebtedness to several works on Kant's philosophy of religion, each of which has been productive for my understanding of the character and significance thereof. In addition to the two classic, and unsurpassed, works by Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) and *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), I would identify Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973); James Di Censo, *Kant, Religion, and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); George Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and his Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind 1774–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); F.E. England, *Kant's Conception of God* (New York, Dial Press, 1930); G. Ferretti, *Ontologie et théologie chez Kant* (Paris, Cerf, 2001); Norbert Fischer (ed.), *Kants Metaphysik und Religionsphilosophie* (Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 2004); Michelle Grier, *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Italo Mancini, *Kant e la teologia* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1975); Gordon E. Michalson, *Kant and the Problem of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Karl-Heinz Michel, *Immanuel Kant und die Frage der Erkennbarkeit Gottes. Eine kritische Untersuchung der "Transzendentalen Ästhetik" in der "Kritik der reinen Vernunft" und ihrer theologischen Konsequenz* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1987); Frank Pierobon, *Kant et la foundation architectonique de la métaphysique* (Grenoble: J. Millon, 1990); Robert Theis, *La Raison et son Dieu: Étude sur la théologie kantienne* (Vrin, Paris, 2012).

religion” in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*,² for example, will not be considered. Herein, I focus on the *Conflict of the Faculties*,³ through which late text I hope to advance a more ample critical context for this, Kant’s redefinition and reposition of the (theological) idea of God, in both an intellectual and an institutional acceptance.⁴ While in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant attacks rational theology as such, in the *Conflict of the Faculties* he attacks the rational and biblical theologian, and the place thereof both in an intra- and an extra-university economy. This application, then, evinces the significance of Kant’s idea of God as an element not only of his philosophy of religion narrowly construed, but also as an element of his philosophy of culture more broadly construed. In conclusion, I reflect on the importance of this second, broad acceptance of Kant’s philosophy of religion for contemporary work in the field.

Philosophy of Knowledge and Philosophy of Religion in *The Critique of Pure Reason*

As is well-known, Kant conceived the first *Critique* as a “self-critique of pure reason.” Already in the Preface to the first Edition of the first *Critique*,⁵ Kant depicted this self-critique as a “tribunal.” By setting out “reason’s eternal and immutable laws” and structure (*Gliederbau*), this self-critique would “adjudicate the sources, scope, boundaries, and limits” of valid cognition and possible experience. Kant differentiated “positive” from “negative” aspects of this adjudication. By assigning the “limits” of possible or valid cognition, Kant would attempt to “differentiate reason’s rightful claims from its groundless pretensions.”⁶

² Ak 28: 1052.

³ For the Lectures, see *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 335-451. For *Conflict of the Faculties*, see *ibid*, 233-3.

⁴ On the first acceptance, I have written previously; see my “Kant and Henry: An Inheritance of Idealism and a ‘Turn’ for Phenomenology,” *Analecta Hermeneutica*, Special Issue, “Refiguring Divinity,” Michelle Rebidoux, ed. (2012): 1-19. I would like to express here my appreciation of the editors of *Analecta Hermeneutica* for permission to rework, and greatly extend, some of those materials for this article.

⁵ To begin this essay with Kant’s “critical period,” which itself begins with his famous *grosse Licht* of 1769, is admittedly to bracket Kant’s early, “pre-critical” works, in which Kant was interested principally in the theoretical status and roles of the concept of God. The *New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (1755), *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763), *The Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality* (1764), and *The Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by the Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766) are collected in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, trans. and ed. by D. Walford and R. Meerbote (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁶ For the juristic conception of the task of the *Critique*, see Dieter Henrich’s classic “Kant’s Notion of a Deduction and the Methodological Background of the First Critique,” in Eckart Förster, ed., *Kant’s Transcendental Deductions* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989), 29-46. For the positive-negative distinction, see Ewing (*A Short Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), who differentiated similarly the “constructive” and the “critical” intentions of Kant’s theoretical philosophy. The distinction has also been made standard by Lachièze-Rey (*L’Idéalisme kantien* [Paris: Vrin, 1931]), who distinguished the “partie positive” and the “partie négative” of the same (104), and by Reuter (*Kants Theorie der Reflexionsbegriffe* [Konigshausen &

Kant contrasts the satisfaction that issues from his transcendental self-critique of reason to the dissatisfaction and necessary incompleteness that issues from the ‘groundless pretensions’ of an inherited metaphysical, or theological, “program.” In its analysis of our experience, this “most common” program “ascends ever higher, to more remote conditions.” It traces the possibility conditions for physics to philosophy, and the possibility conditions for philosophy to theology.⁷ Such a program, Kant recounts, proceeds from objects of experience to the subject of experience or soul, and from “the simple nature of the soul” to “the necessity of a first beginning of the world.”⁸ Once there it finds itself “compelled to resort to principles that go beyond all possible use in experience.” For that reason “plunges into darkness and contradiction.” This darkness, this “realm of endless conflicts,” from which Kant would liberate us, is “metaphysics.”⁹

The compulsion toward metaphysics Kant would arrest by means of “a determination of the sources, range, and bounds of reason.” Of these, Kant claims a “complete, and final, specification.” Kant’s determination is not without cost for the “most common program,” however.¹⁰ He warns us, negatively, “of the [necessary] destruction of the most highly extolled and cherished delusions”—that of the metaphysical and theological (indeed, he will advance the term “onto-theological”)—itineraries just named.¹¹ Kant cannot merely claim, but must deduce, the principles for this division between the valid and the invalid sciences in the structure of reason itself, in order to establish both his positive and his negative claims as results. He does so by means of the articulation of the “internal structure of our knowledge” an articulation “of all the components which constitute the structure of human cognition.”¹²

The two basic elements of this, reason’s structure, are provided by the faculty of sensibility and the faculty of understanding, respectively. The principal element in Kant’s exposition of this structure—found in the first major division of the work, the *Transcendental Aesthetic*—is the doctrine of intuition. Kant first suggests that intuition serves, necessarily, as a “condition of the existence of objects as appearances,” as objects of experience and knowledge rather than ‘mere concepts’ with no objective reference.¹³ In this context, Kant claims that “we can have no cognition of any object except insofar as the object conforms to the character of our intuition.”¹⁴ In other words, the character of our intuition or sensibility determines the limits of experience, the limits of what can become an object for us.

Neumann: Wurzburg, 1989], 12; 82), who has distinguished the positive Funktionsbestimmung from the polemische Intention thereof. For both this positive and this negative intention, the *Sinnenlehre*, or doctrine of intuition, expressed in the *Aesthetic*, remains the organon.

⁷ Kant, *Critique*, Aviii.

⁸ Kant, *Critique*, Axiv.

⁹ Kant, *Critique*, Aviii.

¹⁰ Kant, *Critique*, Axii.

¹¹ Kant, *Critique*, Axiii.

¹² Kant, *Critique*, A13/B27.

¹³ Kant, *Critique*, Bxxv.

¹⁴ Kant, *Critique*, Bxxvi.

Kant asserts not only the necessity of intuition to cognition, but also the priority of intuition within the order of cognition. He writes that “the conditions under which alone the objects of human cognition are given precede the conditions under which they are thought.”¹⁵ Kant insists that “an intuition must be given prior to any activity of the understanding.”¹⁶ This intuitive manifold, Kant continues, “in order to be turned into a cognition, must then be gone over, run through, taken up, and combined in a certain manner,” intellectually.¹⁷ We must subsume intuitions under concepts in order to transform the intuitive reception of a *materium dabile* into a judgment of experience. As one knows, it is for Kant “through intuition that objects are given to us,” and by means of intuition that we are passively or receptively related to objects of experience. It is instead “through understanding that they are thought.”¹⁸ Famously, Kant suggests that “thoughts without content are empty,” and “intuitions without concepts are blind.”¹⁹ Only, Kant continues, “in the case of a unity between sensibility and understanding, can an object be cognized.”²⁰ We will return to this general thesis regarding the necessary ingredients of intuition in any synthetic cognition, or knowledge, below, when we examine Kant’s critique of rational theology.

In the second major division of the work, the *Transcendental Analytic*, Kant continued to set out, positively, his account of the nature of cognition. There, Kant depicted the function of intuition in the order of cognition, and the order in terms of which intuitions could be “subsumed under” concepts. This order of cognition proceeds, paradigmatically, from outer sense, the realm of objects of our common experience, to inner sense, in which the discrete data of the five senses appear together ‘before the mind,’ in order then to be transposed to the activity of the intellect. Kant writes that it is only then, and “by means of this [inner] intuition,” that we encompass within or “take up into our faculty of representation all outer intuitions.”²¹ He writes that “all cognitions are nothing for us and are of no concern to us whatever if they cannot be taken up into consciousness.”²² For this reason, inner intuition functions necessarily as an *Inbegriff aller Vorstellungen* an “inclusive, universal representation.”²³

The inclusiveness, or universality, of inner sense is necessary in order that we accomplish an “[intellectual] representation of our [intuitive] presentation,”²⁴ a formal concept of a material object. For this reason, Kant “amplifies” inner sense in three steps in his ‘positive’ account of the nature of cognition. First,²⁵ in the “Synthesis of Apprehension,” Kant argues for a spatio-temporal unity in inner

¹⁵ Kant, *Critique*, A16/B30.

¹⁶ Kant, *Critique*, B145.

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique*, A78/B103.

¹⁸ Kant, *Critique*, B30.

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique*, A50/B74.

²⁰ Kant, *Critique*, A50/B74.

²¹ Kant, *Critique*, A37/B53.

²² Kant, *Critique*, A116.

²³ Kant, *Critique*, A99.

²⁴ Kant, *Critique*, A113.

²⁵ Kant, *Critique*, A99-100.

sense, in order that inner sense be able to contain within it the outer object as intuited originally in outer sense. He asserts that “regardless of the place of origin of our presentations, as modifications of the mind they yet belong to inner sense.”²⁶ Second, in the “Synthesis of Reproduction,”²⁷ Kant argues for a constancy in inner sense. Kant recognizes that “if I always lost from my thoughts the preceding presentations ... and did not reproduce them” in a constant series, then “there could never arise a whole presentation.”²⁸ This constancy across time, Kant writes, must “amount to a determination of inner sense.”²⁹ Kant builds in this way to a third ‘synthesis’ or moment, a “synthesis of recognition.”³⁰ In the latter,³¹ Kant will combine these claims to (spatio-temporal) unity and (temporal) continuity in order to argue for the conceptual determinability of inner sense. Kant thus builds gradually toward “that unity that only consciousness can impart” to inner intuition, in order that the order of cognition be consummated.

In this way, inner intuition is amplified by the characteristics of spatiality, constancy, and conceptual determinability in order that it perform its function within the order of cognition. Only then can inner sense serve its integral role within Kant’s account of the nature of cognition, as “the formal a priori condition of all appearances universally.” Only then can inner sense serve as an *Inbegriff*, such that “any progress of perception, no matter what the objects may be” is “nothing but an expansion ... of inner sense.”³² In order to clarify this central, positive function of inner sense within the order and act of synthetic cognition, Kant insisted repeatedly and variously that “all of perception, as presentation, is based a priori on pure intuition (that is, on time, the form of inner intuition).”³³ At A 140, B 179, inner sense was asserted to be no less than “the universal condition under which alone categories can be applied to any object.” In the section entitled “On the Supreme Principle of All Synthetic Judgments,”³⁴ Kant depicted inner intuition, or “inner sense and its a priori form, time,” as “the medium of all synthetic judgments,” the “only one sum total that contains all our presentations.” Time thus is an *Inbegriff aller Vorstellungen*, an “inclusive, universal representation.”

Kant also advanced, however, a restrictive and contravening construal of inner intuition. Kant also asserted the *incapacity* of inner intuition. In the third major division of the work, the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant argued that inner sense cannot include, but rather excludes (a priori, according to its form), these same characteristics. In the Paralogisms, we read, for example, that inner sense cannot contain spatiality and its conditions. Kant writes that; “in us,” in inner sense, “there does not occur any relation of place, or motion, or shape, or any

²⁶ Kant, Critique, A99.

²⁷ Kant, Critique, A100-102.

²⁸ Kant, Critique, A102.

²⁹ Kant, Critique, A101.

³⁰ Kant, Critique, A103.

³¹ Kant, Critique, A103-110.

³² Kant, Critique, A210/B255.

³³ Kant, Critique, A116.

³⁴ Kant, Critique, A155/B194.

determination of space at all.”³⁵ In the same context, Kant asserted that inner sense possesses only an inconstant and indeterminate succession;³⁶ “in inner intuition we have nothing permanent at all” and in fact only a “mere flux, chaos.”³⁷ For this reason, Kant asserts, inner intuition “yields absolutely no [conditions required for] cognition.” Inner intuition yields “knowledge only of the succession of determinations,” and “not of any object that can thereby be determined [conceptually].”³⁸

Thus, the spatio-temporal unity, the constancy, and the conceptual determinability of inner intuition that Kant required for his account of the nature of cognition, he also denies to inner intuition in the Paralogisms’ account of the limits of cognition, advanced in order to negate the possibility of rational-psychological (and, as we will see, theological) doctrine of the soul. It is to this end that Kant asserts that “the thinking I, the soul (a name for the transcendental object of inner sense)” must not have “any use whatever extending to actual objects, and hence cannot expand in the least our cognition.”³⁹ In this way, Kant hoped to make impossible psychological—and, I will suggest, theological—pretensions to a cognition of the soul as an object of inner sense and thus as an object of synthetic cognition, or experience.

Kant hoped to secure “safe passage” to the transcendental determination of the nature and dynamics of cognition through a strait too narrow for the requirements of a metaphysical “program” of ascent just named. This said, the restrictions on inner sense that Kant asserts would negate (a priori) not only the formal conditions required for rational psychology, but also those conditions required for his own account of the proper function of the order of cognition. In this tension, or antinomy, lies the significance of this theme for Kant’s theoretical philosophy.⁴⁰ But this tension is also important, I now will suggest, to a full

³⁵ Kant, Critique, A381.

³⁶ Kant, Critique, B413.

³⁷ Kant, Critique, Bxl, A33, B49-50; B291.

³⁸ Kant, Critique, A381.

³⁹ Kant, Critique, A361. I cannot deduce, or depict fully, this tension here: I rather only intimate it, having analyzed its character and implications at requisite length in my *The Aporia of Inner Sense; The Self-Knowledge of Pure Reason and the Critique of Metaphysics in Kant* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

⁴⁰ Recently, Pippin has noted that Kant’s doctrine of inner intuition “involves much more than a technical clarification of Kant’s doctrine of inner sense,” since upon this doctrine rests “the most important results of Kant’s argument in the Critique,” and since “from this flows,” i.e., “the entire criticism of the metaphysical tradition” (Kant’s *Theory of Form* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982], 172). Baumanns in Germany has described “the determinability of [inner] intuition” as the “principal problem (Hauptproblem)” of Kant’s theoretical philosophy (Kants *Philosophie der Erkenntnis: Durchgehender Kommentar zu den Hauptkapiteln der "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"* [Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann 1997], 712). Ferrarin in Italy has declared that “the general task that transcendental philosophy must undertake,” lies in the “comprehensive analysis of the relation between ... between inner sense and space” (“Kant on the Exhibition of a Concept in Intuition,” *Kant-Studien* 86 [1995], 131-74, at 135). Although Paton in 1936 had already announced that “a fuller working out of this doctrine is urgently required” (Kant’s *Metaphysic of Experience*, v. II, 417), Georg Mohr has admitted that “a more precise explication of this doctrine remains a desideratum” (“Commentary” to “Du Sense Interne; Un Texte inédit d’Immanuel Kant,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 119, n. 4 [1987]: 435-52). The relation between this problematic

comprehension and estimation of Kant's critique of theology, and thus the idea of God.

In the third and final major division of the work, the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant depicted the limits of cognition. Across this division, Kant argues against "general metaphysics" (*metaphysica generalis*), defined as an illusion or delusion that results from the employment of formal concepts and principles in abstraction from the intuitive conditions through which objects can be given. He also argues against three specific forms of metaphysics (*metaphysica specialis*), rational psychology (*psychologia rationalis*) and its "doctrine of the soul" (*Seelenlehre*), rational cosmology (*cosmologia rationalis*), and its "science of the world-whole" (*Weltwissenschaft*), and, ultimately, *theologia transcendentalis*, and its "doctrine of God" (*Gotteserkenntnis*).

The Dialectic thus proceeds from a critique of "transcendental psychology" to a critique of "transcendental theology (*Gotteserkenntnis*)."⁴¹ Kant conceives of these disciplines not only as distinct, but also as interdetermining and interdependent. In fact, "among the transcendental ideas [of the soul and God] there can be seen a certain coherence and unity," and in fact a "system" or systematic character. Indeed, the three, and "only possible" doctrines or systems of the soul (in relation to the body) are named at A 390 as (1) Descartes' "physical influence" or interactionism, (2) Leibniz's "predetermined [or pre-established] harmony," and (3) Malebranche's "supranatural assistance" or occasionalism. These "psychological" theses are evidently already "theological" theses not only for the latter's identity for Kant as the "Cartesian Augustinian," but because Leibniz's harmony is pre-established by God, and because Malebranche's "system" is established in God. Each positions its *Seelenlehre* in and through a *Gotteserkenntnis*. Still more importantly, Kant also writes of an ascending series, or "*progressus*," from the first transcendental idea of the "unity of the thinking subject," and its theoretical expression in a "doctrine of the soul," to the latter transcendental idea [of God].⁴¹

Kant worries over the apparently natural and unproblematic character of this *scala Iacob*, which "proceeds from the cognition of oneself (the soul) ... to [the cognition of] the original being." Its trajectory proposes "so natural an advance that it seems similar to reason's logical progression from premises to conclusion."⁴² This "Platonic soaring," and its itinerary from physics to philosophy to theology, would instantiate or enshrine theology at the level of "our speculative power of reason."⁴³ Against this theoretical possibility, Kant asserts that inner sense must not allow for any "objective use" whatever.

⁴⁴ For this reason, *Seelenlehre* and *Gotteserkenntnis* are said to "surpass the boundary of all

epistemological doctrine, however under-examined, and Kant's critique of the idea of God (or his philosophy of religion more generally) has yet even to be noticed.

⁴¹ Kant, Critique, A336–337/B394.

⁴² Kant, Critique, A337/B395.

⁴³ Kant, Critique, B395 note.

⁴⁴ Kant, Critique, A327/B384.

experience.” All such principles must necessarily remain “problematic” and unprovable.⁴⁵

In other words, an apparently merely technical point regarding an apparently scholastic principle, that of inner sense, is instead essential both to Kant’s theory of knowledge, and to Kant’s critiques of metaphysics and theology. The precise ways in which the general doctrine of intuition, and the specific doctrine of inner intuition, is so essential or ingredient in Kant’s critique of theology, understood as a *logos* of *theos* or account or idea of God, must still be set out, however. To this task I now turn.

Kant’s critique of the third of these metaphysical disciplines, rational theology, is the best-known and most influential aspect of Kant’s philosophy of religion. It can be contextualized and comprehended by means of Kant’s claim, above, to the necessary ingredients of intuition in cognition. Kant defines the idea, or ideal, of God as the “original being (*ens originarium*),” which “has no being above it,” and is thus “the supreme being (*ens summum*).” He adds that “insofar as everything conditioned is subject to it, [this concept is also that of] the being of all being (*ens entium*).” “Everything conditioned” here is defined as “its [God’s] complete consequence, to which there would belong our entire sensibility, along with all reality in [the realm of] appearance,” understood as the sum-total of all existence, and as cumulatively the effect of the first cause that is God. Any attempt to “determine the original being” as so conceived, however, “already overstep[s] the bounds of the idea’s [proper] determination and admissibility.”⁴⁶

This “concept of God” is “only the *concept* of all reality” and is not “given objectively” in and through intuition. It is thus a “mere invention” to which our reason, its inventor, falls prey, by assuming “that a mere creature of its own thought is an actual being.”⁴⁷ The force of this invention (and its subsequent illusion) devolves from the fact that our reason “is pressed ... to seek its state of rest somewhere in the regression from the conditioned, which is given, to the unconditioned.” In the latter alone could reason “complete the series of conditions,” through the concept of “the absolutely necessary.”⁴⁸ In this way, “the contingent exists only under the condition of another [existent] as its cause,” “a cause that is not contingent,” and is “without any condition, necessarily.” In this way, without any intuitive basis whatever, and through a hypostatization or reification, we “advance to the original being.”⁴⁹

As is well-known, Kant in this frame attacks three arguments for the existence of God; the “ontological,” the “cosmological,” and the “physico-theological” (or “design”) arguments. Each takes the concept of God as “the existence of a supreme cause.”⁵⁰ The proof-structure of each is distinct. The first “begins from ... the particular character ... of our world of sense, and from this

⁴⁵ Kant, Critique, A339/B397.

⁴⁶ Kant, Critique, A580/B608.

⁴⁷ Kant, Critique, A584/B612.

⁴⁸ Kant, Critique, A584/B612.

⁴⁹ Kant, Critique, A584/B612.

⁵⁰ Kant, Critique, A591/B619.

ascends according to the laws of causality to the supreme cause [existing] apart from the world.”⁵¹ The second “lays at its basis empirically only indeterminate experience only, i.e., some existence.”⁵² The third “abstracts from all experience and infers completely a priori from mere concepts the existence of a supreme cause.”⁵³ In each, however, commonly, “reason spreads its wings in vain in the attempt to get beyond the world of sense by the mere force of speculation.”⁵⁴ For this concept of God, “the concept of an absolutely necessary being” without which, or whom, there can be no existence, “is a pure concept of reason, i.e., a mere idea,” as above.⁵⁵

For Kant, this advance to a first, highest, and supreme cause—in spite of the fact that this presentation is “so natural that even the commonest human mind, once led to the argument, is adequate to it”⁵⁶—is “defective.”⁵⁷ The concept of a most real, or necessary, being (the unconditioned condition of every condition), an *ens realissimum*, must remain a simple concept;⁵⁸ “an individual object completely determined through the mere idea.”⁵⁹ This “mere idea” has “proved to have great power of illusion.” This illusion is the result of theologians’ having “arranged this concept such that—in their view—it contained existence within itself.”⁶⁰ In doing so, Kant argues, they “have already committed a contradiction,”⁶¹ the famous “confusion of a logical with a real predicate.”⁶²

Thus, we must not “presuppose the existence of a being as corresponding to this ideal” or idea, but rather presuppose “only the idea of such a being,” its facticity rather than its validity, in order then to examine it according to transcendental principles.⁶³ We will do so on the principle that “no matter what and how much our concept of an object may contain, we must go outside the concept,” to intuition, “in order to assign existence to the object.”⁶⁴ Kant worries that rational theologians “have taken pains not to understand whether and how a thing of this kind can even be thought, but rather [only] to prove its existence.” Kant, instead, would critically examine “whether or not we think anything at all through this concept,” whether such an object can be intuited, and thus known, at all.⁶⁵

This, however, is only the first or initial, rather than final, gesture of Kant’s determination of the transcendental idea of God. At A 631, B 659, Kant will

⁵¹ Kant, Critique, cf. A592/B620, ff.

⁵² Kant, Critique, cf. A603/B631, ff.

⁵³ Kant, Critique, cf. A621/B649, ff.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kant, Critique, A592/B620.

⁵⁶ Kant, Critique, A589/B617.

⁵⁷ Kant, Critique, A588/B616.

⁵⁸ Kant, Critique, A602/B630.

⁵⁹ Kant, Critique, A574/B602.

⁶⁰ Kant, Critique, A594/B622.

⁶¹ Kant, Critique, A597/B625.

⁶² Kant, Critique, A598/B626.

⁶³ Kant, Critique, A578/B606.

⁶⁴ Kant, Critique, A601/B629.

⁶⁵ Kant, Critique, A593/B621.

distinguish such *theologia rationalis* from *theologia revelata*, a theology of reason from a theology of revelation. The first “thinks its object (as *ens originarium, ens realissimum, ens entium*) merely through pure reason,” by means of the traditional predicates of natural theology, as we have just seen. This is and can become, Kant reflects, both “deistic” and “ontotheological,” as it focuses on the divine being as an object and as “*cause of the world.*” The second, however, “thinks its object— as a supreme *intelligence*, through a concept which it borrows from ... *the nature of our soul.*” The latter proposes an ascent from the nature and dynamics of human intelligence to the nature and dynamics of God as a “*summa intelligentia*,” and as a model for a full self-understanding of the structure of our cognitive activity, through the *analogia mentis* of consciousness rather than the *analogia entis* of causality.

In spite of this recognition of the very different histories, methods, and trajectories of these two basic ‘theological styles,’ in von Balthasar’s sense, Kant’s critique here will be less refined; “I maintain that *all attempts* to make a speculative use of reason in regard to theology are entirely fruitless and are, by their intrinsic character, null and void, and that the principles of reason’s natural use lead *to no theology whatever.*”⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Kant, Critique, A636/B664. Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason (1788) argued that the practical exercise of our freedom (understood as our moral self-determination to represented ends, chosen independently of empirical conditions or sensible inclination) involves two “practical postulates” or regulative principles; the immortality of the soul and the concept of God as moral author of the universe. These postulates are elements of a “pure practical rational faith” and function as a means of self-orientation in an unendliche gehend or endless process toward the adequation of virtue and happiness that Kant names our “highest good,” and the moral state in which the abandonment of virtue is unmotivated, the “holy will.” They are adduced in order that “the exact correspondence of happiness with morality ... [be] postulated,” or established as a real possibility. It cannot, at least in the Critique of Practical Reason, be postulated otherwise. (The Religion essay’s Preface, instead, begins with the claim that “morality in no way needs religion.” Ak 6.3. In this context, Kant argued that it is “morally necessary to assume the existence of God” as a “supreme intelligence” (5.126), a *summa intelligentia* and an analogon of our self-consciousness. This analogy is purely practical; a “consciousness of our duty.” It asserts both a “pure rational belief” in God as supreme intelligence, and the conviction of the reality of our freedom, the integrity of our moral endeavor, or *Streben*. Kant insists that “these postulates are not theoretical dogmas” and “do not extend speculative cognition.” In the first Critique, Kant recalls, “speculative reason could do nothing but commit paralogisms” regarding the soul, and was impotent regarding the “theological concept of the original being,” which it “had to leave undetermined.” Thus, he warns, if “*Gottesgelehrten*” (5.137) seek to extend this moral-practical determination of the nature of the soul and the existence of God as practical postulates in the Critique of Practical Reason (either through “ontological predicates” as, e.g., first cause, or through the predicates of “the understanding and the will,” understood theoretically) they will be blocked by the arguments of the Paralogisms and the Ideal of Pure Reason regarding the limits of our intuition, as above (cf. 5.141). This “moral argument” for God and the soul is first advanced in the “Transcendental Doctrine of Method,” of the first Critique, in “The Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason” of this second Critique, and in the Critique of Judgment (§§86–91). The analogy between the soul and God (as *summa intelligentia*) that Kant attacks in the first Critique—understood according to the principles of *theologia revelata*—and the same analogy that Kant himself asserts in the second Critique, has not even begun to be understood and evaluated. While it is clear that Kant’s assertion of a purely practical *summa intelligentia* presupposes the success of his critique of the theoretical construal thereof, the validity of this critique itself is quite unclear.

The methodological commitments and the proof-structure of these two forms of theology, and Kant's critique thereof, are distinct. Kant's critique of *Gotteslehre* involves the "remarkable fact that we require intuition" in order to establish the necessary conditions for synthetic cognition, or knowledge.⁶⁷ On the basis of the *general doctrine of intuition*, Kant grounded the "remarkable fact" that "from mere categories no synthetic propositions can be formed."⁶⁸ Kant utilized this principle to argue against the theological claim that "existence is a predicate," such that (God's) existence could be contained analytically within the mere concept thereof.⁶⁹ This "transcendental illusion," of course, consists in conflating the purely logical possibility of a concept with the transcendental (real) possibility of an object, and is the best-known element within Kant's critique of theology.

Kant's critique of *Seelenlehre*, instead, involves, in the terms of B291, the "even more remarkable" fact that "we need not merely intuitions, but indeed always outer intuition" in order to form synthetic propositions. For "in order to give as [an object] something permanent," Kant there argued, we require the stability and positionality of and in the manifold of outer sense.⁷⁰ It is thus on the basis of the *specific doctrine of inner intuition* that Kant must argue against *Seelenlehre*. However, the conditions required for asserting, against *Seelenlehre*, the inapplicability of the categories to inner sense, requires that inner sense not contain within itself, according to its most basic capacity and character, a *totum* of representations—inclusive of the material, spatial, and substantial determinations of outer intuition. Thus, Kant finds himself in an antinomy. Kant cannot have both his positive account of the nature of synthetic cognition (and the acceptance of inner intuition as an *Inbegriff* that makes it possible) as well as his negative account of the limits of synthetic cognition, against the *Seelenlehrer* (and the acceptance of inner intuition as denuded of all synthetic representative capacity) in order then to argue against the theological claim that one may ascend *ab exterioribus ad interioribus* and *ab inferioribus ad superioribus*, from outer sense and its *Koerperlehren* to inner sense and its *Seelenlehre* to a *Gotteserkenntnis*.

There is no question that Kant's critique of the proofs for the existence of God as prime or unmoved mover is more prominent both in the economy of the first *Critique* and in its subsequent scholarly reception. I would suggest, however, that neither rational theology itself nor Kant's critique thereof is exhausted by the concept of an *ens realissimum*, as a necessary existence and first cause of all things. In addition to the proof-structures of the ontological, cosmological, and physico-theological arguments for the existence of God as first cause in the fourth Antinomy and the Ideal of Pure Reason, there obtains a less prominent—and in fact, highly problematic—second critique of *Seelenlehre* as a second form of theology, distinct in its historical provenance, its methodological progression, and the character of its concept of God. The method for the prosecution of, and indeed the characteristics of the concept of, the idea of God advanced by these two

⁶⁷ Kant, Critique, B289.

⁶⁸ Kant, Critique, B289.

⁶⁹ Kant, Critique, A602/B630.

⁷⁰ Kant, Critique, B291.

theological styles is distinct. The refutation of one does not of itself imply or secure the refutation of the other.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant left this distinction, and his address of the latter, as an intimation. One must instead refer to his unpublished *Lectures* for more ample and articulate treatment of the history and types of rational theology.⁷¹ Kant is no less critical of the “Platonic” *analogia mentis* than he is of the “Aristotelian” *analogia entis*, of course. But this amplification of the concept of “theology” can be used to articulate Kant’s idea(s) of God. This, in turn, affords a view both of the distinct provenance and character of these historical-theological ideas of God, and of the distinct character and validity of Kant’s critique thereof.

The Ideas of God: *Seelenlehre* and *Gotteslehre* in the Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion

A brief review of Kant’s *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* may clarify the presence, character, and significance of this “second form” of theology in Kant.⁷² He there provides “a more detailed account of the whole concept of God” insofar as this “can be derived from a foundation in experience.” There, too, he opposes a “deistic” to “a theistic” concept of God. In the latter, again, we “cognize God as supreme intelligence.” God, here, is not advanced as a first cause, but rather an “author of all things, through understanding and freedom.”⁷³ Whereas a “deist” possesses a concept of God as “a blindly working eternal nature as the root of things,” and an “original being or highest cause of the world,” the theist advances a “concept of a living God,” and the “theistic concept of God as a *summa intelligentia*.”⁷⁴

How, then, methodologically, is this *cognitio Dei* established? It begins from our “knowledge of our self”⁷⁵ when “we find in our soul the faculty of

⁷¹ Some of Kant’s most extensive treatments of these themes (see also notes 10 and 11, below) can be found in the *Lectures on Metaphysics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) trans. and ed. by Ameriks and Naragon, pp. 109-286). In the *Metaphysik Mrongovius* (1782-83 [Ak 29, 747-940]), Kant gives a “History of Metaphysics” (29: 757) through the basic distinction between Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. The former Kant depicts through its concern both with the rational-psychological question of (a) “how our intellectual cognitions arise” and with the rational theological question of the nature of (b) “the one invisible divinity” (29: 759). In this way, “the ideas of Plato refer to mystical intuition” (29: 760). Plato, we are told, supposes that “we see only the shadows of things,” and uses this account of the nature of vision to advance to a theology (29: 762). Plato, it seems, maintained “mystical intellectual things [intellectualia],” and used such a rational-psychological thesis to ground his “concept of a primordial being.” Thus, a Platonic “intuition of God” which “goes beyond the senses intuitively,” is found to overstep the limits of our understanding, both with respect to rational psychology and with respect to rational theology. It seems that “the school of Plato,” or neo-Platonism, “has retained something of the mystical intellect [intellectus].” This school “has been perpetuated even into the modern period, in Leibniz” (29: 761) and Malebranche.

⁷² Ak 28: 1047; *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, trans. and eds., 335-451.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Kant, *Religion*, 28: 1047.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

cognition.”⁷⁶ It develops or “proceeds” on the basis of “psychological predicates, borrowed from the nature of our own soul” and our *Selbsterkenntnis* thereof. In this self-cognition, we take “the way of analogy.” This analogy, however, is not that of an *analogia entis*, based on cause-effect relations between substances. It is that of an *analogia mentis*. A *similitudo* is to be established between the formal structure and dynamics of mental activity, and the formal structure and dynamics of the divine mind, and of God’s relation to the world as such. Just as God is, in the act of creation, the “single enduring force which created an entire world,” the “effective power” which “poured [himself] out, as it were, in this world-whole,”⁷⁷ so too does the mind generate the concepts of its effective life only to withdraw or recede from view.

Just as God, then, obtains as invisible origin and *principium* of the world, taken as the *pricipiatum* thereof, so, too, does our mind obtain as the invisible origin and *principium* of the ideas, concepts, and judgments that it generates, as well as the experience that it makes possible. In both cases, it seems, a “visible image” is made manifest from, or poured out of, an “invisible ground” that cannot itself be brought to visibility. In this way, we would establish our *Selbsterkenntnis* with reference to a *Gotteserkenntnis*, and vice versa. We “derive [our faculty of cognition]” as an *imago Dei* from the supreme intelligence of the highest original being.”⁷⁸ In this precise way, rational psychology is propaedeutic to, and guided by, and toward, rational theology.

Kant recognizes the distinctiveness of each such analogy, and the theological tradition and style that it represents. In fact, the “living God” revealed by, and in, the *analogia mentis* leads Kant to recognize the purely formal, theoretical, character of the *analogia entis*. Through it, “I regard God as being infinitely removed from myself.” Kant wonders “[how] I become acquainted with God at all in this way,” and how its understanding of God’s nature and relation to us could be made intelligible, effective, and practical: “the deist’s concept of God is wholly idle and useless and makes no impression on me if I assume it alone.”⁷⁹ The deist “concedes that there is a cause of the world,” but “leaves it undecided whether this cause is a freely acting being.” The deist shows disinterest in a thoroughgoing determination of God as a living being, as ingredient within the context of creation, and as a principle for our full self-understanding. The deist represents God as “wholly separate from any experience,” and in fact restricts his theological concept of God to “ontological predicates, for instance, that [God, as first cause] has reality.”⁸⁰ The theist and deist are thus as different as “two species.”⁸¹ Theism—the theology of revelation as opposed to the mere theology of reason—requires that one “have an example such as an intelligence (for instance,

⁷⁶ Kant, Religion, 28: 1048.

⁷⁷ Kant, Religion, 28: 1096.

⁷⁸ Kant, Religion, 28: 1050-1051.

⁷⁹ Kant, Religion, 28: 1002.

⁸⁰ Kant, Religion, 28: 1001.

⁸¹ Kant, Religion, 28: 1001.

the human understanding, from which I infer the highest understanding).⁸² In this relation, between the life and movement of the human and the divine mind, the theist's concept of God become significant; Kant repeats that "theism consists in believing not merely in a God, but in a living God who has produced the world through knowledge and by means of free will."⁸³

Kant is eager to elide the distinction between these two forms of theology, however, in accordance with the interpretive intention announced already in the first *Critique*. As he put the point at A636, B664 "all attempts to make a speculative use of reason in regard to theology are entirely fruitless and are, by their intrinsic character, null and void," such that "the principles of reason's natural use lead to no theology whatever." Thus, this *cognitio Dei*, too, must be subjected to critique, no less than the *Gotteslehre* of rational theology; "if we were to flatter ourselves" by means of a comparison of the human and divine mind, we would "have to be in community with God so as to participate immediately in the divine ideas."⁸⁴ To do so would be to adopt the thesis of "mystics and theosophists," and would be to "delude oneself that one is finally dissolved into the Godhead."⁸⁵ If deism, then, ends in a hyper-rationality, without any genuine connection to lived experience or religion, theism ends in what Kant elsewhere termed the 'euthanasia of reason.'⁸⁶ Thus, "as we strive to present the concept of God," either through a *Gotteslehre* or a *Seelenlehre*, Kant reminds his reader, "we must hold our reason very much in check."⁸⁷ Critique must continue to instruct our metaphysical impulse; critique alone will establish the "question of [our] right [*quaestio juris*]" to such claims, both rational-psychological and rational-theological. The latter will "consider the nature of reason," and "how reason generates concepts," not in light of an *analogia mentis* but by means of a "critique of pure reason." The incentive for the latter is given already by the former; "when we see to which illusions reason is subject, we will [already] comprehend the necessity [of critique]."⁸⁸

Only critique, then, can fulfill a promise of satisfaction, for in the latter we "investigate the powers of the mind, out of which cognitions arise, in order to see whether we can trust them."⁸⁹ It is unsurprising then to read Kant's warning, that "great difficulties arise here," difficulties that require that we "must exercise great care" in order "not to let ourselves be blinded by a mere show."⁹⁰ It would seem that the concept of a "ground of all things," not unlike the 'cause of all things,' is "a true abyss [*Abgrund*] for human reason." This abyss is, for Kant, dizzying; "one can neither resist nor tolerate the thought of a being represented as the highest of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Kant, Religion, 28: 1001.

⁸⁴ Ak 28: 1052.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Kant, Critique, A407/B434.

⁸⁷ Kant, Religion, 28: 999.

⁸⁸ Kant, Religion, 29: 764.

⁸⁹ Kant, Religion, 29: 779.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

all possible things.”⁹¹ Here, “everything falls away beneath us.”⁹² In other words, orientation to the ground of all reality, the “first beginning of the world” of Axiv, is experienced as a dis-orientation, as an absence or a lack of a stable, objective correlate and as a presence of “an insoluble problem for human understanding.”⁹³ There is no doubt that much about this *analogia mentis* remains obscure; from this cursory treatment of Kant’s own cursory treatment in these *Lectures*, one can expect only an introduction. There is also no doubt, however, that this *analogia mentis* - and the neo-Platonic theological tradition that it recovers—is a real, if minor, presence within Kant’s account of the idea of God.⁹⁴ In spite of the distinct character—distinct historically, distinct methodologically, distinct conceptually— of this “second form” of theology, then, Kant concludes that “no analogy between God and the world,” either an *analogia entis* or an *analogia mentis*, “is thinkable.”⁹⁵ Nonetheless, on the basis of this (admittedly introductory) exegesis, we can conclude that there is on Kant’s part a clear distinction between neo-Platonic *Seelenlehre* and neo-Aristotelian *Gotteslehre* and a clear understanding of the specific methodological, and theological, character of the former.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Kant, *Religion*, 28: 1033.

⁹² Kant, *Religion*, 28: 1033.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ For Kant, the “Platonic idea” that underlies such an *analogia mentis* “properly signifies [a] simulacrum.” Kant suggests that “for example, God’s idea of the human being, as archetype, would be the most perfect idea of the most perfect human being” and God’s cognition would be the ideal or archetype of human cognition, each of which must remain, “never adequate to the divine idea” (28: 1058). According to this conception, “particular human beings” and their faculty of cognition “would be formed in accord with this idea” and according to its pattern or process of emanation (28: 1059). This general conception of the relation between the human (mind) and the divine (mind) “finally emerged” as a doctrine “in the second century.” The neo-Platonic School “dreamed of the possibility of participating in the divine ideas.” *Ibid.* For Kant, “the whole school of mystic theosophy based itself on this,” a “corrupt Platonic philosophy” (28: 1059). Thus Kant warns of “the delusion of the Neo-Platonic philosophers,” to be concerned with “a merely spiritual existence,” and to confound the merely spiritual or symbolic with the sensible. Kant notes “the progression ... made through common reason from the visible world to its invisible author.” *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Kant, *Religion*, 28: 1082.

⁹⁶ For Kant’s cursory treatment of the historical progression from the (1) Platonic “doctrine of the visible and the invisible” (28: 537), to the “Scholastics, who came into prominence in the eleventh and twelfth century,” see 28: 537-39. The latter oriented themselves from, and “illustrated,” Aristotle, and “drove his subtleties into infinity.” *Ibid.*, 539. While Aristotelian theology and its deism remains arid, the theology of the Platonists generated “the art of ... penance, sacrifice, all manner of superstitious formulas, etc.” From this religious philosophy “arose theurgy.” Kant worries that this school “one also finds in modern times,” again in “Malebranche” (28: 448-49). Kant criticizes contemporary “Neo-Platonists,” likely Meiners and his *Grundriss der Seelen-Lehre* for finding in the first Critique doctrine of knowledge not “the [valid] determination of the bounds of the pure faculty of understanding” that would “cut off the very roots of enthusiasm” but instead “a dialectic in the critical investigation” that would jeopardize its account of the limits of cognition (See the Editorial Notes to the Cambridge Edition of *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 455 n. 6). Kant responds to this critique with the claim that the neo-Platonists “find their own conceits all over the place in other authors” (8.144 note) and that they misunderstand their “inner inspirations” and “enthusiasm” for “illumination” (8.145). Interestingly, Kant taught Meiners’ exhaustive *Historia doctrinae de uno vero Deo* repeatedly both in his *Metaphysics* and his *Natural Theology* courses. See particularly its Second Book, Sect. 6 (pp. 394-419; “*Qua Platonis de Deo et mundi origine opiniones explicantur*”) for its

Kant's discussion of the *analogia mentis* is sufficiently articulate to encourage its adjudication, independently of his critique of the *analogia entis*. Within the context of the *Critique*, it seems, Kant refutes the *analogia entis* only by refusing to engage the *analogia mentis* at all. His reliance on his aporetic or even antinomial doctrine of inner sense for his critique of the latter only casts further doubt upon the purportedly apodeictic character of Kant's critique of both forms of rational theology, and thus both ideas of God. Unlike *Gotteslehre*, it arises from out of and as an extension of rational psychology, of which it is the goal and consummation. The latter obtains as an unrecognized, and yet important, element within Kant's philosophy of religion. Its identification allows us to extend our understanding of Kant's critique of the idea of God past the narrow confines of the "deism" of neo-Aristotelian *Gotteslehre* to the "theism" of the *analogia mentis*.⁹⁷ This articulation of the idea of God, then, already advances our comprehension of the scope and articulacy of Kant's philosophy of religion. The application of this, Kant's two-fold critique of the idea of God, will still further advance our comprehension thereof.

There is no question that Kant's most systematic and thoroughgoing application of his critique of the idea of God is to be found in the monumental *Religion* essay. Therein, as is well-known, Kant offered a "definition of the concept of religion"⁹⁸—or rather, a redefinition, prescriptive rather than descriptive. Kant there advanced a conception of a "religion of reason," a normative philosophical interpretation of a possible (universal) religious community rather than—and in opposition to—the theological (self-) interpretation of any actual religious communion. But that complex, even revolutionary text advances an idea of "religion" rather than of "God" per se. It presupposes (the validity and success of) Kant's critique of the theological idea of God, as contained in the texts we have just examined, and as extended in the late *Conflict of the Faculties* essay. In this latter, under-examined text, Kant depicts the idea of God in an institutional rather than purely intellectual or formal acceptance. Therein, Kant's exposition can be seen to be founded upon the transcendental philosophical critique of the idea of God in the first *Critique*, but can be seen also to extend it to include the institutional practice of theology, both in its relation to philosophy and in its relation to an extra-university religious economy. To it we now may turn.

treatment of Plato and Platonic theology, and the Second Book, Sect. 7 (pp. 420-456; "Quae Aristoteles de Deo") its clear critique of the eternity and impassibility of Aristotle's God, of the impossibility of providing an imago Dei from within the mind or soul's activity on Aristotle's principles (429 ff.)

⁹⁷ This less formalistic but still theoretical concept of a "living God" (as *summa intelligentia*) affords a transition from the idea of God of rational theology, as this appears in the first *Critique*, to the postulates of God (as *summa intelligentia*) in the second *Critique*, just as the problematic doctrine of inner sense affords a means of adjudicating the relation between the idea of the soul that Kant attacks and the postulate of the soul that Kant defends. The further, philosophical and theological rather than purely historical issue, whether the *summa intelligentia* should be conceived theoretically (and theologically, as in a *theologia revelata*) or practically and morally, as Kant does in his second *Critique* (see note 8), can for our purposes here be bracketed.

⁹⁸ Ak 6.8; *Religion*, 61.

A Contest both Intellectual and Institutional

In his last published writing on religion, the *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), Kant proposed for the University a “division of Labor,” in which the philosopher was both a participant and a guardian.⁹⁹ The latter guards in particular against the theologian; “as soon as ... [theology] presumes to mix with its teaching something it treats as derived from reason ... it encroaches on the territory of the philosophy faculty, which must mercilessly strip from it all [its] shining plumes.” This mutual exclusion of territories is most important for Kant, in order to establish a hierarchy; for “the function of the faculty of philosophy is to control [theology].”¹⁰⁰ Philosophy will “even grant the theology faculty’s proud claim that the philosophy faculty is its handmaid,” he offers, provided that (1) “philosophy not be driven away or silenced” and provided that (2) “the question remains whether the servant carries her lady’s torch before, or her train behind,” i.e., provided that we understand the “handmaid” as a master rather than as a servant.¹⁰¹

Kant was concerned in particular with the enchantment of the popular imagination by the figure and office of the theologian; “people now approach [theological] scholars as if they were soothsayers and magicians, with knowledge of supernatural things.”¹⁰² Kant worries that “exaggerated notions” of the theologian are not disowned but are rather encouraged by a natural pretension; “if someone has the effrontery to give himself out as such a miracle-worker,” then “people will flock to him” as a matter of course. Kant is concerned by an alliance between popular religion and any achieved theological self-formulation thereof, an alliance or allegiance that would cause the populace to “contemptuously desert the philosophy faculty” as the source for its self-understanding.¹⁰³ Kant’s resolution to this problem-context in the *Conflict* is found again in the concept of a tribunal of reason; the philosophy faculty is “[to be] allowed to counteract them publicly” by means of the critical adjudication of theological claims.

Kant depicts this intra-University conflict in public, political, and economic terms. Within the University, the theologian “conducts the affairs” of “the clergyman” by teaching doctrines that lend credibility to the former’s “superstition,” which in turn causes “the contemptuous desertion of the philosophy faculty”¹⁰⁴ and the life of reason it represents. To allow such natural incentives to determine the rule for the life of the university “would authorize anarchy itself,” and amount to a form of suicide for the philosophy faculty. This “cannot be tolerated because it would completely destroy the philosophy faculty,” its principles and its purpose.¹⁰⁵ Kant characterizes this situation in economic terms at 7.36, since, “like the political Mine and Thine, this [dispute] consists in freedom

⁹⁹ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.17.

¹⁰⁰ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.28.

¹⁰¹ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.28.

¹⁰² Kant, *Conflict*, 7.30.

¹⁰³ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.31.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.32.

and property.” Here, “freedom necessarily precedes property as its condition,” as the right to a *proprium*, a field or territory, must be established as a result of the free competition, a reasoned and public argument, between the philosophy and theology faculties over first principles.

This imperative obtains regardless of any “sacred” or “magic power that the public superstitiously attributes to these teachings and the rites connected with them.”¹⁰⁶ Here, “the philosophy faculty must be free to examine in public and to evaluate with cold reason the source and content of [an] alleged basis of doctrine,” its original or fundamental concepts. It must do so even in the face of the powerful allegiance between religion and theology just broached, and its resultant “determination to bring this alleged [religious] feeling to concepts,” the concepts of rational—or revealed, or, as we now will see, biblical—theology.¹⁰⁷

The relation between the philosophy and theology faculties thus is not one of indifference, or collaboration. It is instead, and properly, a “conflict.”¹⁰⁸ Further, this conflict “cannot and should not be settled by an amicable accommodation (*amicabilis compositio*.)” Here within the institutional context of the University no less than in the disciplinary context of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we encounter questions *quid juris*, a “lawsuit” between two parties which “calls for a verdict.” This verdict can only be given in “the decision of a judge which has the force of

¹⁰⁶ Kant, Conflict, 7.31.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Kant had treated the conflictual relation between philosophy and theology in such a broad acceptance again in the 1786 essay “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking.” Religion and Rational Theology, *ibid.*, pp. 1-18. There, Kant argued against any allegiance between “common sense or healthy reason,” or “plain understanding,” and a “speculative use of reason” either metaphysical or theological. Kant worried that such an alliance might provide a “self-orientation” for the use of reason in its “cognition of supersensible objects” analogous to that evident in its cognition of sensible objects (8: 133). Kant worried in particular that “common healthy reason” would “fall into the danger of a principle of enthusiasm,” and participate in the “dethroning of reason” (8: 134). Kant instead proposes that these “high claims of reason’s speculative faculty” be unmasked. Kant will argue that the relation between reason and the realm of the supersensible is grounded “not in any transcendent intuition under the name of [rational] faith,” but rather a mere “need of reason,” a need that reason cannot fulfill (8: 135). In this way, the process through which theology could emerge from religion, a ‘rational faith’ from the practice of an ecclesiastical religion, is established as a desire without satisfaction, a ‘need’ without resolution. It is in this context that Kant warns the theologian, and implores his reader; “do not dispute that prerogative of reason” to be “the final touchstone of truth.” Thus, *sapere aude* is the maxim with which Kant would conclude his examination of self-orientation in thought; “the maxim of always thinking for oneself is enlightenment.” This latter promises the “disappearance of superstition and enthusiasm,” and the dissolution of any bond between a lived faith and its rational theological amplification. But at this point, the philosophical “maxim of reason’s self-preservation” over against theological challenges to its supremacy gives way to the political maxim of an ever-increasing and political construal of the task of enlightenment. For Kant, “it is quite easy to ground enlightenment in individual subjects through their education.” But “one must begin very early to accustom young minds to this reflection.” Kant worries, however that the transformation of enlightenment from the few to the many poses greater obstacles; “to enlighten an age is very slow and arduous, for there are external obstacles which in part forbid this manner of education.” and which must themselves be struggled against. This transformation or process of enlightenment - equally a transfer of power from the theologian to the critical philosopher of religion - is taken up again in the disciplinary struggles depicted in the Conflict of the Faculties.

¹⁰⁸ Kant, Conflict, 7.33.

law,” a decision made by “reason,” and thus the philosophy faculty, itself.¹⁰⁹ The conflictual character of this relation is evident in the following claim; “the philosophy faculty can never lay aside its arms in the face of the danger that threatens the truth entrusted to its protection,” since the theology faculty, “will never give up their desire to rule,” or legislate the significance of the concept of religion through the imposition of a theological self-understanding thereof.¹¹⁰

Such legal, political and economic language is not irrelevant to the estimation of Kant’s understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology. Nor is the scope of this relation irrelevant; though this is an intra-university contest, its range extends into the dynamics of religious life as such, through the figures of “the clergyman” and the “superstition” that Kant takes to characterize actual religious practice. These dynamics, treated most extensively in the *Religion* essay, can be contextualized by means of the frame provided by our theme, the critique of the idea of God, in (1) rational theology, (2) revealed theology, and as we now will see, in (3) biblical theology.

In the *Conflict of the Faculties*, the “subject matter of the conflict”¹¹¹ or conflictual relation involves not only the rational theologian, but also the biblical theologian. While rational theologians are “versed in reason with regard to religious faith,” biblical theologians are “versed in Scriptures with regard to ecclesiastical faith.” Neither, however, provides reliable access to the “Idea of God” and “divine revelation.” Both are compelled to contaminate the essence of religion with the inessential, and corrupt, *Lehre* of theology, as agents for a faith “based entirely on statutes that need to be revealed in order to hold as sacred doctrine.” The biblical theologian, then, treats the sacred text as an idol: “the biblical theologian says ‘Search the Scriptures, where you ... find eternal life.’”¹¹² Kant suggests that “the faculty of biblical theologians insists on this historical content as divine revelation” and thus its own corruption, “as strongly as if belief in it belonged to religion.” With regard to this biblical faith, as with regard to the

¹⁰⁹ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.33.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* In the *Religion* essay, Kant suggests similarly that the philosophical theologian “cares for the welfare of the sciences” as a “scholar” and is thus “a member of a public institution,” a “university.” As a member of the university, however, the philosophical theologian occupies “a property held in trust by another [the Philosophy] faculty” (6.8). His proximity to the philosopher, then, hardly indicates a natural intimacy: Kant is intent first that the theologian’s “censorship shall not disrupt the field of the sciences.” Kant depicts this relation through a series of geopolitical metaphors. To avoid “the anxiety about a transgression of boundaries by philosophical theology,” the philosophical theologian is warned not to “encroach upon the domain of philosophy” (6.10). Kant foresees the result of any trespassing; “we can easily foresee on which side the loss would be.” *Ibid.* For Kant, any “religion that rashly declares war on reason will not long endure against it.” Kant hopes that, to a theological course of study, one might “add by way of conclusion, as requisite to the complete preparation of the candidate, a special course on the pure philosophical doctrine of religion.” Such a course might be developed “along the lines of this book,” the *Religion* essay itself, in order that the final word on theology be given by the critical philosophy (6.10). The character and claims of the “course” that is this text is requisite to a full estimation of the character of Kant’s idea of God—as distinct from his idea of religion—only in application, however: for this reason I allow myself for present purposes to bracket it.

¹¹¹ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.36.

¹¹² Kant, *Conflict*, 7.37.

rational faith of the theologian, Kant thus warns that “the philosophy faculty opposes the theology faculty with regard to this confusion” over the nature of “divine revelation” and the idea of God.¹¹³

It is not only the nature of the (textual) *object* of the biblical theologian that Kant identifies for critique, but also the *activity* of the biblical theologian. Thus, the hope of the biblical theologian for “scriptural erudition in Christianity” through the “art of exegesis” is itself contested.¹¹⁴ For Kant, this threat of idolatry is apparently so strong that, “when conflict arises about the sense of a scriptural text,” it is “philosophy” which rightly “claims prerogative of deciding its meaning.” In the *Conflict* essay, Kant for this reason issues not unrestrictive “philosophical principles of scriptural exegesis.”¹¹⁵ He also announces, on that basis, particular positions regarding the contents and meaning of scriptural texts. Kant’s exegesis—he orients himself only in terms of Christian scripture and doctrine—finds the doctrine of the Trinity “irrelevant,” since “whether we are to worship three or ten persons in the Deity makes no difference,” an irrelevance that extends to the Incarnation.¹¹⁶ Indeed, “similar considerations can be raised about the stories of the resurrection and ascension of this God-man.”¹¹⁷ Kant has concerns not only about the matter of biblical revelation, but also about its manner; he has “serious objections” against the “the Lord’s Supper,” since, as presented, it appears “a sad colloquy,” in which “Christ seems to be taking formal leave of his disciples” rather than “looking forward to a speedy reunion with them.”¹¹⁸ Kant worries that “Christ’s complaints on the cross” apparently “express failure in his purpose,” whereas “we should rather have expected satisfaction in an aim accomplished.”¹¹⁹ A more articulate report of such particular exegetical positions (and their connections to the anti-ecclesial notion of *Afterdienst* in the *Religion* essay) could be advanced: it is important for present purposes only to note that Kant advanced his critique of the theological idea of God, from rational to revealed and further to biblical theology, and amplified this critique in order not only to challenge the general monotheistic idea of God as a first cause but also to contest specific Christological conceptions and exegetical engagements thereof.

Kant recognizes that the theology faculty will “suspect” the faculty of philosophy “philosophizing away all the teaching that must be considered real revelation,” both with respect to his principles, and with respect to these particular positions. But this suspicion, Kant would suggest, is merely the result of the theologian’s idolatry, of “so concentrating on the means [or vehicle], dogma, that it completely loses sight of the final end,” that Kant has set for historical faith—the religion of reason.¹²⁰ Nonetheless, Kant “hears biblical theologians cry out in

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.38.

¹¹⁵ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.38.

¹¹⁶ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.39.

¹¹⁷ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.39.

¹¹⁸ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.40.

¹¹⁹ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.40.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

unison against the very idea of a philosophical interpretation of Scripture.”¹²¹ And yet, he allows himself to “expect the theology faculty to feel honored” by his attempt to discern a religion that reason could affirm. Kant thus proposes a “compromise.” He hopes that “biblical theologians will stop using reason for their purposes,” and that “philosophical theologians will stop using the Bible to conform their propositions.”¹²²

In other words, Kant will withdraw his claim to the exegesis of the Biblical text if the rational theologian abandons the sacred text as a source and norm for his or her theological work, and if the biblical theologian ceases to attempt to explicate the sense of the sacred text differently than Kant just had. This in no way, of course, amounts to a withdrawal of Kant’s claim. In fact, Kant “seriously doubts that biblical theologians would agree to this settlement.”¹²³ But Kant would push his claim nonetheless, since the question is of such consequence. For Kant, “the sole means of avoiding mysticism” regarding the theological (whether rational or revealed) character of, e.g., the Christology just treated, is for philosophy to “impose” its own meaning upon scriptural texts. Otherwise, we will “get lost in the transcendent” realm already indicated in the Preface to the first *Critique*, now through the biblical theologian’s, rather than the philosophical theologian’s, idea of God.¹²⁴

The “determination to bring [religious] feeling to concepts” of biblical and rational theology led to a constellation of authorities and figures within the University that threatened the function and goal of the critical philosophy with respect to the idea of God, in both an intellectual and an institutional acceptance. The idea of God that the critical philosopher would institute threatens this economy of the theological faculty in equal measure. Only one of these parties can prevail; the success of one faculty implies the capitulation of the other. In this conflict or competition (or “outbidding” in Derrida’s sense¹²⁵), lies the significance of the idea of God’s in Kant’s theoretical philosophy. Only the *Conflict* essay, properly contextualized by the first *Critique* and the *Lectures*, positions this conflict or contest over the idea of God in its broad acceptance.

Conclusion: From the “Most Common Program” to a Program for Secularization?

I have argued that the full significance of the idea of God in Kant’s theoretical philosophy can be found by pursuing its development from the first *Critique*, and its critique of rational theology, to the *Lectures*, and its clear distinction between

¹²¹ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.44.

¹²² Kant, *Conflict*, 7.45.

¹²³ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.45.

¹²⁴ Kant, *Conflict*, 7.65.

¹²⁵ For Jacques Derrida’s intriguing analysis of “hyperbolic outbidding between [the] two originaries” of philosophy and theology (*italics added*), see “Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (Psycoloquy Press, 2005), 1-78, at 21 ff.

theologia rationalis and *theologia revelata*, to Kant's last published work on religion, the 1798 *Conflict* essay, and its treatment of the philosophical and the biblical theologian. This series of texts does not allow us to situate the still larger economy or constellation of elements definitive of the idea of religion and the life of ecclesiastical religion, as only the *Religion* essay can do, but it does allow us to situate and explore the idea of God in its broad significance. The *Conflict* essay affords an amplification of the significance of the theme of the idea of God, past the obvious disciplinary distinction and contest between philosophy and theology. It affords access to the broad, cultural acceptance of the notion of the idea of God, the fundamental ordering principle of the thought and practice of the monotheistic religions, that Kant both contested and repositioned for a modern, critical age.

In this acceptance, the theme of the idea of God finds in Kant a privileged historical source. One need only recall Blumenberg's suggestion in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*,¹²⁶ that the "claim . . . to the absolute beginning of the modern age" as a critical and self-critical age, implied its "independence from the Middle Ages" and its theological, and theonomic, constitution. This independence, Blumenberg reminded us, the "Enlightenment was to adopt as part of its own self-consciousness," as the basis for its hope for a "sovereignty of self-foundation."¹²⁷ This self-assertion of a modern, critical self-consciousness, this claim of the independence of modern knowledge and self-knowledge from any theological grounding, "for the first time achieves its full clarity in Kant's philosophy." Thus Blumenberg, in the fourth chapter of his important work, locates this epochal accomplishment specifically in Kant's articulation of "the conditions of the possibility of the synthetic structure of the given,"¹²⁸ which, as above, established both, positively, the nature of cognition and, negatively, the limits of cognition, specifically regarding the nature of the soul and of God. Thus, when Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*,¹²⁹ poses the question "What Does it Mean to Live in a Secular Age?"—and depicts "the modern social imaginary" and its "immanent frame," in which we understand ourselves to have "overcome the irrationality of belief," or when Habermas' *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*¹³⁰ traces the "cultural self-understanding of modernity" as it emerged in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to evince the "emancipatory ambition of the European Enlightenment" (and its "principal of subjectivity"), an emancipation from religion in particular—we situate ourselves within a specifically (though not exclusively) Kantian frame.

The theme of the 'idea of God' allows us to see how thoroughly grounded in his philosophy of knowledge is Kant's philosophy of religion. The frame provided by this theme of the idea of God, and these particular texts, give us this only a part of the unified whole that is Kant's own philosophy of religion, of

¹²⁶ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1985).

¹²⁷ Blumenberg, *Modern Age*, 184.

¹²⁸ Blumenberg, *Modern Age*, 186.

¹²⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1990).

course. It could give us still less, in any direct way, of our contemporary situation, which evidently could not be read off, or from, a single text from 1781 or 1798. But I hope that it is clear that these texts remain current, as they provide the historical-conceptual horizon in which we receive and reflect upon the idea of God. With Blumenberg, I would suggest that we remain within this Kantian frame, intellectually and institutionally, for as long as we decline to recognize, and renegotiate, the character of the idea(s) of God for which he argued.