KANT'S
Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason
A Critical Guide

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too many compromises with illiberal forces. Robert S. Taylor, for instance, thinks that Rawls' political turn was a mistake and that there may be certain comprehensive doctrines with which one simply cannot negotiate. Muslims, on Taylor's account, view Shari'a as binding law and thus could not accept the idea of political autonomy that makes possible cooperation in pluralistic societies.[63] Far better, for Taylor, for liberals to advocate Kant's practical philosophy in the present war of ideas against illiberal doctrines and regimes.[64] From another angle, Islamists such as President Numerei in the Sudan view any critique of Shari'a or the *dhimma* system as fomenting religious turmoil (*fitnah*) – which is why he had Taha executed on January 17, 1985.[65] Clearly we could not expect to find universal, or maybe even wide, assent to the idea of a pluralistic ethical community today.

And yet there are good reasons, I contend, why Euro-American liberals situating themselves in the Enlightenment tradition may be receptive to the idea of politicizing the idea of the ethical community. Kant's religious philosophy in its original form contravenes what Rawls called the "fact of oppression" – namely, that a comprehensive philosophical or religious doctrine can only maintain political or social hegemony through oppressing dissidents.[66] Kantians may promote a vision of a secularized kingdom of God but they should not coerce or stigmatize Jews, Muslims, atheists, or other groups that doubt that pure practical reason is the ground of moral principles. This position is consonant with admiration for Kant's insight that we need to form ethical assemblages that go beyond strict right and that incorporate a wide range of voices: "All societies are in fact negotiating the relationship between religion and the state [and politics] over many issues at different times."[67] An-Na'im's point, I think, is valid and urges us – inspired by Kant's writings – to do our part in raising a banner of virtue that may rally people to pursue ethical ends in tandem.[68]

[63] Taylor, *Reconstructing Rawls*, p. 263.
[64] "Liberals should dedicate themselves chiefly to perfecting, extending, and popularizing the canonical comprehensive liberalisms," especially Kant's: *ibid.*, p. 315.
[65] An-Na'im, "Translator's Introduction," in Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*, p. 16.
[66] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 37. [67] An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State*, pp. 36–37.
[68] Pluralists may retain an ideal of the ethical community, I think, while recognizing in practice the ineliminability of many interlocking and contending ethical communities. This idea abandons Kant's ideal of a universal church triumphant (*R* 6:135), but it may provide better guidance for human beings who thoughtfully disagree on the basis of ethics. The United Nations, with all its flaws, may provide an approximation of what the ethical community might look like today.

CHAPTER 10

Kant's religious constructivism

Pablo Muchnik

I want to suggest a general interpretative strategy for reading *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* – namely, as an attempt to find a middle ground between what Kant considers two forms of excess: the appeal to a transcendent conception of God, and the denial of any claim that presupposes God's existence.

To make my case, I will start by presenting side by side the conflicting views of two contemporary philosophers, Richard Rorty and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Their opposing claims on the role of religion in politics gives rise to a situation comparable to a Kantian antinomy. Putting things this way underscores the originality of Kant's view. For, as Kant saw it, this kind of impasse is a "remarkable phenomenon [which] works most strongly of all to awaken philosophy from its dogmatic slumber, and to prompt it toward the difficult business of the critique of reason itself" (*P* 4:338). The wake-up call of an antinomy will serve to motivate Kant's solution to the problem raised by dogmatic religious claims, as well as to capture what – in my view – is the distinctive ethical function he reserved for religion in the critical system: the support of the non-individualistic virtues involved in *shared* undertakings and *common* pursuits. These are the sociable virtues necessary to overcome the destructive effects of our unsociable sociability – virtues which individuals cannot cultivate on their own, because they require bonds of mutual affection and affiliation to a community based on trust.[1] Kantian religion is tailored to encourage this kind of affiliation and restrain those aspects of religious claims that set people at odds – Kant's God is *made* so that religion can promote the conversation of humankind.

I want to thank Lawrence Pasternack, Gordon E. Michalson, and Lauren Barthold for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter, and the audiences of Oklahoma State University and Rochester Institute of Technology for a lively discussion of my views.
[1] The idea of singling out these sociable virtues is inspired by Nancy Sherman. See Nancy Sherman, "The Virtues of Common Pursuit," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993), pp. 277–99.

I

Liberalism, however, has accustomed us to seeing religion in a very different light. Take, for instance, the case of Richard Rorty, who (at least in his earlier writings) considers religion as an eminently private matter, something to be kept within the confines of one's own conscience and abandoned when entering the public square. As he pithily puts it: "The main reason religion needs to be privatized is that, in political discussion with those outside the relevant religious community, it is a conversation-stopper."[2] According to this view, those who bring religion into politics have "bad taste," because religion, very much like our family and love lives, pertains to the search for private perfection and has no role to play in deciding matters of common concern. Such matters, Rorty thinks, are best settled "by public discussion in which voices claiming to be God's, or reason's, or science's, are put on a par with everybody else's" (*RCS* 172). In the free exchange of ideas, what matters is the ability "of a political proposal . . . to gain assent from people who retain radically diverse ideas about the point and meaning of human life, about the path to private perfection. The more such consensus becomes the test of a belief, the less important is the belief's source" (*RCS* 173). To the extent that religion draws on premises meaningful only for those who share a certain creed, its appeals have no chance to achieve widespread consensus. Thus, in the extreme liberal view the early Rorty advocates, avoiding reference to the religious source of one's vocabulary is necessary to preserve the "Jeffersonian compromise that the Enlightenment reached with the religious" (*RCS* 169) – namely, the privatization of one's religious views in exchange for liberty and toleration. "It does me no injury," Jefferson famously claimed, "for my neighbor to say that there are twenty Gods or no God" – for what one's neighbor thinks about questions of ultimate importance, provided she keeps her views sufficiently private, does not interfere with our common project of building a just society together.[3]

Rorty eventually softened this view after reading Nicholas Wolterstorff's essay "Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and

[2] See Richard Rorty, "Religion as a Conversation-Stopper" (hereafter, *RCS*), in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 171. This paper was first published in 1994 (see *Common Knowledge* 3.1 [Spring 1994], pp. 1–6). Page numbers are from the Penguin edition. Rorty later revises, and considerably weakens, this extreme liberal view (see note 4).

[3] See Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 175–96.

Acting for Religious Reasons."[4] I will ignore Rorty's reformulation, because it is in the starker version that Kant's ingenuity becomes clearer. In his influential essay, Wolterstorff takes issue with what he calls the "neutrality postulate" of liberalism.[5] This postulate contains two strands: the *separation* position, which claims "that government is to do nothing to advance or hinder any religion" (*RLRR* 165), and the *independent-basis* position, which claims that the legitimacy of a public utterance or decision must rest on "some source *independent* of any and all of the religious perspectives to be found in the society" (*RLRR* 166). The insistence on such an independent basis, Wolterstorff argues, is a remnant of the wars of religion, but is no longer necessary in contemporary societies. The "slaughter, torture, and generalized brutality of our century has mainly been conducted in the name of one and another secularism" (*RLRR* 167), not by invoking God or canonical scriptures. Contemporary liberals, Wolterstorff reckons, misplace the source of their fears: the danger for liberalism does not lie in religion, but in the secular ideologies that have replaced it. Furthermore, the effort to find an independent criterion among liberal theorists, old and new, has been futile. Neither Locke's appeal to a universal human nature nor Rawls' "consensus populi" could do the job (*RLRR* 168–76). Thus, in Wolterstorff's critical assessment, contemporary liberals have also misplaced the direction of their theoretical efforts.

The combined effect of these failures is devastating. The *separation* position, Wolterstorff believes, has led to the split between the private and public selves of the religious, and the *independent-basis* position, to the impoverishment of public discourse. "[W]hat has rushed to fill the void [left by silencing religion] is mainly considerations of economic self-interest,

[4] See Richard Rorty, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31.1 (2003), pp. 141–49. Here Rorty "back-paddles" (his words) and distinguishes between two different functions of religion. At the level of the parish, a "congregation of believers ministered to by pastors" can "help individuals find meaning in their lives, and . . . help individuals in their times of trouble" (p. 142). This supportive role of religion, however, must be distinguished from the divisive function of "ecclesiastical organizations – organizations that accredit pastors and claim to offer authoritative guidance to believers" (p. 141). It is the encroachment of these organizations that needs to be forestalled: to advance toward a secular utopia, one has to "prune back" religion to the parish level, for ecclesiastical organizations aim at "promulgating orthodoxy and acquiring economic and political clout" (p. 141), and "typically maintain their existence by deliberately creating ill-will toward people who belong to other such organizations, and toward people whose behavior they presume to be immoral. They thereby create unnecessary human misery" (p. 142). For the late Rorty, then, the pertinent distinction is no longer between religion and secular reason, but between good and bad religion, and good and bad secular reason – "good" understood as involving the diminution of suffering and humiliation in both cases.

[5] See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and Acting for Religious Reasons" (hereafter *RLRR*), in Paul J. Weithman (ed), *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 162–81. In my quotations, I provide the page numbers from this text.

of privatism, and of nationalism" (*RLRR* 177). These selfish demands religion has always kept in check: "in all the great religions of the world there are strands of conviction which tell us that pocketbook, privacy, and nation are not of first importance" (*RLRR* 178). To neglect this uplifting aspect of religion, to bury its moral authority in the depths of our privacy, deprives politics of its capacity to inspire and motivate us.

2

As I see it, the dispute between defenders and resisters of religious privatization hinges on whether the so-called "Jeffersonian compromise," i.e., the conception of politics as a strictly secular enterprise, is sufficient to overcome the disruptive effects our selfish tendencies have on the political – the same effects and tendencies which make politics necessary in the first place. Rorty endorses a self-sufficient and self-correcting conception of political deliberation that accepts no authority higher than the consensus we may reach – thus, he construes any appeal to a transcendent authority (be it God, reason, or science) as a dubious attempt to escape our freedom and be told by another what to do with ourselves. Interpreted this way, the privatization of religion is part of "plugging away at the familiar tasks set for us by the Enlightenment ... [namely], getting our fellow citizens to rely less on tradition, and be more willing to experiment with new customs and institutions" (*RCS* 168). Wolterstorff, on the other hand, is skeptical about the capacity of politics to achieve, all by itself, our highest aspirations – hence, he resorts to God and scripture to guide (and correct) the political deliberation process, breathing into it a moral life it would otherwise lack. For Wolterstorff, religious appeals do not betray our freedom – they nudge us to realize it. Interpreted this way, the privatization of religion does not contribute toward the goals of the Enlightenment – it undermines those goals. Instead of the universal spread of freedom, peace, equality, and justice, which were supposed to ensue from fighting God's shadows, banning religion from the public square has resulted in the impoverishment of our public discourse and the hegemony of selfishness everywhere one turns.

The impasse resulting from these opposing views presents the features of an antinomy of what, in Kantian spirit, one might call "*religious* reason" – the variant of practical reason that plays itself out in religious matters.[6]

[6] Although talk of God runs throughout the first *Critique* and is the centerpiece of the "Ideal of Pure Reason," what I refer to here by "religious reason" is the use that emerges in connection with Kant's doctrines of the highest good and radical evil. The "God" invoked here pertains to morality, not to

Kantian antinomies present opposed, yet equally plausible, arguments While their clash threatens to tear human reason apart, their resolution turns on altering the scope of the assumptions upon which the conflicting parties build their case.[7] The effectiveness of this alteration resides in the fact that, at the root of all antinomies, Kant finds an illegitimate extension o human reason beyond its proper boundaries. Once reason is made aware o its own limits, the clash loses its destructive force: although the question persist, "since they are given ... as problems by the nature of reason itself (Avii), one can adjudicate between them by circumscribing each line o argument to its proper domain.

Kant drew the arguments of his antinomies from the history of philosophy The assumption driving this procedure is that "reason itself does not operat instinctively, but rather needs attempts, practice, and instruction in order t gradually progress from one stage of insight into another" (*Idea* 8:18). That is human reason has a history, driven primarily by false starts and widesprea disagreement, at the end of which comes Kant's Critical philosophy to offe the olive branch of peace to all contenders.[8] This philosophical self conception led Kant to "flatter [himself] that ... [he had] succeeded i removing all those errors that have so far put reason into dissension wit itself" (Axii). Thus, Kant would have seen the persistence of the conflic between advocates of religious privatization and proponents of open religiou entrance into the public square as a sure sign of boundary transgression, as symptom of insufficient critical awareness. I suggest we take Kant's diagnosi seriously, for the first to suffer the ailment was Kant himself.

3

Our antinomy arises because it is not prima facie clear whether th Jeffersonian compromise is in itself sufficient to guarantee a thriving an

speculation. In both cases, Kant believes, the idea of God "proceeds entirely from our own reason an we ourselves make it, whether for the theoretical purpose of explaining to ourselves the purposivene in the universe as a whole or also for the purpose of serving as the incentive in our conduct" (*M* 6:443–44). But it is in connection with morality that God's existence gains a real grip in the Kantia system – and it is this sense of "God" that will occupy us here.

[7] I am referring, of course, to the so-called "dynamical" antinomies, for the resolution of "mathematica antinomies requires a different strategy – namely, declaring the falseness of both dialectically oppose assertions (A531/B559). This technical distinction, however, is unimportant for our goals here.

[8] For a similar reading of Kant's Critical philosophy, see Philip J. Rossi, *The Social Authority of Reaso Kant's Critique, Radical Evil, and The Destiny of Humankind* (Albany: State University of New Yo Press, 2005), particularly Chs. 1 and 5. Also, see Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason: Explorations Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), particularly Chs. 1 and 2.

peaceful polity. Kant struggled with this problem throughout his philosophical career. One can see him gradually drifting away from a position closer to Rorty's in texts like *What is Enlightenment?* (1784), to a position closer to Wolterstorff's in texts like *Religion* (1793). For, during the 1780s, Kant became increasingly skeptical about his earlier, optimistic claim that "freedom to make *public use* of reason in all matters" (*WA* 8:37) was *all* that human progress needed. This claim committed him to a melioristic view of history, according to which

> when nature has unwrapped, from under this hard shell the seed for which she cares most tenderly, namely, the propensity (*Hang*) and calling (*Beruf*) to *think* freely, the latter gradually works back upon the mentality of the people (which thereby gradually becomes capable of *freedom* in acting) and eventually even upon the principles of *government*, which finds it profitable to itself to treat the human being, *who is now more than a machine*, in keeping with his dignity. (*WA* 8:41)

Kant was forced to question this gradualist view when he realized that at the center of that progressive tendency to use reason freely lurked a self-imposed propensity to evil (*Hang zum Bösen*), from which not even the best of us is exempt – a propensity which corrupts rationality at its core and "throws dust in our own eyes" (*R* 6:38). This realization made Kant more wary about the self-sufficiency of the secularizing tendencies of the Enlightenment, more prepared to admit a dark side to human reason, and hence more reliant on God's assistance to remove the dust from our eyes.[9] In short, it made Kant more willing to have a porous relation between religion and politics, rather than the impregnable wall the extreme liberal view wants us to build. This wall, Kant thought, was necessary to protect us from two equally mistaken religious attitudes – namely, the attitude he calls "naturalistic unbelief," "which combines indifference or, indeed, even antagonism to all revelation with an otherwise perhaps exemplary conduct of life" (*R* 6:119), and the attitude he calls "ritual superstition," which requires faith in contingent aspects of a creed as a pre-condition to a good life-conduct. Kant's "moral religion" avoided both extremes – and hence made the rigid liberal wall outlast its function.

To put the point differently, in the run-up to *Religion*, Kant's reflections on radical evil made him draw a wedge between the calling (*Beruf*) to think freely, which he identified in the Enlightenment essay with our moral destiny (*Bestimmung*), and the propensity (*Hang*) that was supposed to

[9] See Joseph P. Lawrence, "Radical Evil and Kant's Turn to Religion," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 36.2–3 (2002), pp. 319–35.

lead us there. This propensity Kant had linked in the 1780s to the invis
hand of providence operating in history through the mechanism of unso
sociability (*Idea* 8:20).[10] According to this view, the plurality of agents
points of view would converge, in spite of their selfish and private agen
into increasingly more comprehensive political agreements – first at
level of a single juridical state, then in a whole federation of republi
nations that would put an end to war in international relations. In the 17
however, Kant began to suspect that those self-interested agreements wo
remain forever unstable, and, therefore, that the progressive outcome of
unsocial sociability was not to be trusted: the mechanical play of hun
inclinations, abandoned to its own devices, left human beings strande
the imminence of continuous conflict, if not in open war.[11]

Religion, in Kant's mind, thus became increasingly important to tr
forming, from the ground up, the comparing and competitive tendencies t
count on self-love to secure a lasting peace. Between the destiny of hun
beings and the historical mechanisms that promised its achievement, K
now realized, there was an abyss which only faith in God could help us cr
Given the radicalism of evil, political reform had to be accompanied by a m
revolution in our mode of thinking (*Denkungsart*) – and this revolution it
seemed to require "some supernatural cooperation" (*R* 6:44), for "[h]ow i
possible that a naturally evil human being should make himself a good hun
being surpasses every concept of ours" (*R* 6:45). Politics could not deli
reliable results without religion, because "out of such crooked wood as
human being is made, nothing entirely straight can be fabricated" (*Idea* 8:

The question for Kant henceforth became: what kind of religion co
support, and even advance, the emancipatory goals of the Enlightenme
What kind of God is compatible with human autonomy?

4

Before tackling this question, we must first discuss the role evil played in
design of Kant's answer. By "evil," Kant means the form of volition t
underlies culpable wrongdoing. This form results from an inversion of
moral order of priority between the incentives in the human will: "self-love a

[10] The most lucid exposition of the relation between the propensity to evil and unsocial sociab
appears in Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 286–9
criticized the naturalizing tendencies of Wood's reading in Pablo Muchnik, *Kant's Theory of Evil.
Essay on The Dangers of Self-Love and the Aprioricity of History* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 20
particularly Ch. 2.

[11] See Howard Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1983), pp. 244–71),
Paul Guyer, "Nature, Morality, and the Possibility of Peace," in Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law
Happiness* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 408–34.

their inclinations [are made] the condition of compliance with the moral law – whereas it is the latter that, as the *supreme condition* of the satisfaction of the former, should have been incorporated into the universal maxim of the power of choice as the sole incentive" (*R* 6:36).

What is most disconcerting about the Kantian view is that evil is compatible with good conduct:

> So far as the agreement of actions with the law goes . . . there is no difference (or at least there ought to be none) between a human being of good morals . . . and a morally good human being . . . except that the actions of the former do not always have, perhaps never have, the law as their sole and supreme incentive, whereas those of the latter always do. (*R* 6:30)

Just as the good will is good not for "what it effects or accomplishes" (*G* 4:394), the immorality of evil does not consist in its empirical manifestations (violence, cruelty, greed, etc.). Evil is "an invisible enemy . . . who hides behind reason and [is] hence all the more dangerous" (*R* 6:57).

Kant reached the conclusion about the invisibility of evil by reflecting on the pattern of human development throughout history.[12] This pattern reveals a tendency in inclinations to overcome themselves and produce concord by means of discord (*Idea* 8:20). Since unlawful inclinations are patently destructive, Kant thought, they force human beings to submit them to rational discipline. Nature thus comes to the aid of reason, "precisely through those self-seeking inclinations, so that it is a matter only . . . of arranging those forces of nature in opposition to one another in such a way that one checks the destructive effect of the other or cancels it" (*ZeF* 8:366). The value of nature's aid, however, is ambiguous. For, Kant realized, although nature can make us *good citizens*, it allows us to remain *evil people*: nature teaches us to hide, behind a semblance of good conduct, our unwillingness to place the moral law as "sole and supreme incentive" (*R* 6:30). Having learned to channel unsociable desires toward socially permissible goals, our reason has also managed to hide those motives under the cover of politeness and respectability.

Kant's expectation was that, by "checking the outbreak of unlawful inclinations," the legal order would gradually generate the conditions for "the development of the moral predisposition to immediate respect for right" (*ZeF* 8:376n). But, in the 1790s, he came to admit that legal and political progress only represented "a great step . . . *toward* morality

[12] I argued for this view in Muchnik, *Kant's Theory of Evil*, introduction and Ch. 4. What I present here is a snapshot of that argument.

(though . . . not yet a moral step)" (*ibid.*). The protection of the deprives agents of excuses for further violence, but since this arranger concerns only the externality of actions and leaves the "crooked w intact, it does not amount to moral improvement. The illusion of vi (*Tugendschein*) reaches no further than the power of coercion – henc cannot guarantee that a change in the balance of forces would not a reveal the deleterious effects of our "invisible enemy": "We are cultivate high degree by art and science. We are *civilized*, perhaps to the poir being overburdened, by all sorts of social decorum and propriety. But much is still lacking before we can be held to be already *moralized*" (8:26). To the extent that our antagonism leads us to create a lawful order out of the very self-love that gives rise to it (*Idea* 8:21), Kant c cluded, the moral battle merely *begins* with political victory. Altho pacification is attained through the power of the state, the value of s achievement is uncertain, because it allows a "nation of intelligent devils remain as evil as they were in the state of nature:

> The problem of establishing a state, no matter how hard it may soun *soluble* even for a nation of devils (if only they have understanding) and like this: "Given a multitude of rational beings all of whom need univ laws for their preservation but each of whom is inclined covertly to exe himself from them, so to order this multitude and establish their constitu that, although in their private dispositions they strive against one anot these yet so check one another that in their public conduct the result is same as if they had no such evil dispositions." Such a problem mus soluble. For the problem is not the moral improvement of human beings only the mechanism of nature, and what the task requires one to kno how this can be put to use in human beings in order so to arrange the con of their unpeaceable dispositions within a people that they themselves l to constrain one another to submit to coercive law and so bring abo condition of peace in which laws have force. (*ZeF* 8:366)

This type of peace, however, amounts to no more than a truce, a tempo cessation of hostilities. It thus neglects a fundamental Hobbesian princi

> War consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of t wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known. And therefore, notion of *time* is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the natur weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or tw rain . . . , so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the kn disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary

[13] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 19 Ch. xiii, 8.

Unlike Hobbes, however, Kant thought that the assurance of peace could not be merely political. The Leviathan, wielding in one hand the public sword and in the other the religious scepter, represents the temptation to eliminate the difference between external and internal freedom. This gives rise to the most dangerous form of despotism, because coercion through the public sword ranges over the legality of actions but cannot determine their morality (*MS* 6:220). Juridical and ethical laws have distinctive spheres of influence. Hobbes' sovereign, however, tries to ignore this distinction, no matter how ethically minimalist the political intervention on the religious sphere turns out to be. For Kant, this intervention represents an invasion of our "internal freedom," where protection from external constraint opens up a space for setting ends that give content to our moral vocabulary. As Kant puts it in the *Metaphysics of Morals*: "I can indeed be constrained by others to perform *actions* that are directed as means to an end, but I can never be constrained by others *to have an end*: only I myself can *make* something my end" (*MS* 6:381).[14]

Since *coercion* to have ends is self-contradictory, Kant recognized that the effectiveness of politics in pacifying a multitude of self-seeking individuals depends on a source that is not itself political. For, unless peace is adopted as an end in itself by each one of the intelligent demons, their belligerent disposition is simply awaiting the chance to show its destructiveness again. Such destructiveness could only be prevented if morality were to provide the incentive to follow the law. But this is precisely what juridical laws cannot possibly do, for they do not determine our motivation at all (*MS* 6:219). Although politics may manage to transmute private vices into public virtues, each of the demons remains in his conscience as inclined to dodge the law as if he were still in the state of nature. Thus, the "unpeaceable disposition" which led the demons to form a political compact marks, at the same time, the limit of their political bond: although coercion can prevent the outbursts of hostility, it cannot impose peace as an end in itself.

Peace could only result from the coordinated exercise of the use of internal freedom by individual agents. This coordination, however, creates a reality irreducible to the aggregative sum of their particular wills – for, once it is adopted through separate and discrete acts of volition, peace becomes a *shared* end. The pursuit of this kind of end represents a new type of virtue, different in kind from the virtues Kant discusses in the *Metaphysics of Morals*.[15]

[14] See Rossi, *The Social Authority of Reason*, pp. 101–4.

[15] I take this to be the gist of Nancy Sherman's interpretation of "common pursuits." I part ways from her analysis, because she does not seem to think that religion is essential to achieving a common end. See Sherman, "The Virtues of Common Pursuit."

For, while one's own perfection (physical or moral) and the happines others (*MS* 6:385) are ends whose adoption depends *exclusively* on the u my freedom, the end of peace is *relatively* independent of my will. As an we hold together, it is not totally my own – and this imposes constraint my freedom different from the self-constraint which I had to exert, as a si individual, in order to adopt the end in the first place. In the "we" constit by holding a *common end*, there is more than the autonomous "I"s which made it possible: there are other end-setting selves whose freedom dir affects mine, for the pursuit of the end in question depends on their wil less than on mine. This mutuality of pursuit goes deeper than the stan Kantian demand of non-instrumentalization: the requirement that ano may contain in herself *my* end (*G* 4:429–30) is expanded here to include adoption of an end that is *ours* – an end that can exist as neither hers nor m Non-instrumentalization leaves our wills separate; mutual pursuits bind t together in a single fate. To distinguish this type of end from the individu ends that depend on my freedom alone, let me call the obligation to adop end of peaceful union a "sociable virtue."

In order to adopt such a sociable virtue, the parties must have overc the effects of unsocial sociability in their respective wills, i.e., they must dislodged from their moral dispositions the vices of "ambition, tyranny, greed" which heretofore had made them mutually dependent but eq hateful (*Idea* 8:21). Kant describes the situation thus:

> He is poor (or considers himself so) only to the extent that he is anxious other human beings will consider him poor and will despise him for it. E addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated these, assail his nature, which on its own is undemanding (*genügsam soon as he is among human beings*. Nor is it necessary to assume that thes sunk into evil and are examples that lead him astray: it suffices that the there, that they surround him, and that they are human beings, and the mutually corrupt each other's moral disposition and make one another If no means could be found to establish a union which has for its en prevention of this evil and the promotion of the good in the human bein however much the individual human being might do to escape from dominion of evil, he would still be held in incessant danger of relap (*R* 6:93–94)[16]

[16] Kant's claim that the isolated individual has an "undemanding" nature, Jeanine Grenberg has pointed out, must be interpreted as part of a strategy of self-deception and rationalization cha istic of radical evil. See Jeanine Grenberg, "Social Dimensions of Immanuel Kant's Concept Radical Evil," in Sharon Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (eds.), *Kant's Anatomy o* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 177–78.

That the pervasiveness of corruption does not require people to be "sunk into evil" makes sense in light of our prior discussion: after the demons have abandoned the "juridical state of nature" and established a sovereign, their vices do not really disappear – they are concealed behind the appearance of good conduct. Holding the monopoly of coercion, the state creates, at most, the conditions for securing "freedom from the *dominion* (*Herrschaft*) of evil," but such freedom leaves citizens still "exposed to the assaults (*Angriffen*) of the evil principle" (*R* 6:93). Kant calls this ambiguous situation the "ethical state of nature" (*R* 6:95). Like in its political counterpart, the ethical state of nature is one in which "each individual prescribes the law to himself," does not recognize an "effective *public* authority," and "is his own judge" (*R* 6:95): "Just as the juridical state of nature is a state of war of every human being against every other . . . so is the ethical state of nature a *public* feuding between the principles of virtue and the state of inner immorality which the natural human being ought to endeavor to leave behind as soon as possible" (*R* 6:97). The public sword is of no assistance at this juncture, for external legislation has no "dominion over minds" (*R* 6:95) and cannot transform our moral disposition: "woe to the legislator who would want to bring about through coercion a polity directed to ethical ends! For he would thereby not only achieve the very opposite of ethical ends, but also undermine his political ends and render them insecure" (*R* 6:96). It is impossible to impose virtue by force – only the individual can, of her own accord, make the end of peace an end for herself.

Thus, Kant recognizes the need to keep apart the two kinds of lawgiving to which a legislator might want to resort: the juridical and the ethical – but the separation does not proceed along the lines of the Jeffersonian compromise. "Justice" and "virtue" do not divide in the same way as "public" and "private" do in liberalism. The Kantian sphere of internal freedom cannot be completely privatized. "What we do with our solitude" might (under some libertarian interpretation) comprise permissible ends, and perhaps even include the obligatory ends that depend on *my* freedom alone.[17] But the ends associated with *shared* undertakings directly affect our collective project of building a common moral world. It cannot hence be a matter of indifference whether my neighbor believes in "twenty Gods or no God" at all – for, where my neighbor places her ultimate conception of the good (i.e., the meanings that govern what she does with her freedom) affects the way she goes about her more prosaic political business, how far

[17] "What we do with our solitude" is a phrase Rorty takes from Whitehead. He uses it to describe the eminently private role religion should play in a liberal polity (see *RCS* 169).

she is willing to uphold justice and respect the rule of law. To the ext
the use of my internal freedom in adopting *common* ends depends on
sociable virtues have an inextricably "public" dimension. Peace is a
cannot sustain alone – mutual dependence and cooperation are esse
the endeavor. Thus, like some contemporary liberals, Kant leaves the
of forming "a union which has for its end the prevention of evil a
promotion of the good" (*R* 6:94) up to the individual agent. Yet,
those thinkers, Kant refuses to consider the choice "private" in the
sense of the term. Liberalism, in Kant's mind, slices agents throu
wrong joints: even if, as a demon, my indifference to common ends d
ensue in any *harm* to others, the moral disposition it conceals is non
a matter of public concern, for my attitude undermines the co
chances of establishing an ethical community and securing a lasting

It is true that the ethical community "can exist in the midst of a p
community and even be made up of all the members of the latter" (*i*
But it cannot possibly be confused with it, since it has a "special u
principle of its own (virtue) and hence a form and constitution ess
distinct from those of the other" (*ibid.*). The battle for communa
starts where politics ends: since the demons' commitment to ci
remains utterly contingent without sociable virtues, only good
can make good citizens. The task of Kant's religion is thus determ
the inability of politics to moralize human beings – or, to put it po
Kantian religion is designed to account for how the demons could sh
selfishness and become good people.

5

The contribution of religion in this process is best understood by
guishing between two different levels of moral analysis. First, rel
supposed to help the single individual with a morally evil dispos
become a "new man," acquire a "good heart" (*Herz*) and be "well-p
to God." Second, religion is supposed to allow all virtuous persons w
been released from the dominion of evil to gain victory over the u
propensity to evil (*Hang zum Bösen*).[18] Victory requires them to unit
in an ethical community. This division of labor between units o
analysis is reflected in the structure of Kant's book: the possib

[18] This group contains the newly converted and those who, in spite of unsocial sociability, ha
a good disposition to begin with, but nonetheless remain, as isolated individuals, "in incess
of relapsing into [evil]" (*R* 6:94).

individual conversion is the concern of *Religion* Part Two, while the communal project of overcoming evil is the topic of Part Three. I have argued elsewhere about the importance of this distinction, and will not rehearse those arguments here.[19] What I want to do instead is to discuss Kant's views in light of the conflict between advocates and resisters of religious privatization.

For Kant, "*Religion* is (subjectively considered) the recognition of all our duties as divine commands" (*R* 6:153). This is not to be confused, however, with a duty toward another being called God – there are no such duties for Kant (*MS* 6:443–44). It is, rather, a perspective we are led to assume when considering the overall effect of our moral endeavors. Were we to recognize God's will as the *objective ground* of obligation – "objective" in the sense of something external and different from the "subjective" stance we adopt in observing his commands – complying with those duties would count as no more than heteronomy on our part.[20]

Kantian religion is, then, a "subjective matter," for it is entwined with our moral disposition (*Gesinnung*), not with an alien, divine will existing independently from us. Yet, for all its subjectivity, religion is not something "private" or "idiosyncratic" in the liberal sense – that is the kernel of truth Kant would recognize in Wolterstorff's position. Faith in God for Kant is not contingent – it manifests a natural predisposition (*Naturanlage*) in our reason, deeply connected with our moral aspirations, and which cannot be eradicated (*R* 6:111). Such a predisposition is certainly in need of criticism and restraint. Yet, to want to extirpate it is as pointless as is the attempt to remove the equally original predispositions that generate metaphysics and morality. All we can do with these tendencies is to educate them – i.e., guide them to enter "the secure path of science."

In the case of traditional religion, this entails purging it from "all empirical grounds of determination, all statutes that rest on history and unite human beings provisionally for the promotion of the good through the intermediary of an ecclesiastical faith" (*R* 6:121). Such is the kernel of truth Kant would recognize in Rorty's position: although morality hallows all that follows from it, not everything that passes for religious is moral.[21]

[19] See Muchnik, *Kant's Theory of Evil*, Chs. 2 and 4.

[20] See Allen W. Wood, "Religion, Ethical Community, and the Struggle Against Evil," in Charlton Payne and Lucas Thorpe (eds.), *Kant and the Concept of Community* (University of Rochester Press, 2011), p. 122.

[21] The later Rorty captures this difference by distinguishing between ecclesiastical and faith-based religion, and excluding only the former from the public square. See Rorty, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration."

For instance, Wolterstorff's appeal to Psalm 72, with its defense of "t widows, the orphans, the aliens, and the poor" (*RLRR* 162) Kant wou consider compatible with our duties and hence a legitimate candidate be part of divine commands. On the other hand, those homophob passages of Leviticus Rorty so dislikes, or Psalm 59, "where we find prayer for revenge that borders on the horrific" (*R* 6:110n), give us "cau to consider [the alleged divine statutory law] as spurious, for [the contradict a clear duty, whereas that it is itself a divine command c never be certified sufficiently on empirical evidence to warrant violati on its account an otherwise established duty" (*R* 6:100n). In cases li this, Kant suggests, I must "either fit the passage to those of my mo principles which stand on their own" or, if this proves to be impossib assume that the passage is a historical contingency, not really part the rational core of religion (*R* 6:110n). Kant would wholeheartec endorse Rorty's appeal to privatize or discard such "spurious" clair "Because the Bible says so" is a conversation-stopper – but those religio enthusiasts who hinder the democratic dialogue in liberal societies ma the same mistake that Kant criticized in his own contemporaries. As argues in *What does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?*, Mendelssoh alleged insight into God's will and Jacobi's alleged inspirati equally undermine the principles of "rational faith" (*Vernunftglaub* (*O* 8:140–41) – the first by ignoring the boundaries of cognition, t second by pitting faith against reason. Even more disturbing, Ka thought, are the views of Johann David Michaelis, who claimed: "T psalms are inspired; if they pray for revenge, they cannot be wrong: *should have no holier morality than the Bible*" (*R* 6:110n). The prop response to ascribing moral infallibility to the Bible is to "ask wheth morality must be interpreted in accordance with the Bible, or the Bib on the contrary, in accordance with morality" (*R* 6:110n).

This question introduces a Copernican turn into religious matte Kant's method here is analogous to the one he had employed in t *Groundwork*, where the design of the book followed a twofold move: fir to analyze the assumptions implicit in common moral consciousness order to discover its supreme principle (the regressive argument th organizes *Groundwork* I and II), and then to engage in a progressiv synthetic style of argument that allows us to move from "the examinati of this principle and its sources back to the common cognition in whi we find it used" (*G* 4:392) (section III). The "two experiments" Ka refers to in the Preface to the second edition of *Religion* replicate the moves:

> Since, after all, *revelation* can at least comprise also the *pure religion of reason*, whereas, conversely, the latter cannot do the same for what is historical in revelation, I shall be able to consider the first as a *wider* sphere of faith that includes the other, a *narrower* one, within itself (not as two circles external to one another but as concentric circles); the philosopher, as purely a teacher of *reason* (from mere principles *a priori*), must keep within the inner circle and, thereby, also abstract from all experience. From this standpoint I can also make this second experiment, namely, to start from some alleged revelation or other and, abstracting from the pure religion of reason (so far as it constitutes a system of its own), to hold fragments of this revelation, as a *historical system*, up to moral concepts, and see whether it does not lead back to the same pure *rational system* of religion from which I have abstracted. The latter, though not from the theoretical point of view . . . may yet, from the practical point of view, be independent and sufficient to genuine religion, which, as a rational concept *a priori* (remaining after everything empirical has been removed), only obtains in this relation. If this is the case, then we shall be able to say that between reason and Scripture there is, not only compatibility but also unity, so that whoever follows the one (under the guidance of moral concepts) will not fail to come across the other as well. (*R* 6:12–13)

One must keep in mind, however, two important qualifications: first, the experience in question in *Religion* is not moral but *religious*, and hence the starting point of Kant's analysis is "revelation," not the alleged common conception we have of a good will. Yet, here, as much as in morality, religious experience contains empirical impurities and contingencies that threaten its a-priori core with "all sorts of corruption as long as [it is] without that clue and supreme norm by which to appraise them correctly" (*G* 4:390). Second, the supreme principle Kant discovers to appraise religious experience is *not* a competing moral principle, offering an alternative form of justification to the categorical imperative. For Kant, there is *one* morality just as there is *one* religion (*R* 6:107–8) – and the former inevitably leads to the latter, "and through religion it extends itself to the idea of a mighty moral lawgiver outside the human being, in whose will the ultimate end (of the creation of the world) is what can and at the same time ought to be the ultimate human end" (*R* 6:6). Since, according to Kant, the belief in God supervenes and completes morality, we can move, in the second experiment, from the supreme moral principle we discovered by abstraction to the religious consciousness from which we started the analysis. There is thus a benign circularity in Kant's Copernican method – the same circularity that governs all our other rational undertakings, where we find in the objects what our a priori concepts have put into them (Bxii).

6

The two experiments in *Religion*, then, are not substantially different fro the experiments Kant performed in speculation and morality, disciplin which underwent a similar purge from their empirical grounds of determ nation. From this purge, pure a-priori metaphysics and morality emerge preserving what was rational in their pre-critical ancestors. This means th an unspoken thought accompanies the title of Kant's work: to redu traditional religion to the bounds of mere reason also implies that critic religion is *not* a transitional genre, a concession to superstition that w eventually vanish once the Enlightenment has done its secularizing jo Religion, like everything that wants to procure "unfeigned respect" in tl "age of criticism," must enter the tribunal of reason in order "to withstar free and public examination" (Axiiin). But it will not vanish after it leav the court, because religion expresses a fundamental interest of hum rationality.[22] As Kant puts it in the Canon:

> All interest of my reason (the speculative as well as the practical) is united the following three questions:
> 1- What can I know?
> 2- What should I do?
> 3- What may I hope?
>
> The first question is merely speculative . . . The second question is mer practical . . . The third question, namely, "If I do what I should, what ma then hope" is simultaneously practical and theoretical, so that the practi leads like a clue to reply to the theoretical question and, in its highest for the speculative question. (A804/B832 – A 806/B834)

The question of hope pertains to religion and cannot be satisfactor answered by either metaphysics or morality, for it involves the problem the combination of the causality of nature and the causality of freedo These causalities belong to incommensurably different domains in t Kantian system, and hence cannot be thought of as deriving analytica from one another (*KpV* 5:111). While metaphysics can account for t causality of nature, it assures us only of the *possibility* of freedom; a while morality proves the *reality* of freedom, it is impotent to determi

[22] I disagree with Yirmiahu Yovel's analysis in "Bible Interpretation as Philosophical Praxis: A Stud Spinoza and Kant," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11.2 (1973), pp. 189–212. Yovel consic religion as a ladder to be disposed of as soon as we have climbed to the (moral) top. In my view, h raises questions reason cannot pass over in silence but which morality is not prepared to answer. T secures a distinctive place for religion in Kant's critical system.

the causality of nature.[23] This is why, in the dialectic of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Kant introduces the idea of God as a *moral creator* of the world, i.e., as a being in whose will the two causal orders are united.

Kant returns to this strategy in *Religion*. But the idea of God has in the meantime undergone a significant transformation. In the second *Critique*, God served as a *postulate* necessary to ensure the possibility of achieving "the exact correspondence of happiness with morality" (*KpV* 5:125), i.e., the combination Kant calls the "highest good." At that time, however, Kant conceived of the highest good as a goal every virtuous agent is devoted to bringing about in isolation. This goal required endless moral progress in order to attain full "conformity of dispositions with the moral law" (i.e., virtue), and hence entailed the assumption of the immortality of our soul as a second postulate (*KpV* 5:122). The God of *Religion* is no longer exclusively linked to the moral needs of the individual agent. God becomes the head of the "ethical community." In that capacity, He provides a focal point of reference to *all* moral agents and relations, allowing them to build a system of *mutual* support based on the laws of virtue (*R* 6:95). This new God assumes an unmistakable communal role: his ethical laws "unfurl a banner of virtue as rallying point for all those who love the good" (*R* 6:94). This banner allows separate agents to converge under a *common* goal, binding their wills in a moral undertaking whose success requires *mutuality of pursuit*.

Kant conceives of the ethical community as an alternative model of inter-subjective relation, exempt from the unsociable tendencies ruling all other aspects of our lives. God's legislative function is important, because it gives *public* sanction, valid for all agents, to the same ethical commands each individual can find in her own reason. This element of publicity extricates religion from the privacy of conscience: worship of God allows isolated individuals to abandon the ethical state of nature, in which each prescribes the law of virtue to herself and is her own judge (*R* 6:95). The God they worship, however, does not express the will of another being. His laws are anchored in the will of each agent: divine legislation is identical with the demands of our own reason and compatible with our autonomy. The same

[23] In the third *Critique* (1790), Kant resorted to reflecting judgment to bridge the "incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible" (*KU* 5:176). This mediation, however, could satisfy only the *reflecting* needs of judgment, not the *determining* demands of practical reason. See Paul Guyer, "Bridging the Gulf: Kant's Project in the Third Critique," in Graham Bird (ed.), *A Companion To Kant* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), p. 424, and Kristi Sweet, "The Moral Import of the Critique of Judgment," in Pablo Muchnik (ed.), *Rethinking Kant*. Vol. II (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010), pp. 222–37.

duality that explains the emergence of individualist virtues in th *Metaphysics of Morals* – namely, the duality between the *obligating I* (*d verpflichtende Ich*) that imposes a duty and the *obligated I* (*das verpflichte Ich*) who endorses it (*MS* 6:417) – Kant uses in *Religion* to explain th emergence of sociable virtues. In the new context, however, the *I* whic gives rise to the obligation assumes the guise of God. As Kant puts it:

> There must therefore be someone other than the people whom we ca declare the public lawgiver of an ethical community . . . [Someone] wi respect to whom all *true duties*, hence also the ethical, must be represented *at the same time* his commands; consequently, he must also be one wh knows the heart, in order to penetrate to the most intimate parts of th disposition of each and every one, and, as must be in every community, gi to each according to the worth of his actions. (R 6:99)

God is the *obligating I* in its legislative role of sociable virtues – the sour of a "we" that requires more than my agency, but which cannot exi without my freedom.

God's public dimension is the appropriate response to what Kant co ceives of as a collective moral problem, i.e., the unsocial sociability l identifies with the propensity to evil. Yet, in direct contrast with tradition religious views, the Kantian God does not entail a commitment to a tra scendent object, independent from our own reason. "Each individual Kant claims, "can recognize by himself, through his own reason, the w of God which lies at the basis of religion; for the concept of the Divini originates solely from the consciousness of [purely moral] laws and fro reason's need to assume a power capable of procuring for them the full effe possible in this world in conformity with the moral end" (*R* 6:104). Only t god within, and the all-too-human need to assume his existence in order fulfill our collective moral destiny, can be compatible with Kanti autonomy. Only a divine legislator, who gives at the same time (*zugleic* expression to my own will, can be the source of the kind of solidari necessary to moralize the demons.

7

We have seen that, like Wolterstorff, Kant refuses to accept the libe assumption that religion is a merely private matter, only shared by th who happen to be so inclined. Properly understood, religion opens up space, beyond the political, where agents can pursue peace as a *common* go Far from disrupting the dialogue, religion is a conversation-trigger:

enables citizens to unite in building a peaceful world they can all share. It does so, because it contains an essential moral core that underlies and shapes all forms of ecclesiastical organization: "There is only one (true) *religion*; but there can be several kinds of *faith*. – We can say, further, that in the various churches divided from one another because of the difference in their kinds of faith, one and the same true religion can nevertheless be met with" (*R* 6:108). This is the true religion of reason, hidden within but also structuring the narrative form of historical revelations. The latter represent "a *wider* sphere of faith that includes the other, a *narrower* one, within itself (not as two circles external to one another but as concentric circles)" (*R* 6:12). Just as Kant discovered the forms of intuition by abstracting from the matter of sensations (A20/B34), or the categorical imperative by abstracting from the matter of desires (*KpV* 5:27), he also discovers rational religion by abstracting from the manifold of religious stories. This is the gist of the "first experiment" in the Preface (*R* 6:12) – its importance cannot be underestimated: with it, Kant can discard religious dogmas but save religion.

Yet, like Rorty, Kant refuses to accept claims that require faith in God as a transcendent authority. Such claims are a sign of obsequiousness, immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*), and "superstition" (*Aberglaube*) on our part. They signify an attitude of mind (*Denkungsart*) that construes God like "a great lord of this world," revealing thus a kind of false consciousness which turns religion upside-down. As Kant describes the process, the intention of those who serve God through "passive obedience" is to perform some

> service (*Dienst*) or other . . . *for* God . . . It does not enter their heads that, whenever they fulfill their duties toward human beings (themselves and others), by that very fact they also conform to God's commands; hence, that in all their doings and not doings, so far as they have reference to morality, they are *constantly in the service of God*; and that it is absolutely impossible to serve him more intimately in some other way (for they can act and exercise their influence on no other than earthly beings, not on God). (R 6:103)

The urge to escape our freedom and be told by another what to do with ourselves – the transcendent/metaphysical urge which so worries Rorty and leads him to privatize religion – Kant turns to strictly immanent uses.[24]

[24] This move replicates the strategy Kant used in the first *Critique* to deflect the speculative use of reason to strictly *regulative* purposes, turning the unavoidable, yet self-destructive, search for the unconditioned, to the service of expanding human cognition. As Kant saw it, the critical project did not consist in the wholesale destruction of traditional metaphysics, morality, and religion; rather, it consists in their radical transformation to preserve what is rational in them. This is captured by the dictum Kant uses to sum up his philosophical enterprise: "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith" (Bxxx).

The *true* service to God (not the counterfeit service which is a sure s heteronomy) is always, at the same time, service to human beings: "well-pleasing to God" requires no more than good life-conduct. "second experiment" shows that appeals to faith that undermine h autonomy do not belong to rational religion – they are "convers stoppers," hurdles in our moral progress. With this experiment in Kant can *construct* a religion that furthers human freedom while av dogmatism.

As in the rest of his dynamical antinomies, Kant found the soluti religious reason in limiting the scope of the opposing claims. This limi allows him to avoid, with a single stroke, the transcendent tenden base religion in *knowledge* of God, as well as the atheistic dismissal o Kant considers a fundamental need of our reason. I have tried to sho much both moves owe to Kant's reflections on radical evil. The K God is *made* in the semblance of human reason. His kingdom i protected from the encroachment of the public sword, the assaults bigots, and the doubts of the skeptics. Such making of God is what I l refer to as "Kant's religious constructivism" in the title of this chapte