

# Chapter 16

## Kant's Lectures on Philosophical Theology – Training-Ground for the Moral Pedagogy of *Religion*?

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### 1 *Religion* as a textbook

Kant maintained a deep interest in theology and religion throughout his life, yet he lectured on philosophical theology only a few times – probably once in the summer semester of 1774 and three times in the mid-1780s: the winter semesters of 1783/84 and 1785/86, and the summer semester of 1787.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps partly for this reason, his decision to devote his publications, during the several years immediately following publication of the third *Critique* (1790), to a series of works relating more explicitly to religion has perplexed many commentators. He wrote an article on the religious experience of suffering (as an existential *anti*-theodicy – in opposition to theological attempts to justify God's goodness in the face of suffering) in 1791 and one on the nature and origin of evil in 1792; then, when the censor rejected the second of his planned series of four articles on the religious implications of the human struggle between good and evil, he hastily collated the four essays, publishing them as *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*<sup>2</sup>

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1 The only two complete sets of extant lecture notes date from the winter semester of 1783/84, when Kant used the Natural Theology section that concludes Baumgarten 1757 as his primary text, supplementing it with Eberhard 1781 and Meiners 1780. Both sets, together with fragments from three other sets of lecture notes, appear in AA 28; all date from the mid-1780s, overlapping significantly. I shall therefore refer only to the Pölitz notes, translated in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant.

2 I adopt the Cambridge Edition for English quotations from Kant's writings or lectures. The only exception is that I use my own, revised version of Pluhar (Kant 2009c) for quotations from *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*; the complete text of my translation appears in Palmquist 2015b. Where the difference between this translation and the Cambridge Edition is substantive, I provide a brief explanation, beginning here: as I first argued in Palmquist 1992b, Kant's use of "*bloßen*" in *Religion* takes on a technical meaning, alluding to the clothing metaphor that governs the book's overall argument; whereas rational religion is "bare," historical religions "clothe" it with myths, symbols, and rituals whose purpose is to fill the gaps left by rational religion.

in 1793. Confirming that his central concern had shifted to religion during these years, he followed with a significantly revised edition of *Religion*, less than a year later, and an essay on religious eschatology in 1794. Although this turn to religion immediately following the completion of the third *Critique* provides evidence for the claim that the religious and/or theological implications of his philosophical system had been a paramount concern from the outset (see Palmquist 2000, chapter I), it raises the question of why Kant never lectured on the subject of the philosophy of *religion* as such, nor continued lecturing on philosophical *theology* in the 1790s.

Why would Kant turn his attention so explicitly to religious themes in the early 1790s, yet not continue to offer lectures on philosophical theology and/or religion concurrently? One reason might have been that the religious censorship imposed by the new king would have made it quite risky for someone with radical ideas such as Kant's to lecture openly on such topics. Friedrich Wilhelm II had acceded to the throne in August of 1786, one year before Kant completed his last known course of lectures on philosophical theology. This is *certainly* why he did not lecture on the subject after 1794, for in October 1794 Kant "solemnly" declared, in reply to a letter of reprimand from Wöllner (the king's censor, who had warned him that his alleged disparagement of Christianity, in *Religion*, had violated the censorship law), that he would "henceforth refrain altogether from discoursing publicly, in lectures or writings, on religion, whether natural or revealed."<sup>3</sup> Kant was willing to *write* on these contentious themes despite the political risk it obviously posed to him in the early 1790s, so why did he not wish to *lecture* on them as well, between 1787 and 1794?

A clue to answering this question can be found in the Preface to the first edition of *Religion*. After briefly outlining his position on the relation between morality and religion (including a modified version of his argument for the postulate of God as a necessary requirement for belief in the highest good), then defending the philosopher's right to address issues that are also the concern of biblical theologians (especially the proper interpretation of the scriptures they regard as divinely revealed), Kant concludes his prefatory remarks with an expression of hope that could be taken as a prediction (RGV 6: 10): theology degree courses ought to include,

upon completion of the academic instruction in biblical theology ... – by way of conclusion, as required for the candidate to be fully equipped – a special course on pure *philosophical*

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<sup>3</sup> See Kant's letter (number 642; in Br 11: 526–30) written sometime after 12 October 1794, which Kant himself published in the Preface of SF (7: 7–10).

doctrine of religion<sup>4</sup> (which makes use of everything, even the Bible), in accordance with a [set of] guidelines like, say, this book (or for that matter a different one, if a better one of the same kind is available).

Kant obviously did not regard the textbooks he used for his own previous lectures on philosophical theology as adequate to serve as the basis for the new kind of course he foresaw. His previous lectures, as we shall see in section 4, dealt primarily with philosophical *theology*, rather than with religion (whether natural or revealed) as such. The radical idea he advances here is that a new course, apparently *supplementing* the existing course on philosophical theology, should include training on how religious leaders should interpret empirical religion, potentially including *any* texts a given tradition regards as divinely revealed. That is, Kant appears to have grown weary of the standard approach to teaching philosophical theology and was formulating his own new approach to such a course; but without an approved textbook, he could not offer the lectures himself. *Religion* is his proposed textbook for that new course.

Having assigned Kant's *Religion* as the textbook for undergraduate Philosophy of Religion courses on numerous occasions, usually with good effect, I am surprised to find little evidence that Kant's immediate successors took his advice seriously. Although his theory of religion influenced the development of modern theology immensely (see, e. g., Dorrien 2012), I know of no theologians and even very few Kantian philosophers who have assigned *Religion* as a textbook for *any* course, much less one aimed at training pastors and/or theologians. After putting this statement – that Kant thought of himself as engaged in the task of writing a textbook – into the context of his philosophical development over the preceding decade, my main goal in the following two sections will be to trace the pedagogical themes that permeate the text of *Religion*. I will then turn my attention in section 4 to a careful analysis of his lectures on philosophical theology, with two questions in mind: (1) Do the student notes to these lectures provide evidence that Kant followed his own, subsequently-articulated theory of moral-religious pedagogy when he lectured on this subject? (2) Do these notes provide evidence that Kant's views on moral pedagogy *within a religious community* were already taking shape in the 1780s? Before examining Kant's lectures, let us look first at the evidence that, even prior to the publication of *Religion*, Kant was keenly aware of the importance of religious pedagogy.

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<sup>4</sup> The term Kant uses here, "*philosophische Religionslehre*," is identical to the title given to the Pöhlitz lecture notes. Whoever gave those notes this title probably assumed Kant was referring, here in RGV 6: 10, to his *own* previous lectures. However, as the context clearly indicates, his reference is to a *new* course, quite different from the one he had previously taught.

## 2 Religious pedagogy as the key to enlightenment

In a much-neglected footnote, tucked away in *Groundwork* II (GMS 4: 411n), Kant refers to an unanswered letter he received from Johann Georg Sulzer (1720–1779), in which Sulzer allegedly asked him why “the teachings of virtue, however much they contain that is convincing to reason, accomplish so little.” Kant confesses: “By trying to prepare a complete answer I delayed too long.” He is probably referring to Sulzer’s letter dated 8 December 1770, written in response to Kant having sent his *Inaugural Dissertation* to him for comment. Sulzer’s reply, complimentary but brief, surely disappointed Kant; the penultimate paragraph expresses the hope that Kant’s “Metaphysics of Morals” will appear “soon” (Br 10: 112), then describes Sulzer’s *own* work as an attempt

to resolve the question, “What actually is the physical and psychological difference between a soul that we call virtuous and one which is vicious?” I have sought to discover the true dispositions to virtue and vice in the first manifestations of representations and sensations, and I now regard my undertaking of this investigation as less futile, since it has led me to concepts that are simple and easy to grasp, and which one can effortlessly apply to the teaching and raising of children.

Sulzer became the highly influential Director of the Berlin Academy’s philosophical division in 1775, but died in 1779.

Although Kant’s memory in 1785 appears to have been inaccurate – Sulzer’s letter from nearly fifteen years earlier refers not to the *failure* of moral education but to the potential *benefit* that Sulzer’s own work in moral philosophy might have for pedagogy – Kant’s belated public response tellingly reveals that, at least at this time (during the very period when he lectured most frequently on philosophical theology), Kant was deeply concerned about the role *moral education* plays in an enlightened society. He writes:

my answer is simply that the teachers themselves have not brought their concepts to purity, but, since they want to do too well by hunting everywhere for motives to moral goodness, in trying to make their medicine really strong they spoil it. For the most ordinary observation shows that if we represent ... an action of integrity done with steadfast soul, apart from every view to advantage of any kind in this world or another and even under the greatest temptations of need or allurements, it leaves far behind and eclipses any similar act that was affected in the least by an extraneous incentive; it elevates the soul and awakens a wish to be able to act in like manner oneself. Even children of moderate age feel this impression, and one should never represent duties to them in any other way. (GMS 4: 411n)

Kant *blames* the failure of moral education to accomplish its task on a strategy Sulzer himself had adopted. Given his influential position, it may not have

been accidental that Kant waited until after Sulzer's death to offer this cutting response. Indeed, Kant lectured on the philosophy of education four times from 1776 to 1787; so we must keep in mind throughout this chapter that, during the main period when he lectured on philosophical theology, Kant was at the same time serving as a teacher of *potential future teachers*.

One year before publishing *Groundwork*, Kant had addressed a closely related issue even more explicitly. In "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" Kant states that "the main point of enlightenment" – i. e., the area where people are most in need of "emergence from their self-incurred minority" (i. e., immaturity) – consists "chiefly in *matters of religion*" (WA 8: 41). His argument indicates that he is thinking primarily of religious *education*: in order for enlightenment to occur in any society, the first and foremost step is to *educate the clergy* so that they know how to promote enlightenment through properly educating those laypersons under their care. In WA Kant compares *unenlightened* priests to animal trainers who treat their church congregants as "domesticated animals" (WA 8: 35). The "[p]recepts and formulas" (WA 8: 36) of the typical church education program, he says, "are the ball and chain of an everlasting minority." For (WA 8: 38) "that the guardians of the people (in spiritual matters) should themselves be minors [i. e., immature] is an absurdity that amounts to the perpetuation of absurdities."

What has rarely been noticed by interpreters is that, nine years after publishing his masterpiece on defining enlightenment, Kant was planning to devote another article to the very theme that was foreshadowed by its 1784 precursor: religious education. Perhaps the chief reason the sequel has been so neglected is that, due to the religious censorship in force during the early 1790s, Kant had to publish the follow-up article, initially planned as the *fourth* in his series of articles on religion, as the "Fourth Piece" in *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. In that position, it has tended to be eclipsed either by the controversial defense of the new theory of the "radical evil" in human nature, advanced by the First Piece (the only one of the four essays that was successfully published in a journal), or by the even more controversial account of how human beings might combat such evil through "practical faith" in the "archetype [*Urbild*]" (RGV 6: 61) of perfect humanity (the essay whose rejection by the censor led Kant to compile all four essays hastily and publish them as *Religion*), or by the enticing depiction of an "ethical community" that might someday develop to such an extent that it could become the vehicle for "the founding of a kingdom of God on earth" (RGV 6: 93), as he argues in the Third Piece. Although Kant's pedagogical intentions for the Fourth Piece (and to some extent, for the whole book) may not be entirely transparent, he does not *hide* them. Rather, the ultimate goal of this new academic discipline, for which *Religion* was to be the first (potential) textbook, is to train

future clergy to be philosophically sound in their approach to teaching religion to the masses. Once we recognize this as the chief goal of *Religion*, the widespread neglect of the Fourth Piece, where the pedagogical purpose of the overall project becomes explicit, can be recognized as a serious lacuna in the literature.<sup>5</sup>

In WA Kant had argued that the *primary* reason the masses remain in a perpetual state of “minority” is that their religious “guardians” (i. e., the clergy) hold a false conception of their role. Chief among the problems he exposes is the notion that the clergy are trained to believe the rules of their particular sect provide an unchanging and static set of dogmas that are to be blindly obeyed. Challenging this common assumption, Kant suggests that, while clergy should indeed be required to expound their denomination’s received dogmas when they are speaking in their “private” capacity, as employees of the church, they should also be encouraged to think for themselves and to *critique* those same doctrines in their capacity as “scholars” (WA 8: 37 f.). That is, on the assumption that clergy will have had a university education in theology and will therefore maintain some interest in theological scholarship throughout their career, Kant in 1784 was already imagining that they ought to take, as part of their formal training, a course on how to educate the laity so that non-scholars *too* can be liberated to think for themselves. *Religion* in general (particularly its Fourth Piece) is the realization of Kant’s dream of designing a textbook for a course that would educate religious educators, since the latter are, according to Kant’s own explicit assessment, the most important guardians of enlightenment.

My *Commentary on Religion* (Palmquist 2015b) highlights this pedagogical theme, especially as elaborated in the Fourth Piece. Before devoting section 3 to a detailed examination of the latter, let us conclude this section with an overview of how pedagogical themes also permeate the first three Pieces. In the second edition Preface (RGV 6: 12f.), Kant clarifies that the second of the two “experiments” (*Versuchen*) he conducts throughout *Religion* consists in the examination of a specific religious tradition and its scripture (for which Kant chooses Christianity and the Bible), to assess whether and to what extent its “teachings [*Lehren*]” can be interpreted consistently with the first “experiment,” described in the first Preface (RGV 6: 10), of identifying the essential “teachings of bare

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5 One of the reasons Kant’s focus on religious pedagogy in *Religion* has so often been overlooked is that his frequent use of the word “*Lehre*,” best translated as “teaching” in most of its occurrences, has usually been translated as “doctrine” – a word that makes Kant’s focus in *Religion* seem more theological than religious. In my Palmquist 2015b translation, I use “doctrine” for “*lehre*” only when it occurs in compound words, such as “*Religionslehre*” (“doctrine of religion”); in the latter cases the context tends to be more theological and academic than religious and pedagogical.

reason” that constitute a rational (universal, natural) religion that might potentially be united with various historical religions. Kant’s focus in both prefaces on interpreting Christian teachings in a way consistent with philosophical teachings is *prima facie* evidence of the book’s pedagogical purpose.

The reason this purpose has so often been overlooked may be that the theory of evil defended in the First Piece makes no reference to this goal until the concluding sections, after Kant’s *philosophical* (first experiment) argument has been fully elaborated (see Palmquist 2008b). Thus, Section IV warns biblical theologians (i. e., the clergy-in-training whom Kant imagines will be taking this new course) that the Christian doctrine of original sin must be interpreted as referring to the “rational origin” of evil, as set out in the previous three sections, not the “temporal origin” (RGV 6: 39); they must therefore avoid “envision[ing] it as having come to us by *inheritance* from the first parents” (RGV 6: 40). In place of this traditional interpretation, Kant offers a *symbolic* interpretation of the biblical account of the fall. Section V (recast in the second edition as part of a new “General Comment” to the First Piece – possibly due to a printer’s error [Palmquist 2015b: 120 n. 74, 144 f.]) then sketches his rational theory of moral reformation. As the argument reaches its climax (RGV 6: 48), Kant (perhaps alluding to Sulzer’s position) insists that

the moral education of the human being must start not from the reformation of mores but from the transformation of the way of thinking and the founding of a character, although it is customary to proceed differently and to fight against vices individually but to leave their universal root untouched.

He then goes on to apply this explicitly to the kind of education clergy must oversee in the context of religious education in churches (RGV 6: 48):

indeed, children are capable of discovering even the slightest indication that spurious incentives are mixed in, in which case the action instantaneously loses all moral worth for them. This predisposition to the good is cultivated incomparably by adducing the *example* even of good human beings (concerning the lawfulness of the action) and letting one’s moral apprentices judge the disingenuousness [*Unlauterkeit*] of some maxims from the real incentives of their actions; and this predisposition passes over into the apprentices’ way of thinking, so that *duty* merely by itself starts to obtain in their hearts a noticeable weight.

Kant is encouraging clergy-in-training to take advantage of the natural ability children have to detect unfair situations, by not focusing their religious education on “*admir[ing]* virtuous actions” per se (RGV 6: 48); instead, biblical stories should be used to cultivate a child’s innate awareness of the difference between right and wrong *motives*.

The Second Piece follows a similar pattern: after some introductory remarks clarifying how Stoic attempts to cultivate virtue go astray, Kant devotes most of the two main Sections to the elaboration of his philosophical theory of redemption, offering his theology-student readers frequent advice as to how various biblical texts can be interpreted in philosophically respectable ways. When read in light of the book's overall pedagogical theme, the Second Piece can be seen as *affirming* pedagogically sound ways of interpreting numerous traditional Christian doctrines, including divine grace (Palmquist 2010) and even Jesus's divine nature (Palmquist 2013). That Kant's main aim is to influence how clergy-in-training will teach their congregants becomes evident in a lengthy footnote (RGV 6: 69–71) dealing with various "children's questions" (RGV 6: 69n), such as whether it might be most "prudent" to live selfishly with the intention of converting to the good just before death. Kant explicitly rejects the legitimacy of the tendency some ministers have, to delude a dying person who has lived a wretched life into believing that a few magic words uttered just before death can result in salvation; instead, ministers should boldly but lovingly urge the dying to do whatever remains in their power to set right the wrongs they have done. Evidence that this pedagogical application was at the forefront of his mind is that in the second edition Kant adds a second footnote at the end of Section One, urging clergy that a dying person's "conscience should rather be *stirred up* and *sharpened*," and issuing a dire warning to clergy who ignore his advice: "to give, in place of this, opium for the conscience, as it were, is to incur guiltiness against [this person] himself and against others surviving him" (RGV 6: 78n). Similarly, his discussion of miracles in the second General Comment includes an explicit reference to "the rational minister" (RGV 6: 87), who "will certainly take care not to cram the heads of those assigned to his spiritual care with little stories [from books containing extravagant claims] and bewilder [*zu verwildern*] their imagination." On the previous page, he had proposed a specific maxim that "teachers of religion" ought to follow when considering an alleged miracle (RGV 6: 85n) – more evidence of his pedagogical focus. Indeed, Kant's main argument against relying on miracles is that this *paralyzes* reason: it interrupts reason's "familiar laws," yet without instructing reason "by any new law" (RGV 6: 86 f.), thus rendering rational education impossible.

The Third Piece, where Kant introduces his theory of the church as the historical vehicle for ushering in the "kingdom of God on earth" (e.g., RGV 6: 101, 131), is filled with allusions to the need for the "visible church" to be *instructed* by the "invisible" guidance of reason. He thus proposes four "requirements," or "marks, of the true church": "universality"; "integrity [*Lauterkeit*]"; "freedom" (both between church members and between the church and the civil government); and "unchangeability" of these four rational requirements, such that all



*other* precepts of one's historical faith must be subject to revision (RGV 6: 101f.). He then devotes an entire section of Division One to the task of defending a specific approach to biblical interpretation: although most clergy will have been educated in a university, where they will have learned various *theoretical* approaches to textual interpretation, their main focus as *pastors* should be on *moral* interpretation (RGV 6: 109–14).

In Division Two of the Third Piece Kant affirms the Bible's suitability for use in moral instruction within a true church (RGV 6: 132), but laments the stranglehold biblical theologians tend to have on interpretive methods. To solve this problem he introduces a "precept" (*Grundsatz*) of rational faith, whereby instruction in the *historical* content of the Bible "must always be taught and explained as aiming at what is moral" (RGV 6: 132). Kant is not asking clergy to *deny* the legitimacy of sacred history, but to employ it in their church teaching to *illustrate* virtue, thereby motivating their congregants to emulate such virtue in their own lives. To illustrate his respect for the importance of history in moral cultivation, while emphasizing what a weighty responsibility religious educators have, he adds a footnote suggesting that people are typically reluctant to be converted away from their childhood religion because we are, after all, ignorant regarding which religious tradition is ultimately "right" (RGV 6: 132n) – perhaps a hint that he still privately cherished certain core aspects of his childhood Pietism. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the Fourth Piece places its primary focus on the contrast between clerical religion and a more meditative, quasi-Pietist approach to the teaching of church beliefs and rituals at the interface between godliness and virtue.

### 3 Kant's guideline for training clerics in religious pedagogy

Given its references to what Kant calls "pseudoservice," the Fourth Piece of *Religion* is often read as an entirely negative, outright rejection of traditional (at least organized, clerical) religion. While exposing pseudoservice is undoubtedly a major concern in this part of *Religion*, it is not the overriding theme. Rather, pseudoservice is the danger that the masses are exposed to *if* religious educators have not themselves been given a proper (philosophical) grounding in rational religion. Kant focuses on the *proper* role of the clergy in any church that retains them. The untitled introduction that opens the Fourth Piece addresses this issue explicitly: an enlightened church will *eventually* do away with clergy altogether

(as in many forms of Pietism), for “priestery”<sup>6</sup> is a demeaning tool of domination that frustrates the true purpose of religion by tending to *discourage* people from thinking freely. However, Kant assumes throughout the Fourth Piece that the historical evolution of religion is too young to dispense with clergy in the short term. Similarly, he had argued in WA that a *complete* lack of civil restrictions is not the best way to encourage free thinking in unenlightened people, since this would probably lead to the adoption of a new set of overly restrictive dogmas (i. e., the “medicine” of rules imposed by unenlightened members of a clergy-less church is likely to be worse than the “disease” of priestery that it sets out to cure); instead, the best way to encourage gradual enlightenment is to have a *balanced* set of statutory restrictions that paves the way for the right kind of free thinking (WA 8: 39 f.).

The Fourth Piece depicts the same situation as holding for the true church: having set as the ultimate goal the development of religious communities consisting of free-thinking members, whose mutual adherence to the four marks of the true church convinces them that clergy are *ultimately* dispensable, Kant provides guidelines for how churches that still employ clergy can avoid falling into error. Thus, after the first section of Part One of the Fourth Piece has offered a moral interpretation of the Gospels as containing “a complete [natural] religion,”<sup>7</sup> the second section *defends* the need for historical religious communities to maintain a “scholarly” component to establish basic parameters for teaching the community’s traditions. Section Two, entitled “The Christian Religion as a Scholarly Religion,” establishes the precept that should guide the influence biblical scholars have on religious matters in a church: while good historical-critical scholarship is crucial for establishing *objective facts* pertaining to the Bible, properly educated clergy will ensure that in their role as pastors such scholarship remains *secondary*: in the true church, scholarly learning always serves only as a *means* to enhance moral religion, never as an end in itself. Particularly dangerous, Kant warns, is the tendency of some theologians (and so also, some clergy) to assume that, because the Bible is believed to consist of revealed propositions, any command found in a biblical text is *ipso facto* an end in itself – i. e., a universal human duty.

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<sup>6</sup> This is Pluhar’s translation (Kant 2009c) of the derogatory German term, “*Pfaffenthum*” (e. g., RGV 6: 130, 179), which has no exact English equivalent. The Cambridge Edition (Kant 1998b) uses “priestdom,” following Greene and Hudson’s translation (Kant 1934).

<sup>7</sup> RGV 6: 162. While interpreting the moral core of the Gospels, Kant does not lose sight of his pedagogical goal. At one point he laments that *religious teachers* have failed to take seriously Jesus’ prohibition against taking oaths (RGV 6: 159n) – an essential feature of his own moral theory.

Part Two of the Fourth Piece concludes the main text of *Religion* with four numbered sections, each offering a different angle on the nature or application of the foregoing precept, under the general rubric of how to avoid religious delusion. It might seem to any casual readers of *Religion* who have nevertheless been diligent enough to make it all the way through to these concluding pages that Kant is merely letting his mind wander, ending *Religion* with a random set of left-over thoughts.<sup>8</sup> Quite to the contrary, these four reflections on his guiding precept for religious education *accomplish* the main pedagogical purpose Kant set for himself in *Religion*: they defend and justify the requirement that the clergy's power in the church be subordinate to the individual church-goer's *conscience*. Although the title of Part Two of the Fourth Piece, "On the Pseudoservice of God in a Statutory Religion" (RGV 6: 167), admittedly highlights the negative side of Kant's argument, Part Two's four sections are filled with constructive advice and admonitions for clergy charged with the task of educating the laity.

Following an introductory paragraph, §1 argues that all religious delusion rests on a common "subjective basis": humans inevitably tend to think "that by everything that we do solely in order to please the divinity well ... we prove to God our willingness to serve him as obedient ... subjects, and hence we also serve God" (RGV 6: 169). This tendency is unavoidable because, as embodied beings, we cannot think of God without some "anthropomorphism": we *all* "*make a God for ourselves*" (RGV 6: 168). Probably in response to early criticisms of the first edition (see, e.g., the early book review translated in Palmquist and Otterman 2013), Kant added a footnote at this point in the second edition, explaining that such anthropomorphism "is in no way reprehensible," *provided* one "*makes a God ... according to moral concepts*" (RGV 6: 168n). The key to avoiding "*idolatry*" is not to reject all anthropomorphism, but to ensure that people compare all their anthropomorphisms with the moral "ideal" (i.e., the archetype of perfection, provided by reason as the core of natural religion). In communities aspiring to approximate the true church, clergy may openly employ anthropomorphisms in their teaching, provided they discourage people from making the deluded attempt to use such symbolic constructions to manipulate God. Church teaching that encourages the latter, Kant warns, exhibits nothing less than a "hidden inclination to fraud" (RGV 6: 170).

Kant reiterates this point in §2, introducing a generally applicable precept of rational religion that "requir[es] no proof" (RGV 6: 170; original emphasis): "*Apart*

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Firestone and Jacobs devote less than four pages (2008: 228–31) to the crucial arguments in *Religion*'s concluding 36 pages, passing them off as a mere "catalogue of ... excesses that are of little concern to" the identification and understanding of *Religion*'s main purpose.

from a good lifestyle [Lebenswandels], anything further which the human being supposes that he can do to become satisfactory [wohlgefällig] to God is a bare religious delusion and a pseudoservice of God.” This precept does not require clergy to abolish all religious ritual, but does require them to educate the laity to use rituals and symbols correctly, as historically-conditioned “clothing” for rational religion that empowers people to experience moral reformation. Having been educated in a strict Pietist school, Kant does not mince his words: a “church” (i. e., its clergy) that “proclaim[s] ... a mystery as revealed,” daring to claim that merely “believing this revelation ... and confessing it” suffices to make a person “satisfactory to God,” is guilty of nothing less than *extortion* (RGV 6: 170). However, in line with the oft-overlooked positive pedagogical aim of the Fourth Piece, Kant adds that reason nevertheless offers “comfort” to the people (RGV 6: 171): clergy should be quick to focus on the moral symbolism of scriptural accounts of salvation, and slow to claim any *theoretical* understanding of “what this relation of God to the human being is in itself.” Any church – i. e., the clergy who lead it – daring to assert *knowledge* of how “God complements that moral lack in the human race” so confidently as to be willing “to sentence to eternal reprobation all human beings who do not know this means of justification” is, ironically, putting *itself* in the position of “the unbeliever” (RGV 6: 171) by absurdly attempting to use human concepts and rituals as an excuse to avoid “a good lifestyle” (RGV 6: 172). The responsibility of enlightened clergy is to teach people the difference between the delusions of “pious play-acting and do-nothingness” and the “virtuous conviction [that] is occupied with something *real* [and] that by itself is satisfactory to God” (RGV 6: 173). Only thus can clergy avoid promoting the twin dangers of *superstition* and mystical *delirium* (*Schwärmerei*; see note 12), whereby churchgoers claim to be able to identify and even *influence* the mysterious workings of divine grace (RGV 6: 174 f.).

In §3 Kant’s polemic against unenlightened religious teachers reaches its climax, as he unhesitatingly rejects any pedagogical strategy that passes off deluded religious concepts as revealed truths. He warns that clergy who fail to heed the subtle but revolutionary pedagogy he is recommending will end up creating churches whose religious practices are not essentially different from those exhibited by primitive tribes – the difference lying only in the sophistication of the methods used in attempting to control God (RGV 6: 175–8). Yet even here Kant’s aim is far from being *anti*-religious, for he exclaims (RGV 6: 179; emphasis added): “So much depends, *when one wants to bind two good things*, on the order in which one binds them!” He is not charging unenlightened clergy with deliberately infecting their congregants with *evil*. Rather, their mistake is subtle: instead of teaching people that doing what is right gives us good reason to hope God will be satisfied with us, they reinforce the natural human tendency to believe

that doing something *merely* to please God will persuade God to *make us* good, quasi-magically, even if our moral character remains as evil as ever; “true *enlightenment* consists” in reversing this deluded trend in religious pedagogy (RGV 6: 179) – just as Kant had claimed in WA. Borrowing a metaphor from Matthew 11:30, Kant assures his readers that the “yoke” of universal, moral religion is far lighter than that of “statutory law” imposed by the clergy in a typical church: whereas the former *frees* people to obey the moral law, the effect of the latter is “that conscience is burdened” (RGV 6: 179). Kant labels this church structure, whereby the clergy dominates “the multitude” by imposing “revealed” statutes on them, *priestery*. It can dominate even “the national regime” through a form of *mind-control*, by claiming to govern people’s *spiritual* destiny (RGV 6: 179 f.). In contrast to such “counter-intuitive” teaching, making “the law of morality” the core of one’s religious teaching “is as obvious to every human being ... as if it were literally written in his heart” (RGV 6: 181). *Starting* from the moral rather than the historical in one’s pedagogy does not destroy historical religion; rather (RGV 6: 182), “the moral–faithful person is ... also open to the historical faith insofar as he finds it conducive to the animation of his pure religious conviction [*Religionsgesinnung*; see note 14].” Both “in the first instruction of youth and even in the pulpit discourse,” it is far more natural and even more prudent “to propound the doctrine of virtue before the doctrine of godliness” (RGV 6: 182). For this enlightened pedagogy instills a “virtue-motivated courage to stand on one’s own feet” that will be “strengthened by the subsequent doctrine of propitiation” (e. g., the biblical teaching concerning Jesus’ sacrificial death), whereas the old approach to religious pedagogy instills fear, anxiety, and passivity (RGV 6: 183).

The main text of *Religion* concludes in § 4 with Kant’s most comprehensive account of the proper role of conscience in religious education. This section might seem particularly out of place to interpreters who think Kant’s general goal in *Religion* and/or his specific goal in the Fourth Piece is primarily negative.<sup>9</sup> If the book’s goal were to destroy traditional religion, or if the Fourth Piece’s goal were to discount the possibility of *any* meaningful religious practices, why would Kant end with such moving reflections on the religious significance of conscience? He ends on this high note because the trajectory of the whole book leads to this singular conclusion: in a congregation that has set itself on the archetypal path whereby it aims to *become* a manifestation of the true church, the clergy will not lull the people to sleep but will serve as a gadfly, pestering the laity to the point of annoyance, if necessary, in hopes of motivating them to look into the depths

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<sup>9</sup> See, e. g., Pasternack 2014: 215 f.; cf. note 8 above. DiCenso 2012 is one of the few commentators to recognize moral pedagogy in a religious context to be a core feature of *Religion*.

of their hearts and emulate the archetype of perfect humanity, whose nature is best expressed in terms of the *logos*, “the *Word* (the Become!).”<sup>10</sup> In § 4 Kant offers frequent and explicit advice to clergy regarding how they should accomplish this goal – far too much to summarize in an essay of this length. Instead of going into such detail, let it suffice to say that the key to true religion for Kant is to form communities united by the agreement that everyone is free to *consult their own conscience*, with the role of the enlightened clergy being to instill *this skill* in the people; conscience takes priority over any and all claims regarding the priority of historical facts, dogmas, or rituals relating to one’s own religious tradition. For the latter exists to serve the former, not vice versa.

*Religion* concludes with the fourth of a series of General Comments, each of which deals with a specific set of borderline concepts, or “parerga,” that inevitably arise for anyone who, like the clergy Kant is hoping to prepare for philosophically-enlightened guidance of religious communities, seeks to explore the interface between rational (moral) religion and their own historical faith. The first three General Comments dealt with religious experiences of being touched by grace, with miracles, and with mysteries of the faith such as the Trinity – all key concerns for any philosophically-minded pastor. The fourth General Comment then explores four examples of rituals that clergy typically encourage the laity to practice: prayer, churchgoing, baptism, and communion. Kant focuses in each case not on denying the legitimacy of the ritual’s traditional interpretation, but on showing clergy how to portray the *rational purpose* of each ritual in such a way that it will serve as a tool for *animating* moral convictions rather than stifling them. While some commentators (e. g., Green 1979) complain that Kant poorly reflects the historical richness of these rituals in Christian tradition, his response would be that clergy-in-training do not need a *philosopher* to teach them the details of their own historical tradition! In this concluding section, Kant therefore sticks resolutely to his goal: instilling in his readers, many of whom he hopes will be pastors-in-training, the enlightened need to preserve morality at the core of each ritual.

Before we examine Kant’s lectures on philosophical theology, a word of clarification is needed. In *Religion*’s second Preface Kant cautions that the

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**10** The Cambridge Edition (Kant 1998b) follows Greene and Hudson’s highly misleading translation of Kant’s “*das Werde!*” (RGV 6: 60) – his parenthetical interpretation of the divine *logos* – by rendering it as “the *Fiat!*”. Pluhar’s “the *Let it be so!*” (Kant 2009c) is closer to the German, but still misses the term’s pedagogical thrust: authentic religion, like duty herself, bids us always to strive to *become* the person we are meant to be. I omit the italics, as neither AA nor Kant’s two original editions emphasize the parenthetical words.

philosopher's task (even in conducting the second experiment) must not include "the technically practical" consideration "of instructional method as a doctrine of art" (RGV 6: 12). Kant's point here is that the philosopher's task is not to teach clergy the *skill* of teaching well (e. g., *homiletics*); *that* art should be left to biblical theologians within a given religious tradition, for each tradition's idiosyncrasies may require a specific approach to such pragmatic skills. But this warning does not prevent philosophers (like Kant) from offering guidelines for *what* is to be taught and *which element* of one's teaching should be *prioritized* – i. e., from reminding clergy that what *matters most* is the moral impact of their teaching. It matters for reasons that go beyond any *specific* religious tradition; this is why religious pedagogy is a legitimate concern of philosophical theologians.

This overview of the religious pedagogy Kant presents in *Religion* has highlighted several key principles. Theology students preparing to enter the ministry should, first, be *open* to the voice of reason as complementing, clarifying, and deepening their understanding of the message of Scripture. Second, in teaching the Bible to laypersons under their care, clergy must never portray assent to historically-contingent facts as being *more important* than (rather than in the service to) moral reformation; for the latter (as Kant argues in the second General Comment) is the true miracle that all genuine religion aims to cultivate. Third, clergy must courageously recognize that their faith in the tradition they have been ordained to promote does not supplant their necessary ignorance of the *ultimate* truth of their tradition's historical truth-claims, so the stories and doctrines upheld by their tradition must be taught with humility, as *symbols* of the moral reality uniting all human beings. Finally, they must never allow their own political power within the church hierarchy to usurp the authority that properly belongs to the sanctity of each person's conscience.

#### 4 The role of Kant's lectures in the development of his religious pedagogy

The foregoing overview of Kant's mature theory of how clergy ought to shape their religious communities into centers for religiously-inspired moral education prepares us to return to the pair of questions posed at the end of section 1. These can be combined and restated as follows: To what extent did Kant's own lectures on philosophical theology serve as a "training-ground," both for Kant himself, to *develop* the pedagogical principles set out in *Religion*, and for his students, to be effectively trained in the ways described above? In order to answer this question, we must take a step back to the lecture notes from the mid-1780s – the very years when Kant was first publicizing his vision of enlightened moral education for and

by priests, doctors, and lawyers – to see how and to what extent he was already incorporating these ideas in his lectures on philosophical theology. Answering this question should enable us to determine whether Kant’s concern for moral education in religious communities, as argued in *Religion*, marked a sudden change of emphasis or was the fruition of his long-term philosophical goal.

As mentioned in section 1, the text of the Pölitz student notes is based on a course of lectures Kant delivered in the winter semester of 1783/84, using textbooks by Baumgarten, Eberhard, and Meiners. Although the short Appendix relating to Meiners 1780 deals mostly with what we might today call “comparative religion,” Kant’s brief comments on a variety of non-Christian theological positions and religious traditions are not irrelevant to our discussion. For, although he claims in the second Preface that the focus of his “second experiment” will be on Christianity, *Religion* does contain numerous references to the same non-Christian traditions. Significantly, many points mentioned in the Appendix to his lectures (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1122–6) also appear in *Religion*. The latter offers no hint as to Kant’s source for these references; but we know that Meiners 1780 was his source for this portion of the lecture notes, and this in turn serves as evidence that when Kant delivered these lectures, he was already formulating the positions later published in *Religion*. Since the Meiners Appendix has no direct impact on the issue of moral *pedagogy* in religious communities, however, I will not comment further on it.

The Pölitz lecture notes begin with an Introduction that sets the stage for a course that was divided into two main parts, covering Natural Theology and Moral Theology. Whereas the content of these two parts is based on Baumgarten 1757, the Introduction consists mostly of Kant’s responses to Eberhard 1781. Kant starts the Introduction by alluding to the pedagogical motives he has for teaching his course. After some opening remarks on “an idea of highest perfection” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 993), Kant cites “Rousseau’s *Emile*” and “Xenophon’s *Cyclopaedia*” to illustrate how an understanding of proper “education” for a given individual “is a true idea of reason” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 994). Such ideas are important because they provide human reason with a “maximum” that enables us to measure the degree to which we attain the ideal that is thereby described – a degree that in moral matters is called “virtue” as opposed to the perfection of holiness (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 994–6). On this basis, Kant explains, the goal of learning about “the concept of God” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 997) is to “make use of it as a gauge by which we are to determine the smaller differences in morality.” While he admits some “speculative interest” in such inquiries, they are “insignificant” in themselves, and should be regarded as “no more than a means enabling us to represent in a determinate way” the extent of imperfect human virtue. The real reason for engaging in such inquiries is to satisfy “the practical interest



which has to do with our making ourselves into better human beings” (V-Phil-Th/Pölit 28: 997). All too often, speculative appeals to God are prompted by “a lazy reason”; an attempt to clarify “our cognition of God” can attain “dignity” (V-Phil-Th/Pölit 28: 997) only “insofar as it has a relation to religion.”

Whereas Eberhard's text focused on training “scholars of the divine” (*Gottesgelehrten*), Kant insists that “in natural religion there is no place for scholarship” (V-Phil-Th/Pölit 28: 998). He continues:

In general no cognition of reason a priori can be called learning. Learning is the sum total of cognition which must be taught. – The theologian or divine scholar must have true learning, since he must interpret the Bible, and interpretation depends on languages and much else which can be taught.

Here we see Kant formulating what was to be a crucial distinction in *Religion*, between philosophical theologians, who teach a priori truths of reason that lead students to natural religion through a simple process of honest self-reflection, and biblical theologians, who teach historically revealed truths that depend on numerous empirical factors and thus cannot attain universality. Part One of the Fourth Piece must be read in the context of this Introduction, if we are to understand that in pitting “The Christian Religion as a Natural Religion” (the title of Section One of Part One; RGV 6: 157) against “The Christian Religion as a Scholarly [or “Learned”] Religion” (the title of Section Two of Part One; RGV 6: 163), Kant is not implying that historical Christianity should *do away* with the latter (at least in the short term), but only that the clergy who are given the task of teaching their historical tradition to the laity must first be educated in natural religion, if they are to avoid leading the people astray. Section Two repeats the same point quoted above, that insofar as clergy are biblical scholars, they should be trained in ancient languages and other specialist knowledge that, as Kant now points out, cannot be universalized (RGV 6: 113, 166 f.). In other words, Part One of the Fourth Piece is the detailed outworking of the distinction between two types of religious education, which Kant had proposed in the Introduction to his lectures, nearly a decade earlier.

The remainder of the Introduction, like most of the main text of the Pölit lecture notes, outlines and responds to the analysis of Natural Theology that concludes Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*. Very little of this content relates directly to that of *Religion*, especially its pedagogical goal. However, an understanding of the overall approach provides a helpful propaedeutic to *Religion*. In short, Kant divides “rational theology” into three parts: “transcendental theology” (dealing mainly with the definition of “God” and the ontological argument for God's existence) treats “God as *cause of the world*”; “natural theology” (dealing with themes

relevant to the cosmological and physico-theological arguments) treats God “as *author of the world*, i. e., as a living God”; and “moral theology” (dealing with the moral argument that Kant was to refine a few years later, in the second and third *Critiques*) treats “God as *ruler of the world*” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1001). These three types of philosophical theology, taken together, aim to provide the “maximum” (i. e., the most complete) understanding of the concept of God that is possible from a priori principles. Natural *religion*, however, requires only a “minimum” cognition of God, consisting of three features: awareness “that we need a religion”; that this philosophical concept of God “is sufficient for natural religion”; and that this “concept of God is *possible*” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 998). Historical religious traditions that appeal to some alleged *revelation* from God attempt to extend this minimum cognition to a confirmation of the maximum rational concept of God – and usually *beyond* that maximum, into the realm that reason can only regard as *mystery*. Other than mentioning this fact at several points, Kant’s lectures make very little attempt to address the issue of what happens when revelation is *added* to reason in this way; that is, the inquiry that becomes the focus of the second experiment in *Religion* is virtually absent in the lectures.

The lengthy Introduction to the lectures continues by distinguishing between “[t]he deist” as one who “accepts only transcendental theology” and the “theist” as one who actively believes in “a *living God*” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1001) – a distinction Kant had already made in the first *Critique* (KrV A633/B661). At various points throughout the lectures, Kant clarifies that his own position is that of the *theist* (e. g., V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1050), even though the position he adopts with regard to our *speculative* cognition of God could be regarded as a form of “skeptical” (as opposed to “dogmatic”) *atheism* (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1010). Despite appearances to the contrary, skeptical atheism is *consistent* with theism, because the former merely entails the *negative* claim that one can never prove the existence or *non-existence* of God; natural and moral theology, by contrast, provide *good reasons* for actively *believing* in a God who (unlike the deist’s God) actively participates in the world. Or, as Kant puts it, moral theism “renders superfluous everything that the skeptical atheist attacks” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1012). Thus, as he states at one point: “It is impossible for us to be satisfied with [the “*ontological* predicates that the deist ascribes to God”] alone, for such a God would be of no help to us” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1020; see also 28: 1123). In addition to providing an invaluable summary of the theology presupposed by (but not restated in) *Religion*, these lectures offer readers of *Religion* ample evidence of Kant’s position: human beings must believe in God because *we need help with the task of being moral*.

The lectures convey a series of deep insights into Kant’s understanding of how God interacts with the world – a position undergirding every argument in *Religion*. Acknowledging this presupposed theory can go a long way in clarifying

some of Kant's most perplexing arguments in *Religion*. For example, whereas proponents of the age-old, moral-reductionist interpretation typically assume that "Kant declares that human reason is God,"<sup>11</sup> the lectures explicitly warn against making such an assumption – one that would amount to pantheism and/or *dogmatic* atheism. After introducing his theory that God's form of cognition is best regarded as "intuitive understanding" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1051), Kant clarifies that this must not be taken as implying the sort of pantheism that Spinoza defended (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1052); rather, the whole point of attributing "intuitive understanding" to God is to confirm that God

has no need for reason; for reason is only a mark of the limits of an understanding and provides it with concepts. But an understanding which receives concepts through itself has no need of reason. Thus the expression "reason" is beneath the dignity of the divine nature. (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1053)

Inasmuch as "humanity" consists in the ability "to judge oneself as fortunate or unfortunate only by comparison with others" (RGV 6: 27), human understanding *must* draw its content from sensibility (for our "animality" defines us as beings who can continue to live only by depending on sensible impulses [RGV 6: 26]), deferring to the guiding light of reason in order to glimpse any ultimate truths (e. g., that "personality" consists in the intellectual "idea of humanity" in its perfection [RGV 6: 28]). By contrast, God's understanding immediately *knows* everything and thus has no need for either sensibility *or* reason. Descriptions of God's nature that portray it as sharing a structural *similarity* to human reason (see below) are therefore "to be found only *in our* human representation of God's cognition, and not in this cognition itself" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1054).

When Kant turns his attention to moral theology, in the second main part of the lectures, he clarifies (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1072) that "morality not only shows us that we have need of God, but it also teaches us that he is already present in the nature of things and that the order of things leads us to him." This is the essence of what, as I have argued elsewhere (Palmquist 2008a), can be called Kant's "moral panentheism": the element of truth in Spinoza's *pantheism*, making it so

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11 Pontynen 2006: 132. This popular view, presupposed by those who prefer to view their beloved Kant as *nothing more* than a skeptical atheist, typically treats his "moral theism" as merely an attempt to appease the weak-minded or unphilosophical masses. The most commonly quoted representative of this position is Heinrich Heine, who in 1834 famously quipped (Heine 1959: 119) that the second *Critique's* moral argument was merely Kant's concession to Lampe; I directly refuted such claims in Palmquist 1992a and Palmquist 1992b (cf. Palmquist 2000: chapters IV and VI).

deceptively attractive, is that God's presence *does* permeate our *moral* nature; yet Kant's God radically transcends the world as we know it, this being the basis of Kant's criticism of Spinoza. Whereas we cannot identify Kant's God with Reason, Kant himself explicitly states that "God is ... the moral law itself, as it were, but thought as personified" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1076; see also 1091). This is why Kant is reluctant to allow any place for miracles within our *understanding* of the natural world (cf. RGV 6: 84–9), yet he openly states that if we wish to believe in a miracle, then "such an effect would have to be a *miracle of the moral world*" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1106 f.; see also 1112) – a position he subsequently defends in *Religion* (RGV 6: 89n). Kant further reveals his tendency toward moral pantheism (or "Critical mysticism," as I called it in Palmquist 2000, Part Four) when he interprets God's "omnipresence" as referring necessarily to "an *inward* presence" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1107) – i. e., a *moral* presence, since God's absolute nature must be conceived as transcending both time and space.

Kant goes on to define "inward presence" as "an action of the duration of the very substance in a thing" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1107). As if to prefigure contemporary theories of non-local causality at the quantum level, he then adds: "God's omnipresence is therefore *immediate* and *inner* but not *local*" (ibid.). That this amounts to a form of pantheism even in a non-moral sense is suggested by Kant's further claim that "space is a phenomenon of God's omnipresence" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1108) – i. e., space exists *in* God and can be regarded as an "appearance" of God, even though (contra Spinoza) it cannot be simply *identified* with God. As usual, and as also occurs repeatedly in *Religion*, Kant cautions his students against interpreting this theory as an un-Critical, *delirious*<sup>12</sup> form of

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**12** The Cambridge Edition (Kant 1998b) translates "*schwärmerisch*" as "enthusiastic"; Pluhar (Kant 2009c) has "fanatic," and Greene and Hudson (Kant 1934) "fanatical." Yet Kant explicitly distinguishes between "*Schwärmerei*" and "*Enthusiasmus*" ("enthusiasm") in KU 5: 275: the latter "is comparable to *madness* [*Wahnsinn*]," while the former "is comparable to *mania* [*Wahnwitz*]," which Kant goes on to describe as "a disease." Anth 7: 202 defines "mania" as "*mental derangement*," with some variants having "*delirium*" as a synonym for "mania" (Anth 7: 202n). Kant nowhere suggests that "*Schwärmerei*" necessarily expresses itself as an -ism-like commitment accompanied by frenzied *zeal* (this being the common meaning of "fanaticism"); rather, it is a *mental derangement* that causes us to believe we are experiencing something that is not actually occurring – as when someone in the throes of infatuation interprets her idol's actions as responses to her, when in fact he remains oblivious to her existence. Indeed, "*Schwärmerei*" in no way refers to an "-ism," a system of belief (as in "capitalism" or "deism"), but to a *feature* or *characteristic* of certain ways of believing in such systems. Thus, when Kant refers to "*Schwärmereyen der Fanatiker*" (V-Anth/Mron 25: 1257), he is not merely being redundant ("the fanaticism of the fanatic"), but is citing a *feature* exhibited by many fanatics: "the delirium of the fanatic." In *Religion* Kant distinguishes two distinct types of *Schwärmerei*: either dark and

mysticism, whereby one deludes oneself into believing we can *grasp* this mystical presence of God (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1109): “this omnipresence cannot be felt by any of us, nor can any of us be certain for himself that God is operating in him in any particular case.” Throughout *Religion* Kant repeats and further develops this warning about the dangers of allowing legitimate religious experience to be usurped by “mystical delirium” (RGV 6: 130), a “supposed inner experience” of “effects of grace” (RGV 6: 53; cf. 83, 201) that can be “sweet or ... fearful” (RGV 6: 68), but risks depriving “the teaching” of “bare morality,” as it relates to “the unambiguously moral feeling ..., of its dignity” (RGV 6: 114). The “religious *delirium*” whereby the believer claims to be able to “distinguish effects of grace from those of nature (of virtue), or perhaps even [believes the former] can produce the latter in oneself” (RGV 6: 174), is “a delusion” because human beings do not possess “a receptivity to an intuition” that would enable us to feel “the immediate presence of the highest being” (RGV 6: 174 f.). “Delirious religious delusion ... is the moral death of reason” (RGV 6: 175) because, as the lectures suggest, having such an experience would amount to *being God*; we would require a form of understanding that had no need of sensibility or reason.

Kant's harsh rejection (in *Religion*) of all forms of religious experience that put the believer into a delirious stupor is required by the theory of divine-human interaction developed in the lectures: God is *timeless* and *extramundane*, whereas all products of human reason are and must be bound by spatio-temporality. As such, God must be regarded as “immutable”: even though from our limited standpoint God might *appear* to “change,” the only way we can depict to ourselves a God who interacts with the world (while remaining God) is to regard God's involvement with the world as “one infinite act” that encompasses the entire manifold of different ways of relating to God that we experience (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1096; see also 1110). Kant's explanation of this paradox is worth quoting at length:

From this highest immutability of God with respect to all his realities it follows that it is anthropomorphic to represent God as able to be gracious after he was previously wrathful. For this would posit an alteration in God. But God is and remains always the same, equally gracious and equally just. It depends only on us whether we will become objects of his grace or of his punitive justice. The alteration, therefore, goes on *within us*; it is the relation in which we stand to God which is altered whenever we improve ourselves, in such a way that, whereas previously our relation to God was that of culpable sinners to a just God,

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“fearful” or bright and “sweet” (RGV 6: 68). For a more detailed defense of this translation, see the “delirium” entry in the Glossary to Palmquist 2015b: 520 f.

afterward, after our reformation,<sup>13</sup> this relation is removed and the relation of righteous friends of virtue takes its place. (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1039)

This passage, read in light of the detailed theory of grace that Kant defends in *Religion*, clarifies two conundrums that have plagued commentators. First, it implies that Kant took seriously the possibility that divine grace is not merely an optional extra supplied by Christian revelation, but that reason (i. e., morally-inspired *natural* religion, the topic of Kant's first "experiment" in *Religion*) also has a place for it. Indeed, we see in this passage (albeit, in embryonic form) the same theory of grace that Kant elaborates in *Religion* as an expression of divine-human *partnership*. In a nutshell, Kant's mature position is that human beings are born with a "predisposition to good" that has a divine aspect (namely, the moral idea within us, otherwise known as the "good will") but that another aspect of that same predisposition (namely, our animality, with its inclination to engage in acts of self-gratification) tempts reason to prioritize self-love over the moral "ought," this choice constituting a "propensity to evil"; the moral character of individual human beings is therefore determined by whether or not their initial evil "conviction"<sup>14</sup> has been *reformed*.<sup>15</sup> Second, this in turn adds significant clarity to Kant's difficult theory of the timeless, noumenal "deed" that determines our moral character (see, e. g., RGV 6: 31); for we can now see that, to the extent that human beings share in God's noumenal nature, we too must be depicted as committing only one act (namely, the act of choosing to be human, and thus necessarily engaged in the lifelong conflict between animality and personality – the latter in its perfect manifestation being the unchanging holiness of divinity); the appearance of a "fall" into evil and of the need for "a return to the good from which [human beings have] deviated" (RGV 6: 44) arises only when we view ourselves in terms of our volition<sup>16</sup> – i. e., in terms of the fact that we always

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**13** The Cambridge Edition (Kant 1998b) has "improvement" here for "*Besserung*." I use "reformation" because Kant argues in RGV 6: 47 that the change of heart that lies at the basis of this change is a *one-off* "revolution" – a *bettering* that suggests reformation rather than gradual change.

**14** The Cambridge Edition (Kant 1998b) follows Greene and Hudson in translating "*Gesinnung*" as "disposition"; Pluhar (Kant 2009c) uses the more psychological-sounding "attitude." For a thorough defense of my use of "conviction," including a classification and contextual analysis of all 169 uses of "*G/gessin-*" words used in *Religion*, see Palmquist 2015a.

**15** For a detailed account of Kant's theory of moral reformation, see Palmquist 2010.

**16** Pluhar (Kant 2009c) and the Cambridge Edition (Kant 1998b) translate "*Willkür*" as "power of choice," whereas Greene and Hudson (1934) use a superscript "w" (e. g., "will<sup>w</sup>" or "choice<sup>w</sup>") to distinguish it from "*Wille*." The standard definition of "volition" is "power of choice," and the

remain free to make choices regarding how we will act in every spatio-temporal situation. The perfect grace that God's holiness offers to the world thus always remains constant; "we [i. e., authentically religious persons] feel it to be stronger because we no longer resist it; the [divine] influence itself remains the same" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1039 f.).

*Conclusion.* This section's synopsis of the *religious* themes addressed in the student notes illustrates that Kant's lectures on philosophical theology deal primarily with issues that are more closely related to the *theological* positions defended in the three *Critiques* – most notably, to questions relating to the nature and existence of God – than to the nature and proper implementation of actual religion. Thus, while the lectures serve as a crucial theological propaedeutic to *Religion*, and can therefore aptly be regarded as Kant's *personal* training-ground for his later development of a more thoroughgoing analysis of empirical (revealed) religion as such, they made only a feeble start to the task of training the theology students who attended these lectures (many of whom would go on to become clergy) in the art of religiously-inspired moral pedagogy. Although the Introduction to the lectures begins with a clear statement of Kant's concern for *educating* people in the proper approach to *religion*, the lectures themselves are far from delivering the goods. He does state at one point (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1066) that, given God's all-sufficiency, it "would not be suitable to the dignity of the most blessed being" to act "as if God were out for praise or glory." This and the similar warnings made later in the course – that we must not try "to entic[e] [God's] favor by rendering him all sorts of praise" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1102), that "we must never regard our *prayer* as a means of getting something,"<sup>17</sup> and that the use "most peoples" make of "the entire natural concept of God" is "nothing else than ... a superstitious object of ceremonial adoration and hypocritical high praise" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1118) – all hint at the moral pedagogy that Kant obviously wanted the theology students attending his lectures to internalize. As such, they foreshadow the far more detailed discussion of "pseudoservice" and "religious delusion" in *Religion*, concluding as it does, in the fourth General Comment, with

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former works well as a translation of "*Willkür*," referring to anything subject to human "choosability."

<sup>17</sup> V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1112. As in *Religion*'s fourth General Comment, Kant continues by noting that prayer can also have a good and proper (i. e., morally constructive) use: "as regards corporeal advantages, we ought to offer [prayer] both with a trust in God's wisdom and with submission to this wisdom. The greatest utility of prayer is indisputably a *moral* one, because through prayer both thankfulness and resignation toward God become effective in us." For a thoroughgoing analysis of Kant's philosophy of prayer, see Palmquist 1997 (cf. Palmquist 2000: appendix VIII).

a discussion of the delusion of controlling God through a false understanding of the role of rituals such as prayer. However, in the lectures these warnings appear as merely passing comments, whereas in *Religion's* Fourth Piece they become the main focus of Kant's argument.

Kant's lectures provide unmistakable evidence that he was already concerned about religious education in the early 1780s. For example, at the outset of his discussion of the problem of evil (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1077), he speculates that God "gave the human being senses" – these being the occasion for our reason to choose evil – "to be moderated and overcome through the education of his understanding." However, his solution to the problem of evil follows the theological tradition of seeing it as a "*mere negation and ... limitation of the good*" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1078), without referring to anything remotely similar to the radically *religious* "propensity to evil" that dominates the First Piece of *Religion*. For only in *Religion* is Kant concerned with interpreting *revealed doctrines*, such as original sin. Likewise, his brief discussion of immortality depicts it as an occasion for "moral growth": "if in this world [a person] strives to act in a morally good way and gradually attains to moral accomplishment, he may hope to continue his moral education [in the afterlife], too" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1085). While this comment on its own foreshadows the arguments of the second *Critique's* Dialectic, more than any arguments in *Religion*, Kant's next point is that any hope of receiving *rewards* from God must stem not from an appeal to God's *justice* but from an appeal to God's *benevolence* (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1085) – a nuanced point that should help readers of *Religion* understand why Kant is so reluctant to *spell out* an explicit theory of divine grace: *justice* corresponds to the theme of the second *Critique* and (as Kant insists both in the lectures and throughout his Critical writings) human beings "can never expect rewards from God's justice" because "we can never do more than is our duty" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1085); yet *benevolence* corresponds to the theme of the third *Critique* (i. e., the "interest" human reason has in fulfilling our desire for "pleasure"<sup>18</sup>) and any hope of ben-

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**18** Kant associates the third *Critique* with the faculty of "pleasure and displeasure" (*Lust und Unlust*); but its arguments reveal that reason's special interest in this faculty leads it to experiences that offer a higher fulfilment of our natural mental capacity, in terms of "satisfaction" (*Wohlgefallen*). In *Religion* Kant consistently uses the latter term to refer to God being (or not being) *satisfied* with human beings. Unfortunately, Pluhar and other translators often translate this term as "liking" or "pleasing," thus making it difficult to distinguish from *Lust*. My translation (in Palmquist 2015b) reserves "pleasing" for forms of *gefallen*, which Kant consistently uses throughout *Religion* to refer to *false* attempts to *ingratiate* God, with *Wohlgefallen* referring to *genuine* satisfaction of God's demands, through adoption of moral convictions. Benevolence is the idea of reason that provides human beings with *hope* that God will indeed be satisfied



efitting from this aspect of God's nature must be based on an appeal to *historical* (revealed) religion.<sup>19</sup>

Probably the only exception to this observation, that the lectures merely *foreshadow* the themes that eventually became the focus of *Religion* rather than working them out in any detail, is that they do present a fairly detailed account of the various *non-Christian* religious traditions that uphold some version of the doctrine of the Trinity: following Meiners' text, Kant depicts this as a nearly universal characteristic of world religions (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1074 f.) – comments that were later incorporated in a very similar form in *Religion* (RGV 6: 140 f.). Kant's position (as mentioned in all three *Critiques* and *Religion*, as well as being a key focus of these lectures) is, of course, that our most profound and useful way of thinking of God is in terms of a *moral* Trinity. This is not because Kant seeks to identify God with reason (see footnote 11), but because our a priori cognition of God can be based on nothing other than the structure of human reason. Thus, God as holy lawgiver is how our theoretical reason *must* think of God; God as benevolent ruler is how our (judicial) capacity for pleasure and displeasure requires us to present God to ourselves; and God as righteous judge is how our practical reason (e. g., as manifested in conscience) necessarily shapes philosophical theology (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1075). Kant is not saying God necessarily is a lawgiving, benevolent Reason that judges us with perfect righteousness, but that we must *conceive* of God in this way, if the idea of God is going to be of any practical use in educating human beings to become better persons. This theme is covered in similar detail in both the lectures and *Religion*, but it has only minimal implications for Kant's moral pedagogy, serving more as a propaedeutic than as instruction in moral pedagogy as such.

We can now answer the two questions posed at the end of section 1. Our analysis of Kant's lectures on philosophical theology here in section 4 provides ample evidence that his lectures were, indeed, a formative step on the way to several of

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with the latter, even though our attempts to be good are inevitably imperfect – an argument that relates not so much to divine *justice* as to divine *goodness*.

**19** Other references to education and/or the cultivation of reason in V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz are very brief allusions, with no direct implication for religion. Thus, at V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1097 Kant mentions that astronomers have “taught us modesty and caution in our estimation of [“the whole world” – i. e., the universe].” He then adds that “the cultivation of our own reason urges us to assume and use” the “necessary maxim of our reason that in every animal and plant there is not the least thing that is useless and without purpose” (V-Phil-Th/Pölitiz 28: 1098). While these examples illustrate how natural theology has an *educative* emphasis, they do not concern specifically *moral* or *religious* education. For an excellent account of how Kant affirms the wise use of rhetorical devices in moral and religious education, see Stroud 2014.

the key claims that shape the main arguments in *Religion*; however, the student notes provide very little evidence that in delivering these lectures Kant was attempting to *accomplish the same goal* that he set out to accomplish in *Religion*. Rather, the hints we have picked up from the text suggest that, while delivering these lectures, Kant came to recognize the need for a *radically different* university course, and that he hoped *Religion* might serve as an adequate textbook for that new course. The lectures Kant actually delivered focused on philosophical *theology*: they brought together the essential tenets of the theology that Kant develops in various passages throughout the three *Critiques*; by contrast, the new course Kant formulated in his mind as he was delivering those lectures was to be a sequel to his course on philosophical theology, aimed at *philosophical training for biblical theologians*, especially those training to be clergy. Because the lectures Kant actually delivered were not intended solely for that purpose (e. g., they rarely, if ever, allude to biblical texts, whereas *Religion* does so repeatedly), they cannot be viewed as anything more than *Kant's training-ground* for constructing his own *subsequent* philosophical doctrine of a particular religious tradition (i. e., his philosophy of the Christian religion). Otherwise, we would find much more than a few hints as to how the clergy-in-training who attended his lectures ought to educate people, once they begin pastoring a church. Yet there can be no doubt that certain key aspects of Kant's views on moral pedagogy *within a religious community* were first expressed in seed form in his lectures.

This nuanced way of answering our two questions explains *why* Kant turned to religion in the early 1790s. For the lectures explicitly state the great paradox that lies at the heart of Kant's abstract philosophical theology (which I have described elsewhere, using the label "Critical mysticism"), arguably forming the core of the whole Critical philosophy, an existential paradox that can be resolved only by immersing oneself in a particular religious tradition. Even though our most valiant attempts to understand and emulate the idea of God, imposed upon us by our own reason, may end up as merely "fruitless seeking" (V-Phil-Th/Pölitz 28: 1113), *this very striving* nevertheless "fulfills our great vocation and furthers the cultivation of our reason."