

Kant's Naturalistic "Religion" and "religion"

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Abstract

In this paper, the two terms "Kant's naturalistic *Religion*" and "Kant's naturalistic religion" are conscientiously distinguished from and yet, simultaneously, similar to one another. To begin with, Kant's naturalistic *Religion* is intended to mean clearly Kant's naturalistic *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, a masterpiece written by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in 1793. At the same time, Kant's naturalistic religion is set to mean a naturalistic religion whose theory and method have largely followed Kant's naturalistic *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Having been affected by the extreme development of modern rationalism, scientism, naturalism, and demythologization,¹ found typically in Kant's naturalistic *Religion*², a religion principally limited within the boundary of pure, naturalistic reason alone may, therefore, be depicted as Kant's naturalistic

¹ Cf. John Cheng, 'Awakening from the Kantian Anti-supernatural Slumbers', *Fu Jen Religious Studies* 《輔仁宗教研究》, no. 8 (2003.12) pp. 193-225. The present essay is a sequel to this previous article on Kant. Cf. also Eugene Thomas Long, *Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy of Religion 1900-2000* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), in particular 'Neo-Kantianism', *Ibid.*, pp. 60-73, as well as the part on demythologization, *Ibid.*, pp. 323-325.

² According to Timothy Sean Quinn, there are two particular monographs characteristic of the so-called modern philosophy which from its inception was notorious for its rebellion against religious orthodoxies. They are Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* and *The Anti-Christ* of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Cf. Timothy Sean Quinn, 'Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and The Papal Encyclical', in: *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et ratio*, edited by David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003) p. 177.

religion. To quite an extent, this naturalistic religion of Kant seems to be characteristic of many quarters in the traditional Christian religion today. The author, being a practicing Christian, reflects critically on Kant's naturalistic *Religion*, as well as his naturalistic concept of religion. It is hoped that such a reflection would be helpful not only to our understanding of Kant's naturalistic religion being practiced by many today, but also in matters concerning our religious growth as inherently homo religiosus (宗教人), such that our religious aspirations and endeavours are not limited within Kant's naturalistic religion alone.

Keywords: Faith and Reason, Kant's Naturalistic *Religion*,
Kant's Naturalistic Religion,
Age of Science and Reason,
Rationalism, naturalism,
Religion within the Limits of Reason alone,
Kant's naturalistic Theory and Method of Religion,
Demythologization

Introduction

In his encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio : Faith and Reason* (1998)³, which may represent the supreme development of the personal wisdom and scholarship of Pope John Paul II⁴ towards the preeminent relationship between faith and reason (or reason and faith) in religion, the Pontiff begins with the following brief introductory note. Apparently, this comment offers us the very gist of the Pope's address to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the perennial relationship or balance between faith and reason, i.e., the two wings of Catholic thought:⁵

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth --- in a word, to know himself --- so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves (cf. *Ex* 33:18; *Ps* 27:8-9; 63:2-3; *Jn* 14:8; 1*Jn* 3;2).

If faith and reason resemble two equally indispensable wings of Catholicism or channels in religion with which we can know the fullness of truth about God and themselves, then the deliberate rational approach of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to restrict religion within the limits of reason alone becomes immediately a potential

³ John Paul II, Pope, "*Fides et Ratio: Faith and Reason*", in: *The Pope Speaks*, Vol. 40, No. 5, 1998, pp. 295-343.

⁴ Cf. Nick Bakaler and Richard Balkin, eds., *The Wisdom of John Paul II. The Pope on life's most vital questions* (London: Routledge, 2002) ; Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger commented that "Pope John Paul II worked more than 12 years on his encyclical *Fides et Ratio (Faith and Reason)* and the final text may represent the "summa," or maximum expression of his pontificate." (*The Catholic Register*, Week of October 26, 1998, Toronto, p. 16.)

⁵ John Paul II, Pope, "*Fides et Ratio: Faith and Reason*", p. 295; cf. Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., and David Ruel Foster, "Introduction", *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et ratio*, p. ix.

problem. As systematically put forward in his major work *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793)⁶, what seems to be even more subtly misleading is that this *Werk* or *Religion* deals with faith too⁷, but in accordance with Kant's one-sided naturalistic theory and method of religion. This double-level grotesque misrepresentation of Christianity seems to have become, therefore, a real problematic predicament in the history of the traditional Christian religion.

As most scholars who examine Kant's philosophical system tend to interpret his critical historical thinking in terms of his three *Critiques*, i.e., *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *Critique of Judgment* (1790), *very few who do so seem to have included his naturalistic philosophy of religion.*⁸ Yet, without exception, all these three philosophical *Critiques* have dealt with religion, substantially laying the critical foundation for his naturalistic religious thinking, as systematically put forward in his religious *Werk*, i.e., *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone.*⁹ The author, in consequence, would like to help meet *the need* to some extent and do a critical reflection on this naturalistic *Religion* by Kant who has been generally regarded as the most influential philosopher in the West over the last three centuries¹⁰. Hopefully, this reflection would also be helpful to our understanding of the nature of Kant's naturalism and its influence on religion. In this

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, with an essay "The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion" by John R. Silber (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960). *Werk*, just as *Religion*, is henceforth a short term representing this religious work by Kant.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, in particular Kant's concept of "pure religious faith", *Ibid.*, pp. 100ff.

⁸ Cf. 康德著，李秋零譯，《單純理性限度內的宗教》（香港沙田：漢語基督教文化研究所，1977），頁 xiii.。

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cf. Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 206.

way, our personal development of faith and reason, as well as our spiritual aspirations and endeavours, might not be deplorably confined within the limits of just one wing or one dimension alone.

Summing up Kant's mature philosophy succinctly, Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), a German philosopher and one of the founders of modern existentialism, states that Kant's naturalistic thinking "is in reality nothing other than a practical knowledge of men. The fundamental question of philosophy, encompassing all others, remained for Kant: 'What is man?'"¹¹ William H. Walsh further says: "He [Kant] wished to insist on the authority of science and yet preserve the autonomy of morals".¹² There is no doubt that Kant's naturalistic approach to science and humanity have made many vital contributions to modernity, in areas such as the theoretical foundation of science and mathematics, the epistemological subjectivity of consciousness towards the objectivity of things, the synthetic-constructive use of theoretical reason, and the individual personal dignity, freedom and morals, etc.¹³ However, it would be unwise for us Christians who treasure so dearly a supernatural faith in our heart to remain analytically blind and spiritually naïve to Kant's impact-making, naturalistic religion-within-the-limits-of-reason-alone theory, method and influence towards our priceless supernatural religion and personal faith.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹² William H. Walsh, "Kant, Immanuel", in: *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. Four (New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1967) p. 306.

¹³ Cf. Curt Friedlein, *Geschichte der Philosophie: Lehr- und Lernbuch*. 14., durchgesehene Auflage (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1984) pp. 372-273.

Following this short introduction¹⁴, we will thus (a) point out succinctly two historical factors which may have affected Kant's naturalistic theory in his *Religion*, (b) deal with Kant's naturalistic transcendental method of religion in terms of his three *Critiques*, (c) do an analysis of Kant's naturalistic *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, and (d) offer some remarks on the possible influence of Kant's naturalistic *Religion* and religion on the traditional Christian religion today, before a brief conclusive remark is drawn.

I.

Two Historical Factors affecting Kant's Naturalistic Theory of Religion

In this section, we briefly describe two major historical factors which seem to have substantially affected Kant's naturalistic theory of *Religion*.

2.1 Kant's Post-Rem Solution of the Problem of Universals

No thinker can ever avoid the Problem of Universals (POU). Indeed, "a philosopher's commitment to a particular solution of the problem of universals determines his entire philosophical system."¹⁵ Just as statesmanship is said to count on using large maps, it is hoped that our understanding of Kant would be expanded by situating his general theory of religious thinking in the history of Western

¹⁴ Kant's life and writings can be found in the author's previous paper on Kant, i.e., "Awakening from the Kantian Anti-supernatural Slumbers", *Fu Jen Religious Studies*, no. 8 (2003.12) pp. 195-198.

¹⁵ R.G. Miller, "Universals", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, v.14, 1967, ed. W. McDonald. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967) p. 455.

philosophy as regards the POU. Simply, the POU is the-one-and-the-many problem. "The term universal, derived from the Latin *universalis* (*unum versus alia*, one against many), signifies a unity with reference to some plurality. Unlike the singular, which cannot be communicated, the universal is by definition something that is communicated or communicable to many."¹⁶ We often encounter countless things, relations or properties, like trees, friendships and wisdom, etc. And as soon as we begin to ask if there is an ideal, eternal, mind-independent model or form for each of these things, relations or properties, we begin to encounter the POU.

In the history of Western philosophy, there are generally three major schools of thinking as regards the POU:¹⁷

1) The *ante rem* (before thing) realism of Plato (427-347 B.C.E.) asserts that there is indeed one real ideal, eternal, mind-independent form or prototype for each thing, relation or property, but it exists in the suprasensible, transcendent realm, eternally independent of our mind and things happening in the sensible world. A prominent thinker of *ante rem* realism is St. Augustine who thinks that truth and true moral values are conformities to God's word or mind in which various eternal ideal forms or models can be found. Universals are, hence, to be discovered by us.

2) The *in re* (in thing) realism of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) denies the existence of any real, eternal form or archetype of things, relations or properties in the suprasensible realm, but believes that the existence or reality of such ideal forms is to be abstracted from

¹⁶ E. Synan, "Universals", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 452.

¹⁷ Cf. R. E. Hennessey, "Universal", in: *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion*, vol. O-Z. Eds. P. K. Meagher, T. C. O'Brien, and C. M. Aherne (Washington, D.C.: Corpus, 1979) pp. 3613-1614.

concrete, singular things in the present sensible realm. An important thinker who well integrates Aristotle's *in re* realism with Plato's *ante rem* realism is St. Thomas Aquinas who thinks that the eternal forms or prototypes of things, relations or properties in God's mind can be to a significant extent abstracted from or found in God's creation.¹⁸

3) The *post rem* (after thing) nominalistic anti-realism of William of Ockham (1300-1350), traceable to the Sophists in ancient Greece, thinks that universal is only an empty name with no reality, disclaiming, therefore, the existence of any eternal or ideal form anywhere. A history-making subscriber is Kant who regards both the whole supernatural realm and any eternal mind-independent form as impossible to know. At the same time, he regulates the *a priori* existence of certain mind-dependent universals or transcendental categories for his theory of knowledge. "Since, for Kant, mathematics and physics are composed of necessary and universal propositions while sensible experience lacks universality and necessity, the conditions of universality and necessity must, he felt, be imposed by the mind."¹⁹ Further, he postulates the existence of universals such as God, the soul and immortal world for a practical theory of ethics in his *Religion*. "Understanding does not obtain its a priori laws from nature, it prescribes them to it".²⁰ In general, Kant's naturalistic religion consists in that religious truth and its ethical standards are conformities to the natural and *post-rem* rationality of the human mind.

¹⁸ Cf. E. Synan, "Universals", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 454.

¹⁹ E. Synan, "Universals", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 455.

²⁰ *Ibid.* This quote is taken by Synan from Kant's *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, 2.36, 18-20 (*Ibid.*).

If the history of Western philosophy were largely divided by three major periods, the Ancient Greek Period was characterized by the struggles among the above three camps. The Judaeo-Christian Medieval Period was dominated by Sts. Augustine and Thomas as mentioned. Apparently, the Modern-and-Post-Modern Period since the 16th century has been dominated by the naturalistic, nominalistic and *post rem* anti-realism of Ockham, Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), etc.

2.2 Kant's Copernican Revolution in the Age of Science and Reason

The radical naturalistic theory of religion of Kant ----- who is called "the summit and culmination of the Enlightenment"²¹ ----- seem to have been culturally rooted in the humanistic, rationalistic and scientific forces sprung up ever since the Renaissance (c. 1440 - c. 1540).²² Known also as the Age of Reason, and hence of natural Science too, the Enlightenment is the historical era characterized by the emergence of progressive and liberal ideas that led to the French Revolution and remained influential in Western philosophy. Increasing scientific knowledge at the same time also gave rise to the development of empiricist, naturalist, and materialist doctrines against the traditional supernaturally-revealed Christian religion and its clergy.²³ This spirit expressed itself most emphatically in a new

²¹ Karl Jaspers, *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²² Cf. Stuart Hampshire, *The Age of Reason* (New York, NY: Mentor Book, 1956); Richard Osborne, *Philosophers for Beginners* (New York, NY: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1992) pp. 59-100.

²³ Cf. Antony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, Revised Second Edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979) p. 106).

and extravagant belief in the naturalistic use of human reason. Such a movement was especially critical and negative towards the authority of the Church which had, among other things, unscientifically rejected the heliocentric theory of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) and his famous disciple, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). By and large, these were some revolutionary facts radically affecting the naturalistic nature of Kant's religious theory.

Kant's Copernican Revolution consists in that, just as Copernicus "had explained the perceived movement of the heavens by the actual movement of the observer, so Kant explained the perceived order of the world by the actual order of the observer."²⁴ As mentioned, Kant's *post rem* anti-realism has dismissed the existence of any eternal, mind-independent universal both in the supernatural and natural realms. In theorizing the synthetic *a priori* existence of mind-dependent universals or transcendental categories, Kant demonstrates "that human observation of the world were never neutral, never free of priorly imposed conceptual judgments."²⁵ As a result, "science, religion, and philosophy all had to find their own bases for affirmation, for none could claim a priori access to the universe's intrinsic order."²⁶ While Copernicus's sun-centered theory replaced the traditional earth-centered (and hence man-centered) order with the sun (instead of man) as the center of the universe, Kant in one sense put man back to the center of the universe by virtue of the human mind's central role in configuring the world order. Bordering on extreme subjectivism, man was again at the center of

²⁴ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*. Understanding the ideas that have shaped our world view (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993) pp. 346-7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

his universe, but this was now only his universe, not the traditional objective universe of Aristotle and St. Thomas. Before Kant, in accordance with the Aristotelian-Thomistic mentality, there was objective reality. As human knowledge is subjectively constructed, there is now no objective but only subjective reality. Subsequent developments in the Western mind radically magnified that subjective relativism, increasingly clearing the grounds for subjective certainty still felt by Kant, ushering modernity into the black hole of postmodern relativism.

Without doubt, "Kant's penetrating critique had effectively pulled the rug out from under the human mind's pretension to certain knowledge of things in themselves, eliminating in principle any human cognition of the ground of the world."²⁷ Thus the true task of philosophy was to investigate the formal structure of the human mind, for only there would it find the true origin and sure foundation for certain knowledge of the world.²⁸ Indeed, the world which man perceived and judged was formed in the very act or process of his perception and judgment.²⁹ "The task of the philosopher was therefore radically redefined. His goal could no longer be that of determining a metaphysical world conception in the traditional sense, but should instead be that of analyzing the nature and limits of human reason."³⁰

As a result, our theory and hence method of religion has to be justified within the limits of human reason only, through our vigorous moral belief and action in the natural realm. "Kant just held that

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 347.

²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

although one could not know that God exists, one must nevertheless believe he exists in order to act morally. Belief in God is therefore justified, morally and practically, even if it is not certifiable.”³¹ Religiously, this as-if theory and method of Kant towards the supernatural realm lead us to act dutifully as if supernatural reality really exists. Supernaturally revealed religion, via Kant’s regulative conceptualism, is being lowered to natural or naturalistic religion. The existence of the whole supernatural realm is, therefore, conceptualized by Kant’s naturalistic theory of religion to serve man in this Kant’s Copernican Revolution.

II.

Kant’s Naturalistic Transcendental Method and His Three Critiques

As the very focus of metaphysical study, one may say that Kant’s Copernican revolution results in the 180-degree shift of the traditional object of metaphysics (i.e., the world out there) to the knowing subject and his or her faculty of knowledge (*Erkenntnistvermögen*) in his naturalistic Transcendental Method (先驗或超驗方法³²). As Gerald O’Collins and Edward G. Farrugia observe, after the skepticism championed by René Descartes (1596-1650), European scholars could no longer ignore the question about the knowing subject who asks and seeks to know, but are too

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

³² 參見：布魯格編著，項退結編譯，國立編譯館主編，《西洋哲學辭典》（台北：華香園出版社，1988）頁391。“**Transcendental Method** 先驗方法是研討形上學的一種方法。直至康德（Kant）止，西洋形上學一般以對象世界為主，康德則認為首先當研討認識行為成爲可能的主體條件，以認識的主體條件爲起點的哲學，他稱之爲先驗的，以這一方法爲起點去研討形上學，即係先驗方法”（同上）。

conscious of the possibility of being deceived. Then David Hume (1711-76) came along and rejected all knowledge which is neither analytical (tautological) nor experiential.³³ Human experience was indeed of the phenomenal in terms of sense impressions only; at the same time, there was no way to ascertain what was beyond the sense impressions, spiritual and metaphysical.³⁴ Synthesizing Hume's naturalistic empiricism and Descartes' subjective I-think-and-therefore-I-am rationalism, "Kant put metaphysics into question, in the sense that whoever makes claims concerning the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and its liberty must first inquire whether such an enterprise is at all possible. What we call 'external' reality may be shown to be (at least in part) the product of our mind."³⁵ Ever since, the traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics has been in decline, while the Humean-Kantian transcendental epistemological method for the study of metaphysics and religion, etc., has been on astronomical rise.

All in all, the naturalistic transcendental method used in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* can be traced as a logical product of Kant's three *Critiques*, i.e., *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *Critique of Judgment* (1790), plus his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). First of all, Kant's fundamental steering question for the *Critique of Pure Reason* is "How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible?" Consequently, the first *Critique* offers us a naturalistic theory of knowledge in the sensible realm, i.e., a system of synthetic

³³ Cf. Gerald O'Collins, S.J. and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J., *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1991) p. 247.

³⁴ Cf. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, p. 337.

³⁵ Gerald O'Collins, S.J. and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J., *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 247-248.

a priori judgments regarding our sensible transcendental elements on space, time and other categories. It includes a critical review of rational psychology, cosmology and theology. As "the most thorough and devastating of all anti-metaphysical writings"³⁶, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is divided into two parts: a) A Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, which analyses the two *a priori* (or pure) sources of human knowledge, namely our sense and understanding; and b) A Transcendental Doctrine of Method, which criticizes the use of pure reason beyond sensible experience³⁷. This book develops Kant's naturalistic theory and method of religion, stressing only our empirically experiential knowledge and its faculty, without touching upon our supernatural faculty and its mystical knowledge³⁸.

Following Hume's principle that "it is in the practical order that we shall find the ultimate sense of theoretical, and not vice versa"³⁹, the basic guiding question for the *Critique of Practical Reason* emerges: *How is it possible to make traditional religion and morality meaningful?*⁴⁰ Facing the existence of a conceptualistic God *ex machina*⁴¹, soul and immortal world which is impossible to prove by our sensible transcendental elements, i.e., by our only credible naturalistic means of verifying reality, Kant's answer ---- despite his

³⁶ W. H. Walsh, *Metaphysics* (London: Hutchison University Library, 1966) p. 38.

³⁷ Thomas Langan, "Immanuel Kant", *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, ed. Etienne Gilson, p. 414. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman K. Smith (Trow & London: Redwood Press, 1964).

³⁸ Cf. Henri Laux, "La raison mystique", *Archives de Philosophie* 63, Avril-Juin, 2000, pp. 123-127.

³⁹ Thomas Langan, "Immanuel Kant", *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, ed. Etienne Gilson, p. 436.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 435.

⁴¹ Cf. Theodore M. Greene, "The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant's Religion", p. lxiv.

admiring awe at the starry heavens⁴² ---- is to reduce religion naturalistically to moral actions. These practical acts are our response to the summons of our free will calling us to the categorical moral imperative: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law."⁴³ In Langan's word, "freedom is seeking to impose an order guided by the ideas of reason... in the practical sphere."⁴⁴ It is only natural that Kant turned the traditional Christian religion naturalistically into an ethics of vigorous morality towards others in his *Religion*.

Significantly, the *Critique of Pure Reason* offers Kant its transcendental method and helps him, among other things, to grasp the essence of religion naturalistically, in terms of the ethical practice in this world. At the same time, the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the earlier *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* show him how to regulate free will morally that "the inferences to God, freedom, and immortality may properly be based upon the moral experience",⁴⁵ as if God, the immortal soul and other supernatural metaphysical realities exist as some meaningful concepts. To mediate between "the phenomenal world of the theoretical understanding and the noumenal, practical world of will",⁴⁶ Kant puts forward his *Critique of Judgment*, defining *judgment* as "[t]he principle common to both theoretical and practical reason ... the act of unifying experience and idea."⁴⁷

⁴² Paul Guyer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 1.

⁴³ Thomas Langan, "Immanuel Kant", *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, ed. Etienne Gilson, p. 438; cf. Immanuel Kant, *Werke in Zwölf Bänden* VII, p. 140.

⁴⁴ Thomas Langan, "Immanuel Kant", *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, ed. Etienne Gilson, p. 441.

⁴⁵ Theodore M. Greene, *Ibid.*, p. li.

⁴⁶ Thomas Langan, "Immanuel Kant", *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, ed. Etienne Gilson, p. 440.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

Although "we cannot intuit objectively a purposiveness and order in things themselves ... [I]n feelings of the beautiful and the sublime we experience a harmony of our faculties, a union of the ideas of reason and the freedom of will which suggests through the phenomenon itself a deeper reality."⁴⁸ The *Critique of Judgment* thus furnishes Kant's *Religion* with the philosophy of feeling and the teleological argument. Although we can neither rationally prove nor disprove the teleological design of nature with dogmatic certainty, the transcendental *a priori* assumption of natural purposiveness and of the philosophy of positive moral feelings such as inner pleasure, sublimity and harmony are indispensable to our individual conscience in making moral judgment.⁴⁹ This pure naturalistic approach to religion and ethics is without question critical and helpful to individuals and groups who have no supernatural faith, but it is an anomaly to those who are supernaturally inspired and motivated.

III.

An Analysis of Kant's Naturalistic *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*

Having laid out some of the major factors affecting Kant's naturalistic theory and method of *Religion*, we will proceed to critique analytically the contents of Kant's *Werk* in light of this backdrop. However, let us first sum up the general contents of the book or the version which we use.

⁴⁸ Thomas Langan, "Immanuel Kant", *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, ed. Etienne Gilson, pp. 441-442.

⁴⁹ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated, with an introduction, by J. H. Bernard (New York and London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1966) pp. xvi-xxxv.

4.1 General Contents of Kant's Naturalistic *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*

In a nutshell, Kant's naturalistic *Religion*⁵⁰ engages itself judiciously in the problem and struggle between the good principle and the radical evil in human nature, reducing the book to a theory of "religion of ethics"⁵¹. The naturalistic theory and method may be justified by Kant's remark that "mysteries introduced into the catechism as though they were wholly popular, but which, ultimately, must first be transformed into moral concepts if they are to become comprehensive to everyone!"⁵²

Systematically, Kant's naturalistic *Religion* is divided into four books or major sections, each ended with a General Observation.⁵³ Book One is called "Concerning the Indwelling of the Evil Principle with the Good, or, On the Radical Evil in Human Nature".⁵⁴ It deals with I) the original, natural predisposition to good in human nature, II) the propensity to evil in human nature, III) man as evil by nature, and IV) the origin of evil in human nature.⁵⁵ Kant does so without the explicit help of the supernatural, "simply because in this realm all use of reason ceases"⁵⁶. It is true that Kant has quoted Scriptures quite a few times, but he seems to have focused only on its rational or rationalistic dimension, as he writes: "the calling to our assistance of

⁵⁰ The names of the different books or major sections are taken literally from the version translated by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson. See footnote 4 above.

⁵¹ John R. Silber, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's *Religion*", in: Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, *Ibid.*, p. lxxx.

⁵² Immanuel Kant, "Preface to the Second Edition", in: Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵³ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, pp. iii-v ff.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-49.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. iii.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

works of grace is one of these aberrations and cannot be adopted into the *maxims* of reason, if she [reason] is to remain within her limits.”⁵⁷

Book Two is called “Concerning the Conflict of the Good with the Evil Principle for Sovereignty over Man”⁵⁸. Divided into two sections, Section I concerns the legal claim of the good principle to sovereignty over man, whereas Section II is about the legal claim of the evil principle to sovereignty over man, and the conflict of the two principles with one another.⁵⁹ In the first section, Kant dismisses the supernatural legal claim of the personified idea of the good principle, i.e., the Son of God, to sovereignty over man, for “this idea as an archetype is already present in our reason. For only a faith in the practical validity of that idea which lies in our reason has moral worth”⁶⁰. Likewise, Kant dismisses in the second section the supernatural legal claim of “the prince of this world” (Jn 14:30), i.e., the devil, as the evil principle to sovereignty over man. Kant believes “that there exists absolutely no salvation for man apart from the sincerest adoption of genuinely moral principles into his disposition; that what works against this adoption is...as it is a certain self-incurred perversity...which lies in all men and which can be overcome only through the idea of moral goodness in its entire purity”⁶¹.

Book Three is called “The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle, and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth”⁶². Divided into two divisions, Division I deals with the philosophical

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-84.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. iv.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-138.

account of the victory of the good principle in the founding of a kingdom of God on earth, while Division II talks about the historical account of the gradual establishment of the sovereignty of the good principle on earth.⁶³ Using Scriptural terms, Kant is seeking at least on paper to replace the traditional revealed Christian faith with his so-called pure rational religious faith.⁶⁴ He calls the former "superstitious",⁶⁵ "historical" and "ecclesiastical"⁶⁶ and the latter "pure religion of reason",⁶⁷ "saving"⁶⁸ and "moral faith".⁶⁹ "Thus historical faith can become ecclesiastical faith (of which there can be several), whereas only pure religious faith, which bases itself wholly upon reason, can be accepted as necessary and therefore as the only one which signalizes the *true church*".⁷⁰

Book Four is called "Concerning Service and Pseudo-Service under the Sovereignty of the Good Principle, or, Concerning Religion and Clericalism".⁷¹ Divided into two parts, Part I concerns the Christian religion as both a natural and learned religion, and Part II concerns the clericalism and pseudo-service of God in a statutory religion, as well as the guide of conscience in matters of faith.⁷² Kant can only accept the Christian religion as a natural religion which is to be understood rationally and thereby "binding upon every man"⁷³. Kant regards Christianity as a learned religion which "relies

⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-110.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.105-106.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-190.

⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. iv-v.

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

upon history”⁷⁴ and can hardly be authenticated rationally.⁷⁵ Resenting supernaturalism, Kant believes that the “one true religion comprises nothing but laws...as revealed through pure reason... To deem this statutory [Christian] faith as essential to the service of God generally, and to make it the highest condition of the divine approval of man, is *religious illusion*, whose consequence is a *pseudo-service*”⁷⁶.

4.2 Kant’s Rational Conceptualistic Approach to the Supernatural Realm

Kant’s only aim in *Religion*, as Theodore Greene states, “is to discover how religion may be brought clearly and forcefully to the hearts of the people.”⁷⁷ In his honest philosophy, as regards the multicultural *milieu* of his time and his personal convictions, Kant had to reconcile pluralistically (or deal realistically), therefore, with⁷⁸: a) the age of Newtonian physics or naturalistic scientism believing only in the existence of reality which can be verified scientifically; b) the mechanic principle of empirical reality assuming nature as wholly explicable in terms of blind causal laws which exclude freedom; c) that the teleological concept of purpose or design, though scientifically incomprehensible, is an essential and adequate explanation of the universe; d) the absolute necessity of the existence of God and religion as the ultimate foundation for the philosophical

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷⁷ Cf. Theodore M. Greene, “Introduction,” in: Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960) p. xxxv.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. ix-lxxviii

principles of personal autonomy and morality; e) the evangelical pietism and the rationalistic deism of the *Aufklärung* or Enlightenment which attempts to break down the traditional authority and dogmatism of the Christian church on the one hand, and to strongly emphasize individual freedom, reason and the practical side of religion on the other; e) the importance to preach a gospel of toleration and freedom of conscience grounded rationally upon our inmost moral consciousness; and f) the hypocrisy and superstitious excesses of many Christians over supernatural reality. Besides, Kant "has intended all his writings on religion solely for scholars in the fields of philosophy and theology, whose right to independent thought on these subjects it is to the interest of the government to foster."⁷⁹

It is true that this naturalistic approach of Kant has served well the spirit of the Enlightenment, in solidarity with the scholarly valour and independent discovery among various academic communities. However, Kant would only help hasten the naturalistic demythologization of the entire supernatural realm down the next two centuries, in terms of his rational *post-rem* conceptualism as "*der Allzermalmende*" (the all-destroyer)⁸⁰. As regards (1) works of grace, (2) miracles, (3) mysteries, and (4) means of grace, "[t]hese matters are *parerga* to religion within the limits of pure reason; they do not belong within it but border upon it."⁸¹ "It is not essential, and hence necessary, for everyone to know what God does or has done for his salvation, but it is essential to know what man himself must do in

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xliii.

⁸¹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 47.

order to become worthy of this assistance.”⁸² “To go further than this is nothing but *Schwärmerei*, the indulgence in fanciful dreams.”⁸³ However empty, these supernatural *post-rem* concepts are regulative in the sense that once people realize their illusion, they would begin to accept Kant’s concept of “pure faith of reason.”⁸⁴ During the process of struggle between the good and the evil principles, “[w]hat is left, then, is essentially a religion of good works, in which virtue is loved for its own sake --- a religion of pure humanity”⁸⁵ in what Kant calls “the gradual transition of ecclesiastical faith to the universal religion of reason.”⁸⁶

4.3 The Gradual Transition of Ecclesiastical Faith to Pure Religious Faith

Without mistake, the above theme is part of a subdivision theme found in Book Three of Kant’s *Religion* entitled “The Gradual Transition of Ecclesiastical Faith to the Exclusive Sovereignty of Pure Religious Faith is the Coming of the Kingdom of God”.⁸⁷ If we take Kant literally, this concept is a very serious offence against the traditional faith and religion of the Christian Church. It is something which committed Christians cannot take lightly and just turn their attention away, although various authors tend to overlook this grave

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Theodore M. Greene, “Introduction,” p. lxii.

⁸⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 120.

⁸⁵ Theodore M. Greene, “Introduction,” p. xxii.

⁸⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 113.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105. This quote is the translation of the original German “*Der Allmähliche Übergang des Kirchenglaubens zur Alleinherrschaft des reinen Religionsglaubens ist die Annäherung des Reichs Gottes*”. Immanuel Kant, *Schriften zur Ethik und Religionsphilosophie*. Zweiter Teil (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1971) p. 777.

anti-Christian position⁸⁸.

Beginning from his pre-critical discussions of the supernatural realm, and continuing on in particular through his three *Critiques* and the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant's negative and destructive criticisms of the Christian ecclesiastical faith has reached their peak in the systematic layout of *Religion*. Accordingly, in Book One Kant "divided all religions into those who are *endeavors to win favor* (mere worship) and *moral* religions, i.e., religions of good *life-conduct*",⁸⁹ denouncing the former as practicing fanaticism, superstition, the illusion of the "adepts", and *thaumaturgy* as sheer aberrations of reason going beyond its proper limits.⁹⁰ In Book Two, Kant begins to deprecate or depreciate in doubts the objective reality of Christ as the personified idea of the good principle,⁹¹ stating that "a religion of mere rites and observances has run its course, and when one based on the spirit and the truth (on the moral disposition) is to be established in its stead, it is wholly conformable to man's ordinary ways of thought".⁹²

Explicitly, in Book Three, Kant expresses that the ecclesiastic faith should have the pure rational faith as its highest interpreter,⁹³ pointing out the gradual, inevitable transition of the ecclesiastic faith

⁸⁸ Cf. "Kant's Philosophy of Religion", in: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-religion>), p. 12, as regards "Kant's criticism of organized religion". Various 'interpreters see Kant as trying to mark off a defensible rational core of Christian belief, but offer differing judgments about the success of his efforts. Some evaluate these efforts as self-defeating, paving the way for a more radical denial of God such as Nietzsche's. Others see Kant articulating an account of the dynamics linking morality and religious belief that has positive value for a believer's reflective appropriation and practice of faith." (*Ibid.*)

⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 47.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-60.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-105.

to the exclusive sovereignty of pure rational faith as the coming of God's Kingdom. "In consequence, Kant articulates in Book Four some of his strongest criticisms of the organization and practices of Christianity that encourages what he sees as a religion of counterfeit service to God."⁹⁴ As W. H. Walsh sees it, "[t]he severity of Kant's criticisms on these matters, along with his rejection of the possibility of theoretical proofs for the existence of God and his philosophical re-interpretation of some basic Christian doctrines, have provided the basis of interpretations that see Kant as thoroughly hostile to religion in general and Christianity in particular."⁹⁵ In fact, Kant is so much against this ecclesiastical faith that he views its replacement by his pure religious faith as a victory of the good principle over the bad.

4.4 Kant's Naturalistic Faith and Reason

One may say that Kant's naturalistic *Religion* is Kant's intellectual masterpiece in spelling out his naturalistic conception of faith and reason which may be needed by non-believers and communities with no explicit supernatural belief. In direct opposition to the Pope's *Fides et Ratio* which seeks to reaffirm our supernatural faith and reason such that our confidence and love of God and His Christian Church may increase, Kant, in terms of his naturalistic version of faith and reason, seems to be promoting the exact opposite. Throughout *Religion*, Kant attempts to conceptualize and irrationalize our confidence and love of God as well as our ecclesiastical faith. In

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Cf. W. H. Walsh, "Kant, Immanuel: Philosophy of Religion", in: *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Volume Four. Paul Edwards (ed.) (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. & The Free Press, 1967) p. 322.

this way, his notion of the universal pure religion based on his naturalistic faith and reason may succeed in replacing the ridiculous Christian religion. In the struggle between the good and the evil principles, Kant first identifies the struggle as the free rational adoption or choice between a good and an evil maxim, "a *revolution* in the man's disposition (a going over to the maxim of holiness of the disposition)".⁹⁶ "[T]his change must be regarded as nothing but an ever-during struggle toward the better, hence a gradual reformation of the propensity to evil, the perverted cast of mind."⁹⁷

Knowing that religion is an immense force or influence to be reckoned with in such a struggle,⁹⁸ Kant proceeds to regulate religion according to his naturalistic rationalism. He, then, divides all religions into the empty-worship-and-favour-winning religions and the moral religions of good life-conduct as mentioned. To Kant who has dismissed the whole supernatural realm in terms of his naturalistic *post-rem* solution in the POU, his Copernican revolution and Transcendental Method, the supernatural ecclesiastical faith of the Christian religion is a resounding example of empty worship. As a religion of mere ritual observances, such a faith is superficial, irrational, deceptive, a repetition of things beyond your understanding and of doing nothing practical. Further, this "dogmatic faith, which proclaims itself as a form of knowledge, appears to her [i.e., reason] dishonest and presumptuous".⁹⁹ Besides, "to think that, through the gift of a really firm theoretical faith in miracles, man could himself perform them and so storm heaven --- this is to venture so far beyond

⁹⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 43.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-47.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

the limits of reason that we are not justified in tarrying long over such a senseless conceit”.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, “[t]o deem this statutory faith (which in any case is restricted to one people and cannot comprise the universal world-religion) as essential to the service of God generally, and to make it the highest condition of the divine approval of man, is religious illusion whose consequence is pseudo-service, that is, pretended honouring of God through which we work directly counter to the service demanded by God Himself.”¹⁰¹ Kant, therefore, seeks to replace this difficult-to-prove faith of the past which concerns merely the legality of acts without true morality with his own brand of saving, practical, pure religious faith. Historical faith may thus become ecclesiastical faith, whereas only pure rational religious faith can be the only one to represent the *true* Church.¹⁰²

IV.

Kant’s Critical Influence on the Traditional Religion

As Kant’s thinking is the watershed of modern philosophy, and whose naturalistic scientism and rationalistic humanism are still the immeasurably influential point of departure for the 21st century¹⁰³, it is impossible to list all the influences of Kant here. However, as a real vivid example of the vast Kantian impact upon the whole Christian Church, one may quote the modern demythologizing movement

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁰² Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Cf. “Immanuel Kant”, in: <http://www.friesian.com/kant.htm>, p. 6.

started by Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)¹⁰⁴ which has become widespread today among countless non-believers and believers, professors and students, clergy and lay alike¹⁰⁵. Characteristic of Kant's naturalistic *theory and method of religion*, this demythologizing approach to the traditional Christian religion tends to treat various supernatural realities like hell, devils, angels, the original sin, the virgin birth and the *real presence* (of Christ in the Holy Eucharist) as empty and conceptualistic, yet regulative and instrumental for ethical purposes..

As seen above, Kant even describes the gradual transition of ecclesiastical faith to the exclusive sovereignty of pure religious faith as the coming of God's Kingdom. "*Whatever, over and above good life-conduct, man fancies that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious illusion and pseudo-service of God.*"¹⁰⁶ This seems to be Kant's favourite axiom in distinguishing an irrational faith from its rational counterpart. Looking back, the naturalistic, demythologizing religious philosophy of the Enlightenment as represented and summed up so well by Kant in his *Religion and religion* has been a real problematic predicament in the history of the traditional Christian religion. Ostensibly, its unpleasant impact has substantially been felt in modern Europe and many parts of the world. As we know, countless Christians and even non-Christians today tend to approach the supernatural realm with a certain demythologizing

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Karl Jaspers and Rudolf Bultmann, *Myth and Christianity: An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion without Myth* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1958) pp. 1ff; cf. David Hume, *Hume on Natural Religion*, edited and introduced by Stanley Tweyman (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1966) pp. 1ff; cf. P. J. Cahill and J. Ryan, "Demythologizing," in: *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Second Edition, vol. 4, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale in association with The Catholic University of America, 2003) pp. 655-659.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. John Cheng, "Awakening from the Kantian Anti-supernatural Slumbers", pp. 193-225.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

interpretation, limiting religion within the limits of naturalistic reason alone. And when we talk about faith and reason, these two dimensions are largely reduced or limited to the naturalistic realm. Many, therefore, possess hardly any real faith in the traditional supernatural sense, let alone any true Christian mysticism¹⁰⁷.

On the other hand, as a theory of ethics, Kant's naturalistic philosophy of religion seem to have served quite well many of those who have either lost their traditional Christian faith or those without much supernatural faith or religion. Indeed, to the uncommitted and lapsed, the demythologizing and the rebellious Christians, Kant's *Religion* and religion might have been largely what is needed as an excellent guide of ethics in naturalistic religion. However, for those who take their supernatural faith seriously, the aforesaid, as a critical reflection on Kant's naturalistic *Religion* and religion, has to be made explicitly, in particular to those who do not wish their personal development of faith or religion to be limited within Kant's naturalistic reason alone.

V.

Conclusive Remark

In the final analysis, to those who are not aspired to the traditional Christian religion or any religion supernaturally revealed, Kant is no doubt a brilliant philosopher of the European Enlightenment as regards his superb ethical treatment of faith and

¹⁰⁷ According to the observation of Karl Rahner, S.J. (1804-1984), a well-known Catholic theologian for the renewal of the Church, the future Christian will either be a mystic or he (she) is not. Cf. Karl Rahner, "The Spirituality of the Future", in: *Theological Investigation*, vol. 20 (New York: Crossroad, 1981) p. 149.

reason in naturalistic religion as found in his *Religion* and religion. However, to those who are still believers in the traditional, supernaturally revealed religion like Christianity, Pope John Paul II, for instance, may be called an anti-Kantian prophetic genius who strives to put true supernatural *Fides* and sound non-naturalistic *Ratio* back together again at the turn of the third millennium, after their long naturalistic separation since the beginning of the Age of Science and Reason.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., and David Ruel Foster, "Introduction," in: *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et ratio*, p. ix.