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Review of Kant, God and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 462

Kant can often seem to have more in common with our secular age than with pre-enlightenment Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Luther. Think of his denial that we can know that God exists, of his rejection of organized religion in his personal life, of the priority he gives to human freedom and dignity over any supernatural authority. His philosophy is frequently seen as engaging in projects similar to our own, for example in giving an 'analysis of the discursive nature' of our cognition (Allison) or defending a form of phenomenalism (van Cleve). However, more recently some commentators have started to investigate Kant's theological commitments, for example Christopher Insole and Stephen Palmquist. In Kant, God and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn, Edward Kanterian offers a similar approach. He examines Kant's early work, up to around 1770, to demonstrate that Kant was firmly embedded in the eighteenth century, and especially in the German, broadly Protestant, philosophy of that age. During the period under investigation, Kant was almost obsessed with formulating (*a priori* and *a posteriori*) proofs for the existence of God. Additionally, before, and even after his so-called critical turn, Kant adopted a Lutheran 'motif of weakness', stressing the limits of man's reason, and conceding that there are some things humans cannot know. Further, Kant is repeatedly shown as influenced by Christian thinkers working within a typically Lutheran, Protestant or Pietist framework, and replying to thinkers in that tradition. For this reason, Kanterian challenges the common assumption that Kant is closer to us than to his own age.

The book consists of seven chapters. Chapter one begins with Erasmus and ends with Hume, thereby covering a span of more than 200 years. Here we are introduced to major philosophers and theologians prior to Kant, most of whom shared a broadly religious outlook. Chapter two deals primarily with Kant's most important early philosophical works, Universal Natural History (1755) and the New Elucidation (1755). The author demonstrates that the theological theme is at the centre of Kant's thought from the outset, since the former book offers a wide-ranging teleological proof for the existence of God (using and expanding upon Newton's cosmology), while the second book develops an a priori existence proof, based on modal considerations. Chapter three covers Kant's work just prior to The Only Possible Ground in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God (1763). These works deal very much with Leibniz and Newton. However, reference is also made to three figures whose relation to Kant is less often discussed, namely Pope, Spalding and Crusius. Again, the focus here is with Kant's theological commitments, especially on the question of 'optimism' much debated in the period, i.e. whether this is the best of all possible worlds, assuming it was created by a benevolent God. As it transpires in this chapter, and in fact is defended throughout the book, in his early decades Kant was driven by a 'reconciliation' project, attempting to develop a coherent system uniting Christianity, rational metaphysics and the new physics. Chapter four, by far the longest of the book, deals in great detail with The Only Possible Ground. This was, as Kanterian writes, 'the most important, systematic, far-ranging and ambitious of his works so far, indeed of anything he was to write prior to the first Critique'. A central topic here is Kant's updated version of his 'modal argument' for the existence of God (essentially the claim that for there to be possibility at all, something that 'grounds' all possibility must exist of necessity – God). Kanterian tries to formalize this argument using contemporary modal logic, taking, as a point of departure, a similar attempt offered by Allen Wood in 1978. Chapter five deals with the doubts Kant soon had not only about his modal argument, but generally also about rational theology and metaphysics. The works discussed here primarily concern the foundations of knowledge and metaphysics (and the relation of the latter to mathematics), rather than focusing specifically on God, as in the prior chapters. In chapter six, Kanterian

focuses on what he refers to as Kant's 'sceptical period'. Kanterian argues here that while 'from 1764 onwards, Kant often adopts a sceptical, anti-metaphysical tone', which finds its culmination in Dreams of a Spirit-Seer (1766), he remains nonetheless committed to the metaphysico-theological claims of the tradition. This is evidenced by numerous notes in Kant's Nachlass in the 1760–1770s, which Kanterian explores in the seventh chapter, before summarizing Kant's 'unfinished drama' in the epilogue. The scholarship of this book is impressive. The author discusses almost all of Kant's texts up to 1770, and many works after 1770, and interprets numerous passages of the Nachlass and lectures (including texts little discussed so far, e.g. Metaphysik Herder). The secondary literature includes many references to Kant's predecessors and contemporaries, and also to Anglophone and German Kant studies in the last 100 years.

A recurring theme in this book, and unusual in standard treatments of Kant, is the motif of 'fallenness' or 'weakness', which, the author argues in the first chapter, was a religious background assumption framing the thoughts of most thinkers from (at least) Luther to Kant. According to Luther, man is a 'fallen' creature, and his reason and will are both corrupted. The surprising consequence of this is that some of the things Luther says about metaphysics sound almost like Kant's critical verdicts, such as when Luther describes metaphysics as a 'misguided discipline' and 'a study of empty illusion'. We cannot, as fallen creatures, hope to know God, by appeal to our faulty reasoning. According to Luther, we should do away with futile speculation and take a practical turn instead, towards a lived faith. As Kanterian emphasizes, however, Luther was not entirely dismissive of reason; he appealed to it in disputes. But, he did not think that it is possible or useful to make 'theoretical sense of the mysteries of salvation and of God'.

One of Kanterian's main claims is that Kant is committed to the weakness motif as well. As he tries to show, Kant belonged, intellectually and by formation, to a broadly German-Protestant tradition of philosophy. He studied at the Pietist 'Collegium Fridericianum' in Königsberg, where two of his teachers, Schultz and Knutzen, were Pietist theologians. According to Kanterian, the 'young Kant appears to have studied carefully Knutzen's dissertation', in which 'the weakness motif arises out of [...] pious humility and the veneration of God's majesty'. There are remarkable analogies between the tone of religious exaltation in Knutzen and in the Universal Natural History (and even in the first Critique, cf. B650). Knutzen also discusses the problem of the cosmological antinomy, in the context of the contrast between God and his finite creation. Moreover, Knutzen was not the only one to combine theology with metaphysics. Many other German thinkers to whom Kant was exposed followed this line as well, for example Wolff, Baumgarten, Spalding and Crusius, all of whom receive extensive treatment in this book.

Even prior to The Only Possible Ground, we see Kant appeal to the motif of weakness. Kant's New Theory of Motion and Rest (1758), in which he argues against the notion of absolute rest, is said to 'tie in' with the weakness motif. According to Kanterian, 'this short text can be seen as an early attempt to reject the overly confident claims of rationalist metaphysics'. Additionally, in the 1762 essay, The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures, Kant asserts that: '[t]his is the fate of human understanding: either to be brooding and fall for spectres, or to snatch at objects much too great and build castles in the air'. As Kanterian explains, '[t]he former tendency is obsessed with forms and takes them for substances, the latter tendency overestimates the limits of our mind and advances claims about what cannot be known'. This suggests that the critical turn has its roots in the weakness motif, for the latter predisposed Kant to assume that there are things we are too limited to know. His doubts about

the speculative, 'overconfident' arguments of the rationalists, were in part doubts about the human condition in general. That he was nevertheless still trying to develop a rational metaphysics even during the 'sceptical' period (Kanterian cites evidence from the Nachlass) is not incompatible with this. Kant was simply caught between two different tendencies of humanity, the desire to obtain knowledge about ultimate things versus the nagging doubt about our own limits. Around 1770 he finally realized that there are deep reasons preventing us from developing rational metaphysics. The author offers a good deal of reasons to show that 'critical' philosophy has much older roots than commonly assumed, both in Kant's thinking and that of his predecessors. At the very least, we need to guard ourselves against too strict a distinction between the 'pre-critical' and the 'critical' system.

Some possible points of criticism arise with respect to Kanterian's attempt to formalize Kant's modal argument. First, we may wonder how his general hermeneutic project, i.e. locating Kant in his own age, fits with a reconstruction of his arguments by means of conceptual tools developed long after Kant. Of course, a possible reply could be that it was Leibniz, on whom Kant relies, who laid the foundations of modal logic. Therefore, hermeneutics and formalization are just complementary projects. But this may only work, if the formalization of Kant's modal argument is really just a re-articulation of its premises and conclusion, not a radical remodelling, that actually changes the proof, its premises and conclusion. And this brings us to the second point. For after a long series of attempts to formalize Kant's argument, the author actually concludes on a sceptical note: even the most sophisticated formalization of the argument (developed in an appendix) proves something much weaker than intended by Kant. Moreover, we are told, formalization might be doomed from the outset, because the super-general concepts involved in Kant's argument, e.g. 'all predicates', 'all possibilities', actually resist formalization. Why then try to press Kant into the straitjacket of our logic at all?

There are many other topics treated in this book, for example Kant's cosmology, his relation to Newton, Leibniz, Rousseau, his early ethics and aesthetics, his account of existence and necessity, etc. Its impressive scholarship and thought-provoking claims make this a must-read for anybody with an interest in Kant, his ideas and his age.