

STEPHEN R. PALMQUIST, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester 2016, pp. 640.

This recent *Commentary* (CCKR) on Kant's ground-breaking 1793/1794 book, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (RBBR) consists of two interwoven strands. The first strand is a careful analysis of the entire text of RBBR, which is presented by Stephen Palmquist in a thoroughly revised version of Werner Pluhar's 2009 translation (WP). In the *Commentary*, Kant's text is quoted in short snippets, ranging from one to about 30 lines of text: these block quotes are annotated with many footnotes, comparing Palmquist's revisions with Kant's German, Pluhar's original, and variant translations offered by the two twentieth century translators: George di Giovanni's 1998 translation (GG) for the Cambridge Edition of Kant's works; and Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson's 1934 translation (GH). A lengthy Glossary at the end of the book also guides readers into a deeper understanding of the nuanced meanings of Kant's terminology, especially his use of specifically religious terms. The second strand consists of one to three paragraphs of explanation and interpretation following each passage quoted from RBBR. In these comments, are restated the main point(s) that Kant makes in the quoted passage and then are discussed any interpretive uncertainties that are arisen in the secondary literature. There are also pointed out Kant's sources and various allusions he makes to biblical texts as well as to various theological, political, or cultural ideas or trends. By weaving together these two strands, CCKR offers an encyclopedic resource to which readers can turn for illumination on any given passage in RBBR.

In many ways the second strand of CCKR also serves as a summary and synthesis of Kant's philosophy of religion. A basic presupposition that characterizes the book is that Kant's overall philosophical system is thoroughly *perspectival*, its two main "standpoints", the theoretical and the practical, requiring a bridge or synthesis in the form of what is called the "judicial standpoint". One of the most important functions of RBBR is to fulfill this bridging function by making room for a religion that is *more than* just pure morality. It is presented in CCKR what we can call a theologically "affirmative" interpretation, which in many respects opposes the traditional (theologically negative) view of Kant's philosophy of religion as attempting to reduce all religion to mere morality and thus, in essence, to destroy historical religion altogether. In contrast to the latter reading, Kant's project is seen in RBBR as an attempt to *raise* morality to the level of religion, through which alone human beings can fulfill their basic moral nature.

This raising function of religion is key to understanding the title of *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. Kant's focus is on "bare" (*bloßen*) reason, not on "pure" (*reinen*) reason. In the second edition *Preface*, he compares rational and historical religion to two concentric circles, rational religion being the inner circle. Rather than claiming that reason (i.e., morality) alone is sufficient, Kant views rational religion by itself as *bare*, i.e., in need of clothing. This clothing comes in the form of religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals which (if functioning properly) illustrate and lead to the rational truths which they clothe. Such theological clothing is essentially theoretical, while the bare body of religion is practical; by showing how genuine religion synthesizes these two elements, Kant attempts to bridge his theoretical and practical standpoints, thereby filling a gap that would otherwise render his overall philosophical system incomplete.

Another way to explain the role that *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* plays in Kant's philosophical system is to say that it completes his answer to the question of rational hope.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR), Kant had posed the question: if I do what I ought to do, thus making myself worthy of happiness, then what may I hope? In *RBBR* Kant examines this question in a way that takes into account the exigencies of the human situation: given that I have fallen short of my moral duty (thus indicating that I am radically evil), how may I become worthy of happiness, and thereby have good reason to hope? *RBBR* provides Kant's answer in the form of a rational theory of individual conversion to a "practical faith" in an inward archetype of perfect humanity, and of communal cooperation in an "ethical community" through which individuals unite themselves in a common, divinely-guided effort to exhibit a genuinely good "lifestyle" (*Lebenswandeln*).

Kant's exposition in *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* revolves around two "experiments" (*RBBR* 6:12) that correspond to the two aforementioned concentric circles: first he outlines the rational system of religion; then he compares doctrines of Christianity to those of his rational system. Kant originally wrote the text of *RBBR* as four journal articles, which he intended to publish in *Berlinische Monatschrift* as a series of journal articles. The first essay appeared in 1792, but the second was blocked by the king's religious censor. Kant then quickly compiled all four essays together and published them as *RBBR*, calling each major part a "piece" (*Stück*), probably a subtle allusion to the work's controversial history.

In each of *RBBR*'s four Pieces, Kant presents an aspect of rational religion (radical evil, archetype/grace, invisible church, service of God) as the first experiment; then, as the second experiment, he compares relevant Christian doctrines (original sin, Jesus/justification, visible church/salvation, worship) to rational religion to see how well the historical doctrines fit as clothing for the bare body of rational religion. This clothing is needed because a weakness in human nature (i.e., our embodied nature) makes *bare* rational religion unattractive: without some historical instantiation of the bare doctrines of religion, we will feel powerless to improve our lifestyle. Kant therefore allows historical manifestations of such doctrines to serve as symbolic representations (clothing) for bare rational religion, thereby enhancing its viability for us.

This *Commentary* also assumes the position (defended in various earlier works by Stephen Palmquist), that the four Pieces that compose *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* follow the order of Kant's typical *architectonic system* of perspectives: they adopt the transcendental, logical, empirical, and hypothetical perspectives, respectively.

In this perspectival approach to Kant's philosophy: "Calling something 'transcendental,'... signifies for Kant a concern to identify a set of *boundary-conditions* that define necessary and universal features of a *perspective*; and this perspective is what *makes* an object 'real,' whenever it meets the conditions so defined. In *RBBR*, this object is the experience of religion itself. Adopting this perspectival strategy (related to the three *Critiques*), not only provides an effective way of resolving many of the apparent inconsistencies that trouble interpreters of *RBBR*, but also facilitates a plausible way of detecting when Kant is transitioning between his two experiments, i.e., between rational religion and his explicit discussion of Christian beliefs, symbols, and rituals.

The First Piece adopts the transcendental perspective in the sense that Kant there argues for a propensity to evil in human nature, and this serves as the necessary *condition* (or boundary marker) for the *possibility* of religion. Kant employs a quasi-transcendental argument for this evil propensity: the argument seeks to establish necessary conditions for what we actually experience; but it is not strictly *a priori*, as it depends on contingent features relating to human free will.

The steps of Kant's argument correspond to the section headings in the First Piece: any being with a predisposition to good (Section I) would need to *presuppose* the existence of a propensity to evil in order to explain how any evil action (or choice) would be *possible* (Section II); we *do* observe evil actions (or choices) in the world (Section III); so human beings must possess this propensity that therefore makes them radically evil (Section IV). Having explained the rational origin of the radical evil in human nature, Kant turns to the second experiment and examines the Christian doctrine of original sin; he claims that, as long as we understand it rationally (i.e., "as a transcendently ideal feature of human nature"), rather than as a theory about the historical origin of sin in time, this doctrine agrees with rational religion's teaching regarding radical evil.

The rest of *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* is Kant's attempt to demonstrate how we may overcome our evil nature and become good. The Second Piece adopts the logical perspective, in the sense that Kant there sets out the requirements for *understanding* and thus coping with the *transcendental conditions* marking the boundary of the religious system. The logical perspective in *RBBR* conveys Kant's model of grace, whereby the requirement for overcoming evil is to have practical faith in the "*logos*" (Word), described by Kant as "*das Werde!*" – a cryptic expression, which is translated as "the Become!" (*RBBR* 6:60). Kant's argument should be understood as an *ethics* of grace (not a *theology* of grace): he argues that, whatever theological formulation we may adopt, the result must be that our inward "conviction" (*Gesinnung*; see note 14, below) must conform to the archetype (*Urbild*) of morally perfect humanity that we find in human reason. Kant then turns to the second experiment and argues that Jesus and the Christian notions of grace and justification can be interpreted in ways that are appropriate clothing for the religion of bare reason.

Kant is concerned with human nature in general throughout *RBBR*, but his focus shifts midway through the book: *RBBR*'s first two Pieces examine how our common human nature influences the *individual's* moral development in general and the search for religious transformation in particular; in the Third and Fourth Piece, by contrast, Kant examines how our common human nature imposes upon us the duty to work together in *communities*, if we are to fulfill our moral predetermination (*Bestimmung*). In the Third Piece Kant adopts the empirical perspective in order to work out the actual requirements for completing the religious system. Kant's focus in the Third Piece is therefore on how historical forms of religion can manifest rational religion. In order to combat the evil principle in our nature, according to Kant, human beings must join together to build an *ethical community*, which must take the form of a church, inasmuch as the members can be unified in a non-coercive way *only* if they mutually appeal to the idea of God. Kant then turns to the outer circle, comparing the origins and nature of historical Christianity to the rational notion of the (invisible) church. This aspect is pointed out after the Third Piece, Division One, Section IV, where Kant presents the four requirements or "marks" of the true (invisible) church (*RBBR* 6:101-102). The next four sections explore, in turn, the deeper implications of these four basic conditions: Section V argues that historical faiths attain *universality* only by being grounded in pure rational faith; Section VI argues that practical reason (morality) must be the highest interpreter of all Scripture in order to protect the *integrity* (*Lauterkeit*) of the true church; Section VII shows how *freedom* must characterize the relations between church members as they seek to understand doctrines such as "sanctifying faith"; and Division Two illustrates how these four requirements must remain *unchangeable*, if the true church is going to avoid being corrupted. Just as Kant states in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* that only a transcendental idealist can be an empirical realist, so also his rational system of religion establishes a legitimate place (and indeed, the rational *need*) for historical religion.

Finally, Kant adopts the hypothetical perspective in the Fourth Piece by examining how the members of a church can attempt to serve God in either a true (hypothetical) or a false (speculative) way. He argues that true service of God consists of acts performed with the intent of obeying the moral law; non moral acts may count as *indirect* service of God, if they empower a person to become more moral. However, if non moral acts are elevated to the *status* of being directly pleasing to God, then church rituals end up defeating their own purpose; Kant calls this “pseudo-service”. Here we can see Kant as applying the logic of his Copernican hypothesis (as introduced in *CPR*’s second edition Preface) to the proper understanding of religious worship: far from denying the validity of historical religious traditions, he is arguing “that empirical religion may be a *necessary* means of propagating morality universally.” Kant intersperses discussion of his two experiments throughout the sections of the Fourth Piece, examining Christianity to show how it can promote the true service of God that is taught by rational religion (through a proper, *hypothetical* interpretation of its traditions) and how it nevertheless often ends up promoting pseudo-service instead (through an unjustified, *speculative* interpretation of its traditions).

In his *Commentary to Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, Stephen Palmquist suggests and defends new translations for about 50 of Kant’s most important technical terms, and he points out numerous sources that probably influenced Kant’s writing at various points. We can conclude this review by highlighting some of the most significant examples of these two types of new contribution.

The foregoing overview already notes several key terms that are re-translated in *CCKR*: “bare” replaces “alone” (GH) and “mere” (GG) for *bloßen* (see note 2, above); “piece” replaces “book” (GH) and “part” (GG) for “*Stück*” (see note 3); “lifestyle” better conveys the nuances of Kant’s *Lebenswandel*n than do the various expressions used by the other translators, such as “life-conduct” and “way of life”; when *Bestimmung* does not carry its usual meaning, “determining”, it is used “predetermination” rather than “vocation” (GH, GG, and WP), as this better expresses Kant’s view that our moral nature is not something we are free to choose or reject; for *Lauter(keit)*, it is used “ingenuous”/”integrity” rather than “pure”/”purity”, thus avoiding confusion with *reinen*; and *Gesinnung* refers neither to a metaphysical “disposition” (GH and GG) nor to a psychological “attitude” (WP), but to what religious people typically refer to as an inward *conviction*. Among *CCKR*’s other terminological innovations, four significant examples are as follows. *Schwärmerie* does not refer to any kind of “ism”, as does “fanaticism” (GH and WP), nor does GG’s alternative, “enthusiasm”, capture its potential to refer to *negative* as well as positive psychological states; instead, *Schwärmerie* is a form of psychological disturbance (bordering on a disease) that can be joyous or depressing and is thus best rendered as “delirium”. Translating *Seligmachung* and *Seligwerdung* as “sanctification” clarifies certain theological claims that otherwise remain obscure. *Gottesdienst* means “liturgy”, not the far too literal “service of God”. And *Glaubenslehre* means “dogmatics” in the classical theological sense; the usual “doctrine of faith” is also too literal. Palmquist defends these and numerous other conventions in *CCKR*’s Glossary. In translating such special terms, and in revising Pluhar’s entire translation of *RBBR*, two primary goals are consistency and accuracy in capturing the nuanced *religious* meaning of the special terms Kant employed in *RBBR*.

Of the various sources newly uncovered in *CCKR*, are pointed out the most significant discoveries relate to the many substantive differences between *RBBR*’s first (1793) and second (1794) editions. An entirely new discovery reported in *CCKR* is that in the second Preface Kant also praises a 1793 Latin work by Gottlob Christian Storr, which focused entirely on Kant’s philosophy of religion. Kant writes as if he had not had time to include responses to Storr;

but by carefully analyzing Storr's many citations to the specific pages where he criticized claims in *RBBR*'s first edition, it is demonstrated that several of Kant's 26 new footnotes in *RBBR*'s second edition are direct replies to Storr's criticisms.

Finally, Palmquist in his *Commentary* focuses significant attention on the role of the General Comments in Kant's religious system – what Kant calls “parerga” in *RBBR*'s second edition – showing how they are not merely optional extras, but examine crucial issues that anyone seeking to live a religious life must come to terms with. In each case, they pose dangers that Kant seeks to correct by re-interpreting the nature of religious experience. I argue that throughout *RBBR*, especially in these four appendices, Kant develops what I call a “Critical mysticism”: rather than discounting the legitimacy of all religious experience, he seeks to refine the way religious people understand their deepest experiences, so that they do not contradict the *limitations* of knowledge established in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. An important point to note here is that the second edition of *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* contains what seems to be a printer's error: in the first edition the First Piece had no General Comment; Kant added one (long) paragraph of new material to the second edition, putting it in small type and inserting it *after* Section V of the First Piece. However, the whole of Section V somehow ended up being renamed as the General Comment. This was probably a printer's error, because the arguments in Section V are constitutive of Kant's religious system, while those in the new paragraph are not; only the latter should count as the first General Comment.

ANDREA GENTILE

