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# Review of "Kant's Critical Religion" by Stephen R. Palmquist

Philip J. Rossi

Marquette University, [philip.rossi@marquette.edu](mailto:philip.rossi@marquette.edu)

three (objective) intentionalities (affection, cognition, volition)—this seems R.'s implicit position. Naming the objective of *te* the infinite (181) is interpretation, but since *te* does not come with a signature, all naming is interpretation. The horizon of being need not be infinite to allow beings to be relative and finite in reference to it. (R. prefers "indefinite horizon" to "infinite horizon.") R.'s best term and the book's title remains the *transcendent*. TE correctly emphasizes *experience*, for the transcendent agent of *te* gives *experience*, not understanding.

But can we invoke connaturality to ask how an invisible agent, capable of touching humans in this way, bestows *te*? Minimal transcendental conditions for *te*'s occurrence as consonant with connaturality are: the agent's *consciousness* (since what it communicates is consciousness of itself), *freedom* (*te* is beyond our control so the agent is at least more powerful than we), and *love* (since it bestows goods: peace and joy, inspiring desire and gratitude), none of which need be infinite. R. is sympathetic to the approach through connaturality but refrained from tackling the issue of the *nature* of the transcendent, content with the mere assertion, in ST, that we can prove the "existence of God," or, in TE, that believing in a Reality distinct from our human experience makes more sense than denying it. Connaturality requires only the transcendent, not the infinite, allowing us resonance with an agent attuned to our nature; we validly affirm the existence and nature of the agent of *te*, claiming nothing about gods or beings infinite, almighty, absolute. R.'s favorite word, *transcendent*, remains the best: the transcendent remains beyond (trans) our cognition and volition, while affective attunement between humans and the agent(s) of *te* makes its occurrence befitting, welcome, fulfilling. R. says (139) we are placed in a relationship of mediated immediacy resulting in a second immediacy above (trans) us; *te* could be explained as a second immediacy that includes an uplift, by the agent of *te* in the sense of an obediential potency. R.'s thesis is correct, but in calling the agent of *te* infinite it goes too far, and in not identifying the transcendent as conscious, free, and loving, it does not go far enough.

This is a remarkable book, based on solid phenomenology and following careful method; it employs correct theory and reaches valid, conservative conclusions. It should spark lively discussion and deserves careful study.

Marquette University, Milwaukee

ANDREW TALLON

KANT'S CRITICAL RELIGION. By Stephen R. Palmquist. Kant's System of Perspectives Series, vol. 2. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000. Pp. xiv + 560. \$99.95.

Palmquist's work—one part of an ambitious four-part project to interpret Kant's work as a "System of Perspectives"—displays impressive acquaintance with the full range of Kant's writings and engages much of the extensive English language commentary and interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion that has appeared during the last half-century. P. argues

correctly that Kant treats religion in general and Christianity in particular primarily as a sympathetic reformer rather than as the “all-destroyer” that Moses Mendelssohn called him. P. also rightly sees *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793) as an important systematic contribution to the development of Kant’s critical philosophy. He joins a list of recent commentators who have called attention to Kant’s treatise on Swedenborg’s *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766) as an important text in the development of Kant’s thought. Finally, he is quite right to give far more serious weight to Kant’s “architectonic” program for the critical philosophy than has been the case for most interpreters of the past century.

For the theological reader, one intriguing aspect of P.’s interpretation lies in its efforts to make Kant’s account of religion compatible with traditions of evangelical Protestantism that have frequently seen Kant’s critical project as hostile to Christian belief and practice. This is a challenging undertaking, considering that what Kant writes about the divinity of Christ and the theology of atonement in a text such as *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* seems to depart significantly from what has often been considered robust Christian orthodoxy. P.’s effort to show that “a *real* (though mysterious) God—not just an ‘idea’ of reason—is the central focus toward which every strand in Kant’s System points” (9) and thus to set forth a “Kantian Christianity” stands in ironic polar contrast to Gordon E. Michalson’s contention from a “post-liberal” theological position that the fundamental trajectory of Kant’s work comes to completion in atheism [*Kant and the Problem of God* (1999)]. These two studies, in their turn, stand in further contrast to the views of other interpreters (e.g., J. Collins, E. Galbraith, J. Mariña, G. Sala, R. Schaeffler, R. Sullivan) who, because they read Kant’s account of the human situation in terms that resonate more with Catholic than with Reformation construals of grace and creation, are less inclined to place his work unequivocally at either of these extremes. The quite different faces of Kant that emerge at the hands of these commentators suggest that deeply embedded theological presuppositions play a key role in shaping the interpretation and assessment of his philosophy and its impact.

There is other material of direct theological interest in P.’s treatment of what he calls “critical mysticism” (part 4, chap. 10) and in a number of the nine appendices. Some of these deal with standard topics in the interpretation of Kant’s treatment of religion: the proofs for God’s existence, evil, grace. More original is the discussion of Kant’s “critical hermeneutic” of prayer (app. 8) and P.’s inventive construction of 95 theses and a “critical catechism” in support of a “Kantian Christianity” (app. 9).

Despite these strengths, P.’s ingenious “System of Perspectives” seems more to get in the way of engaging Kant’s own texts and what he says about religion than it does to illuminate these matters. P.’s overarching concern to elaborate the critical project as thoroughly and systematically “perspectival” harmonizes too readily the ambiguities and deep tensions in Kant’s thinking about many important philosophical topics, including religion. Despite Kant’s own systematic ambitions and skills, he is too supple and

honest a thinker to stay fully tied to *any* framework he elaborates. I therefore suggest that P. organizes Kant's critical philosophy into a system that is considerably more complex with respect both to its planning and execution than the textual and historical evidence indicates. The diagrams and tables that P. offers to illustrate the interrelationship and organization of the various systematic elements of Kant's critical philosophy seem to be less on the mark than Onora O'Neill's pithy characterization of the constructive goal of Kant's system as a "modest cottage" over against the "lofty tower" that was the goal of rationalist metaphysics [*Constructions of Reason* (1989), 12]. The work of constructing this cottage, moreover, is considerably more untidy than P. would have us construe it; in fact, some of the most important philosophical and theological issues arise for Kant precisely as he recognizes and wrestles with that untidiness.

*Marquette University, Milwaukee*

PHILIP ROSSI, S.J.

### SHORTER NOTICES

[TORAH NEVI'IM U-KHETUVIM] = BIBLIA HEBRAICA LENINGRADENSIA: PREPARED ACCORDING TO THE VOCALIZATION, ACCENTS, AND MASORA OF AARON BEN MOSES BEN ASHER IN THE LENINGRAD CODEX. Edited by Aron Dotan. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Press, 2001. Pp. xxv + 1264. \$49.95.

Although the composition of the Hebrew Bible was complete by the mid-second century B.C.E. (at least in some circles), the oldest complete manuscripts of this Bible date to the late tenth/early eleventh century C.E. Of these, the manuscript housed in St. Petersburg, Russia (formerly Leningrad, hence the codex's designation) is the best known and is the basis for the widely used *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, its predecessors, and successor, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*.

As indicated by this work's subtitle, Ben Asher, a Masorete (transmitter of the traditional Hebrew Bible), was responsible for adding vowels, accents, and a variety of other marginal and interlinear materials to a text that had hitherto been written with consonants only. The process by which such materials were gathered by Ben Asher and then added to this manuscript is extraordinarily intricate, requiring a sure eye, steady hand, and great dedication.

This same rare combination of qualities is required of anyone who would

seek to interpret Ben Asher's efforts. Aron Dotan, preeminent Masoretic scholar based at Tel Aviv University, is just the person to accomplish this task for today's scholars and students. For over three decades, he has published major studies on this manuscript in particular and on the Masora in general. To accomplish this, one must be able to read and distinguish between marks (often very small) on the manuscript that reflect Ben Asher's work and those that result, for example, from a millennium's handling of the increasingly fragile vellum pages that make up this medieval treasure.

And that is just the beginning of D.'s task. He needed to make literally thousands of individual decisions on how to interpret and present the evidence from the manuscript in the accessible printed edition he produced. D. also decided that his edition would be suitable for Jewish ritual use, a decision that necessitated the exclusion of considerable materials found in the manuscript itself, the inclusion of other data not found there, and the standardization of several textual phenomena important for contemporary synagogal usage.

Given the complexity of the task and the disparate audiences D. endeavors to address, it is not surprising that his ambitious enterprise has been subject to all sorts of criticisms. At the same time, it