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KANT'S *RELIGION* AND PRUSSIAN RELIGIOUS POLICY*

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Since Dilthey's template study of 1890, the Prussian state's attempt to censor Kant's religious writings has typically been seen as the work of a reactionary politics bent on imposing religious orthodoxy as a bulwark against the spread of Aufklärung. *This essay offers a revisionist interpretation, arguing that the attempted censoring was a by-product of a set of a long-standing* Religionspolitik *designed to achieve religious toleration through a system of regulated public confessions. Reaffirmed in the Religious Edict (1788) and the Censorship Edict (1788), Prussian policy required acceptance of a plurality of public confessions whose stability was preserved through the restriction of public proselytizing and the acceptance of private religious freedom. In breaking with this religious settlement, through their public advocacy of a true "religion of reason", the Protestant religious rationalists of the theological* Aufklärung *breached the embargo on public proselytizing, leading eventually to government's attempt to censor Kant's own "pure moral religion".*

INTRODUCTION

On 4 October 1794 the Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant received a royal order declaring that in his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* and associated writings he had "abused his philosophy for the purpose of distorting and disparaging several principal and fundamental doctrines of Holy Scripture and of Christianity". Given Kant's "duty as a teacher of the young" and considering the king's well-known governmental objectives, this conduct was irresponsible and must cease forthwith.[1] This was Kant's second brush with the authority of the Prussian state. The first had come in June 1792 when the second of the essays that would be collected in the *Religion* had been rejected by the government's Immediate Examination Commission, where he had chosen to

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1 I. Kant, *Kants Werke: Akademie Textausgabe* (Berlin, 1902–), 6. Hereafter cited as *AK*.

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send it.[2] The proximate context for these events was provided by the issuing on 9 July 1788 of a "Special Edict by his Royal Prussian Majesty concerning the Religious Constitution of the Prussian State", generally known as the Prussian Religious Edict or the Wöllner Edict, after its immediate author, Johann Christoph Wöllner, the head of the government's department of religion. As we shall see in more detail below, the edict was dedicated to maintaining the legally ordered system of religious confessions, and to preventing particular forms of theological innovation and proselytizing, to the extent that these threatened the confessional balance. This edict was followed on 19 December 1788 by a "Renewed Censorship Edict for the Prussian States exclusive of Silesia", which reaffirmed the variegated arrangements for vetting Prussian-published printed works, as these had been laid down in prior edicts of May 1749 and June 1772.[3] There was probably no strict legal requirement for Kant to send the first two essays of the *Religion* to the Examination Commission, as these were initially written as articles for J. E. Biester's *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, and censorship of journals was generally assigned to universities, not the Superior Consistory for which the commission was acting (at the king's insistence). Kant's motive in going out of his way to seek the vetting of works which he knew courted attention for religious innovation is the first uncertainty of several that mark this historical episode.

Uncertainty, however, is not a characteristic of the way in which this set of events has been understood by philosophers and philosophical historians. The terms of the dominant modern interpretation were set by Wilhelm Dilthey's template study of 1890. Treating the issue as an unambiguous clash between the progress of scientific reason and an obscurantist church and state, Dilthey writes as if the historical significance of the edicts lay in the fact that a particular philosopher would fall foul of them. According to Dilthey, by uncovering the rational moral core of biblical Christianity, Kant had reconciled the long-standing conflict between science and positive religion, allowing the latter to be seen as the historical husk from which a "pure religion of reason" would emerge. Those who framed and enforced the Religious Edict, with its prohibition on public religious innovation, were simply perpetuating humanity's self-incurred immaturity and

2 The Examination Commission, directed by G. F. Hilmer and J. T. Hermes, was "immediate" in the sense of being directly responsible to the king, having been established by Frederick William II in May 1791 as a result of the perceived laxness of the Berlin Superior Consistory in vetting rationalist religious publications.

3 The full texts of the Religious Edict and the Censorship Edict are given as appendices to Dirk Kemper's invaluable collection of *Streitschriften* dedicated to the edicts. D. Kemper, ed., *Mißbrauchte Aufklärung? Schriften zum preußischen Religionsedikt vom 9. Juli 1788* (Hildesheim and New York, 1996).

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blocking the path to *Aufklärung*.[4] The longevity of the terms set by Dilthey's study is shown by the fact that they continue to inform Allen Wood's General Introduction to the Cambridge University Press edition of Kant's writings on *Religion and Rational Theology*, part of the new standard English edition of Kant's works. Declaring that "The conservatives argued that public order required that the masses be taught a religion which is doctrinally uniform and orthodox, pure of subversive rationalistic glosses", Wood concludes that "Kant's enlightenment principle . . . that all individuals have not only a right but a moral duty to think for themselves, obedient to the universal principles prescribed to them by their reason, thus seemed to the conservatives like a recipe for civil anarchy".[5]

We can identify three central assumptions informing this widely shared view of the events.[6] First, it is assumed that a state is only justified in making laws which could have been prescribed by the people themselves, acting in accordance with rational principles. If, as Dilthey and Wood claim, the Religious Edict was attempting to impose orthodoxy for reasons of state independent of such principles, then it may be regarded as anti-enlightenment and, indeed, illegitimate. Second, it is assumed that Kant's rational-theological writings were neither a direct intervention in concrete religion nor themselves instances of positive theology, representing instead the philosophical *Aufklärung* of historical religion and theology, through the rational recovery of the a priori principles of a universal moral religion. Finally, it is assumed that the core figure of Kant's philosophical theology—his conception of the progressive hermeneutic refinement of a rational morality from the historical and doctrinal husks of biblical Christianity—can be applied reflexively to Kant's own encounter with the Prussian state's censorship regime. This allows Kant to be seen not just as a philosopher advancing a doctrine regarding the unfolding of reason in history, but as the veritable temporal personification of a priori reason. The attempt to censor him will thus be regarded as marking the point at which the rational *Aufklärung* encountered the constricting 'husks' of a state and church dedicated

4 W. Dilthey, "Der Streit Kants mit der Zensur über das Recht freier Religionsforschung", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 3 (1890), 418–50.

5 A. W. Wood, "General Introduction", in A. W. Wood and G. di Giovani, eds., *Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge, 1996), xviii–xix.

6 For other studies sharing these assumptions to different degrees, see P. Schwartz, *Der erste Kulturkampf in Preussen um Kirche und Schule (1788–1798)* (Berlin, 1925); K. Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ, 1966); F. C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); G. di Giovanni, "Translator's Introduction", in Wood and Giovani, eds., *Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology*, 41–54; and T. P. Saine, *The Problem of Being Modern, or, The German Pursuit of Enlightenment from Leibniz to the French Revolution* (Detroit, MI, 1997).

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to man's merely empirical governance. Not the least remarkable effect of these assumptions is that the Religious Edict floats free of its particular historical role in enunciating Prussia's religious constitution, appearing simply as a generic conservative reaction against Enlightenment reason.

There are, however, significant counter-currents to the standard interpretation which, were they to coalesce, would amount to a major revision of our understanding of the Religious Edict, the North German or Protestant *Aufklärung* itself, and the historical significance of Kant's brush with Prussian censorship. There are two main research tendencies to be noted. In the first place, there is a scholarship which situates the edict not in the history of philosophy but in a history of the Prussian state's long-standing efforts to pacify and govern its fractious confessional communities.[7] In treating the edict as an instrument aimed at the controlled religious toleration of the public confessions, this approach turns Kant's near-censoring into the unintended and peripheral by-product of a broad and long-standing Prussian *Religionspolitik*. Further, by recovering the religious focus of the North German *Aufklärung* itself—its fundamentally Protestant rejection of sacramentalist "superstition", its fears of Catholic proselytizing, its violent public arguments over the degree to which sacramental Protestantism could or should be turned into a rational natural religion—this research has begun to transform the standard Kantian view of an *Aufklärung* grounded in the free individual use of universal reason.[8]

Secondly, while less developed and more diverse than this historical contextualization of the edict, there is a significant body of scholarship that is sceptical of the standard view of Kant's philosophical theology; that is, the view

7 See O. Hintze, "Die Epochen des evangelischen Kirchenregiments in Preußen", in G. Oestreich, ed., *Otto Hintze: Regierung und Verwaltung* (Göttingen, 1967); more recently, H. Rudolph, "Oeffentliche Religion und Toleranz: Zur Parallelität preußischer Religionspolitik und josephinischer Reform im Lichte der Aufklärung", in P. F. Barton, ed., *Im Zeichen der Toleranz: Aufsätze zur Toleranzgesetzgebung des 18. Jahrhunderts in den Reichen Joseph II.* (Vienna, 1981), 221–49; and K. Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland: Religion, Politik und Gesellschaft vom Ende der Aufklärung bis zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1995), 13–36.

8 Among the works providing insight into the religious character of the North German *Aufklärung* are K. Aner, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit* (Halle, 1929); J. Schmidt, "The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelssohn and the *Mittwochgesellschaft*", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989), 269–91; J. Schmidt, "What Enlightenment Was: How Moses Mendelssohn and Immanuel Kant Answered the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30 (1992), 77–101; W. Sparn, "Vernünftiges Christentum: Uber die geschichtliche Aufgabe der theologischen Aufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert in Deutschland", in R. Vierhaus, ed., *Wissenschaften im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Göttingen, 1985), 18–57; and S. Lestition, "Kant and the End of the Enlightenment in Prussia", *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993), 57–112.

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of it as a philosophical reflection on positive theology whose transcendental or a priori character detaches it from concrete religious commitments and entanglements.[9] While some of this scholarship has located the religious dimension of Kant's philosophical theology in his long-marginalized positive metaphysics,[10] other work, some of it indicative of Catholic re-engagement with the arch-Protestant philosopher, has focused on relocating Kant in the context of positive theological debate.[11] The present writer has contributed to this revisionist scholarship by approaching Kant's moral and religious philosophy as a "way of life"—in the manner of the descriptive histories of religion and philosophy undertaken by Peter Brown and Pierre Hadot—thereby focusing on the role of Kantian anthropology and spiritual exercises in a certain practice of "spiritual grooming".[12] Despite its diversity of approach, this second body of scholarship allows us to call into question the standard separation of Kant's philosophical theology from positive confessional theology, showing how Kant's *Religion* and associated writings can be approached as a positive theological intervention in the concrete religious culture of late eighteenth-century rationalist Protestantism.

If the first body of revisionist work leads us to question whether the Religious Edict was as unenlightened as it has appeared in the standard account, then the second is beginning to indicate that Kant's philosophical theology might be quite far removed from his official conception of *Aufklärung*, as the free use of reason in accordance with universal principles. Thus far, these two lines of scholarship have largely run parallel, despite their evident historical and methodological affinities. In this essay I offer a sketch of how they might be brought into convergence, so that the Religious Edict, seen as a public-law instrument for the management of religious peace, might provide a new context for Kant's theology, now seen as an unsettling public intervention in a concrete religious and political culture. I shall begin by outlining a revisionist account of the Religious Edict

9 The founding study for the sceptical view remains J. Bohatec, *Die Religionsphilosophie Kants in der "Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft": Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer theologisch-dogmatischen Quellen* (Hamburg, 1938).

10 M. H. Chang, *Die Einheit der Wirklichkeit: Kants Gotteslehre in metaphysischer Perspektive* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996).

11 P. J. Rossi and M. Wreen, eds., *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered* (Indianapolis, 1991); F. Ricken and F. Marty, eds., *Kant über Religion* (Stuttgart, 1992); J. P. Lawrence, "Radical Evil and Kant's Turn to Religion", *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 36 (2002), 319–35; J. Baur, "Philosophie im Ausgriff auf konkrete Religion: Kants Umgang mit dem Topos 'Orthodoxie'", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 39 (1997), 191–203.

12 I. Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2001), 274–363; *idem*, "The Morals of Metaphysics: Kant's *Groundwork* as Intellectual *Paideia*", *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2002), 908–29.

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as a representative instance of Prussian "enlightened absolutist" *Religionspolitik* (Section I), then move on to a sketch of Kant's philosophical theology as a rational religious intervention in the volatile North German religious *Aufklärung* (Section II), before concluding with some remarks on the historical significance of Kant's religious and political metaphysics in the context of the Prussian religious settlement (Section III).

I. THE RELIGIOUS EDICT AND THE NORTH GERMAN *AUFKLÄRUNG*

We can begin by clearing up some of the more evident misunderstandings regarding the edict and its relation to the religious *Aufklärung*. The standard view, as represented in Wood's Cambridge introduction, treats the edict as an attempt to enforce religious orthodoxy for the purposes of social control, hence as a measure that was bound to repress the *Aufklärung*, understood as the free use of reason in religious matters. Several rather evident features of the edict, however, make the wide acceptance of this view puzzling.

In the first place, there can be little doubt that rather than attempting to impose an orthodox religion, the edict's central concern was to maintain the plurality of confessions that had been recognized by Imperial public law—in the Westphalian Treaty of Osnabrück (1648)—which formed the historical basis of state religious toleration in Prussia.[13] Article 1 of the edict thus commands that "all three main confessions of the Christian religion, namely the Reformed, Lutheran and Roman Catholic, should be maintained and protected in their prior condition, in accordance with the severally declared edicts and orders of our blessed predecessors, remaining in force in all our provinces". Article 2 then extends this same protection to the "sects previously publicly tolerated in our states": the Jewish nation, the Herrnhutter, the Mennonites, and the Bohemian Brethren.[14]

We can further observe that the edict was not directed against the religious freedom of individual citizens. In fact, it stipulates repeatedly that citizens have the right to believe what they like in private, and should not be hindered from changing their public religion of choice, although they should inform the authorities of this "in order to avoid all inconveniences in civil relations" (Article 3). The edict, however, does restrict the freedom of the official clergy of the public confessions, who are required to teach the articles of the faith defining the religious office into which they were ordained. Yet the clergy too are free to believe what they like as private citizens, with the proviso that, should the strength of their personal beliefs interfere with their ordained public preaching,

13 Hintze thus characterizes the measure itself as a *Toleranzedikt*. Hintze, "Epochen", 83.

14 Kemper, *Mißbrauchte Aufklärung*, 227.

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they should relinquish their office (Article 8). Of course, this kind of private religious freedom will not measure up to the Kantian conception of unfettered communication between intellectual beings; yet it is a form of freedom nonetheless. In fact, alongside its statist toleration and regulation of the public confessions, the edict maintains a negative religious liberty, in the form of the right to free private belief and to be left alone in the public religion of one's choice. The political rationale for this religious policy is made clear in Article 2:

> In addition [to the three main confessions] the Prussian state should further maintain the prior specific toleration of the remaining sects and religious parties, and at no time visit on any person the least compulsion of conscience; so long as each quietly fulfills his duties as a good citizen of the state, keeps any particular opinions to himself, and takes care not to spread these or convert others to them, making them err or waver in their faith. As each man has to care for his own soul, so he must be able to act quite freely in this regard; and in our opinion a Christian Regent has only to see to it that the people are instructed by teachers and ministers in genuine Christianity, true and unfalsified, thus giving each the opportunity to learn and take [this] up for themselves. Whether or not a subject wishes to make good use of this generously offered opportunity for belief, must remain at the completely free disposal of his own conscience.[15]

Despite emerging earlier and having a more secure constitutional basis than in either France or Britain, religious toleration in Brandenburg-Prussia had never been based in Lockean freedom of conscience. It emerged in fact from two sources of a quite different kind: firstly, from the ruling dynasty's inability to impose its own (Calvinist) confession as a state religion, owing to the resistance of the powerful Lutheran estates;[16] and secondly, from the public-law provisions of the Treaty of Osnabrück, which required signatory states to maintain a particular territorial distribution of confessions, initially as this had stood in the *Normaljahr* of 1624.[17] Unlike Locke's scenario, in the Prussian context the chief threat to toleration came not from the state but from the confessions themselves, which saw the territorial distribution as an artificial restriction of their God-given right to preach and convert. This helps to explain why Brandenburg-Prussia's leading "civil philosophers"—Samuel Pufendorf and Christian Thomasius—had

15 Ibid.

16 For an account of this, see B. Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia, PN, 1994).

17 See *Instrumentum Pacis Osnabrugenses*, article V, § 1, in W. G. Grewe, ed., *Fontes Historiae Iuris Gentium* (Berlin, 1988), 193–4. For the Imperial public-law religious order, see M. Heckel, "*Itio in partes*: Zur Religionsverfassung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation", in Klaus Schlaich, ed., *Martin Heckel Gesammelte Schriften: Staat, Kirche, Recht, Geschichte* (Tübingen, 1989), 2:636–736.

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grounded private religious freedom not in the subjective right of individuals but in the state's refusal to enforce confessional imperatives, particularly in such areas as the legal prosecution of witchcraft, heresy, and blasphemy.[18]

It is this dual structure of Prussian religious policy—the combination of regulated toleration of the public confessions and freedom of private belief—that holds the key to understanding what it was about the wave of religious rationalism that triggered the Religious Edict. In this context it was not *Aufklärung* (understood as the free use of universal reason) that concerned Wöllner and the government, but something quite different: proselytism. Proselytism infringed both sides of Prussian *Religionspolitik*. On the one hand, it threatened the legally sanctioned order of public confessions, which formed the basis of religious pacification and toleration in Prussia. All Prussian governments saw this public order of confessions as the key to maintaining religious peace.[19] This explains why the edict reacts not only to clandestine missionary activities undertaken by the confessions, the Catholics in particular (Article 4), but also to the preaching of rationalist Protestant churchmen, whose deviation from the Augsburg Confession can be so great that they are in effect attempting to convert their flocks to a new kind of religion (Articles 7 and 8). On the other hand, conversion activities of either kind were also a threat to the private liberty of conscience promised by the state to its citizens: that is, to their freedom to be left undisturbed in their chosen public confession or else in complete religious privacy (Article 3). Here it was the rationalists who proved particularly problematic. By demanding that individuals justify their civil and religious convictions on inner rational principles, the rationalists flew in the face of the Prussian state's long-standing doctrine that, as citizens, individuals should have to account only for their external conduct while, as Christians, their convictions were a matter of faith, not reason. It is possible to suggest, then, that the religious *Aufklärung* drew the negative attention of the edict not for championing rational freedom but as a new source of proselytism, threatening to undermine both the public religious settlement and the private religious liberty of citizens.

The first thing to observe in this regard is the manner in which the edict characterizes the religious *Aufklärung*, namely, as a cover for a group of intellectual movements that had penetrated confessional Protestantism in a sectarian manner,

18 See M. J. Seidler, "The Politics of Self-Preservation: Toleration and Identity in Pufendorf and Locke", in T. J. Hochstrasser and P. Schröder, eds., *Early Modern Natural Law Theories: Contexts and Strategies in the Early Enlightenment* (Dordrecht, 2003), 227–55; and K. Haakonssen, "Protestant Natural-Law Theory: A General Interpretation", in N. Brender and L. Krasnoff, eds., *New Essays on the History of Autonomy: A Collection Honoring J. B. Schneewind* (Cambridge, 2004), 92–109.

19 See in particular the revealing discussion in Rudolph, "Oeffentliche Religion".

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bent on making converts to the "religion of reason": "One is not ashamed to again resuscitate the miserable and long-refuted errors of the Socinians, Deists, Naturalists and other sects, and to spread these in a brazen and shameless way among the people under the utterly misused name of *Aufklärung*" (Article 7). For the purposes of the edict, these overlapping doctrines would have been broadly understood, with Socinianism signifying the (unitarian, anti-sacramentalist) treatment of Christ as a non-divine moral teacher, deism indicating the relegation of revelation and biblical miracles in favour of a rationally known impersonal divine principle, and naturalism the doctrine that scientifically known natural laws were sufficient for understanding all things, including man's moral nature and its perfection. Deeply indebted to the anthropology and perfectionism of Leibnizian–Wolffian metaphysics, religious rationalism covered a wide cultural spectrum in a variety of forms. It reached all the way from the secret societies, where this metaphysics was taught as an esoteric knowledge to the *illuminati*,[20] across radical rationalists like Carl Friedrich Bahrdt,[21] to the "liberal" Protestant theology of the neologians, who used it to transform sacramental religion into perfectionist moral anthropology.[22]

In this light, the religious rationalism of the North German *Aufklärung* must itself be seen as a concrete theological intervention in the Prussian religious settlement. The edict's strictures against it thus cannot be understood as an attempt to restrict the free use of universal reason in order to defend theological orthodoxy. Rather, in prohibiting rationalist attacks on biblical revelation and on the key sacramental doctrines of Christ's atonement and reconciliation, the edict was designed to prevent the conversion of multi-confessional Christianity, understood as a public religious system, into the non-sacramental ethical religion of a particular cultural faction. In attempting to maintain a minimal sacramental Christianity, the edict was not enforcing (as Wood claims) a "doctrinally uniform and orthodox" religion, for its fundamental historical-political premise was that doctrinal agreement on the articles of faith was impossible; rather, it was maintaining the sacramental basis of the pastoral work performed by multi-confessional religion in its role as popular pedagogy. It is true that the edict declares the duty of a Christian prince to be to "maintain and protect from falsification the Christian religion . . . in its high dignity and original purity"; but this appearance of orthodoxy quickly gives way to pluralism for, as the sentence continues, this is religion only "as it is taught in the Bible and in accordance

20 See M. Mulsow, *Monadenlehre, Hermetik und Deismus: Georg Schades geheime Aufklärungsgesellschaft, 1747–1760* (Hamburg, 1998).

21 For a helpful introduction to Bahrdt, see C. F. Bahrdt, *The Edict of Religion and History and Diary of My Imprisonment*, ed. J. C. Laursen and J. van der Zande (New York, 2000).

22 See Aner, *Theologie der Lessingzeit*; and Sparn, "Vernünftiges Christentum".

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with the conviction of each confession of the Christian church as prescribed in its particular credal books". In this way, it continues, "the poor people would not be exposed to the falsehoods of the modish teacher, so that millions of our good subjects would not be robbed of their tranquility in life and their comfort on the deathbed, and so be made unhappy" (Article 7).

We may next observe that this attempt to suppress public religious rationalism was not the result of a late eighteenth-century backlash against the Frederician Enlightenment. In fact, it represented a policy that began with the public emergence of religious rationalism during the seventeenth century and had continued sporadically ever since. In 1693, for example, F. W. Stosch was arrested and called before a Brandenburg Royal Commission for publishing the *Concordia rationis et fidei* (1692). Drawing on a mixture of Socinian, Hobbesian, Spinozist and deist doctrines, Stosch was an ardent religious rationalist who denied Christ's divinity, rejected the reality of miracles and of hell, and affirmed that the Bible should be read allegorically, as an attempt by primitive peoples to understand a God who is in effect pantheistically (or metaphysically) identified with the cosmos.[23] In responding to the complaints of the Lutheran clergy against Stosch, the commission—whose members included Philip Spener and Samuel Pufendorf—reacted in accordance with the Prussian religious settlement: they suppressed publication of the book and then quietly restored its author to his former civil rank and entitlements as privy secretary to the court.[24] When, in 1699, the man who would become Pufendorf's most famous translator and glossator, Jean Barbeyrac, was charged by Berlin's Huguenot Consistory with spreading Socinianism at the French Collège, he was dealt with in a similar way. A commission of the Brandenburg Privy Council found him guilty of heterodoxy and banned him from lecturing on theology, yet refused to countenance the consistory's demand for excommunication, ruling instead that he could continue to teach philological subjects "as a learned and worthy man".[25] In both cases the Prussian authorities maintained their policy of restricting public dissemination of doctrines deemed harmful to the legally sanctioned confessional order while permitting freedom of private belief. Little, apparently, had changed during the reign of the *aufgeklärt* Frederick II, whose minister for religious affairs, Baron von Zedlitz—also tagged "the enlightened"—applied the same policy to Johann

23 F. W. Stosch, *Concordia rationis et fidei*, ed. W. Schröder (Stuttgart, 1992).

24 For more see D. Döring, *Frühaufklärung und obrigkeitliche Zensur in Brandenburg: Friedrich Wilhelm Stosch und das Verfahren gegen sein Buch "Concordia rationis et fidei"* (Berlin, 1995).

25 S. C. Othmer, *Berlin und die Verbreitung des Naturrechts in Europa: Kultur- und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zu Jean Barbeyracs Pufendorf-Ubersetzung und eine Analyse seiner Leserschaft* (Berlin, 1970), 72–4.

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August Starck (in 1776) and Johann Heinrich Schulz (in 1783), prohibiting them from the public dissemination of their radical religious rationalism, to which they were quite free to adhere in private.[26] In short, without doubting Wöllner's personal animus against the *Aufklärer*, the edict he framed did little more than continue Prussia's long-standing policy of inhibiting religious rationalism from undermining the confessional balance, although this was becoming ever more difficult.

Lastly, we may suggest that the political ambivalence of the edict—the combination of public religious toleration and suppression of religious rationalism as a species of proselytism—is confirmed by the fluidity of ideological positions in the furious debate that broke around it. It is not surprising that opposition to the edict was led by religious rationalists such as Pierre Villaume and Gottlieb Hufeland, one of Germany's first Kantian law professors. Like the proponents of the standard modern view, many of whose arguments they already supply, these rationalists ignored the edict's separation of public religion and private belief, accused it of attempting to impose theological orthodoxy, and insisted that public institutions must reflect the truth of the individual's inner rational convictions; even if this meant—as Hufeland proclaimed—that there must be as many religions as there are rational convictions.[27] At the same time, however, the edict was defended by some Catholics who regarded it as reaffirming their position as a legally tolerated minority and who shared the fear of rationalist proselytism.[28] Even more significantly, the edict found an articulate defender among the religious rationalists themselves, in the person of Johann Semler, a leading "neologian". Semler argued that rather than attempting to impose a single true theology, the edict was a public-law instrument for maintaining the plurality of public confessions; yet he also argued that Lutheran clergy, like those of other confessions, should teach their own faith as if it were true.[29] We will return to Semler's sophisticated response below. For the moment, it is enough to observe that the edict could indeed find support among the religious rationalists, at least among those who accepted that transcendent truth could only be pursued within

26 Schmidt, "What Enlightenment Was", 98.

27 G. Hufeland, *Ueber das Recht protestantischer Fürsten unabänderliche Lehrvorschriften festzusetzen und über solchen zu halten veranlasst durch das Preußische Religionsedict vom 9. Julius 1788* (Jena, 1788); [P. Villaume], *Freimüthige Betrachtungen über das Edict vom 9. Julius 1788 die Religionsverfassung in den Preußischen Staaten betreffend* (Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1788).

28 [N. Reders], *Apologie aus katholischen Grundsätzen des siebenten und achten Paragraphes des weisen Religionsediktes König Friedrich Wilhelms von Preussen, wider . . . versteckte Deistische, and Socianische Proselytenmacher* (Halberstadt, 1790).

29 J. S. Semler, *Verteidigung des Königl.[iches] Ediktes vom 9. Jul. 1788 wider die freimüthigen Betrachtungen eines Ungenannten* (Halle, 1788).

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the security envelope of a public-law confessional system grounded not in truth but social peace.

We are now in a position to indicate a revised interpretation of the Prussian Religious Edict, which, I suggest, we are no longer entitled to regard as the instrument of a reactionary state intended to suppress the free and enlightened use of reason by imposing religious orthodoxy. In place of this view we can begin to see the edict as an instrument re-enforcing a long-standing public-law balance of confessional religions, at the heart of which lay not the imposition of orthodoxy but the separation of public religion from private belief. In this regard, the edict can itself be seen as representative of a particular kind of *Aufklärung*, namely the civil or political *Aufklärung* associated with so-called "enlightened absolutism".[30] The prime objective of this measure was not repression of individual heterodoxy but maintenance of the system of multi-confessional toleration through which the Westphalian treaties had established a pacifying distribution of confessional communities within and among states. Prussian *Religionspolitik* had operationalized Westphalian Imperial *jus publicum* through the sophisticated dual strategy of public policing of the confessional borders accompanied by acceptance of free private belief. Both sides of the strategy testify to the Prussian state's desacralization, in the sense of its civil neutralization of theological truth and political rejection of an established church. The edict's official endorsement of a multi-faith Christianity should thus be seen in terms of the state's maintenance of the confessional system for the purposes of national pastoral pedagogy.

What the champions of unfettered religious reason chose to ignore—and what their modern counterparts choose to forget—is that this confessional balance was under continual threat of destabilization. Outside Prussia, in Austria and several southern German cities and territories, this threat resulted from the re-Catholicizing activities of a church that had never formally accepted the Westphalian religious settlement.[31] Inside Prussia, it arose from abiding interconfessional hatreds, which surfaced not just in Protestant sectarians but also in the

30 See Rudolph, "Oeffentliche Religion", 248. Similarly, important new research by Michael Sauter promises to shake the usual view of Wöllner—as an anti-enlightenment religious reactionary—showing that, despite his Rosicrucianism and opposition to rationalist religious doctrines, this official was in many regards a typical representative of the civil enlightenment, dedicated to social, cultural, and economic reform. See M. J. Sauter, "Visions of the Enlightenment: The Edict on Religion of 1788 and Political Reaction in Eighteenth-Century Prussia" (PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2002); M. J. Sauter, "Visions of the Enlightenment: Johann Christoph Woellner and Prussia's Edict on Religion of 1788", in H. Blom, J. C. Laursen, and L. Simonutti, eds., *Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Public Good* (forthcoming); and M. J. Sauter, "Preaching, a Ponytail, and an Enthusiast: Rethinking the Public Sphere's Subversiveness in Eighteenth-Century Prussia", *Central European History* (forthcoming).

31 Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums*, 21–30.

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champions of the religious *Aufklärung*, whose anti-sacramentalist commitment to rational truth could itself lead to intolerance. J. E. Biester, for example, the *Aufklärer* who championed Kant's religious philosophy and published it in his *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, also published a vehemently anti-Catholic diatribe against certain Prussian towns which had been allowing Catholics to worship in Lutheran churches.[32] Without doubting Wöllner's personal animus against the *Aufklärer*, it remains the case that there was good reason for the government to treat proselytism—religious and rationalist—as a threat to the stability of the confessional balance on which the religious settlement depended. The strictures against proselytism were designed to ensure that the rival confessions tolerated each other.

How credible, though, is the edict's view of religious rationalism as itself a form of proselytism? After all, how could the advancement of doctrines grounded in a universal human reason have anything in common with the induction of converts into a kind of faith? Yet it was not just Wöllner who regarded the rationalists as sectarians; so too did Semler, when he criticized them for exalting the deliverances of inner reason over doctrines to whose public teaching they were committed by an oath of office. Semler's scepticism regarding the rationalists' claims for the free and universal character of individual reason allows us to pose a different kind of question: What if access to the kind of universal reason championed by the rationalists were itself dependent on induction into doctrines closely related to the theology of confessional religion? This is the question that we shall explore with regard to Kant's rational theology. If Kant's philosophical theology is not clearly distinct from positive theology in the relevant regard—that is, in being grounded in universal a priori reason rather than in statutory doctrines—then it, too, might be regarded as a form of proselytism, this time for the "pure religion of reason".

II. KANT'S PURE RELIGION OF REASON

Modern treatments of Kant's religious writings as works of pure philosophy—grounded in universal reason, and unindebted to positive theological doctrine—all rely on arguments to this effect that were developed by Kant himself. Kant's arguments revolve around the claim that his conception of God is modeled on human reason (rather than vice versa) and, as such, is a properly philosophical

32 J. E. Biester, "Falsche Toleranz einiger Märkischen und Pommerschen Städte in Ansehung der Einräumung der protestantischen Kirchen zum katholischen Gottesdienst", *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 1 (1784), 180-92. The *Monatsschrift* provides strong evidence for a continuity between the offical anti-Catholicism of an anti-ritualist Protestant religion of conscience and the de facto anti-Catholicism of the anti-sacramentalist rationalist *Aufklärung*, Kant included.

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conception: "But where do we get the concept of God as the highest good? Solely from the idea of moral perfection that reason frames a priori and conjoins inseparably with the concept of a free will".[33] This claim, however, is anything but transparent, and neither was it disinterested. It is not transparent, for we shall see that Kant's conception of human reason is itself indebted to a long-standing metaphysical conception of God—as the divine intellect capable of creating the intelligible forms (noumena) that it intuits—which functions as a positive doctrine in a practice of spiritual self-cultivation. Further, in the more immediate context with which we are concerned, the claim served a clear strategic interest. Kant believed that if he could convince the Königsberg theology faculty to declare his religious writings to be philosophy rather than theology, then he would not have to accept the judgment of the Immediate Examination Commission, and could seek an altogether friendlier vetting by the philosophy faculty of the University of Jena. In the event, this proved to be a wily way of evading Prussia's unwieldy censorship arrangements.

In seeking to raise Kant's religious philosophy above the domain of historically transmitted doctrine, modern defenders wish to elevate their own normative approach to this philosophy over the historical treatment of it as a characteristic expression of North German religious rationalism. The core of this defence lies in the claim that Kant's philosophy of religion does not constitute a positive theology because it is grounded in the recovery of the a priori or transcendental dimension of moral reason, meaning that it is not dependent on the inculcation of particular metaphysical doctrines and is in principle open to anyone who consults their own reason.[34] This claim can be elaborated in various ways. Allen Wood, for example, locates Kant's God among his Ideas of Reason, which places the divine being beyond the empirical understanding in a domain of pure intellection, yet keeps him as an object of reason rather than of statutory doctrine.[35] Claus Dierksmeier also grounds Kant's transcendence of positive theology in the Prussian philosopher's reflection on the limits of human reason. According to Dierksmeier, such reflection reveals that the noumenal domain—understood in terms of divine intellection and the existence of a universe of pure rational beings—is both beyond human (theoretical) understanding, yet remains available as the "standpoint" of a "noumenon religion" from which to

33 I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in M. J. Gregor, ed. and trans., *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1996), 63 (*AK* 4:408–9).

34 For a general argument to this effect, see O. O'Neill, "Within the Limits of Reason", in A. Reath, B. Herman and C. M. Korsgaard, eds., *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls* (Cambridge, 1997), 170–86.

35 A. W. Wood, "Kant's Deism", in Rossi and Wreen, eds., *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, 1–21.

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undertake moral judgment and action.[36] All such accounts rely on the fundamental conception of a community of intelligible beings capable of pure intellection and willing—the "kingdom of ends in themselves"—in which human beings participate because they are partly rational, even if also partly sensuous creatures. Like Kant himself, his modern defenders thus argue that in making this community of rational beings central to his "pure moral religion" or "pure religion of reason", Kant was not propagating a positive theological doctrine, but reflexively manifesting the transcendental-rational kernel of all such doctrines. This means, of course, that the Prussian state had no business lumping him in with the other proselytizers.

This defence, however, prompts a disarming question: If the figure of the community of intelligible beings was not just another positive doctrine—propagated and inculcated by a particular sect or school—then how are we to account for its dissemination and uptake? Kantians—from Kant himself through to modern American Kantians such as Wood, Rawls and Korsgaard—have answered this question in a remarkably uniform manner. They argue that all individuals are led to this figure of thought because humans simply *are* sensuously affected rational beings, which means that all must experience the inner conflict between their participation in rational willing and the distractions of their sensuous inclinations.[37]

There are two broad grounds for questioning the adequacy of this answer, however. In the first place, an extensive scholarship shows that the figure of *homo duplex*—divided into a rational intellect capable of spontaneous participation in divine reason and will, and a sensuous nature that mires humanity in the world of space, time and utility—was the core anthropology of German university metaphysics. This figure of thought was introduced into the German monastic and academic system by Albert the Great,[38] carried into early modernity by post-Reformation Protestant scholasticism,[39] secularized in Leibniz's monadology,[40]

36 C. Dierksmeier, *Das Noumenon Religion: Ein Untersuchung zur Stellung der Religion im System der praktischen Philosophie Kants* (Berlin, 1998), 5–9.

37 See C. M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge, 1996), 30. For further strikingly similar formulations see Kant, *Groundwork*, 100 (*AK* 4:453–4); J. Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy", in E. Förster, ed., *Kant's Transcendental Deductions: The Three Critiques and the Opus postumum* (Stanford, CA, 1989), 498; A. W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge, 1999), 8–11; and Dierksmeier, *Noumenon Religion*, 77.

38 B. Thomassen, *Metaphysik als Lebensform: Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Metaphysik im Metaphysikkommentar Alberts des Grossen* (Münster, 1985).

39 M. Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1939); W. Sparn, *Wiederkehr der Metaphysik: Die ontologische Frage in der lutherischen Theologie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1976).

40 H. Heimsoeth, "Atom, Seele, Monade: Historische Ursprünge und Hintergründe von Kants Antinomie der Teilung", in *Studien zur Philosophie Immanuel Kants II: Methodenbegriffe*

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and refurbished by Kant as the anthropological underpinning of his moral and religious philosophy.[41] Of course, the fact that it was propagated and inculcated in the schools does not by itself show that the figure of the noumenal community was simply the positive doctrine of a "school philosophy"; although our second consideration takes us much closer to this conclusion.

Secondly, then, a major line of inquiry in the history of philosophy leads us to view such moral anthropologies as *homo duplex* not as reflexive recoveries of a universal moral identity, but as instruments of self-problematization preparatory to particular kinds of self-cultivation or spiritual grooming.[42] Seen in this light, the role of the *homo duplex* figure is to induct those exposed to it into a particular way of relating to themselves, namely, as beings capable of pure rational intuition and self-governance but distracted by sensuous inclinations and desires. Transmitted to university students via accounts of the limits of the human understanding and will—in comparison with a divine mind and "holy" will—this way of relating to the self is designed to induce a particular kind of self-dissatisfaction: how galling that my capacity for pure moral willing should be corrupted by my sensuous inclinations. This induced metaphysical pathos is in turn the stimulus to a work of intellectual self-refinement, imagined in terms of transcendence of the lower sensuous self and participation in the community of rational beings.[43] The result is the spiritual grooming of the metaphysician, culturally recognized as a personage whose inner rational self-purification has given him access to the "higher" noumenal standpoint of a being no longer mired in the world of space, time and sensuous interests.

Needless to say, this was not the only way of relating to the self or seeking to transform oneself in accordance with a particular stylization of the ethical life. Early modern Epicureans, for example, taught that man was fundamentally a creature of his passions; that all appeals to rational intellection or willing were dangerous illusions; and that the best such a creature could hope for

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der Erfahrungswissenschaften und Gegensätzlichkeiten spekulativer Weltkonzeption (Bonn, 1970), 133–247; B. Jasinowski, "Leibniz und der Ubergang der mittelalterlichen in die moderne Philosophie", *Studia Leibnitiana* 4 (1972), 251–63; and Mulsow, *Monadenlehre, Hermetik und Deismus*.

41 Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments*, 52–8, 98–102, 279–316; and Hunter, "The Morals of Metaphysics".

42 The literature is large and diverse. For an introduction and overview see P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. M. Chase (Oxford, 1995); and M. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. R. Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1985).

43 See, for example, Kant, *Groundwork*, 101 (*AK* 4:454–5).

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was to restrain his most vicious passions and seek a quiet life.[44] There are thus good prima facie reasons for treating Kant's figuration of *homo duplex* as simply one among several moral anthropologies competing for cultural space in early modern Germany; hence for treating the "pure moral reason" arising from this figure as the product of a particular ethical culture, universal only in name and aspiration. To the extent that the metaphysical anthropology of *homo duplex* was oriented to cultivating a form of reason capable of some kind of participation in divine reason—even if only in the form of willing in accord with a universe of intelligible beings—then it may be understood as a theology. This theology is positive rather than philosophical because "universal reason" is that to which one aspires as a result of being inducted into the doctrines permitting this intellectual culture, not that which permits one to adopt the doctrines rationally. Finally, as the product of a metaphysical culture formerly responsible for the spiritual grooming of the theological elite, this rationalist theology was inevitably controversial when secular philosophers used it to claim a higher metaphysical insight than that available within the biblical-sacramental theology of the confessions. This is the conflict that lay at the heart of the philosophical and theological debate over the North German Protestant *Aufklärung*.

Seen in this light, Kant's religious philosophy is just what the advocates of its purely philosophical character say it is not: a competing positive rationalist theology, grounded in its own anthropology and spiritual discipline, and oriented to transforming existing sacramental theologies and forms of worship. Two broad observations regarding his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* and associated writings will lend weight to this changed viewpoint. First, we may observe that Kant's religious philosophy consists of what might be called metaphysical simulations of the central Christian mysteries: specifically, original sin, Christ's vicarious atonement, salvation and reconciliation with God. Consider in particular Kant's treatment of the doctrine of Christ's vicarious atonement for humanity's sin. This doctrine had been a bone of particular contention between naturalist *Aufklärer* and sacramentalist theologians, with the former denying on principle that any person could fulfill another's moral duties, and the latter insisting on the need for supernatural grace in order to redeem a nature that was corrupt and incapable at its root. In addressing this problem in the second of the essays that he sent to the Immediate Examination Commission—"Concerning the battle of the good against the evil principle for dominion over the human being"—Kant performs a characteristic dialectical outflanking manoeuvre, by accepting both that vicarious atonement is morally impossible and that man's nature is radically evil. He then "transcends" the conflict by treating

44 For further discussion see D. Kimmich, *Epikureische Aufklärungen: Philosophische und poetische Konzepte der Selbstsorge* (Darmstadt, 1993).

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the biblical Christ as a symbol of the pure noumenal being within everyone. This noumenal being is the ideal of goodness, biblically understood as "humanity pleasing to God". In experiencing the pain of going over to this ideal, the "Old Man" in us becomes a "New Man", so that each person in effect atones for himself and saves himself through an act of transcendent moral self-regeneration.[45] Given this metaphysical simulation of vicarious atonement, we can conclude not only that Kant's religious philosophy was grounded in a positive historical doctrine—centrally, in the anthropology and noumenal standpoint of university metaphysics—but that this philosophy took the form of a concrete intervention in a religious-cultural conflict in which Kant himself was a combatant.[46]

The second observation to make is that Kant's philosophical theology was elaborated via a specific metaphysical hermeneutics. If the Bible treats Christ as the real historical incarnation of God, rather than as a symbol of our noumenal inner selves, that is because it was written for the infancy of mankind, when the sensuous side of *homo duplex* was dominant, and crude historical narratives were required to render the noumenal domain visible. Now though, in late eighteenth-century Protestant Germany, it was possible to provide a rational interpretation of the Scriptures, whose content turns out to be Kant's own metaphysical simulation of the Christian mysteries. This hermeneutics is presented in terms of the winnowing of the sensuous historical husks from the Bible's inner noumenal core, leading to the revelation of Kant's "pure moral religion" to an enlightened humanity. In other words, in a remarkable sectarian *coup de main*, Kant situates his own metaphysical hermeneutics not just as one source of morally improving biblical interpretations, but as the single authentic revelation through which the world of noumenal beings discloses itself in time, in the form of his own "pure religion of reason". Kant thus understands his hermeneutic purification of historical biblical Christianity as heralding the translation of the noumenal community into history and into the "public" domain, giving the true meaning of the biblical promise regarding the building of God's kingdom on earth:

> The basis for the transition to the new order of things must lie in the principle of the pure religion of reason, as a revelation (though not an empirical one) permanently taking place within all human beings . . . We have reason to say, however, that "the Kingdom of God is come into us", even if only the principle of the gradual transition from ecclesiastical faith to the universal religion of reason, and so to a (divine) ethical state on earth, has put

45 I. Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, in Wood and di Giovanni, eds., *Religion and Rational Theology*, 103–17 (*AK* 6:60–78). Cf. W. Sparn, "Kant's Doctrine of Atonement as a Theory of Subjectivity", in Rossi and Wreen, eds., *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, 103–12.

46 For a similar argument see Baur, "Philosophie im Ausgriff auf konkrete Religion".

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down roots universally and, somewhere, also in public—though the actual setting up of this state is still infinitely removed from us.[47]

We should not underestimate the cultural significance of Kant's metaphysical hermeneutics in the context of the Protestant religious *Aufklärung*. By seeking to make his hermeneutics central to German university metaphysics, Kant was reasserting the long-standing but always contested claim of this metaphysics to provide definitive "rational" explications for the biblical faith of confessional Protestantism. Yet he was doing this from outside the church and its theology faculties, on the basis of a claimed personal philosophical insight into a noumenal religion in relation to which all ecclesial religion was a "merely empirical" approximation.

In constructing this dominating cultural eyrie—that of secular theological custodian of confessional Protestantism's transcendent truths—Kant was situating himself to make a decisive intervention in the war of positions between the religious naturalists and the confessional theologians. From this height he could establish "dialectical" relations between these positions; that is, relations of reciprocal deficiency in which the theologians' blind attachment to the biblical "husk" of historical Christianity was matched by the naturalists' loss of transcendental insight. Kant could thus claim a truly extraordinary, "world-historical" role for his metaphysical hermeneutics. He could present it as the means for determining the precise point and degree to which biblical doctrines could be rationalized, through the revelation of their noumenal significance, in a manner suited to the level of humanity's historical maturation. In this way he could claim to outflank and triumph over both the confessional theologians (who lagged behind the emergence of reason in history) and the naturalist *Aufklärer* (who pre-empted this moment and lost touch with the transcendent). Given this program, it is implausible to see Kant as anything other than a lay positive theologian engaged in a concrete religious contest.

Kant's interpretation of Christ—as the merely sensory symbol for an act of moral self-regeneration performed by noumenal man on himself—would have been enough by itself to secure the Immediate Examination Commission's rejection of his second essay, which may have been the result he wanted. More broadly though, in relation to our larger argument regarding the Religious Edict, it would seem that Kant's religious philosophy would indeed have fallen quite naturally within the edict's strictures against proselytism. If we combine the account we have just given of this philosophy—as a positive theological intervention in the battle over the religious *Aufklärung*—with our earlier account of the edict, as a measure proscribing proselytism in order to maintain the

47 Kant, *Religion*, 152 (*AK* 6:122).

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public confessional balance, then there can be little doubt that Kant's religious essays were proselytism in the required sense. In publicly teaching that the existing confessions represented only the empirical shell of a quite different "higher" noumenal religion which was destined to displace them, Kant was both undermining the public-law confessional system and infringing the negative right of citizens to be left undisturbed in their chosen belief, or lack of such.

III. DIVIDED ENLIGHTENMENT

The set of religious and political arrangements reaffirmed in the edict of July 1788 represented the leading edge of a *Religionspolitik* that had been continuously evolving since the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555.[48] These measures were focused on a single European-wide problem—how to exercise stable and legitimate political authority over multi-confessional societies—although the Brandenburg-Prussian solution differed significantly from those evolving in France and England. Through its dual strategy of establishing an array of legally recognized confessions while permitting freedom of private belief, the Prussian state sought to maintain the pacified confessional system as a variegated public religion, while declaring the state's agnosticism regarding the ultimate truth of any religious, philosophical or ideological position.[49] Unlike the cases of France and England where, in different ways, a state church could ensure congruence between religious and political legitimacy, Prussian *Religionspolitik* was forced to deal with the uniquely difficult problem: how to provide normative legitimacy for the state independently of the theological and moral truths that defined its confessional communities.

I have discussed elsewhere the manner in which Samuel Pufendorf attempted to meet this challenge, by providing a secular legitimation for a desacralized state.[50] For our present purposes it will be enough to recall just two aspects of this. First, Pufendorf realized that if civil authority were to be legitimated independently of the moral theologies and philosophies associated with the major religions, it would be necessary to reject the idea of a single transcendent source of moral obligation, whether this lay in the community of believers, Protestant conscience, or a transcendental moral law. He thus showed how such universal foundations could be replaced by a diversified ethics of office, capable of reflecting

48 For an account that situates the Wöllner Edict in this broader history, see Rudolph, "Oeffentliche Religion".

49 For a detailed treatment, see M. Heckel, "Die religionsrechtliche Parität", in *Martin Heckel Gesammelte Schriften*, 1:227–323.

50 Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments*, 148–96.

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a new plurality of sources of obligation.[51] Second, he separated the civil offices of citizen and sovereign from the ecclesial offices of teacher and learner, stipulating that political duties derive from the exchange of obedience for security, religious duties from relations of wisdom and love.[52] In this way, Pufendorf enacted a fundamental division between the "civil kingdom" and the "kingdom of truth": in the former, coercive power would be exercised for the purposes of social peace independently of ultimate truths; in the latter, transcendent truths would be imparted free of all civil coercion. This fundamental pluralization of the moral domain held the key to the legitimacy of Prussian *Religionspolitik*, and formed the ring for the war of positions that broke out over the Protestant *Aufklärung* and the Religious Edict. I shall close by sketching the historical significance of three of the warring positions.

Prussian *Religionspolitik* found one of its most articulate exponents in Carl Gottlieb Svarez. In addition to being a state jurisconsult and privy councilor, Svarez was both an author of the Prussian civil code and a member of the *Mittwochsgesellschaft*, the private Enlightenment debating society whose members also numbered Biester and Gedike (the editors of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*) and Moses Mendelssohn, the celebrated Enlightenment philosopher.[53] In his *Lectures on Law and State*, which he gave as part of the political education of the Prussian Crown Prince in 1791–2, Svarez presented the future king Friedrich-Wilhelm III with a classic exposition of the dual (Pufendorfian) strategy organizing Prussian religious policy. On the one hand, Svarez instructed his charge: "Insofar as we regard the Regent simply as the head of civil society, all his rights over religious associations flow solely from the rights of general supervision, through which he must ensure that no associations are tolerated in the state which are contrary to the ends of the state and endanger public peace and security". On this basis, it is legitimate for the state to examine religious confessions to ensure that they are compatible with social peace; to make sure that religious parties attempt to exercise no corporate rights beyond those enunciated by the law; and to prevent controversies between opposed confessions from disturbing the public religious peace. On the other hand, Svarez also impressed upon his student that: "The state can never and under no circumstances be justified in prescribing what a religious association should teach or how it should order its form of worship". Further: "The state can never prohibit the practice of a religion merely on the grounds of its dogmatic principles". In giving the reason

51 See in particular the discussion of "moral entities" in S. Pufendorf, *The Law of Nature and of Nations in Eight Books*, trans. C. H. & W. A. Oldfather (Oxford, 1934), chap. 1, bk I.

52 S. Pufendorf, *Of the Nature and Qualification of Religion in Reference to Civil Society*, ed. S. Zurbuchen (Indianapolis, 2002), 17–20.

53 See Schmidt, "The Question of Enlightenment".

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for the state's agnosticism regarding religious principles, Svarez reveals the true ground of his difference from the *Aufklärer*, who sought to ground society in rational religious truth: "Purely dogmatic concepts and opinions of God and divine things, of the relation of man to the Godhead, of his condition after death, no matter how false and incorrect, can never have a harmful influence on civil life and the duties that a man owes to his neighbour or the state".[54] In short, if religious falsehoods are not harmful to civil life and duties, and may thus be left undisturbed by the Enlighteners, then religious truths are redundant in the civil kingdom, and should form no part of the state's political principles.

Johann Semler's defence of the Religious Edict is remarkable in that it represents the position of a theologian who accepts this political rationale for the confessional system, but views it from the perspective of one of the tolerated confessions. Semler mediates this difficult relation—between the political management of religions on the basis of civil peace and the religious care of souls on the basis of transcendent truth—not via a unifying dialectical philosophy, but through his own version of the pluralizing ethics of office. The clergyman's duties arise not from his putative existence as a rational being, but from the office he holds as a teacher in one of several public confessions. There never will be a unified religion grounded in agreed rational principles, in part because man is an essentially immoral creature, and in part because the moral world is inhabited by different "species".[55] For this reason, where his private views depart from the doctrines of his confession, it is an abuse of his office for a clergyman either to preach his opinions from the pulpit—as if a religion should be grounded in his personal insights—or to attack the Religious Edict on this basis, as if his office were identical to that of the cabinet minister's.[56] It is also as the occupant of a religious office—and not as a rational individual in touch with a "higher" noumenal religion—that the clergyman will participate in the hermeneutic clarification of biblical doctrine, the truth of which does not depend on his personal insight. In other words, it is the architecture of multiple moral personae that allows Semler to maintain congruity between the state's agnostic management of the confessions and the confessional proclamation of transcendent truth. By treating the moral clarification of such doctrines as vicarious atonement as something undertaken by the church and the clergyman in his official persona, Semler is able to acknowledge that the office of sovereign will never be grounded in the truth of such a clarification, but in the fact that there will always be several such truths, to be managed in an agnostic manner.

54 C. G. Svarez, *Vorträge über Recht und Staat*, ed. H. Conrad and G. Kleinheyer (Cologne, 1960), 504–6.

55 Semler, *Verteidigung*, 24–5.

56 Ibid., 102–6.

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As outlined in his celebrated "What is Enlightenment"? essay of 1784, Kant's response to the conflict over the Protestant *Aufklärung* differs starkly from Svarez's and Semler's.[57] There is a somewhat oblique pointer to this difference in Kant's anomalous use of the distinction between public and private opinion, central to both Svarez's and Semler's positions and to the Prussian form of religious toleration.[58] Kant's strategy is to relabel the official or public use of reason (by clergy and state officials) as "private"—because it is not addressed to the "world" of rational beings—affirming that such reason can be restricted in accordance with state interest. At the same time, he relabels the personal or private reasoning of scholars as "public"—ostensibly in the sense of being directed to a reading public—denying that this can or should be restricted by the state, as it represents the free universal use of reason that leads to *Aufklärung*.[59] More than just a dramatic turn of phrase, this renaming of public and private points towards a radical transformation in the topography of political legitimacy. For Kant's argument is that ultimately the legitimacy of government measures depends upon whether they can be grounded in the people's free use of reason, represented in the first instance by scholars discoursing in the "public" sphere. This transformation would of course efface the public-law legitimacy of a measure like the Religious Edict, consigning the history of religious pacification embodied in it to the obscurity of a merely "private" state interest. At the same time, it would remove legitimacy from the "Pufendorfian" exercise of sovereignty in the interests of social peace, transferring it to the people's free use of reason, understood as inherently pacific. In short, in Kant's model Pufendorf's "civil kingdom" loses legitimacy because it is not grounded in the rational pursuit of truth, while his "kingdom of truth" is rebaptized as the source of political legitimacy.

Given today's democratic commitments, and the widespread belief that toleration and liberal rights arise from the confluence of reason and democracy, it is understandable that many scholars should regard Kant's position as representing a decisive step towards modernity. Taking Kant at his own word, these scholars accept that the Kantian *Aufklärung* was indeed "public", either in the sense of being grounded in principles of reason and morality accessible to

57 For a helpful montage of the circumstances in which Kant published this essay, and the debate that it provoked, see J. Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley, CA, 1996).

58 Cf. J. C. Laursen, "The Subversive Kant: The Vocabulary of 'Public' and 'Publicity' ", in his *The Politics of Scepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant* (Leiden/New York, 1992), chap. 9.

59 I. Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?' ", in H. Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1970), 55–7 (*AK* 8:36–9).

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everyone,[60] or in the sense of deriving such principles from discursive deliberations in a "public sphere" or "ideal speech community" accessible to everyone.[61] Whatever its normative merits, however, there are two sets of reasons for rejecting this view as an account of the historical significance of Kant's conception of *Aufklärung*. In the first place, when we examine Dirk Kemper's extensive collection of contributions to the actual journal debate surrounding the Religious Edict—a field-day for Kant's "man of learning addressing the entire reading public"[62]—the signs of Kant's public use of reason are most noticeable by their absence. Not only are the contributions to this debate characterized by radical divergences over what is to count as reason—ranging from positive jurisprudence and reason of state, across Pufendorfian civil philosophy, Semler's complex ethics of office, Catholic and Lutheran metaphysics, through to the radical rationalism of Bahrdt and Villaume, and the Kantian rationalism of Hufeland—but they look nothing like a free and irenic exchange of views oriented to reaching agreed principles or judgments. Those who did follow the motto of *Sapere aude!* and dared make free public use of their own reason created not an irenic intellectual transparency or an ideal communication community, but an ideological battlefield filled with sectarian intellectual conflicts. For the most part, these conflicts are characterized by the zealous affirmation of "rational convictions"; mutual vilification by those holding opposing positions; contempt for the "idiots" standing in the way of *Aufklärung*; and a remorseless will to annihilate ideological enemies by raking them with enfilades of "candid reflections", "impartial judgments", "sincere considerations" and "irrefutable proofs".

Secondly, we have provided an account of why Kant's own contribution to the debate over religious rationalism—the philosophical theology of his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*—could not be "public" in the required sense. We have argued that Kant's practical reason, understood as the capacity to will in accord with a universe of intelligible beings, is not accessible to everyone, being in fact dependent on specific metaphysical doctrines (the anthropology of *homo duplex*), and the ethical exercises through which Kantians learn to relate to themselves as rational beings who must transcend their sensuous inclinations. Kant's theology—his metaphysical simulation of the Christian mysteries and his hermeneutic treatment of this simulation as the historical emergence of a pure moral religion from the sensuous husks of mankind's biblical childhood—thus

60 For example, see O. O'Neill, "The Public Use of Reason", in her *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1989), 28–50; and O'Neill, "Within the Limits of Reason".

61 For example, see L. Hinchman, "Autonomy, Individuality, and Self-Determination", in Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?*, 488–516; and J. Habermas, "The Unity of Reason in the Diversity of its Voices", in Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?*, 399–425.

62 Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", 55 (*AK* 8:36).

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could not be regarded as philosophical in the required sense, as it depends on the same metaphysical doctrines and ethical exercises, permitting us to treat it as a rival positive theology.

Seen in this light, Kant's appeal to the public and the public use of reason takes on a new and unsettling appearance. Despite his references to scholars addressing the reading public, we feel justified in suggesting that the substantive content of Kant's public is provided by the figure of the community of intelligible beings. For this is the only community which can be relied on to reach rational moral agreement, precisely because it is envisaged as transcending the sensuous inclinations and interests that lead to conflict of wills. Several features of Kant's scholarly reading public indicate its role as the partial empirical realization of the noumenal community. First, it is envisaged as universal, as the scholar "considers himself as a member of a complete commonwealth or even of cosmopolitan society", and finds his "true public" in "the world".[63] Next, Kant identifies membership of the public with the putative capacity to exercise a universally accessible a priori reason—here called "maturity"—by declaring it absurd to imagine that scholars might be "immature" or incapable of this exercise: "For to maintain that the guardians of the people in spiritual matters should themselves be immature, is an absurdity which amounts to making absurdities permanent".[64] And finally, because he regards the rationalization of biblical Christianity undertaken by the spiritual guardians "as a revelation (though not an empirical one) permanently taking place within all human beings", Kant treats the free expression of this revelation—rather than any measures taken by the government—as the real driver of human progress: "This spirit of freedom is also spreading abroad, even where it has to struggle with outward obstacles imposed by governments which misunderstand their own function ... Men will gradually work their way out of their unrefined state (*Rohigkeit*) by themselves, so long as artificial measures are not deliberately adopted to keep them in it".[65]

As intellectual historians, therefore, we must learn to look at Kant's appeal to the public use of reason in a new way. This appeal does not represent the moment at which the free use of a universal reason could finally throw off the artificial constraints of church and state, renewing a process of enlightenment that would end with the state itself being grounded in reason. Rather, it represents Kant's strategy for capturing the debate over the religious *Aufklärung*, by presenting his own metaphysical version of Protestant rationalism as the self-revelation of noumenal reason in all men, and by treating the existing form of religious toleration—based on governmental maintenance of the confessional

63 Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", 56, 57 (*AK* 8:37, 38).

64 Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", 57 (*AK* 8:38).

65 Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", 59 (*AK* 8:41) (translation modified).

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balance—as an external obstacle to this revelation. In short, Kant was speaking not on behalf of universal reason or an enlightened public sphere, but on behalf of an emergent academic cultural faction, characterized by a sectarian commitment to its own "pure religion of reason".

CONCLUSION

The final, and perhaps the most compelling, piece of evidence for this revised interpretation of Kant's relation to Prussian *Religionspolitik* lies in his attitude to toleration itself. Kant's conception of religious *Aufklärung* was of course quite inimical to the agnosticism regarding ultimate truths that characterized the Prussian management of confessional multiplicity and which Svarez sought to impart to the next sovereign. Further, despite his own separation of the personae of clergyman and scholar, Kant's conception was also inimical to the sophisticated pluralization of moral offices through which Semler reconciled his religious vocation with this system of management; for Kant's scholar speaks "in his own person", expressing a transcendent moral reason. In conceiving morality in terms of the self-legislation of a noumenal community, and in conceiving the "pure moral religion" as the historical actualization of this community via the purification of empirical Scriptures and confessions, Kant's religious philosophy fuelled a rationalist religiosity that was radically hostile to both religious and civil pluralism.

Unlike Semler and Svarez, Kant thus refused to accept the permanent division of the confessions or the legitimacy of the government's role in preventing mutual encroachment among them, which lay at the heart of the Prussian form of toleration:

> On the subject of sectarianism ... we are accustomed to say that it is desirable for many kinds of religion (properly speaking, kinds of ecclesiastical faith) to exist in a state. And this is, in fact, desirable to the extent that it is a good sign—a sign, namely, that the people are allowed freedom of belief. But it is only the government that is to be commended here. In itself, such a state of public religious affairs is not a good thing, unless the principle underlying it is of such a nature as to bring with it universal agreement on the essential maxims of belief, as the concept of religion requires, and to distinguish this from conflicts arising from non-essentials.[66]

In the end, "In what really deserves to be called religion, there can be no division into sects (for since religion is one, universal and necessary, it cannot vary)".[67] Kant's defence of religious freedom—that is, his defence of the particular

66 I. Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, in Wood and di Giovanni, eds., *Religion and Rational Theology*, 274–5 (*AK* 7:52).

67 Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, 272 (*AK* 7:48).

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rationalist biblical hermeneutic which he called the free use of reason—was thus opposed to the Prussian state's system of tolerated religious pluralism. For the same reason, Kant refused to accept that the state's toleration of confessional diversity requires that it refrain from endorsing all ultimate moral principles. Instead, he envisaged the progressive emergence of an "ethical state", grounded in the ultimate principles of a self-legislating moral community, which is to say, the principles of his metaphysical version of Protestant religious rationalism.[68]

68 Kant, *Religion*, 130–32 (*AK* 6:94–6).

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