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Interpreting Kantian Religious Judgment for the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT

This article clears a path for employing the affirmative way of interpreting Kant's general theory of religion as a guidepost for twenty-first century religious practitioners. Before attempting such an employment, I correct several misconceptions regarding the affirmative way of interpreting Kant's theory that, if adopted as mainstream, would risk weakening its universal applicability. With this purpose in mind, I consider and respond to a misplaced criticism of my interpretation of Kant's theory of grace, advanced by Douglas McGaughey in 2013. I then assess the current state of a debate that has arisen between several key affirmative interpreters, concerning Kant's reference to the two "experiments" that guide the argument in his *Religion*. I give special attention to Lawrence Pasternack's 2017 attempt to "dismantle" this whole line of interpretation as one that "may very well not be worth our time." After identifying several serious flaws in Pasternack's argument, I conclude by backing a better alternative developed by Brandon Love. By clearing away two very different sorts of potential roadblocks that could stand in the way of a reader of Kant gaining a fair understanding of the affirmative approach to interpreting his theory of religion, these arguments prepare the way for a concluding attempt to catch a glimpse of how Kant's theory of religious judgment (especially his four guidelines for designing the constitution of a church), if adopted widely by practitioners of various historical religions, could benefit the fractured world we find ourselves in, a quarter of the way through the twenty-first century.

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1. The affirmative revolution in interpreting Kant's theory of religion

Of all the many and varied aspects of Immanuel Kant's theory of judgment, his theory of *religious* judgment has been among the least discussed by his interpreters. Those who mention his theory of religion at all often portray it in a thoroughly reductionistic way, as merely an application of his theory of how to make correct *ethical* judgments. In various publications over the past 40 years, I have made a concerted effort to offer an alternative to this reductionistic approach to interpreting Kant's theory of religion--an alternative I sometimes call an "affirmative" approach. Since the mid-1990s, the literature on Kant's theory of religion has mushroomed, to the point where we now witness a previously unprecedented number of internal debates between those interpreters who agree with the broad claim that Kant sets out to identify and affirm a specifically religious type of judgment and that the resulting theory of religion is worthy of our affirmation.

Before we proceed, a word of explanation is in order regarding my use of "religious judgment" in this article's title. As far as I am aware, Kant himself never used this expression; it certainly never appears in his influential 1793/1794 book, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, the main work that sets out the details of his theory of religion. However, words with the root "judg" do appear over 100 times in the text of *Religion*.¹ I'll say more about some of these uses in §4, below. For now, note that these references to judgment in the context of Kant's theory of religion support a claim that many affirmative interpreters have backed: that the role filled by *Religion* in the overall architectonic structure of Kant's system is properly regarded as being a supplement or complement to the *third Critique* rather than to the second. That is, if we were to give *Religion* a title that more explicitly highlights its role in the overall structure of Kant's philosophical system, the title would not be something like *The Ethical Nature of All True Religion*, as traditional reductionist interpreters would have it, but instead something like *The Role of Religious Judgment in Empowering Moral Improvement*. For at no point in *Religion* is Kant's focus on expanding or even refining the moral philosophy put forward in his explicitly ethical writings (especially *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*); rather, his focus is on expanding and refining the reach of *judgment* (beyond the sort detailed in the third *Critique*), so that the role of certain types of judgment in assisting us to fulfill our moral mandate can be seen to include not only aesthetics and purposiveness in nature, but also religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals.

¹ I base this word count on the English translation of Kant's text that I cite throughout this article, which appears interspersed throughout the main text of my *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Chichester: Wiley, 2016). My translation revises Pluhar's 2008 translation. I count 111 words containing the root "judg" in the text of *Religion*: 33 refer not to the action of judging but to a (human or divine) person who serves as judge. That leaves 78 references to the action of judging in *Religion*. Most of these refer to specifically religious forms of judgment, such as the hypothetical situation whereby a divine being is believed to pass (or to be able to pass) judgment on humans, or where human beings judge a certain act or belief to be either in conformity with or in contradiction to the teachings of their historical faith.

In the prefaces to both editions of *Religion* Kant refers to an "experiment" he intends to conduct in the book's main text. In the second Preface he also introduces a metaphor of concentric circles to clarify the difference between the main experiment (which attempts to distinguish between historical/biblical religion and a set of pure conditions for the *possibility* of any true religion) and a "second experiment" (6:12), which takes fragments from one particular historical religion and holds them up to the system of pure religious reason to see if they overlap. When Kant refers to "judging" or "judgment" (78 times) in the text of *Religion*, he usually has this second experiment at least at the back of his mind, if not at the forefront. That is, religious judgment, in its philosophical (Kantian) sense, attempts to assess whether or not a particular historical religious belief, symbol, or ritual, aligns with the underlying principles of pure religion that will qualify that belief, symbol, or ritual as genuinely religious, if it passes the test. More of this later.

This article's main purpose is to clear a path for employing the affirmative way of interpreting Kant's general theory of religion, especially his account of religious judgment, as a guidepost for twenty-first century religious practitioners, regardless of the particular religious tradition they may belong to. Before attempting such an employment, we must correct several misconceptions regarding the affirmative way of interpreting Kant's theory that, if adopted as mainstream, would risk weakening its universal applicability. With this purpose in mind, the following three sections will proceed as follows.

In §2 I shall consider and respond to a criticism of my interpretation of Kant's theory of grace, as put forward in several publications but primarily in a 2010 paper entitled "Kant's Ethics of Grace" (hereafter "KEG") (Palmquist, 2010).¹ It would not be an understatement to say that on my interpretation, Kant's theory of divine grace serves as the cornerstone of his whole approach to religious judgment. As such, it is crucial to respond to a misplaced criticism of my interpretation advanced by Douglas McGaughey (2013).² In §3 I shall then assess the current state of a debate that has arisen between several key affirmative interpreters, concerning Kant's reference to the two "experiments" that guide the argument in his *Religion*. Special attention will be given to Lawrence Pasternack's influential 2017 attempt to "dismantle" this whole line of interpretation as one that "may very well not be worth our time." (Pasternack 2017).³ After identifying several serious flaws in Pasternack's argument, I conclude by backing a better alternative developed by Brandon Love. By clearing away two very different sorts of potential roadblocks that could stand in the way of a reader of Kant gaining a fair understanding of the affirmative approach to interpreting his theory of religion, my arguments in §§2-3 will prepare the way for a concluding attempt to catch a glimpse

¹ See my article "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Grace", *The Journal of Religion* 90 (2010), 530-53.

² Douglas McGaughey, "Historical and Pure Religion: A Response to Stephen Palmquist", *The Journal of Religion* 93 (2013), 151-176.

³ Lawrence Pasternack, "The 'Two Experiments' of Kant's *Religion*: Dismantling the Conundrum," *Kantian Review* 22 (2017), 107,108.

of how Kant's theory of religious judgment, if adopted widely by practitioners of various historical religions, could benefit the fractured world we find ourselves in, a quarter of the way through the twenty-first century.

2. Kant's religious hermeneutics as the antidote to McGaughey's misplaced criticism

A key feature of Kant's theory of religious judgment, often neglected even by the growing number of affirmative interpreters, is his claim that in religious matters, everything depends on how believers/practitioners *interpret* the beliefs and rituals of their preferred historical religion. This emphasis is evident in a variety of ways throughout the text of *Religion* but reaches a crescendo in §VI of Division One of the Third Piece (*Stück*), entitled "Church Faith Has Pure Religious Faith as Its Highest Interpreter" (6:109). Kant there distinguishes between three ways of interpreting religious texts in a church (e.g., in sermons or childhood education): the theoretical/historical, the practical/ethical, and the judicial/experiential interpret according to empirical facts, moral lessons, or personal *feelings*, respectively. In a single concluding paragraph, he dismisses the third approach (later revived by Schleiermacher), leaving the first two as the only serious contenders to serve as the highest hermeneutic principle to guide the religious judgment of churchgoers. Kant concedes, in a nutshell, that matters of historical fact can serve as important contributors to religious education in a church--indeed, what church leaders teach must not *contradict* known scientific or historical facts--but the main thrust of one's teaching should be moral. When facing scriptural texts that pose potential ethical difficulties, such as when the Bible portrays God as commanding Abraham to kill his child, Kant says (6:110) that imposing a moral interpretation onto the text may often seem forced, [and] may often really be forced: and yet this interpretation must, if only it is possible that the text accepts it, be preferred to a literal interpretation that either contains within itself absolutely nothing for morality, or perhaps even acts counter to morality's incentives.

Nothing in my past publications, provided they are read in line with my own stated biases and intentions, challenges or counteracts the basic principle of Kantian religious hermeneutics that can be gleaned from the previous paragraph: for Kant "pure religion," or "rational religion" as he sometimes calls it, is necessarily grounded in humanity's *moral* nature. Nevertheless, in 2013 Douglas McGaughey's article in *The Journal of Religion* accused me of imputing to Kant 11 claims, all of which are--I actually agree!--contrary to Kant's actual intentions. In a few publications since that time, I have responded briefly to McGaughey's astonishing criticism of my position; (Palmquist, 2015: xin).¹ these brief previous responses could give the impression that I regard a simple "No!" as sufficient to refute McGaughey's claims. The rest of this section fills that lacuna by attempting to do what all good Kantian interpreters should do, whenever such a seemingly ungrounded dispute arises: I will highlight what is correct about McGaughey's interpretation, then identify why he needs to work harder to take on board some key features of the affirmative

¹ Most notably, see my *Comprehensive Commentary*, p.xin.

approach to interpreting Kant's theory of religion, if he is to avoid the dangers of the alternative, reductionist interpretation, which always stands in danger of throwing out the proverbial "baby" of moral improvement with the "bathwater" of historical religion.

Without providing any preliminary description of my approach to interpreting Kant or any textual evidence from my publications (except repeated general references to "KEG" and one short paragraph quoting a few passages out of context), McGaughey accuses me of defending 11 false claims about Kant's theory of religion. Without explanation, he simply lists these claims in the lefthand column of a table under the heading, "Palmquist". In the righthand column, under the heading "Another Kant", McGaughey (2013, 155-6) lists 11 corresponding claims that he presents as the correct versions of what he believes I have defended. Here are his 11 sets of claims, with numbers and letters ("A" for McGaughey's left column and "B" for the right) added by me:

1. A. "Religion is *historical* religion based on particular revelation" / B. "Religion is *pure* religion based on the universal gift of moral capacity that can neither be derived from nor reduced to the senses, which can be the core of any and all historical religion"
2. A. "Grace is a divine gift without an account of the 'ground' of humanity's moral capacity to which grace would add" / B. "Grace is speculative opinion, neither subjectively nor objectively sufficient, that undermines morality, which in turn is the internal, self-legislation of a noncodified moral order."
3. A. "Religion reduced by Kant to 'mere' morality if no Noumenal (divine) perspective" / B. "Religion is necessary for any and all human experience and anchored in the Noumenal gift of the capacity of creative freedom"
4. A. "'Exclusive Christology' of morally perfect individual as the historical archetype of the Logos external to the individual" / B. "'Inclusive Christology' of possible, universal, internal, moral improvement by which it is impossible to determine the moral status of an other"
5. A. "Christ is to be imitated" / B. "Morality, when at all, is at best served by examples, never by imitation, which only fosters discouragement"
6. A. "Religious hope: concerned with the speculative opinion (neither subjectively nor objectively sufficient) of 'parerga' of religion (i.e., based on ignorance as in Pascal's Wager; leads to personal torment)" / B. "Religious hope: Concerned with the mystery (subjectively sufficient) of *pure* religion (i.e., the capacity of goodness that is creative freedom can never be lost and remains the condition for any and all possible moral transformation)" [*sic*]
7. A. "Substitutes God's hypothetical decisions (as divine 'timeless choices') for humanity's categorical decisions" / B. "Embraces humanity's categorical capacity to create and add things (as 'timeless choices') that are not otherwise found in phenomenal reality"
8. A. "Moral improvement is concerned merely with the individual" / B. "Moral improvement is communal (involves Kingdom of Ends and culture that promotes the goodness of humanity) and is concerned with the improvement of the species as an open-ended process"

9. A. "Morality measured by external consequences (consequentialism)" / B. "Morality measured by internal moral disposition known only to the individual (deontology)"
10. A. "Alternative: philosophy or religion (literal anthropomorphism, which we must embrace speculatively)" / B. "Alternative: none between pure philosophy and pure religion--regulative ideas of God, freedom, and the soul with respect to moral improvement in this life (symbolic anthropomorphism at most, which we embrace as a necessary assumption)"
11. A. "Moral perfectionism made possible by God" / B. "Moral improvement made possible by extraordinary capacity given by God to humanity as the 'final end' of creation/nature"

Anyone familiar with my writings on Kant's theory of religion¹ will share my perplexity in trying to understand how McGaughey could have possibly gleaned the 11 foregoing "A" claims from my work. A careful look at the first few pages of his article, however, provides some helpful insight here. McGaughey's main distinction is between historical religion and pure religion, and in the first few pages he defines this distinction in some detail, appealing to Kant's aforementioned concentric circles metaphor as an absolute, either/or choice. McGaughey apparently thinks Kant tells us that a religious person must choose *either* to accept the inner core of the concentric circles (i.e., pure rational/moral religion, the religion of reason) *or* to accept some historical religion (i.e., the outer circle, the part *outside* of the inner circle): McGaughey consistently writes as if one *cannot* accept both. He quotes Kant's metaphor of the hopeless attempt to mix oil and water (6:13) as evidence that the two circles can never have anything in common. If one imagines Kant's concentric circles imagery to be a large wheel, then McGaughey's foundational assumption is that the wheel's *hub* (the oil of pure religion) can have nothing at all in common with the wheel's outer *tire* (the water of historical religion). If this were indeed Kant's meaning, much of the rest of McGaughey's argument would follow, and much of my approach to interpreting Kant would indeed be deeply flawed.

But McGaughey's key assumption cannot be what Kant intended, for he misquotes the oil and water metaphor. Kant introduces this metaphor (6:13) as part of his discussion of how "between reason and Scripture" (i.e., between rational religion and revealed religion) we can find "not merely compatibility but also unity": Kant states that if one follows revealed religion "under the guidance of moral concepts", then one *will also be following* rational (moral) religion. He then appeals to the oil and water metaphor to explain what happens if one follows revealed religion *without* grounding it in such moral guidance. Revealed religion is like water only when it is released from the requirement of being moral: Kant's point is that if a religious person thinks revealed truths are *distinct from* and (especially) *superior to* moral truths, then pure (moral) religion and revealed religion cannot enjoy the aforementioned "unity"; instead, they amount to "one *religion* and one

¹ See especially my *Kant's Critical Religion* (Ashgate, 2000; Routledge, 2019) and *Comprehensive Commentary*. The latter, admittedly, had not yet been published when McGaughey wrote his 2013 article.

ritual worship", such that "the two would often have to be shaken together, in order to associate for a short time" yet will inevitably separate once again. McGaughey, by contrast, reads Kant's metaphor as meaning that any and all expressions of historical religion are necessarily "water" and thus fundamentally incompatible with the "oil" of pure religion--a claim Kant never makes, though reductionist interpreters routinely read it into the text at every turn.

McGaughey's misreading of Kant's oil-and-water metaphor is conveniently consistent with his aforementioned, wheel-like reading of Kant's concentric circles metaphor. Once we recognize that Kant's warning about oil and water refers only to historical religions that do *not* hold moral concepts at their core, we can see that Kant's reference to concentric circles is also an attempt to show how historical religion and revealed religion can be *unified*, not (as McGaughey reads it) an attempt to argue that moral religion can *never* be manifested in historical religion. McGaughey's position is extremely odd, for if he seriously maintains that historical religion and pure religion can never unite in one and the same person, then he is essentially condemning Kant's theory to be just that--an idealistic theory that, by definition, can never be put into practice--whether in the 21st century or in any other age. The textual evidence against such a claim (popular though it was when McGaughey first cut his philosophical teeth, prior to the appearance of affirmative interpretations) is so overwhelming that I cannot begin to present it all in a single article. Anyone who doubt this can find all the details spelled out in my *Comprehensive Commentary*, thus demonstrating that Kant's intended his theory of pure religion to make a real impact on the actual practice of historical religions of all types, around the world.

What exactly was it about my affirmative way of interpreting Kant's theory of religion that prompted McGaughey to respond to it in such an overwhelmingly negative, one-sided way? I may never know the answer to this question, though I have attempted to solve the mystery in private correspondence with him. Perhaps he read the 11 claims into my writings because the title of my first publication on this topic (Palmquist 1989)¹ misled him to think that my lifelong focus on the question of whether or not Kant's theory of religion is compatible with Christian belief and practice amounts to the claim that Kant *himself* thought of his theory as a defense of historical Christianity. (In that early article, I concluded that Kant's theory is consistent with Christianity, *if* properly

¹ See Stephen Palmquist, "Immanuel Kant: A Christian Philosopher?", *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989), 65-75. The origin of this title is noteworthy: based on a reviewer's recommendation, the editor required me to change my original title, which was "Can A Christian Be A Kantian?" As a young philosopher who felt the pressure of "publish or perish", I accepted the editor's requirement, especially because he did not require me to change the paper's content to fit the new title. The article never argues that Kant himself was a Christian; it argues only that Kant's theory of religion is not *incompatible* with Christian belief, such that Christians can also be Kantians without being forced to give up their Christian faith (or vice versa). Had I been able to foresee how often readers of my subsequent work have incorrectly assumed that I was making a claim about Kant's personal religious faith, I would have more courageously defended my original title as preferable.

interpreted; however, despite the misleading title that the journal's editor imposed on the article [see note 1 on p.15, above], I have never argued that Kant himself was, or thought of himself as, a Christian.) Or, perhaps McGaughey's motivation for writing such a vitriolic denunciation of my work, without even attempting to engage with its actual arguments, was because he knew I was then teaching at a university with "Baptist" in its name. If this was his reason, he was badly misinformed, since the only thing genuinely Baptist about the university in Hong Kong where I taught for 34 years is its heritage: prior to taking government funding in 1983, the institution was indeed funded and largely run by a group of American Baptists, working with the Baptist Convention of Hong Kong. But by the time I joined in 1987, it had already cut these religious ties and was on the path to being the thoroughly secular university it is today. Whatever his reason, nothing in "KEG" ever makes any of the 11 patently false claims that McGaughey attributes to me. While some interpreters (such as Firestone and Jacobs) *have* argued that Kant's primary goal in *Religion* was to promote historical Christianity, I have never defended such a claim--though I have claimed that interpreters *could* employ Kant's theory in this way.

In light of this detailed response to McGaughey's poorly argued article, and in a spirit of Kantian unity, I shall conclude §2 by responding to each of the 11 claims that McGaughey imputed to me (i.e., the "A" claims in the foregoing list) and to his preferred alternatives (i.e., the previously listed "B" claims), regarding the issue of how Kant intended his theory of pure (rational) religion to relate to historical religions. The following 11 numbered paragraphs correspond to the above list, with each item being labelled as claim "C" to indicate that each constitutes my attempt at a synthesis between McGaughey's "A" (his straw-man Palmquist) and "B" (his view of Kant's actual position).

1C. I fully agree with McGaughey's 1B. Perhaps he thought I would uphold 1A because 1A seems quite close to what Kant calls his "second experiment" (6:12), which I take very seriously. Kant says this second aspect of the book's aim will start with the fragments of a particular historical faith (i.e., Christianity) and examine the compatibility of each fragment with the corresponding element of pure religion. The fact that I have written a number of articles, including "KEG", that explore how this "second experiment" works, does not mean I ever claim that Kantian religion is *based on* any given historical religion.

2C. My *actual* argument in "KEG" is that Kant intends his discussion of divine grace, in subsection C of Section One of the Second Piece, to explain how a Christian *could* believe in the doctrine of prevenient grace *without* denying its rational grounding in "humanity's moral capacity". Claim 2B, that "Grace is speculative opinion," is not something Kant ever states; as such, I struggle to understand what McGaughey might mean here. In any case, Kant certainly never claims that belief in divine grace *necessarily* "undermines morality"; it only has this result if one believes in an tenet of historical faith in such a way that the belief supersedes or even negates all moral concerns. By no means do Christians necessarily interpret the doctrine in this

way. A main goal of Kant's theory of religious judgment was to urge Christians to avoid committing such a laziness-inducing error.

- 3C. Claims 3A and 3B are not contradictory but complement each other in Kant's theory of religion. As I will clarify in §4, Kantian religious judgment is (at least in part) anchored in freedom, as B requires, because genuine religion is anchored in morality and morality presupposes free choice. However, this does not change the fact that, when Kant discusses divine grace in *Religion*, he grounds it in the same noumenal gift (namely, the archetype of perfect humanity) that is the source of human freedom. "KEG" interprets Kant as explaining how Christians can therefore believe in their tradition's account of divine grace without abandoning pure rational religion, provided they retain this grounding in morality. McGaughey's misunderstanding of the concentric circles metaphor as requiring an either/or *choice* between historical and pure religion, has blinded him to this compatibility.
- 4C. "KEG" never states what McGaughey reports in claim 4A, that Christology is "exclusive", nor that it is solely grounded in a particular historical individual who is "external" to religious believers. Rather, I argue that Kant's account of the archetype (which uses explicitly Christian language and therefore surely counts as one of the "fragments" that he referred to as his "second experiment") seeks to explain how a person who *does* believe that Jesus Christ was a unique historical "prototype" of this archetype can do so without becoming morally lazy. McGaughey is therefore correct to insist in claim 4B that for Kant Christology is "inclusive," "internal," etc.
- 5C. "KEG" never makes claim 5A; it mentions imitation only once in passing, in reference to Kant's view that the person who experiences a change of heart will interpret suffering in a new way, a way that is similar to (and only in this *symbolic* sense "imitates") Jesus' attitude toward suffering. I fully agree with McGaughey's claim (5B) that Kant would regard rote imitation as fostering discouragement.
- 6C. "KEG" nowhere refers to Pascal's Wager, nor does it ever mention Kant's term "parerga". I do refer often to the role hope plays in Kant's theory, and I generally agree with the claim that increasing our awareness of our moral capacity is the rational ground for hope. But Kant also argues that we human beings, who do not have knowledge of God's noumenal perspective, must therefore *also* ground our hope in some empirical evidence that our moral improvement has progressed over time.
- 7C. McGaughey's claim 7A completely ignores the main argument in "KEG", that Kant's theory of grace has *both* a noumenal and a phenomenal side, both being crucial to his argument. In no way do I interpret Kant as claiming that the noumenal must be *substituted* for the phenomenal. Rather, I argue that, according to Kant, Christians who believe in divine grace (the noumenal) must base their personal assessment of their own condition on phenomenal evidence of their

moral improvement. McGaughey's preferred claim (7B) seems relevant to Kant's moral philosophy, but it is not something Kant explicitly argues in *Religion*.

8C. Neither in "KEG" nor in any of my other publications have I ever defended claim 8A. Rather, I interpret Kant as arguing that moral improvement is a matter of concern *both* to individuals and to the whole human community. I thus agree that claim 8B accurately describes (part of) Kant's position.

9C. A reader of "KEG" might impute claim 9A to me, because of the way I interpret the phenomenal/historical side of belief in divine grace. But again, my interpretation is two-eyed (perspectival), not one-sided in the way McGaughey's wording of claim 9A implies. I agree that claim 9B describes how Kant thinks we should measure morality; the phenomenal side of my argument in "KEG" does not claim that we are to measure *morality* by external consequences; rather, I read Kant as claiming that those who believe in divine grace (something human beings can never know for certain) should assess whether God's hypothetical action applies in their individual case through a process of internal self-examination, attempting to discern a tendency to improve (morally) over time. Kant's pragmatic claim cannot mean he is defending "consequentialism", because the latter is a theory of *moral* judgment, not of religious judgment.

10C. McGaughey's two claims here are so sketchy that I am unsure of what he intends by the word "Alternative". In any case, what is clear from Kant's text (and from a fair reading of "KEG") is that Kant opposes literal anthropomorphism but approves of symbolic anthropomorphism. In the prefaces to *Religion*, he also explicitly states that religion and philosophy should work together, in "unity". According to my best guess of McGaughey's intended meaning, Kant's (and my) reading could therefore be expressed accurately by 10B.

11C. My position in "KEG" and elsewhere is that God and human beings must work together as partners toward the cause of moral improvement. God founds the invisible church (i.e., pure religion), whereas human beings are charged with the task of building visible churches (i.e., historical religions) (see 6:100-102). As such, McGaughey's 11B is certainly correct, while his imputation of 11A to me expresses only one side of my two-sided interpretation.

Once again, as far as I can tell, all of McGaughey's erroneous assumptions about my interpretation of Kant's theory of religion stem from his radical interpretation of Kant's concentric circles metaphor, whereby historical religion and pure religion can, by definition, never be expressions of one and the same truth. If McGaughey were correct on this point, the whole notion of an "experiment," whose purpose is to explore the possibility of finding *unity* between the historical and the pure, would be a failure before it starts. However, now that I have clarified in some detail what I actually argue, in response to each of McGaughey's imputed claims, we can turn to a more explicit way of challenging my focus on "two experiments" as the hermeneutic key to interpreting Kant's *Religion*.

3. Pasternack's attempt to dismantle the "two experiments" hermeneutic

When I was writing my doctoral thesis in Oxford during the mid-1980s, I included several chapters setting out a new way of interpreting the theory of religion Kant defends in *Religion*. One of the several key hermeneutic principles I proposed to guide one's reading of Kant's (then) much-neglected book was to focus attention on defining and locating the "experiment(s)" (*Versuch[en]*) that, as Kant appears to say in the Preface to the second edition of *Religion* (6:12), he will be conducting throughout the book. A 1992 *Kant-Studien* article, which I later revised as Chapter VI of *Kant's Critical Religion* (2000/2019), is where I first defined Kant's two experiments as a key hermeneutic principle and proposed tracing Kant's alternating attention to each experiment throughout *Religion*. While a few earlier interpreters had mentioned Kant's stated intention to conduct his "experiment(s)" in the book, I know of no previous scholar who made Kant's statements in the prefaces, interpreted in terms of his appeal to the metaphor of concentric circles, as a "map" to guide one's reading of the entire text.

A few subsequent scholars, most notably John Hare in his 1996 *The Moral Gap*, also highlighted the importance of Kant's reference to the two experiments/circles, yet none focused on this theme as resolutely as I had done, until Chris Firestone and Nathan Jacobs published their *In Defense of Kant's Religion*, in 2008. Contrasting several possible "rubrics" that scholars had previously used to interpret Kant's text, they proposed an altogether novel way of defining and locating the two experiments--but without ever mentioning my thoroughgoing treatment of the same guiding metaphor in *Kant's Critical Religion*. Six years later, Lawrence Pasternack followed with a commentary that also made numerous references to Kant's metaphor, but tended to write as if Kant was really employing only one experiment throughout *Religion*. I have previously engaged with the Firestone/Jacobs interpretation at some length, (Palmquist 2012)¹ so here I will respond for the first time to Pasternack's new approach.

My focus in this section will be on Pasternack's most mature work on the two-experiments hermeneutic: his 2017 *Kantian Review* article offers an overview of the various options that had been proposed up to that point (including the approach in his own 2014 commentary on *Religion*⁹), (Pasternack 2014)² then proposes a new argument that attempts to dismiss the whole exercise as "an utterly banal misunderstanding" (122), little more than a waste of everyone's time (108). Before I summarize and respond to his new argument, let me share some details regarding the historical context in which Pasternack was prompted to write the 2017 article. Before doing so, let me add that from 2012 until his untimely death in 2024 Pasternack sent me early drafts of most of his

¹ See "Cross-Examination of In Defense of Kant's Religion", *Faith and Philosophy* 29 (2012), 170-180, and "To Tell the Truth on Kant and Christianity: Will the Real Affirmative Interpreter Please Stand Up?", *Faith and Philosophy* 29 (2012), 340-346.

² Lawrence Pasternack, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Immanuel Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: An Interpretation and Defense* (London: Routledge, 2014).

publications, and I gave detailed feedback on many of them, including his 2014 book and the 2017 article that is the main topic of this section. As such, I am painfully aware of the sad fact that Pasternack will be unable to publish a rebuttal or other clarification in response to my comments here. I shall therefore aim to be as fair-minded and accurate as possible, sticking only to known facts and obvious implications.

Not long after he started work on his doctorate in Hong Kong, my former student Brandon Love wrote what was undoubtedly the best paper a graduate student has ever submitted to me: in it, he proposed an ingenious way of resolving the debate that had at that point been raging for only a few years, regarding the nature and location of Kant's two experiments in *Religion*. (Firestone supervised Love's graduate work for his master's degree, so Love's interest in this debate was personal as well as professional: honorably, he hoped to make peace between his two beloved supervisors.) At my encouragement, Love submitted his paper to a prominent Kant journal in 2014. In it, he proposed an ingenious resolution of the dispute, showing how all past interpretations are correct, each in its own way, once we notice that Kant uses the term "natural religion" in two distinct ways (6:154-6): as referring *either* to the way practical reason *justifies* religion in general (or any specific religious belief or practice) by grounding religion in morality, *or* to the way religious beliefs and practices (whether pure or historical) are *spread* in history. (Note that this is parallel but not identical to Kant's distinction between pure and historical religion, which McGaughey 2013 interpreted in such a misleading way.) In the first case, Kant contrasts natural religion with *revealed* religion, as two ways of understanding the *basic nature* of religion, while in the second, he contrasts it with *scholarly* religion, as two ways of conceiving how religion is best *propagated*. In a nutshell, Love argues that my way of distinguishing between the two experiments focuses on the first sense of "natural religion", while the Firestone-Jacobs reading focuses on the second: Kant really *does* move from natural religion (in the first sense) to *revealed* religion in each of *Religion's* four pieces, as I have demonstrated elsewhere; yet he also really *does* focus only on natural religion (in the *second* sense) throughout the first three pieces, while turning to *scholarly* religion only in the Fourth Piece. Love's paper adds that Hare's translation thesis (as interpreted in Firestone-Jacobs 2008) also correctly conveys certain aspects of the relation between the second *Critique* and *Religion*. Of course, much more could be said about Love's claims; but let it suffice to say that, as a stellar example of good philosophy, his insight has the potential to resolve the debate once and for all.

Unfortunately, the journal did not accept Love's paper for publication: their reviewer composed an extraordinarily long response, arguing that there was no need to resolve this dispute because Love's whole valiant attempt to make peace between the interlocutors was simply a waste of time. The reviewer's stated reasons for this reaching this conclusion closely matched the arguments later presented in the last two sections of Pasternack 2017, which ended up being published in the same journal. In 2023, Love presented a much-revised version of his 2014 paper, one that incorporates

an equally empathetic response to Pasternack 2017, at a Notre Dame colloquium on Kant's affirmative approach to religion. As all the iterations of Love's paper remain unpublished today, I will not risk rendering its publication irrelevant by saying anything further about the details of his brilliant argument. Instead, the remainder of §3 will be a response to Pasternack 2017.

The first 70% of Pasternack's article is devoted to a generally helpful overview of the various ways affirmative interpreters have explained Kant's references to the two "experiments" that he intends to conduct in the main text of *Religion*. (Love's unpublished 2014 paper also included such an overview, though of course his conclusions were very different from Pasternack's. Pasternack's summaries say nothing about the new solution suggested in Love's 2014 paper, because that position had of course not been published. Given that detailed summaries of the various positions are available elsewhere, I see no need to summarize the options here. Any reader who is unfamiliar with this debate can consult §§1-2 of Pasternack 2017.) Perhaps the main weakness of his summary of the debate is that he borrows the potentially misleading "Religion as Translation" versus "Religion as Symbol" distinction that Firestone-Jacobs 2008 had introduced. Pasternack also employs two additional (but equally misleading) rubrics: "Religion as Apologetics" (referring to the new approach defended by Firestone-Jacobs 2008) and "Religion as Vehicle" (referring to the approach in Pasternack 2014).

These rubrics are all misleading because they use the word "religion" in a thoroughly unKantian way. Kant himself is careful to reserve "religion" for the forms of religious judgment that *properly* prioritize the relationship between moral precepts and the beliefs, symbols, and rituals of a particular historical tradition. The more neutral word Kant uses for historical religious traditions, quite apart from any consideration of their moral content, is "faith". Thus, "rational faith" refers to the beliefs, symbols, and rituals that are (as it were) "commanded" by reason itself, whereas "historical faiths" are the systems of beliefs, symbols, and rituals to which people adhere at various times and places down through human history, many (if not most) of which are not explicitly moral. By contrast, Kant modifies his technical use of "religion" with words like "pure", "moral", or "rational" when it refers to his philosophical theory of the elements that must be exhibited by any *genuine* (i.e., rationally grounded) faith; likewise, the term "historical religion" refers to any historical faith that has properly preserved the elements of rational/pure religion at its core. Given Kant's official definitions of these technical terms, Firestone-Jacobs 2008 and Pasternack 2017 should have used the rubric "*Faith* as x" in order to distinguish between the various ways of treating Kant's two-experiments language as the primary hermeneutic tool for interpreting the text of *Religion*. This may seem like nit-picking, but it has important implications for how one assesses the relevance of Kant's theory to the way religion is actually practiced during any given historical period.

When this correction is made, the fancy labels for each hermeneutic approach align more closely with Kant's own usage. In *Kant's Critical Religion* and other early publications, for example, I did

indeed argue that the elements of any given *historical faith* (not just Christianity) can and should serve as symbols of pure moral religion. Likewise, Pasternack 2014 argues that Kant portrays *historical faiths* (not pure religion!) as "vehicles" for moral religion. (The label "*Religion* as Vehicle" thus substitutes the proverbial philosophical "horse" for the historical "cart"!) Perhaps most importantly, Pasternack's extreme impatience and premature dismissal of the arguments advanced by Firestone-Jacobs 2008 could have been significantly tempered, had he recognized that they are not arguing that *rational religion* is "apologetic", but rather that the Christian *faith* stands (or, they argue, should stand) in an apologetic relationship with pure moral religion. The exception to my suggested terminological correction of these labels is the label they give Hare's hermeneutic assumption: if we choose to read Hare 1996 as Firestone/Jacobs 2008 and Pasternack 2017 do, as adopting a "Religion as translation" hermeneutic, then in this case alone, the label is best read as arguing that Kant's *Religion book* is a project of translating the tenets of a particular *faith* (namely Christianity) into the terms of rational religion.

The last main section of Pasternack 2017 offers a careful exegesis of the sentences in the two prefaces of *Religion* where Kant refers to the "experiment" (6:10) and/or "second experiment" that guide(s) Kant's writing of the book. In a nutshell, Pasternack reads Kant as using "*Versuch*" in a non-technical, "banal" sense, whereby it refers simply to the "essay" (one of the possible meanings of Kant's German word) that Kant presents to the public, along with the Preface. Pasternack claims there is no textual evidence to support the supposition that Kant ever had any "first experiment" in mind. Instead, he hypothesizes, the "experiment [*Versuch*]" Kant mentions in the first Preface (6:10) is *identical* to the "second experiment [*Versuch*]" he mentions in the second Preface (6:12);¹ the only difference is that in the 1794 edition Kant is telling the reader that he is now making a *second attempt* to put forward his argument regarding the nature of religion. In other words, the whole debate over the nature and location of Kant's alleged "two experiments" is all based on a sad translation mistake: Kant's use of *Versuch* at 6:12 refers simply to the "second iteration" of the book's singular project (127). Although Pasternack amasses an impressive array of evidence to support his new reading--most notably, he is undoubtedly correct that the word *Versuch* can and did often refer to an "essay" in Kant's day, so it is not impossible that Kant might have intended to use it in this way--his argument remains far from conclusive, for the following reasons.

First, although Pasternack acknowledges that Kant's reference to a "second experiment" occurs in the same paragraph as his concentric circles metaphor, he does not seem to recognize that Kant employs both metaphors for the same expressed purpose: explaining the nature of the book's key task(s). What Pasternack 2017 never considers is that those who use the "two experiments"

¹ As such, the conclusion of Pasternack 2017 is consistent with the claim that Kant intended to propose a single task (or experiment) for *Religion*, but one that takes place in two distinct steps. Pasternack's own tendency in his 2014 commentary was to use the singular term "experiment", in much the same way.

language are referring to something that is far more deeply embedded in the text of *Religion* than merely what we find in Kant's use of the term "Versuch". Aside from one brief reference in an early quote from Hare, Pasternack mentions Kant's use of the concentric circles metaphor in only one passage (p.122). He is correct that Kant employs this metaphor (and his infamous reference to the "second experiment") in the context of a clarification of the meaning of his book's title. What Pasternack leaves unstated is that the simple measure of changing "experiment" to "attempt" in our English translation of Kant's words, or even the more radical measure of regarding the use of "*Versuch*" in both prefaces to be references to one and the same thing, does nothing to change the fact that Kant's concentric circles metaphor itself beckons the reader to perform a *two-step* task: first, distinguish between historical and pure religion, then assess the extent to which fragments of some specific historical faith contain within them the kernel of moral truth that reason teaches. In other words, Pasternack's attempt to silence all future discussion of Kant's two experiments is not only futile, but potentially detrimental to the goal that Pasternack himself sets forth: a fuller understanding of what Kant intended to accomplish in the main text of *Religion*.

Even if Pasternack's argument were correct and Kant does not intentionally distinguish between two distinct "experiments" that he plans to conduct in the text, this fact would not free interpreters from the need to understand what the concentric circles are all about. From the very beginning of my work on interpreting Kant's *Religion* I have regarded any talk of the two experiments to be integrally bound up in an understanding of the concentric circles metaphor. So, in fact, nothing crucial would change in my argument, if I were to grant Pasternack's new argument. All that would change is that interpreters would no longer be able to talk in terms of experiments. We would still be duty-bound to answer two questions: (1) What is the difference between the nature of the inner and outer circles? and (2) Precisely how and to what extent does the outer circle relate to the inner circle? These just *are* the two experiments, as I understand them. Interpreters frequently introduce new terminology in order to clarify the arguments and theories they believe a great thinker has put forward. I would not protest if, in the wake of Pasternack 2017, future interpreters begin to describe the continued use of a two-experiments hermeneutic as "Palmquist's" model for interpreting *Religion*. However, I arrived at the name for this model because the translators used the word "experiment" to translate Kant's *Versuch*, so I still continue to maintain that the term I use to describe the tasks defined by the two concentric circles are Kant's, not mine. In other words, the first problem with Pasternack's new approach is that it doesn't really solve any problem; as he himself ironically admits at the end of the article, everything remains as it is, and interpreters are still left with the task of figuring out *what* tasks Kant intends to carry out and *where* in his text he accomplishes whatever the task(s) may be.

The second drawback of Pasternack 2017 is that it remains completely silent about the very significant arguments put forward in the aforementioned paper by Brandon Love, even though that paper predated (and, according to my observation as a personal friend of both scholars, was *the*

motivating factor prompting) Pasternack's decision to write an article on this topic. (Again, the anonymous review of Love's paper expresses many of the same points defended in Pasternack 2017, and in the several discussions of Love's paper that I had with Pasternack, he seemed to have a prior familiarity with its claims.) Of course, his silence is in a sense justified, because Love to this day has not published any of the several versions of his paper, so Pasternack was under no scholarly obligation to cite it. However, I believe Love's paper (and later, his doctoral dissertation¹) demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt, through an extensive analysis of a tradition in early chemistry that had a deep influence on Kant's thinking, that in the earlier decades of the eighteenth century chemists used just such "experiment" terminology to describe the two-step process they employed to conduct experiments on chemical compounds: in short, chemists first *separate* a compound into its constituent *elements* (a process sometimes called "analysis"), then attempt to reunite them (a process sometimes called "synthesis"). Kant uses exactly the same terminology elsewhere in his writing, most notably in the prefaces to the first *Critique*, and he knew about the chemists who made such distinctions, because he referred to them from time to time. This makes it far more likely than Pasternack admits for Kant to think in terms of a pair of experiments when he appeals in the first Preface to the need to *distinguish* biblical theology from philosophical theology and when he appeals in the second Preface to a second step of *uniting* these. As a close friend of both Love and Pasternack during the years when they were writing their respective essays, it saddens me that up to now, the less profound work of the senior scholar has eclipsed the more profound work of the junior scholar--a fate Pasternack himself had to endure at certain stages of his career. Once Love's paper is eventually published, all Kant scholars will be able to see for themselves that there is much more to Kant's use of *Versuch* than Pasternack was willing to admit.

4. Conclusion: What can Kant do for religion in the 21st century?

In a lengthy footnote, after summarizing some of the more influential approaches to interpreting Kant's theory of religion by several prominent German interpreters, McGaughey 2013 (156-7n) quotes approvingly from a 2007 article by Andreas Urs that claims, in commenting on *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*² (40), that proponents of "the current 'affirmative' interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion in the English speaking world...are more ready to fill in the ditch between Christian theology and Kant's philosophy of religion in contrast to what is done in similar German publications. As a consequence, Kant's critical approach loses its bite." If McGaughey's

¹Brandon Love, *Kant's Baconian Method as a Transformation of Aristotelian Transcendental Philosophy—A Propaedeutic* (Hong Kong Baptist University doctoral dissertation, 2018). <https://scholars.hkbu.edu.hk/en/studentTheses/kants-baconian-method-as-a-transformation-of-aristotelian-transce>

²Chris L Firestone and Stephen Palmquist, *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). McGaughey 2013 (157n) cites this review article by Andreas Urs as "*Neuerscheinungen zu Kants Religionsphilosophie*," *Philosophische Rundschau* 54 (2007), 31-53

rough-and-ready parody of my position were even close to being accurate, then Urs' claim might have some merit. However, Urs' assessment proves to be off target for any affirmative interpreter who portrays Kant as attempting to revolutionize *historical religion* not by blurring the difference between the pure and the historical (as McGaughey misconstrues my interpretation as doing) but by requiring the historical to *conform itself* to the pure. As such, which type of interpretation actually causes Kant's theory of religion to "lose its bite"? Is it not those such as McGaughey's, which end up converting Lessing's "ugly ditch" into a chasm that is forever and always unbridgeable, such that Kant's pure religion can *never* become relevant to *anything* historical? As anyone who has ever actually been bitten is sure to testify, the *pain* of being bitten is *always* an empirically real *experience*, not merely an abstract transcendental condition! How could *any* philosophical theory have "bite" in the empirical world if it defines itself into a corner by claiming that it can *never* have any resonance with anything historical?

In §IV of Division One of the Third Piece, Kant sets out four guidelines for the constitution of a "true church" (6:101-2): universality, integrity (*Lauterkeit*), freedom, and unchangeableness (of these four guidelines). Just before introducing these guidelines, he distinguishes between the "invisible church", of which only God could serve as the founder, and the "visible church", whose founding can only be the task of us human beings (6:100-101). I read these four guidelines as Kant's explanation of how his theory of religious judgment will (or at least should) have "bite" in relation to any and all historical religious faiths. For, as I demonstrate in Part Three of my *Comprehensive Commentary*, immediately after this discussion of the four categorial guidelines for designing a constitution for a visible church, each of the next four main sections of *Religion's* Third Piece focuses on one of the four guidelines. This is no accident. Kant typically presents his theory of judgment in the third main part of the relevant work, so this is precisely where we should expect to find Kant introducing a set of "categories" to guide our judgment in matters of religious faith.

With this in mind, let us look briefly at the way Kant uses words with the "judg" root in the Third Piece (6:93-147). Division One starts out with a Hobbesian distinction between the "state of nature", wherein "each person is his own judge [*Richter*]" (6:92) and "each human being wants to be himself the judge [*Richter*] concerning what is to be a right for him" (97). The problem is that "this state is a continual wounding of the rights of all others through the presumption of one's being the judge [*Richter*] in one's own cause" (97) --a problem whose solution, Kant suggests, is to set up an "ethical state". But this solution immediately runs into a problem, because "a human judge [*Richter*] cannot fathom the inwardness of other human beings" (95) and this means that our ethical judgments about each other are bound to be inaccurate. This is why human beings inevitably end up appealing to "a divine judge [*Richter*]" (116), a rational postulation that allows us to cope with our inability to understand various perplexities of our ethical situation, such as why some human beings end up being good while others end up being evil: on such matters, "we must leave the judgment [*Urtheil*] to the All-seeing" (121). In other words, the twofold key to Kantian religious

judgment is, on the one hand, to interpret our relations with other people ethically, while on the other hand *deferring* judgment of others in humble recognition of our own ignorance, leaving the ultimate judgment to God, who alone knows the heart of each person.

A parenthetical word is in order here about the importance of hermeneutics to the scholarly task of interpreting the writings of great philosophers. Both McGaughey and Pasternack have accused me of imposing an "agenda" onto Kant's text that is not merited by the text itself. As we have seen, they level this accusation in different ways and with different aims in view, but they both agree that a good interpreter will resist the temptation to impose any such agenda onto a text and should instead just read the text for what it is. The problem, of course, as Gadamer made so clear in his monumental writings, is that it is virtually impossible to interpret *without* reading one's own assumptions into the text. The art and science of interpretation does not (or should not) succeed if we think of ourselves as doing pure, objective exegesis, because *everyone* who writes *anything* about another text must (if he or she has anything remotely interesting to say) *have an agenda that is to some extent foreign to the text*. Post-Gadamer, it should no longer be controversial to affirm that eisegesis is an essential part of good interpretation; what matters is not *whether or not one has an agenda*, but rather whether one's agenda (regarding what the text doesn't say) is *justified* by what the text *does say* and therefore provides *insight* into what the original author wrote and might have meant by what he or she wrote. McGaughey's and Pasternack's articles are themselves excellent illustrations of two serious errors that philosophers typically make when they critique other people's interpretations: Pasternack's error is to assume that an interpretive agenda cannot bring out *genuine* insights if it is not literally and explicitly based solely on the original text; McGaughey's error is to assume that an interpreter who *seems* to be disagreeing with you thereby has nothing valuable to teach you, but should instead just be scoffed at and dismissed as a ridiculous buffoon.

I hope the foregoing article practices what it preaches by responding to McGaughey 2013 and Pasternack 2017 without committing these twin hermeneutic errors that both result in prematurely dismissing one's interlocutors' insights. That is, even though McGaughey's list of 11 errors initially struck me as total fabrications that do not reflect anything I actually wrote, I should read them as evidence that their author was bringing an (unspoken) agenda to the text of my article, and that if I can identify and empathize with that agenda, then I can *tweak* each claim in such a way that the revised list becomes instructive. By reading our opponent's work with humility, rather than with the knee-jerk assumption that "you disagree, so you're just wrong!", we can actually learn something about how our own work was not as clear as we thought it was. By appropriately tweaking such seemingly erroneous claims, *new* insights can be gleaned, and as I illustrated in §2, I was able to reassess and, in some cases, tweak the items in McGaughey's *right-hand column*, which (when I first read his article) seemed mostly correct. In other words, one of my goals in this

article has been to illustrate how a good interpretation draws insight from one's interlocutor and uses the disagreement to move to a higher level of understanding.

Where the rubber hits the road, when it comes to the influence Kant's theory of religious judgment could have on religious belief and practice in the last three-quarters of the twenty-first century, is in his analysis of the proper relationship between what he calls (as we have already seen) pure/moral/rational religion and specific historical faiths. This is where his aforementioned four guidelines for religious judgment can have significant "bite": whereas pure religion must be universal, historical faiths are inevitably tied to specific traditions; whereas pure religion focuses on a person's moral integrity, historical faiths typically focus on currying favor through divine worship; whereas pure religion is grounded in freedom (both of individuals, between each other, and of the religious community in its relation to the state), historical faiths are usually based on a hierarchical relationship between the clergy and the laity and are often unduly concerned with gaining and maintaining political power in the state; and whereas pure religion holds these basic forms of judgment to be categorically necessary (unchangeable), historical faiths properly consist of various empirical forms that are best seen as evolving with the changing times yet which can *seem* immutable by their adherents.

Unlike McGaughey, who writes as if each of these "whereas" comparisons entails that pure religion must keep itself distanced from any and all historical faiths, a close look at Kant's references to judgment in the Third Piece (and throughout *Religion*) reveal quite a different story. While I do not have space here for a detailed analysis, suffice it to say that many of Kant's references to judges, judging, and judgment in the Third Piece are concerned with identifying a way of understanding the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in such a way that it can be *consistent with* the principles of pure religion. Suffice it to say that Kant interprets the different persons of the Trinity as different aspects of *moral judging*. Empowered by belief in such a moral Trinity, a genuinely religious person (6:145) "must constantly test himself as one summoned to give account before a judge [*Richter*]." This is "bite" if ever there was any.

Why should believers in any historical faith care about conforming their beliefs and practices to Kantian pure religion? One good reason, Kant says, is that this enables the historical faith to be spread more widely to a broader range of people. As he puts it in 6:103: "a historical faith based merely on facts can spread its influence no farther than however far the reports relating to the capacity of judging [*zu beurtheilen*] their credibility can reach out to, according to circumstances of time and place." By contrast, a historical *religion* (i.e., a faith that embraces the principles of pure religion at its core) will have *universal* appeal.

A more detailed analysis of Kant's theory of religious judgment would reveal that it, too, entails a two-step process that parallels the way early chemistry experiments were conducted, and this same two-step process lies at the basis of Kant's (or if we follow Pasternack, some interpreters') suggestion that two experiments (or perhaps a single, twofold experiment) operate(s) throughout

Religion. As such, I fully agree with the final conclusion of Pasternack 2017, that what really matters is what the main text says about the nature and function of religion. What it says is that religious people *must*, if they are to avoid falling into a false form of religious belief and practice, attempt to accomplish two rational aims: first, distinguish the elements of your religious tradition that are grounded in moral reason from those that are not so grounded; and second, assess how best to interpret the latter elements in such a way that they can stand in *unity* with the former. This is precisely what I had in mind when, over 35 years ago, I first interpreted the second Preface to *Religion* as urging readers to be on the lookout for the two experiments that appear throughout the main text. To that claim I would now add a prediction: a thorough study of Kant's use of terms relating to judgment in *Religion* would confirm that religious judgment for Kant must follow a similar two-step (or two-sided) process. The fate of religion in the remainder of the 21st century will depend, to a large extent, on the extent to which religious believers and practitioners are willing to follow Kant's lead as they consider how to make real, historical religious judgments

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