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### KANT'S RECONCEPTION OF RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY SECULARISM\*

In the First Supplement to *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795), Kant observes that 'nature uses two means to separate the nations and prevent them from intermingling,' and defines these means as 'linguistic and religious differences.' Then he adds that these differences 'may certainly occasion mutual hatred and provide pretexts for wars, but as culture grows and men gradually move towards greater agreement over their principles, they lead to mutual understanding and peace.'<sup>1</sup> Abstracting from the issue of linguistic differences, one may note that Kant perceives differences between religions, and so religion itself, in two, apparently incompatible, ways: as a factor that can generate conflicts *and* as one that can ensure peace and understanding among people(s). How we qualify religion depends on the development of culture, but what exactly enables the change of qualification?

In this paper, I suggest that Kant addresses this question by offering a reconception of religion in line with what interpreters have called 'religious rationalism'. In that he does so, Kant almost dilutes the contents of religious belief in an ethical doctrine which he projects to be endorseable by everyone. This, to my mind, takes him closer to some 'radical' tendencies in the Enlightenment than many commentators would be inclined to admit.<sup>2</sup> But

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\* This paper has been prepared as part of the research project *The Enlightenment Ideas of the Freedom of Thought and Conscience, and Contemporary Secularism*, funded by the National Science Centre in Poland (UMO-2014/15/D/HS1/02751).

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel KANT, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Political Writings*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113–114.

<sup>2</sup> Clearly, such a reading is incompatible with those interpretations that either consider Kant a thinker deeply informed by the principles of Protestantism, or suggest that Kant's theory of reli-

it is also what, as I take it, should make his position quite unattractive as a potential inspiration for some of the recent defenders of religion and the so-called ‘convictions of conscience’, especially in their ‘pluralist-liberal’ breed.

#### VARIETIES OF SECULARISM—AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Kant made the above-quoted diagnosis at a time when the atrocities of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century wars of religion were still a relatively fresh memory,<sup>3</sup> although the application of political and cultural measures, like advocating toleration and freedom of belief, to prevent such events from happening again, had already been underway.<sup>4</sup> Arguably, more than two centuries later Kant’s diagnosis did not entirely lose on perspicuity: what may look like religious conflicts continue to ruin certain parts of the world; it suffices to mention attempts at eradicating Christianity from the Middle East,<sup>5</sup> growing radicalization of some groups of Muslims in Western societies, and not unrelated anti-religious phobias, coming in the aftermath.<sup>6</sup> In the early modern era, the aim of religious toleration, promoted by authors like John Locke and Pierre Bayle, was to put an end to strife between Christians of different denominations, especially Protestants and Catholics. Likewise, it is political secularism that is expected to ward off religious conflicts and enable peaceful coexistence of individuals professing different creeds, or endorsing different ideologies and worldviews, in culturally diversified societies nowadays.<sup>7</sup>

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gion leaves much space for a plurality of religious and non-religious creeds. *Kant-Studien* 4,1-3 (1900): 1-31; Onora O’NEILL, “Kant on Reason and Religion,” in Grethe B. PETERSON, *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 18 (Utah: The University of Utah Press, 1997), 267–308.

<sup>3</sup> Some descriptions of these atrocities, committed e.g. on French Protestants, can be found in a book by Jean CLAUDE, *An Account of the Persecutions and Oppressions of the Protestants in France* (London, 1686). Cf. Margaret JACOB, “How Radical Was the Enlightenment? What Do We Mean by Radical?” *Diametros* 40 (2014): 99–114.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the state ensuring peace between confessions—see, e.g., the Prussian case described in Ian HUNTER, “Kant’s *Religion* and Prussian Religious Policy,” *Modern Intellectual History* 2,1 (2005): 1–27; Michael J. SAUTER, *Visions of the Enlightenment. The Edict on Religion of 1788 and the Politics of the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century Prussia*. Leiden and Boston: Brill 2009.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Eliza GRISWOLD, “Is This the End of Christianity in the Middle East?”, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html?\\_r=0#](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html?_r=0#) (accessed: 9.07.2016).

<sup>6</sup> On anti-religious prejudices motivating political decisions, see Martha NUSSBAUM, *The New Religious Intolerance. Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 43–55.

<sup>7</sup> On the tenets of political secularism, see Jocelyn Maclure, “Political Secularism: A Sketch,”

But what is political secularism? In *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience* Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor mention two principles which underlie political secularism: equal respect for all individuals and freedom of conscience. With a background in the liberal tradition of Western political philosophy (in particular John Rawls), they do not consider it necessary to justify these principles or ground them in any more fundamental values; rather, the principles themselves should be articulated in a way that does not preclude alternative justifications.

Apart from equal respect and freedom of conscience, Maclure and Taylor distinguish two major 'operative modes' of political secularism: the separation between Church and state and the neutrality of state towards religion(s). Within these operative modes, the principles can be followed in practice, although occasionally more emphasis on any of them can result in their falling into conflicts with one another. For instance, too much concern about freedom of conscience may lead to situations in which some citizens are exempted from the obligation to observe certain common practices, rules or laws—but in this way equality becomes challenged.

Depending on the way in which these key tenets are realized by the two operative modes, Maclure and Taylor distinguish two models of political secularism: 'republican' and 'pluralist-liberal'. The republican model 'allows greater restriction on the free exercise of religion, in the name of a certain understanding of the state's neutrality and of the separation of political and religious powers.' On the other side, the pluralist-liberal model is 'centered on the protection of freedom of conscience and of religion, as well as a more flexible concept of separation and neutrality.'<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the latter is more sympathetic to the view that individuals have a right to openly act on their 'convictions of conscience', rather than cherishing these convictions but 'in private', since it recognizes that some beliefs, strongly held and considered of crucial importance by individuals, endow individuals' existence with meaning and determine their moral identity.<sup>9</sup>

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in *RECODE Working Paper Series. Online Working Paper No. 16*, 2013: 1–9; Damian BARNAT, "Sekularyzm polityczny a spór o przekonania sumienia" (ms). The authors discuss political secularism in the light of the need for accommodations in the law as a response to the requirement to respect individuals' 'core' convictions grounded in conscience.

<sup>8</sup> Jocelyn MACLURE and Charles TAYLOR, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>9</sup> Maclure and Taylor characterize the role played in individuals' lives by the core convictions of conscience in the following way: 'It is in choosing values, hierarchizing or reconciling them, and clarifying the projects based on them that human beings manage to structure their existence,

Since secularism addresses the challenge of religious diversity, its roots should go back to those societies which had to deal with this issue in the course of their history. There is surely no uniform way in which this would be accomplished. Rajeev Bhargava, for example, emphasizes differences between the European and the non-European models of secularism, in particular the one endorsed in India.<sup>10</sup> Fairly often, though, secularism is understood only as a tendency to eliminate religion from the public sphere or to diminish its cultural significance, rather than as a way of accommodating diversity. For instance, Jonathan Israel construes secularism as ‘the elimination of theology from law, institutions, education and public affairs,’ and attributes its origins to the ‘radical Enlightenment’, initiated by Spinoza and developed by his followers throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, secularism would involve primarily a critique of *revealed* religion,<sup>12</sup> and it would prioritize *libertas philosophandi*, an individual’s right to public expression of his or her views, over religious liberty, the right of an individual and institutions to act in accordance with their credal and other core beliefs.<sup>13</sup>

But extensive literature on the topic allows different, and more nuanced, claims about the Enlightenment too: for example, that it offered a new way of thinking about religion—as a tool of moral education of the masses or as a means of shaping national identities; that it promoted rationalization of re-

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to exercise their judgment, and to conduct their life—in short, to constitute a *moral* identity for themselves.’ Maclure and Taylor, *Secularism*, 12–13; ‘... core beliefs and commitments, including religious ones, must be distinguished from other personal beliefs and preferences because of the role they play in the moral identity of individuals. The more a belief is linked to an individual’s sense of moral integrity, the more it is a condition for his self-respect, and the stronger must be the legal protection it enjoys.’ *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>10</sup> Rajeev BHARGAVA, “Is European Secularism Secular Enough?” in Jean L. COHEN and Cecile LABORDE, *Religion, Secularism, and Constitutional Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 157–181. On the Chinese model of dealing with religious diversity, see: Peter van der VEER, “Religion after 1750,” in John R. MCNEILL and Kenneth POMERANZ, *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 7: *Production, Destruction, and Connection, 1750–Present*, Part 2: *Shared Transformations?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 160–180.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan ISRAEL, “‘Radical Enlightenment’—Peripheral, Substantial, or the Main Face of the Transatlantic Enlightenment (1650–1850)?,” *Diametros* 40 (2014): 73. For the claim that the radical Enlightenment originates in Spinoza, see Israel’s seminal work: *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and its sequels.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Leo STRAUSS, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 35.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jonathan ISRAEL, *Locke, Spinoza and the Philosophical Debate Concerning Toleration in the Early Enlightenment (c. 1670–c. 1750)* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1999).

ligion instead of entirely dispensing with it in the 'public affairs'; or—importantly—that secularism was a much later invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the emergence of that concept prompted an anachronistic re-interpretation of the Enlightenment itself.<sup>14</sup> *Pace* Israel, atheism might not be the only radical facet of the 'age of reason'; a reformatory zeal might account for its radicalism equally well.

It might seem that political secularism does not have much in common with the attempts to rationalize religion, undertaken by the German *Aufklärer* and the so called-Neologians,<sup>15</sup> as well as some Dutch Spinozists,<sup>16</sup> or with the criticism of religion, notoriously raised by the French *philosophes*. For political secularism aims at managing religious diversity, whereas the Enlightenment seems to challenge the very fact of religion and human religiosity. However, a closer look at the 18<sup>th</sup>-century debates on religion reveals that religious diversity was also an issue, and one of primary importance.<sup>17</sup> This at least is evident from the quote from Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden* that I started with.

Kant's views on religion are far from unambiguous. For example, while he does not attach any intrinsic value to religious practice and despises believers' efforts to acquire the divine grace through mere worship and observance of 'statutory laws', rather than through the cultivation of one's moral character,<sup>18</sup> he recognizes the need for religious institutions. But although indispensable to bring the 'Kingdom of God' closer to earth, religious institu-

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jonathan SHEEHAN, "Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization," *The American Historical Review* 108,4 (2003): 1061–1080; Margaret JACOB, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981); Ian HUNTER, "Secularization: The Birth of a Modern Combat Concept," *Modern Intellectual History* 12,1 (2015): 1–32.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. I. HUNTER, "Kant's Religion...".

<sup>16</sup> A concise presentation of the views on (mainly) the Christian religion, held in 'Spinoza's circle' is offered in Henri KROP, "Radical Reformation or Dechristianization. Spinoza's Circle on Religion" (ms).

<sup>17</sup> See James SCHMIDT, "German Enlightenment," 2013, [https://open.bu.edu/bitstream/handle/2144/4535/schmidt\\_german\\_enlightenment.pdf?sequence=3](https://open.bu.edu/bitstream/handle/2144/4535/schmidt_german_enlightenment.pdf?sequence=3) (accessed 26.11.2016), especially the exchange of letters on religious toleration between Moses Mendelssohn and August Hennings. Mendelssohn defends religious diversity urging that the ultimate purpose of nature is to bring about unity (*Einheit*), rather than uniformity (*Einerleiheit*) (p. 18). The article has been published in translation into Polish: James Schmidt, *Niemieckie oświecenie*, trans. Anna Tomaszewska, in Justyna MIKLASZEWSKA and Anna TOMASZEWSKA, *Filozofia Oświecenia. Radykalizm—religia—kosmopolityzm* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2015), 65–94.

<sup>18</sup> See Immanuel KANT, "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason," in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 188–201 (RGV, AA 06:168-185).

tions, representing ‘ecclesiastical faith’, have a merely instrumental role to play, as a ‘vehicle’ subsidiary to ‘pure religious faith’. Moreover, they should be liable to continuous reform, following the progress of rationality in history.<sup>19</sup> With his conception of ‘pure religious faith’, Kant seems to reduce religion to the moral law, legislated by the autonomous reason.<sup>20</sup> But then he also suggests that morality must be complemented by religion; for if we assume that the end of morality—the ‘highest good’—is really achievable, we have to endorse a transcendent realm, with its divine ruler, in which virtue is justly rewarded by a due proportion of happiness.<sup>21</sup> The late Kant even seems to equate God with the moral lawgiver, which apparently undermines the autonomy of the will.<sup>22</sup> And while he claims that there is only one true and universal religion, he seems to allow its different manifestations and leave much space for different views on the nature of God and the relation between God and man.<sup>23</sup> Thus, once we consider the complexity of Kant’s views, it may become difficult to clearly see whether his position potentially supports the tendency to accommodate religious diversity or rather the tendency to relegate religion from ‘public affairs’ altogether.

#### KANT ON THE PUBLIC USE OF REASON—AND RELIGION

In order to address the above concern, let us see whether Kant’s texts can motivate a determinate position on the relation between religion and the public sphere. Importantly, Kant does not refer explicitly to the ‘public sphere’ but

<sup>19</sup> This is clearly suggested for example in the following fragment of *Die Streit der Fakultäten*: ‘...ecclesiastical faith, as the mere vehicle of religious faith, is mutable and must remain open to gradual purification until it coincides with religious faith...’ Immanuel KANT, “The Conflict of the Faculties,” in *Religion and Rational*, 267 (SF, AA 07:42).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., I. KANT, “Religion within the Boundaries”, p. 138 (RGV, AA 06:105).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 60 (RGV, AA 06:8).

<sup>22</sup> See Immanuel KANT, *Opus postumum*, trans. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 204 (OP, AA 22:122).

<sup>23</sup> ‘There is only one (true) religion; but there can be several kinds of faith.—We can say, further, that in the various churches divided from one another because of the difference in their kinds of faith, one and the same true religion can nevertheless be met with.’ I. KANT, “Religion within the Boundaries”, 140 (RGV, AA 06:108). Referring to ‘churches’ Kant does not seem to have only Christian religious institutions in mind, since the subsequent paragraph introduces also non-Christian faiths: Judaism and Islam, apart from the Christian denominations (Catholicism and Protestantism).

talks about 'the public use of reason.' I assume, though, that we can think of the public use of reason as constituting the public sphere *in the Kantian sense*.<sup>24</sup>

In *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* (1784), Kant introduces an opposition between the public and the private use of reason. One makes the public use of reason, he claims, when one speaks 'in one's own person', rather than on behalf of an institution one works for, thus as a 'scholar' or an educated person (*Gelehrter*), rather than as one who holds an office, like that of a clergyman or a government official.<sup>25</sup> Besides, the public use of reason 'must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men.'<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is not sufficient to speak on one's own behalf, that is, to express one's own opinions, in order to secure the public character of one's use of reason; such a use also has to promote freedom and enlightenment, construed as 'man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity,'<sup>27</sup> that is, as the ability to use one's reason without the guidance of others. Thus, one's use of reason in the public mode, Kant seems to suggest, should encourage others to think for themselves too.

In a later essay, *What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* (1786), Kant elaborates on the crucial condition of the public use of reason—freedom of thought, by which he understands three things: freedom to publicize one's writings in print (freedom of the pen), freedom of conscience, and reason's self-legislation (autonomy).

Characterizing freedom of thought as freedom of the pen, Kant rejects the idea that one can be free without exchange with others, by merely exercising control over one's thoughts. Freedom of thought in this sense requires the ability to think in community with other people, thus to justify one's claims and assess the justifications of others; but also to base one's claims on universally shared principles of reasoning that guarantee their communicability.<sup>28</sup> Printed texts are the best means of articulating one's reasons in accord with these principles.

<sup>24</sup> The Kantian sense is not much remote from the Enlightenment one: the public sphere provided a venue which enabled an exchange of views between educated, that is primarily literate, citizens. Cf. M.J. SAUTER, *Visions of the Enlightenment*.

<sup>25</sup> Immanuel KANT, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *Political Writings* (2003), 56.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Or *universal* communicability, as suggested by Onora O'NEILL, *The Public Use of Reason*. In: *Constructions of Reason. Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 49–50.

Another sense of the freedom to think, which I have called freedom of conscience, Kant describes as freedom from external guidance in religious matters, such as could be given, e.g., by religious authorities or state institutions. On this construal, Kant writes,

freedom to think is... taken in a sense in which it is opposed to *compulsion over conscience*; [for] even without having external power some citizens set themselves up as having the custody of others in religious affairs, and instead of arguing they know how to ban every examination of reason by their early influence on people's minds.<sup>29</sup>

What Kant says implies that reason can be employed in the public mode once restrictions on conscience, imposed jointly (especially in Kant's times) by religious institutions and the state, have been removed. The role of the 'custodians' is to protect religious beliefs from examination, rendering them in this way, as it were, immune to criticism. For Kant, freedom of thought entails, however, a possibility to rationally scrutinize all beliefs, including those that may have been transmitted in the course of education, as part of national or family heritage etc.—at the risk of changing or even rejecting them.<sup>30</sup> In other words, to think freely means to be able to revise one's beliefs, if this is what reason recommends, regardless of their origin. In this respect, religious beliefs would not be distinct from any other beliefs. Importantly, what I have called freedom of conscience—in the Kantian sense—implies the ability to engage in a critique of religion, rather than the possibility to profess one's beliefs and act upon them in practice.

In its last sense, freedom of thought refers to 'the subjection of reason to no laws except those which it gives itself,' that is, reason's self-legislation. To think freely is to follow the laws of reason alone and the opposite of it is following no laws at all, which Kant equates with a 'lawless use of reason'.<sup>31</sup> This seems to suggest that there is only one way of a legitimate use of reason, and this is when reason follows its own laws; relying on authorities other than reason means using one's reason in a potentially lawless fashion.

<sup>29</sup> Immanuel Kant, *What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?*, in *Religion and Rational* (2001), 16 (WDO, AA 8:145).

<sup>30</sup> Kant allows the idea that the public sphere may reform or constrain religious institutions under certain conditions, but not *vice versa*. Interference in matters of a religious institution would be justified, for example, if the institution decided to adopt 'a permanent religious constitution which no-one might publicly question,' since this would be detrimental to the progress of enlightenment. See I. KANT, "An Answer to the Question," 58.

<sup>31</sup> I. KANT, "What Does It Mean," 16 (WDO, AA 8:145).



Since self-legislation is just another name for autonomy, freedom of thought, requisite for the public use of reason, presupposes that in our communicating with other members of the public sphere we should be guided by those principles of which our own reason is the sole author. The public domain resembles thus the moral one in that both are delimited by reason's self-legislation and constitute the areas of the exercise of reason's autonomy.

Since admission to the Kantian public sphere requires that one reject all authorities, apart from the authority of reason, there is no space in it for heteronomously grounded beliefs, and so particular religious points of view cannot be represented there. Basing one's participation in the Kantian public sphere on one's religious creed, one would in fact turn back to the private use of reason. Thus, the public sphere, according to Kant, does not open up any space for dialogue between different creeds, nor does it have resources to recognize—as in Maclure's and Taylor's pluralist-liberal model of secularism—the 'meaning-giving' role of the 'core convictions of conscience'; rather, it can only offer a possibility to scrutinize them from a purely rational perspective.

The above considerations may lead to the conclusion that—to put it crudely—Kant's philosophy offers reasons supporting relegation of religion from the public sphere. However, this might be too simplified an account of the relation between religion and the public sphere, as Kant construes it. Let us look into Kant's letter to Frederick William II, published with the introduction to *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Kant addresses there the king's objection that in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* he 'misused his philosophy to distort and disparage many of the cardinal teachings of the Holy Scriptures and Christianity.'<sup>32</sup> Kant responds to the objection by emphasizing that he purported to demonstrate that the principles of Christianity are compatible with reason. If religion is rational, or at least can be rationalized, there is no reason why it would have to be relegated from the public sphere in Kant's sense. Thus, the religious point of view can in principle be represented in the public sphere, provided that it can be articulated in accordance with the principles of reason.

It seems, however, that in the *Rechtslehre* (1797) one can find an explicit argument for the neutrality of the state towards religion(s), and so there seems to be a Kantian version of an argument for secularism: namely, as 'an inner attitude of mind [*Gesinnung*]' religion falls 'outside the effective ju-

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<sup>32</sup> I. KANT, "The Conflict of the Faculties," 240 (SF, AA 07:6).

risdiction of civil power.’<sup>33</sup> On such an account, religious and all other ‘convictions of conscience’ belong into what Locke called an ‘inward court’ of the human conscience<sup>34</sup> and do not have, as such, any public purport; for Locke, judgments on matters regarding religion are private (in one of the senses of this word). Kant also makes it clear that the ‘jurisdiction of civil power’ applies to churches—as institutions recognized by the state—but only in the sense that the state has a right to constrain the influence of ecclesiastical institutions on citizens if they aimed at undermining the stability and peace of the state. Otherwise, civil authorities are not entitled to interfere in internal policies of a church, or to propagate a particular faith among citizens.

We should note, though, that the word ‘public’ has been used above in two different senses. To say that something does not belong to the public sphere because it constitutes ‘an inner attitude of mind’, is to employ the term ‘public’ as an equivalent of ‘open, transparent, and accessible, in opposition to what is secret or that to which access is restricted’—as Maclure and Taylor would put it.<sup>35</sup> However, referring to the public use of reason, Kant uses the word ‘public’ to designate a property of those acts of rational individuals that have their origin in the autonomy of reason. In this sense, ‘an inner attitude of mind’, as well as what pertains to or follows from it, could be public, whereas there could also be things that do not bear this property, even though they would belong to a space open and accessible to everyone. For Kant, the distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’, unlike for Locke, does not reflect the division between that which pertains to ‘soul’ and that which pertains to ‘body’<sup>36</sup>; rather, it is a distinction between two kinds of rationality: one restricted by rules or norms external to it and one restricted by *its own* intrinsic rules or norms. From this perspective, there is nothing that would warrant relegation of religious or any other beliefs from the public sphere as long as that they do comply with the autonomy of reason.

One might observe, however, that to demand that religious beliefs follow the Kantian pattern of universal rationality is to blatantly misunderstand the

<sup>33</sup> Immanuel KANT, *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, trans. John Ladd (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 133 (MS RL, AA 06:327).

<sup>34</sup> In Lockean terms, judging upon the matters of religion is up to the ‘inward court’, since ‘the care of each man’s salvation belongs only to himself.’ John LOCKE, *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 45–6. This claim underlies Locke’s argument for toleration with regard to religious beliefs, and Kant seems only to reiterate it in his *Rechtslehre*.

<sup>35</sup> MACLURE and TAYLOR, *Secularism*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> J. LOCKE, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 46.

nature of such beliefs. Hence, Kant's reply to Frederick William II can at best be read as elusive, especially in the light of those recent interpretations which argue that Wöllner's edicts (1788) did not target enlightenment but those sectarian movements which aimed at challenging religious pluralism guaranteed by the Prussian state.<sup>37</sup> Thus, for instance, Ian Hunter identified these movements as radically rationalist with regard to religion, a tendency that would 'reach all the way from the secret societies..., across radical rationalists like Carl Friedrich Bahrdt, to the "liberal" Protestant theology of the neologians, who used it to transform sacramental religion into perfectionist moral anthropology.'<sup>38</sup> On Hunter's reading, Kant would subscribe to religious rationalism himself.<sup>39</sup>

As an advocate of 'purely moral religion', or 'the religion of reason'<sup>40</sup>, and one who locates in reason the source of faith,<sup>41</sup> Kant may indeed seem to represent religious rationalism. Since for Kant there is only *one* true religion—the religion of reason—his doctrine cannot favour religious pluralism.<sup>42</sup> As a rationalist with regard to religion, Kant would also encourage a reinterpretation of the dogmas of the *revealed* religion, so as to make them compatible with reason.

Such a 'rationalization of religion'<sup>43</sup> would result in questioning the need for religious institutions, not only mediating the 'Word of God' to the peo-

<sup>37</sup> Cf. I. HUNTER, "Kant's Religion"; IDEM. "Secularization"; M.J. SAUTER, *Visions of the Enlightenment*.

<sup>38</sup> I. HUNTER, "Kant's Religion," 9.

<sup>39</sup> Antoni Szwed also qualifies Kant's attitude to religion as 'purely rationalist'; for Kant 'does not reject the Christian revelation contained in the Bible, but attempts to show that its significance is secondary to his rationalist religion and, in principle, does not add anything new to ethics and religion.' Antoni SZWED, *Rozum wobec chrześcijańskiego Objawienia. Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard* (Kęty: Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, 2011), 107.

<sup>40</sup> I. KANT, "Religion within the Boundaries", 64 (RGV, AA 6:13).

<sup>41</sup> 'The concept of God and even the conviction of his *existence* can be met with only in reason, and it cannot first come to us either through inspiration or through tidings communicated to us, however great the authority behind them. [...] rational faith must come first, and then certain appearances or disclosures could at most provide the occasion for investigating whether we are warranted in taking what speaks or presents itself to us to be a Deity, and thus to serve to confirm that faith according to these findings.' I. KANT, "What Does It Mean," 14–15 (WDO, AA 8:142-3).

<sup>42</sup> On the other side, the end of Wöllner's religious edict would consist in 'reaffirming the constitutional recognition of a plurality of confessional religions, while simultaneously attempting to contain the threat to this constitutional order that was posed by the anti-confessional proselytizing of Protestant rationalism.' I. HUNTER, "Secularization," 18.

<sup>43</sup> Ian HUNTER, *Rival Enlightenments. Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 340.

ple, but also acting as the guardians of morality in the society. Thus, if we look at the rationalists about religion as themselves a partisan group struggling for domination in a relatively pluralist political space, we may better see the motivation of Wöllner's 1788 edicts on religion and censorship. Since many of those who would criticise religion in the name of enlightenment would themselves represent state institutions, the unimpeded development of rationalism with regard to religious matters would render the state anything but neutral towards religion(s).

According to Hunter, Kant's religious rationalism can be traced back to the metaphysics and anthropology of a '*homo duplex*—the figure of sensibly embodied intelligible being,'<sup>44</sup> or 'the nexus of the intelligible and sensible worlds,'<sup>45</sup> popular in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Protestant academic circles. However, I would like to take a different route trying to explain Kant's rationalist approach to religion. In the age of reason there was another influential, though somewhat secret, source of such an approach: the philosophy of Benedict Spinoza (identified by Israel as the origin of the 'radical Enlightenment'). I do not claim that Kant was a declared Spinozist but, as I hope to show in the next section, there are remarkable affinities between Kant's and Spinoza's views on religion. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, until the 1785 pantheism controversy between Friedrich H. Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn, the ideas of Spinoza received remarkably bad press as an alleged source of free-thinking and atheism, and hence immorality, which is why philosophers would not risk their reputation by openly endorsing them. This was also true of Kant.<sup>46</sup> Thus, while we consider Spinoza a harbinger of the radical Enlightenment, we can try to inquire how close Kant himself would come to that secularizing tendency of the age of reason.

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<sup>44</sup> I. HUNTER, *Rival Enlightenments*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>46</sup> Several scholars have recently studied the affinities between Spinoza and Kant (in particular his pre-Critical metaphysics). Cf., e.g., Noam HOFFER, "The Relation between God and the World in the Pre-Critical Kant: Was Kant a Spinozist?" *Kantian Review* 21,2 (2016): 185–210. I have discussed some Spinozist themes in Kant in: Anna Tomaszewska, "Spinoza's God in Kant's Pre-Critical Writings: An Attempt at Localizing the 'Threat'," *Kant Studies Online* 2015: 65-102.

KANT'S ACCOUNT OF RELIGION—AND SPINOZA<sup>47</sup>

In order to bring out the above-mentioned affinities, I will refer to three types of religion in Spinoza, distinguished by Yirmiyahu Yovel.<sup>48</sup> They include the true religion (*amor Dei intellectualis*—an intellectual love of God), the universal religion (*religio catholica*), and the crude historical religion (*religio vana*). I will also characterize them against the background of Kant's account of religion.

*Religio vana* is the kind of religion that Spinoza criticizes in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. As a historical religion, it is based on the Scripture as an unquestionable source of truth which God has revealed to man. *Religio vana* rests on 'a fundamental principle' on which the Scripture is 'true and divine throughout'. But this principle, according to Spinoza, should not be accepted uncritically from the start; rather, it 'should emerge from a critical examination and understanding of Scripture.'<sup>49</sup> Mediated by tradition, without the critical exegesis of the Scripture, the historical religion makes minds susceptible to superstition and produces false notions of God, nurtured by the emotion of fear. It is this crude historical religion that Spinoza challenges by offering a method of a critical hermeneutic of the Bible, which reveals that the book has primarily moral, rather than cognitive, purport and teaches 'to obey God with all one's mind by practicing justice and charity.'<sup>50</sup>

Kant's equivalent of *religio vana*, identified by Spinoza as the ground of religious strife in societies, is a form of what he refers to as an 'ecclesiastical faith'. The problem with the ecclesiastical faith—otherwise a vehicle of 'true, inner and universal religion which must be distinguished from particular church dogma, as a matter of historical belief'<sup>51</sup>—is that it often declares its historically mediated, and so limited, revelation, on which it builds a *particular* church, to be universally valid. Kant recognizes that 'the so-called religious struggles, which have so often shaken the world and spat-

<sup>47</sup> In a bit more detail, I compare Kant's and Spinoza's accounts of religion in: Anna TOMASZEWSKA, "W stronę radykalnego Oświecenia: uwagi o religii według Spinozy i Kanta," in *Znaczenie filozofii Oświecenia. Człowiek wśród ludzi*, ed. Barbara Grabowska, Adam Grzeliński and Jolanta Żelazna (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2016), 167–186.

<sup>48</sup> Yirmiyahu YOVEL, *Spinoza and Other Heretics. The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict SPINOZA, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> I. KANT, "The Conflict of the Faculties," 286 (SF, AA 07:67).

tered it with blood, have never been anything but squabbles over ecclesiastical faiths.’<sup>52</sup> Like Spinoza, he takes the trespasses of the ecclesiastical faith to derive from a misguided reading of the Scriptures and also insists that the Bible has moral rather than cognitive purport. To illustrate the point: already in his 1775 correspondence with a Swiss theologian, Johann Caspar Lavater, Kant suggests that the Gospels should not be read as a report on certain events in history, but as a text that carries a moral message. Accordingly:

... considered as history, our New Testament writings can never be so esteemed as to make us dare to have unlimited trust in every word of them, and especially if this were to weaken our attentiveness to the one necessary thing, namely, the moral faith of the Gospels.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, also Kant proposes a method of interpreting Scripture. This method consists in reading the Bible in the light of the principles of (practical) reason, so as to sift out the moral teaching from the historical narrative; for the latter, he thinks, ‘contributes nothing’ towards ‘making better human beings’.<sup>54</sup>

Kant’s idea of interpreting Scripture in the light of the moral law derived from practical reason takes us to the second type of religion in Spinoza, distinguished by Yovel: *religio catholica*. This term designates ‘the religion which is universal or common to the whole human race’, and one that ‘does not consist in ceremonies but in charity and integrity of mind.’<sup>55</sup> The catholic religion contains several basic dogmas; for example, one that God exists and is merciful and, most importantly, one saying that the ‘worship of God and obedience to Him consists solely in justice and charity, or in love of one’s neighbour.’<sup>56</sup> Hence, *religio catholica* should be regarded as universal morality which people are obliged to follow not on the basis of any reasoning or justification, but insofar as they practice obedience to God. In other words, Spinoza’s universal religion is morality considered as commanded by God and not as justified by human reason. This kind of religion can do without ceremonies and customs, characteristic of particular faiths; besides, and interestingly, it does not presuppose knowledge of the nature of God.<sup>57</sup> As

<sup>52</sup> I. KANT, “Religion within the Boundaries,” 141 (RGV, AA 06:108).

<sup>53</sup> Immanuel KANT, *Correspondence*, trans. Arnulf Zweig (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 153 (Br, AA 10:178).

<sup>54</sup> I. KANT, “Religion within the Boundaries,” 143 (RGV, AA 06:111).

<sup>55</sup> B. SPINOZA, *Theological-Political*, 167.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>57</sup> Here is how Spinoza expresses this ‘Kantian’ view: ‘But what God, or the exemplar of the

Leszek Kołakowski has pointed out, Spinoza's 'universal religion belongs entirely to the domain of practical reason.'<sup>58</sup> It is religion conceived as universal morality that can safeguard 'concord and peace' in a society, which is why Spinoza postulates, in chapter 19 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, that the state should interpret the commands of this religion and convert them into enforceable laws. The conception of the state religion seems to imply that people can be made morally better by means of political measures.

Also Kant advocates the idea of religion as universal morality; indeed, this is what his definition of religion as 'the recognition [*Erkenntnis*] of all our duties as divine commands' entails.<sup>59</sup> On this definition, religion is the moral law considered under the form of a divine order;<sup>60</sup> yet it is the same moral law that reason legislates to itself, 'for religion is a purely rational affair.'<sup>61</sup> Kant believes that with 'the universal religion of reason'<sup>62</sup> a 'moral-world epoch' would be brought about, one in which 'the highest possible good on earth' would be realized.<sup>63</sup> It is this universal religion—rather than a political revolution—which, according to Kant, shall lead to the emergence of what he calls 'the new order of things'<sup>64</sup> in which peaceful coexistence of

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true life, is, e.g. whether He is fire or spirit or life or thought, etc. is irrelevant to faith. ... it has nothing to do with faith whether one believes that God is everywhere in essence or in potential, whether He governs all things from liberty or from the necessity of nature, whether He issues edicts like a prince or teaches them as eternal truths, whether man obeys God of his own free will or by the necessity of the divine decree, or whether reward of the good and punishment of wrongdoers takes place naturally or supernaturally. ... It is, therefore, not the man who advances the best reasons who necessarily manifests the best faith but rather the man who performs the best works of justice and charity. How salutary and necessary this doctrine is in a society if we wish people to live in concord and peace with each other!' *Ibid.*, 183-4.

<sup>58</sup> Leszek KOŁAKOWSKI, *Jednostka i nieskończoność. Wolność i antynomie wolności w filozofii Spinozy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012), 374.

<sup>59</sup> I. KANT, "Religion within the Boundaries," 177 (RGV, AA 06:154); IDEM, "The Conflict of the Faculties," 262 (SF, AA 07:36).

<sup>60</sup> It is therefore correct to claim that God, or revelation, 'gives authority', a stamp of '*imprimatur*', to the moral law; however, religion would be no more than a mode of presentation, or consideration, of morality. From this it does not follow that religion and morality are essentially different. The problem of the relation between reason and revelation, then, seems to be spurious, or could be reduced to the question about the relation between two different ways of using the language; but it does not seem particularly instructive to claim that the relationship between the two is 'harmonious', as is done, e.g., in: Phil ENNS, "Reason and Revelation: Kant and the Problem of Authority," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 62,2 (2007): 103-114.

<sup>61</sup> I. KANT, "The Conflict of the Faculties," 287 (SF, AA 07:67).

<sup>62</sup> I. KANT, "Religion within the Boundaries," 152 (RGV, AA 06:122).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 162 (RGV, AA 06:136).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 152 (RGV, AA 06:122).

human beings would be founded on their moral disposition rather than on political arrangements, imposed from outside.

But what is the relation between the universal religion of reason and particular ‘ecclesiastical faiths’? Does Kant suggest replacing particular faiths with the religion of reason as a solution to interreligious conflicts? Or does he think that it is possible to distil a moral core from the existing empirical religions so as to ‘defang them of their bellicosity’?<sup>65</sup> If we take Kant’s rationalism with regard to religion as part of a larger sectarian movement, then the first option looks more plausible. But it seems to entail that Kant would consider the existing creeds pretty much worthless and unfit for spreading the rational faith as its vehicles. This cannot be quite true, though, considering Kant’s assessment of particular empirical faiths. For example, in the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he compares different faiths with one another as to how close they are to the religion of reason, and finds out that Christianity fares much better than, for instance, Judaism.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, in a different place, Kant admits that ‘in the various churches divided from one another because of the difference in their kinds of faith, one and the same true religion can nevertheless be met with;’<sup>67</sup> thus, he holds that different empirical faiths can instantiate the universal religion. This would imply that Kant does not propose literally replacing particular faiths with the religion of reason; rather, he would propose no more than (re-)interpreting particular creeds in the light of the universal religion. It is fairly unclear, though, what rules would be applied in the process of ‘translating’ the propositions of particular faiths into the propositions of the universal religion, and *who* would be entitled to apply them: individual believers, religious institutions or, perhaps, an authority external to both—and in the latter case, whether this would be the state (as suggested by Spinoza) or the enlightened public sphere.

The last type of religion in Spinoza, distinguished by Yovel, is ‘the intellectual love of God,’ that is, the true religion. The concept of *amor Dei intellectualis* emerges in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza discusses kinds of cognition. It refers to the ‘third kind of knowledge,’<sup>68</sup> or *scientia intuitiva*—the

<sup>65</sup> M. JACOB, “How Radical Was the Enlightenment?,” 109.

<sup>66</sup> I. KANT, “Religion within the Boundaries,” 154 ff. (RGV, AA 06:125ff.).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 140 (RGV, AA 06:108).

<sup>68</sup> Benedict SPINOZA, *Ethics*. In: *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), part 5, propositions 25ff., 375ff. Proposition 36 explains the nature of the intellectual love of God in the following way: ‘The mind’s intellectual love toward God is the love of God wherewith God loves himself not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explicated through the essence of the human mind considered under a form



cognition of particulars that consists in a full insight into what determines them to be what they are, i.e. into their causes. Such an insight would be attributed to a mind that can represent *all* causal determinations of a particular thing, thus to one that has a grasp of the totality of causally related things and conceives it, as it were, from the divine perspective. Accordingly, for example, Jacob Freudenthal, a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Spinoza biographer, has called Spinoza's religion 'die Religion der Erkenntnis.'<sup>69</sup> For the intellectual love of God, according to Spinoza, would manifest itself in the pursuit of knowledge—or even in following the ideal of absolute knowledge. Such an ideal, though, can be followed outside any institutional framework devised in order to worship the divine, thus by an individual scholar dedicated to his studies of nature, rather than by a mere member of a religious organization. If anything, this is the idea that clearly motivates the secularizing tendency of the radical Enlightenment.

Can any equivalent of Spinoza's true religion be found in Kant? *Prima facie* a negative answer proves obvious. Unlike Spinoza, Kant denies the possibility of cognition from the divine perspective. Moreover, he argues in the Transcendental Deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that we cannot even know *whether* God exists.<sup>70</sup> In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) Kant clearly distinguishes two kinds of concepts in philosophy: the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which he assigns to theoretical and practical philosophy, respectively.<sup>71</sup> Religion belongs into the practical domain, as is clear from Kant's famous declaration in the First Critique: 'I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.'<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, while for

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of eternity. That is, the mind's intellectual love toward God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself.' From the scholium to this proposition one can get to know that the intellectual love of God has in fact an epistemic dimension: 'Again, since the essence of our mind consists solely in knowledge, whose principle and basis is God..., it follows that we see quite clearly how and in what way our mind, in respect of essence and existence, follows from the divine nature and is continuously dependent on God' (378–9).

<sup>69</sup> Walter ECKSTEIN, "The Religious Element in Spinoza's Philosophy," *The Journal of Religion* 23,3 (1943): 153-163.

<sup>70</sup> Though, in some pre-Critical writings Kant allows speculation about both the existence and the nature of God. The writings include *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (1755) and *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763).

<sup>71</sup> Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 9ff. (KU, AA 05:171ff.).

<sup>72</sup> Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117 (B xxx). There are fideistic overtones in Kant's statement: faith contrasts here with, and precludes, knowledge.

Spinoza true religion aims at the cognition of the totality of nature, for Kant even the universal religion of reason presupposes the constraints on our knowledge that come with the doctrine of transcendental idealism. This seems to imply that Kant's 'religious rationalism' does not share anything, save the name, with the rationalism of Spinoza.

I do not think, however, that differences in their theories of cognition rule out the fact that there are salient similarities between Kant's and Spinoza's accounts of religion which make it legitimate to classify both as rationalist with regard to religion. First, on both accounts the roots of the true religion lie in reason, hence Kant's and Spinoza's criticism of revealed or historical religion and rejection of the idea that true religion may be grounded in revelation. Second, Kant's views evolve towards the idea that through the awareness of the moral law, legislated by reason, the subject acquires a kind of 'access' to the divine. Thus, some passages in the *Opus postumum*, a collection of notes Kant made by the end of his life, suggest that he would come close to equating God with practical reason. In one of these passages one can read:

The transcendental idealism of that of which our understanding is the originator. Spinoza. To intuit everything in God. The categorical imperative. The knowledge of my duties as divine commands (expressed according to the categorical imperative).<sup>73</sup>

I propose the following reconstruction of Kant's train of thought in the above-quoted passage. That of which the understanding is the 'originator', i.e., its a priori categories and principles, has a transcendently ideal status, that is, it applies to things as they appear, rather than things as they are in themselves. Now, reference to Spinoza introduces the idea of 'intuiting everything in God.' To intuit a thing in God means to cognize it from the divine perspective—*sub specie aeternitatis*.<sup>74</sup> Clearly, this is a metaphor of an unlimited rational cognition. Kant's further

<sup>73</sup> I. KANT, *Opus postumum*, 222 (OP, AA 21:15).

<sup>74</sup> The way Kant employs the metaphor of seeing things in God throughout his writings betrays inconsistency: in the pre-Critical period he would realize that the metaphor comes from Malebranche. Cf. Immanuel KANT, "On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World," in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, trans. David Walford (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 405 (MSI, AA 2:410), but later on he connects it with Spinoza to denote cognition *sub specie aeternitatis*. In Kant's *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß* one can also find evidence that he would relate the metaphor to Plato and the idea of acquiring knowledge by means of intuiting ideas-archetypes in the mind of God. Cf. Immanuel KANT, *Notes and Fragments*, trans. Curtis Bowman, Paul Guyer, Frederick Rauscher (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 326 (HN, AA 18:434). In a note titled *On philosophical enthusiasm* Kant traces Spinozism, which he then associates with *Schwärmerei*, back to Plato and Neoplatonism (*ibid.*, pp. 327-8 (HN, AA 18:436)).

mentioning the categorical imperative suggests that he regards it as the object of this kind of rational intuition.

Thus, the awareness of the moral law would give us an insight in the moral—and so intelligible—realm: a reality viewed from the divine perspective, thus as it is in itself, rather than merely as it appears to be. But moral cognition acquires here a religious dimension: for by being aware of one's duties one at the same time becomes aware of that which has been commanded by God—along the lines of Kant's definition of religion, recalled in the *Opus postumum* passage quoted above. Briefly, what constitutes religion for Kant is the moral law which, as probably the only thing, can be regarded *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is to say that Kant equates morality with religion.<sup>75</sup>

#### CONCLUSIONS

By the end of the first chapter of part three of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant introduces the idea of 'a (divine) ethical state on earth' which shall come to fruition once 'the gradual transition from ecclesiastical faith to the universal religion of reason' has been effected.<sup>76</sup> It is the existence of this 'ethical state' that would guarantee, according to Kant, 'an eternal peace' in the world—quite a utopistic picture indeed.<sup>77</sup> By way of a conclusion, I would highlight the following claims as crucial to Kant's reflections on religion and its political significance:

- (1) Kant charges religion with a conflictual potential. In order to mitigate it, he thinks it indispensable to offer a thoroughgoing rethinking of religion: now 'the universal religion of reason' should deliver criteria by

<sup>75</sup> Some interpreters have argued that Kant does not identify religion with morality, but considers it only from the point of view of what 'bare' reason can make of it; Kant would thereby be interested in those elements of religion that can be contained within the limits of reason without reducing religion, as a phenomenon *sui generis*, to morality. Cf. Stephen PALMQUIST, "Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?" *Kant-Studien* 83,2 (1992): 129–148. I am not inclined to agree with such a reading: when it comes to what constitutes the core or essence of religion, Kant is a reductionist. The empirical elements of religion (sacred scriptures, the church and its statutes etc.) make up for him but a husk that is pretty much accidental (historically and politically conditioned) and replaceable with a different one. The husk has a value only insofar as it shields the core and makes it appealing to rational but embodied creatures, but ideally it should be shaken off once the core has enough power to motivate finite rational agents.

<sup>76</sup> I. KANT, "Religion within the Boundaries," 152 (RGV, AA 06:122).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 153 (RGV, AA 06:124).

means of which to construe particular ‘ecclesiastical faiths’, the latter being historically conditioned, hence contingent, unlike the former one.

- (2) Since the religion of reason must be universal, it shall preclude any other religion as an endorsable alternative: clearly, there can be only one universal religion. Such a view does not favour religious pluralism, even if we regard particular faiths as manifestations of the universal religion—after all, their character is transitory, so there is nothing *intrinsically* valuable about them.
- (3) Kant would thus not support the idea of a diversity of religious beliefs in the public sphere, at least in one of the senses in which he understands the term ‘public’, i.e. as pertaining to the domain of the exercise of the autonomy (self-legislation) of human reason. For reason cannot ground a *plurality* of religious creeds; it can at best engage in a critique of such creeds.
- (4) Kant’s idea of the universal religion of reason may seem to have little political purport; for the imagery of the ‘Kingdom of God’ on earth<sup>78</sup> refers to the idea of the *moral* improvement of humanity. But ‘eternal peace’ is a political idea, or at least one that appears in a political context. What looks like conflation of morality and politics, however, is an important mark of Kant’s way of thinking. What underlies the conflation is, I think, Kant’s commitment to the view that a political goal could be realized in that the ends of morality (such as the moral improvement of humanity) are realized too.
- (5) Religion plays a role in bringing forward the moral development of humanity but only insofar as one takes it for what it should be (according to Kant): the moral law considered as if it were commanded by God. Since the moral law, for Kant, springs from the autonomy of practical reason, so must religion, and Kant’s reference to the divine sanction only confers upon the moral law a tinge of necessity and absolute bindingness.
- (6) Grounding ‘true’ religion in reason and the critique of revealed religion take Kant close to Spinoza, and thereby to the radical Enlightenment, as does an emphasis on the freedom of thought, constitutive of the public sphere, unlike the freedom to act in accordance with one’s religious beliefs. Prioritizing the autonomy of reason over

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<sup>78</sup> I. KANT, “Religion within the Boundaries,” 152 (RGV, AA 06:122).

those 'convictions of conscience' that may arise from sources other than reason, also testifies to Kant's affinity with that current.

Finally, for the reasons mentioned above, Kant's views on the relation between religion and the public sphere would be far from motivating the 'pluralist-liberal' kind of secularism, although perhaps without directly implying its 'republican' variety, to recall the distinction introduced by MacLure and Taylor. Just to what extent Kant can be an inspiration for contemporary political philosophers working on secularism remains thus an open question.

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#### KANT'S RECONCEPTION OF RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY SECULARISM

##### Summary

In *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience* Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor distinguish two models of a secular state: a republican and a pluralist-liberal one. Whereas the former displays a tendency to relegate religious beliefs from the public sphere for the sake of its postulated neutrality, the latter emphasizes the importance of freedom of conscience and, consequently, the right of individuals to manifest their religious commitments also in public. In this paper, I argue that Kant's views on religion cannot provide a general framework that would warrant the pluralist-liberal kind of secularism. To that effect, focusing on Kant's distinction between the private and the public use of reason, introduced in his 1784 essay on enlightenment, I claim that the public sphere construed along the Kantian lines could not provide a space in which a plurality of different, heteronomously grounded beliefs, could coexist with one another. Comparing Kant's theory with Spinoza's—particularly with regard to their critique of revelation and the proposal to reinterpret the Scripture in the light of universal moral principles—I also suggest that, as a rationalist about religion, Kant comes close to the secularizing tendency of the 'radical Enlightenment.'

KANTA NOWA KONCEPCJA RELIGII  
A WSPÓŁCZESNY SEKULARYZM

Streszczenie

W książce *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience* [*Sekularyzm a wolność sumienia*] Jocelyn Maclure i Charles Taylor wyróżniają dwa modele świeckiego państwa, które nazywają republikańskim i pluralistyczno-liberalnym. Model republikański ujawnia tendencję do usuwania przekonań religijnych ze sfery publicznej w imię postulowanej neutralności tej sfery, natomiast model pluralistycznego liberalizmu opiera się na podkreśleniu znaczenia wolności sumienia oraz, co za tym idzie, prawa jednostek do manifestowania swoich przekonań także w przestrzeni publicznej. W swoim artykule staram się pokazać, że poglądy Kanta na temat religii nie mogą dostarczyć ogólnych ram dla uzasadnienia pluralistyczno-liberalnego modelu sekularyzmu. W tym celu, skupiając się na rozróżnieniu przez Kanta prywatnego (*Privatgebrauch*) i publicznego użytku z rozumu (*öffentlicher Gebrauch*), dokonany w eseju *Odpowiedź na pytanie: czym jest oświecenie?* (1784), argumentuję, że sfery publicznej – w kategoriach Kantowskich – nie należy rozumieć jako przestrzeni umożliwiającej wyrażanie różnorodnych przekonań religijnych, zwłaszcza gdy nie dają się one pogodzić z autonomią rozumu. Porównując koncepcję religii Kanta z koncepcją Spinozy – przede wszystkim gdy idzie o krytykę religii objawionej oraz propozycję reinterpretacji Pisma św. w kategoriach uniwersalnej moralności, będącej treścią religii powszechnej (Spinoza) lub religii rozumu (Kant) – proponuję również ujęcie, zgodnie z którym poglądy autora trzech *Krytyk* zbliżają się do tzw. radykalnego Oświecenia, czyli nurtu sprzyjającego postępowi sekularyzacji.

**Key words:** Kant; religion; the public use of reason; secularism; radical Enlightenment; Spinoza.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kant; religia; publiczny użytek z rozumu; sekularyzm; radykalne Oświecenie; Spinoza.

*Translated by the Author*



The preparation of a special issue of *Roczniki Filozoficzne* (*Annals of Philosophy*) its dissemination in journal databases was financed under contract no. 723/P-DUN/2016 from the resources of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for the popularization of science.



