

## Kant and Religion

This masterful work on Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* explores Kant's treatment of the idea of God, his views concerning evil, and the moral grounds for faith in God. *Kant and Religion* works to deepen our understanding of religion's place and meaning within the history of human culture, touching on Kant's philosophical stance regarding theoretical, moral, political, and religious matters. Wood's breadth of knowledge of Kant's corpus, philosophical sharpness, and depth of reflection sheds light not only on Kant but also on the fate of religion and its relation to philosophy in the modern world.

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# Kant and Religion

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*To the memory of my brother*  
*Roger Earl Wood*  
*(1947–2008)*

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Writings of Kant will be cited according to the following abbreviations:

- Ak *Immanuel Kants Schriften*. Ausgabe der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1902–). Unless otherwise footnoted, writings of Immanuel Kant will be cited by volume:page number in this edition.
- Ca *Cambridge Edition of the Writings of Immanuel Kant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992–2016). This edition provides marginal Ak volume:page citations. Specific works will be cited using the following system of abbreviations. (Works not abbreviated below will be cited simply as Ak volume:page.)
- Anth *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798), Ak 7 *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Ca Anthropology, History, and Education
- ED *Das Ende Aller Dinge*, Ak 8 *The End of All Things*, Ca Writings on Religion and Natural Theology
- EF *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (1795), Ak 8 *Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Project*, Ca Practical Philosophy
- G *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785), Ak 4 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ca Practical Philosophy
- I *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784), Ak 8 *Idea toward a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, Ca Anthropology, History, and Education
- KrV *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781, 1787). Cited by A/B pagination. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Ca Critique of Pure Reason
- KpV *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788), Ak 5 *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ca Practical Philosophy
- KU *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), Ak 5 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Ca Critique of the Power of Judgment

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- MA *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* (1786), Ak 8  
*Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, Ca Anthropology,  
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- MS *Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797–1798), Ak 6 *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ca  
 Practical Philosophy
- O *Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientieren?* (1786), Ak 8 *What Does It  
 Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* Ca Religion and Rational  
 Theology
- P *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik* (1783), Ak 4  
*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Ca Theoretical  
 Philosophy after 1781
- R *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793–1794),  
 Ak 6 *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Ca Religion  
 and Rational Theology
- SF *Streit der Fakultäten* (1798), Ak 7 *Conflict of the Faculties*, Ca  
 Religion and Rational Theology
- TP *Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt  
 aber nicht für die Praxis* (1793), Ak 8 *On the Common Saying: That  
 May Be Correct in Theory But It Is of No Use in Practice*, Ca  
 Practical Philosophy
- VA *Vorlesungen über Anthropologie*, VA 25 *Lectures on Anthropology*,  
 Ca Lectures on Anthropology
- VE *Vorlesungen über Ethik*, Ak 27, 29 *Lectures on Ethics*, Ca Lectures  
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- VL *Vorlesungen über Logik*, Ak 9, 24 *Lectures on Logic*, Ca Lectures on  
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- VM *Vorlesungen über Metaphysik*, Ak 27 *Lectures on Metaphysics*, Ca  
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- VP [*Vorlesungen über*] *Pädagogik*, Ak 9 *Lectures on Pedagogy*, Ca  
 Anthropology, History, and Education
- VpR *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, Ak 28 *Lectures  
 on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, Ca Religion and Rational  
 Theology
- VRL *Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen*, Ak 8 *On  
 a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy*, Ca Practical Philosophy
- WA *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (1784), Ak 8 *An  
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## Preface

The topic of this book is Kant's philosophical project in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Its main focus is Kant's philosophical engagement with religious faith and Christian theology as he knew them. But Kant's project in the *Religion* will take us into other aspects of Kant's metaphysics and moral philosophy. We will encounter the unknowability of the supersensible and the roles of analogy, symbolism, and aesthetic experience in our thinking about it. The theme of religion will take us into Kant's theory of rational assent and the importance of enlightenment as thinking for oneself. We will deal with important topics in Kant's moral philosophy and moral psychology, such as moral evil, the distinctiveness of the moral incentive, and freedom of conscience. We will also have to appreciate some themes in Kant's ethics that have been underemphasized or even badly distorted, such as the connection of the moral incentive to emotions and goodness of heart, the human experience of guilt and the challenge of self-acceptance, and the vital importance of community in Kant's ethics and of the hope for moral progress of the human species in history. The wide range of these topics indicates the depth and centrality of Kant's thinking about religion for his entire philosophy.

In addition to Kant's project in the *Religion* in relation to its own time, however, the book will inevitably have another focus. Throughout we will be addressing, at least implicitly, also what Kant's treatment of religion might mean for us. That includes what Kant's philosophy, as regards its religious import, has meant for our culture in the last two centuries. The present book is not the place to review that history. So I choose to leave much of this second, inevitable focus implicit. I will be challenging the idea that Kant's philosophy of religion was meant to advance the cause of "secularism" in the modern world, or to rid modern culture of religion and replace it with a nonreligious rational morality. I will certainly not be looking at Kant – as Gordon Michalson puts it – as "a way station between Luther and Marx" (Michalson, 1999, p. 27). I shamelessly profess to think that this would be a route the human race has

not traveled but should have traveled. But you won't find me directly defending that thought here. A responsible book on Kant's philosophy of religion cannot address such issues except indirectly.

This is not a biographical study of Kant. In Chapter 1, I do discuss Kant's religious background and his dealings with the Prussian government over the *Religion's* publication, but only because these matters shed light on Kant's philosophical project. Criticism or defense of Kant's personality, his attitudes on sex and race, or even his personal religious attitudes are not part of my project. I won't be trying to decide whether Kant should be criticized for being "too sympathetic to religion" or "not sympathetic enough," since I will leave it to my readers to decide, each for him- or herself, how sympathetic to religion someone ought to be. Those who approach Kant (or any other great philosopher) from the standpoint of what they like to call the "hermeneutics of suspicion" represent only the forces of anti-intellectualism and hate. We live in an age of religious hate, which includes antireligious hate. I don't doubt that some people reading Kant's project in the *Religion*, or what I have to say about it, will find ways of interpreting and self-righteously rejecting it from some hate-driven standpoint of "moral clarity." There is nothing I can do to prevent them, except to protest in advance and express the wish that they would not do it. For those interested in what I have to say about Kant as a human being, see Wood, 2005, pp. 1–23 and Wood, 2008, pp. 6–12.

Nor do I intend to survey recent scholarship on Kant's philosophy of religion, which is surprisingly large and still growing. I did not in the least anticipate that Kant's philosophy of religion would become such a focus of scholarly interest at the time I wrote my first book about Kant's religious thought half a century ago. Though some of this literature is very good, and I have learned much from it, it is also a sadly true generalization that whenever literature on a subject explodes in this manner, a great deal of it is inevitably not of high quality. I refer to the literature only occasionally, when I think mention of it sheds light on what I want to say. Surveys of the literature prior to the last ten years have been done by Palmquist (2000); Firestone and Palmquist (2000); Firestone and Jacobs (2008); and Firestone (2009, chap. 1).

There has been a stream of recent scholarship favorable to Kant and at the same time to traditional Christianity, represented by such people as Chris Firestone, Nathan Jacobs, Stephen R. Palmquist, and Andrew Chignell. I agree with some of this scholarship and disagree with some. I regard it as worse than unfortunate, however, that its generally sympathetic attitude toward Kant's *Religion* has been so atypical of what people think about Kant and religion. Secular philosophers have often seen Kant's sympathy with religious belief, and Christianity in particular, as a reason for keeping their distance from Kant. They suspect Kant's categorical imperative of reintroducing into ethics the supernatural moral tyrant of traditional religion without openly admitting it. Or else they react as Goethe did when he accused Kant of "wantonly tainting [his philosophy] with the shameful stain of radical

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evil in order that even Christians might be attracted to kiss its hem” (Goethe, 1988, 2:166).

Traditional religious believers have been even less kind to Kant on religion. They usually view Kant as an enemy. Thus Gordon Michalson has written that Kant’s “efforts to ameliorate the theologically destructive effects of the *Critique of Pure Reason* implicitly make things worse for Christian faith, not better” (Michalson, 1999, p. 5). Even more bluntly hostile is Matthew Alun Ray, whose book’s title leaves nothing to the imagination: *Subjectivity and Irreligion: Atheism and Agnosticism*. Ray concludes that Kant’s philosophy of religion leaves us with only “Königsbergian nihilism” (Ray, 2003, p. 26). Treatments of Kant on the Christian religion by more scholarly Christian writers such as Nicholas Wolterstorff, John Hare, and Christopher Insole stress what they see as “conundrums,” gaps, inconsistencies, and failures in Kant’s project. Even one recent writer who professes to be defending Kant against such criticisms apparently cannot take Kant’s basic project seriously in the terms Kant states it. He concludes that Kant’s own declaration in his response to the Prussian authorities that he was not disparaging Christianity was disingenuous, “not entirely innocent” of “guile” and “prevarication” (Pasternack, 2014, p. 12).

The views people attribute to Kant on religion often tell you far more about those people than they do about Kant. In this presentation of Kant on religion, I am trying to let Kant speak, with my only additions being the intellectual sympathy and at the same time the critical perspective that any philosopher should always bring to the study of another philosopher. But perhaps readers of this book will think it is true of me, too, that my views on religion color and distort. Therefore, most of this Preface will be used in an attempt to get those issues out of the way by putting my cards on the table, so that my readers can decide for themselves whether my views are distorting my intended aims. Thus I offer the following five or so confessional pages in the interest of full disclosure, and not because I think other people ought to be particularly interested in my religious autobiography for its own sake.

I was raised a Christian – more specifically, an Episcopalian (or Anglican). I was, I think, a sincere religious believer until about the age of twenty. As a Christian adolescent, I saw myself as a “middle-church” Anglican, always at some distance both from Roman Catholicism and from all “fundamentalist” or “evangelical” sects. The earliest writers who influenced me about religion were Thoreau and Tolstoy. During this time I thought all forms of secularism shallow and dehumanizing. I was also always a firm believer in individual religious conscience, and suspicious of authority in matters of religion – as well as of authority more generally. We should listen with respect to the thoughts of anyone whose competence and arguments, on their merits, justify that respect. Then we should draw our own conclusions. In no area of life have I ever thought it morally acceptable for any human adult to defer submissively to the thoughts of others because these others hold some institutional position, whether priest, professor, or politician.

I recently read an op-ed piece arguing that Americans choose their politics before they choose their religion. This was presented as a recent development, but I think it has been true for a long time. In the US Civil War, both the proslavery and antislavery causes were motivated by what they thought were Christian convictions. Perhaps this same connection between religious and political convictions has held for me, too, though in that case it included some significant political self-discovery. It was sincere religious conviction that led me to be a pacifist (a conscientious objector to military service) even before the Vietnam War made that stance fashionable. I even announced my refusal of military service so early that the FBI still had the resources to investigate me and put an official bureaucratic stamp on my religious sincerity. But student and occupational draft deferments always kept me one step ahead of either an induction order or a requirement to do substitute civilian service. I did not do as both my brother and brother-in-law did and do alternative service itself as evidence to myself of my conscientious antiwar convictions. Like Vice President Dick Cheney, I had “other priorities.” Unlike him, however, I have never wanted to send others to kill and die in my place.

In those days I considered myself politically very conservative. This self-conception lasted for a while even after people on both the right and the left persistently informed me that my moral and political views made me a “liberal” or even a “leftist.” The views they meant were: my pacifism, my sympathy with the civil rights movement, and my belief that any significant economic inequality and especially the very existence of poverty in an opulent society are outrageous injustices for which there can be no excuse. I believed that all these convictions must be consistent with political conservatism simply because they are absolutely required by the Gospels and by basic human decency. That last belief has not changed at all. But it took me several years during this same time to change my own view of where I belong on the political spectrum, which I did as I came to add Marxism and feminism to my strongly held political convictions. It then took me longer still to drift gradually away from my religious upbringing. Some might say I “lost my Christian faith.” If so, this was more like losing ten unwanted pounds, or losing the mugger (or cop car) pursuing me, than like losing my keys, my wallet, or my way. I remain a pacifist to this day, though the original religious basis for it is long gone.

In Chapter 2 §3, I try to explain in what sense Kant’s moral argument shows faith in something to be necessary for any decent and thinking person. I did not know it at the time, but my first book, *Kant’s Moral Religion*, which dealt sympathetically with this argument, was a stage in my leave-taking of my religious upbringing. Its young author still had a great deal to learn about Kant’s ethics, since he accepted many errors about it that were current then and are sadly still current now. I have told people that I no longer feel I am identical with the author of that book. That’s another reason why I am writing this one.



The book I have taught in my classes more than any not authored by Immanuel Kant is Dostoevsky's greatest novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Central to its philosophical and religious argument is Ivan Karamazov's never-written poem, *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, with its image of the aged Inquisitor, who uses institutionalized Christianity to serve Satan rather than Christ. The idea that human attempts to appropriate Christianity through organized religion might be seen as mortally hostile to Christ has seemed compelling to me ever since I first read Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* (1919) as an undergraduate.

Since the 1970s, it has been clear to me that as a political force in the United States, white evangelical Christianity is thoroughly pernicious. I am not forgetting African American evangelicals, "Faithful America," or the #exvangelicals. And I am sure there are (because I have known some of them) individual white evangelicals who do sincerely adhere to the values of the Gospels. So let's be clear: I am talking about white evangelical Christianity exclusively *as a political movement* when I say without hesitation or qualification that it has no redeeming virtues. It is driven by toxic delusions, the motivation of which is dark, twisted, based on fear and hatred, openly barbaric, openly tyrannical, valuing cruelty toward the vulnerable for its own sake, even rejecting all democratic traditions and the rule of law. Its violent inversion of the values of the Gospels is sick, monstrous, and nihilistic.

Sometimes people find themselves slipping into an evil or criminal enterprise, and as their activities progress, perhaps as they even achieve some success, they eventually find themselves accepting and even committing evils which they could not even have conceived possible when they began. White evangelical Christianity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries exemplifies this kind of downward spiral. The cruelty and malice of their policies are thinly disguised (but only from themselves) by the outrageous hypocrisy which has long been sadly common among religious people of all denominations. Opposition to legal abortion is just about the only political cause that they could even pretend to represent to anyone as anything but wanton cruelty. But it is no exception. The pretense of moral decency, which they offer by saying they "care about the babies," is a transparent lie in view of what they are actually doing. They are claiming legal guardianship over part of another person's body and claiming it for the sole purpose of depriving that very person of her freedom. Then, after violating her most personal and most fundamental rights, they refuse to take any responsibility for what would actually become a "baby" (by being born). A more exquisitely depraved combination of callousness, cruelty, and hypocrisy would even be hard to imagine.

I think many of these people know they have allied themselves with evil. But they think (or at least sometimes *say* they think) that they believe God will use this evil (which they sometimes say they regret) to bring about good. Some have compared it to Persian Emperor Cyrus in 2 Chronicles 36. Cyrus was a pagan tyrant, who nevertheless ended the Babylonian Captivity and ordered the

rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. There is at work here a familiar and famously corrupt principle: *the end justifies the means*. Or as St. Paul puts it: “Why not say as some slanderously say (as some slanderously report that we say): Let us do evil that good may come? whose damnation is just” (*Romans* 3:6).

What is corrupt here is not only the use of wrongful means to achieve what can be represented as good ends. For then there would still possibly be a question whether the desirability of the end might outweigh the undesirability of the wrongful means; and it is at least imaginable that it might. What is really corrupt about *the end justifies the means*, or *doing evil that good may come*, is instead a dynamic all too familiar in political movements. Devotion to what seemed a good end is transformed into merely a means to wrongfulness, which then, objectively regarded, becomes to any clear-eyed observer the true end of the movement. The allegedly noble intention with which the evildoers supposedly began has been corrupted at its core. This dynamic has certainly shown itself in obvious – and terrible – ways in movements and political regimes that have called themselves Marxist. There the dogma of a historical process with its own “objective” teleology, like the faith in divine providence among religious people, serves as a pretext for self-deception. Those who think they know “whose side God is on” applaud barbarism as what they represent as God’s chosen means to do his benevolent will.

The only way to make sure you are pursuing a good end is to pursue it only through actions you can regard as in themselves right and good. Choose only good ends and also good means to them. This of course makes many desirable ends more difficult to achieve, perhaps even impossible. But it is a hard fact that the good is never easy to achieve, and sometimes we really do lack the resources to achieve desirable ends by permissible means. I might point out that the thoughts just expressed could constitute the essence of political *conservatism*, to the extent that the word denotes anything admirable. In that respect, despite my sympathy with Marxism and with other radical hopes, I remain a conservative to this day.

The long-term influence of white evangelical Christianity as a political movement may turn out to be the very opposite of what it desired (or thought it desired). From talking to my students, I fear that it has turned an entire generation of decent young people away from Christianity and even away from all religion. I now have a hard time getting most students to take seriously any philosopher, such as Descartes, Kant, or Kierkegaard, who even uses the “G-word.” I understand their attitude, but as a teacher and scholar of the history of philosophy, it is my job to help them to see how good and intelligent people in the past, and even today, could be religious believers. Their difficulty in grasping this is understandable during a time when in popular culture Christianity has been identified with all the most despicable of ends.

Religion is, and it ought to be, about emotions even more than it is about intellectual convictions or even moral resolve. I hope that in this book we will see that this is Kant's view too. Consequently, the cultural and political influence of a corrupt version of Christianity in my time and nation could not avoid having a powerful emotional impact on me. I hope I can still appreciate intellectually much of what is true, good, and beautiful in Christian symbols; I make a principled effort to do so when I encounter these symbols in literature, art, or philosophy. I hope the reader will see this effort on display in this book as I try to present Kant's positive engagement with the Christian religion in a sympathetic light. Kant saw plenty that was wrong with the Christianity of his time, but he had no difficulty seeing the Christian religion as a positive moral force in the life of individuals. He even invested in it his deepest hopes for progress in human history. It takes considerable intellectual effort for me to imagine sharing his sentiments on those points, but I think the effort, and even the need for it, has helped me to understand Kant better. In this book I try to present sympathetically his favorable attitude toward Christianity. But the political exploitation of Christianity for the most evil causes has fatally poisoned Christianity for me as regards my own life. Perhaps the thing they can't seem to poison for me is great religious music. I would begin by naming Brahms's *Deutsches Requiem*, and then go on to works by Bach, Bloch, Britten, Fauré . . . but that would take up too much space.

Although I do not claim to be a religious person myself, I do respect many religious people, and I humbly (though also skeptically) remain open to their opinion that their religion is the foundation of what I know to be good about them. I mention here my long-time friends Robert Merrihew Adams and the late Marilyn McCord Adams, who have placed Christian faith at the very center of their lives. My wife's Jewish grandmother became a Quaker and raised my wife as one. My wife used to attend Quaker Meeting regularly – especially during the twenty years she was affiliated with a Roman Catholic university. I have known many admirable Catholics and Quakers. I have also known a fair number of practicing Jews and at least a few Muslims, whose religious beliefs and practices were an important and positive part of their admirable lives. The person I proudly regard as *my very first student*, Janice Dean Willis, considers herself to be *both* a Tibetan Buddhist and a black Baptist. Her autobiography, *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist* (Willis, 2008), makes for rewarding reading by anyone.

I therefore resist the antireligious attitude adopted by most people with whom I associate in the academic and scientific community. A self-inflicted intellectual incapacity to appreciate the human potential of religion is a serious deficiency in the culture of most scientists and most academic humanists. Studying Kant or others who combine reason, science, and enlightenment with religious faith helps me, and should help others, toward a more positive view of religion.

I also have a long-standing philosophical commitment to what is sometimes called *evidentialism*. This is the moral conviction that, in the words of W. K. Clifford (its most famous historical exponent), “it is wrong, always everywhere and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” (Clifford, 1999, p. 77). Or to adopt a formulation closer to that of David Hume: we should always *proportion our beliefs to the evidence* (Hume, 2007, p. 80). Two other historically important evidentialists (both of them religious believers) were John Locke and Moses Mendelssohn. The views of the latter will be discussed in Chapter 8.

“Evidence,” as I understand it in this context, includes those theoretical or epistemic grounds, whether rational, empirical, or transcendental. Kant’s “deduction” of freedom and the moral law, for instance, is a philosophical argument to the effect that we would fall into incoherence if we did not presuppose that we are free – that is, able to judge and act for reasons, and especially to be motivated to obey a moral law of which we may regard our own rational will as the author. Avoiding incoherence is a reason to believe. I do not regard assent based on such philosophical arguments as violating the evidentialist principle. What evidentialism excludes, and treats as a moral failing, are the following: beliefs motivated by wishful (or fearful) thinking, beliefs based on partisanship, and beliefs you manipulate yourself into holding because you think they support some flattering conception of yourself or because it benefits you to hold them. None of these is evidence or any reason to think that what you believe is true.

I would equally insist that it is impossible altogether to exclude such irrational and corrupting influences on our beliefs. It is even an aspect of our freedom to act on reasons that we are also free not to act on them. Reasons differ from causes in that causes always necessitate, while reasons never do. Beings who act on reasons are free to choose which reasons they think are good reasons, and therefore are free to choose to act on bad reasons or to refuse to act on reasons at all. For imperfectly rational beings like ourselves, the freedom to act rationally is always the freedom to act irrationally. Fichte would call the freedom to act for reasons or not “formal” freedom, while he would call the higher or fuller freedom to act for good reasons “material freedom.” Part of being an evidentialist, as I understand the position, is being constantly aware (as far as you are able) of the influences on you to act contrary to reason and doing your best to resist them, while at the same time being aware that human fallibility being what it is, you will never be able entirely to do so. When I turned away from religious faith, I did so partly because it often deliberately chooses to violate the evidentialist principle. Many interesting thinkers – Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and James – were outspoken violators of the evidentialist principle. In Chapter 2, I attempt to show how Kantian moral faith and evidentialism, while in tension, are not ultimately irreconcilable: in fact, they are complementary virtues.

I here find myself writing about the same topic with which I began my career in the 1960s. I hope I can now say better what attracts me to this topic. Kant had

hopes about the future of politics and also about the future of religion. Living under a military despotism, and surrounded by similar authoritarian regimes, he believed that people would come to see that the only legitimate form of political constitution is a representative republic, constituted so as to protect the rights of individual human beings. Living at a time when he saw religion as still in the chains of “priestcraft,” Kant looked forward to a time when religion would be the chief vehicle for humanity’s collective devotion to the cause of enlightenment. Religious communities would unite human beings in service of reason, helping humanity to progress toward the ideal of a realm of ends, a “kingdom of God on earth.”

I think we can now see that Kant was historically right about politics: although even the flickering hope for the state he regarded as legitimate has now become extremely fragile, most educated people in the world today would still agree that a representative republic protecting the rights of all citizens and open to the equal participation of all is the political state we ought to try to create. About religion, however, Kant would seem to have been historically wrong. Neither institutionalized religion nor institutionalized reason in the form of science and learned culture have changed in the ways Kant hoped they would. Yet when a philosopher seems to have been wrong about the course of the world, it’s not necessarily the philosopher who has gone wrong. The philosopher may have been right, and it may be that it is the course of the world that went wrong. As you will see if you read this book, this is my basic thought about Kant and religion. But another aim of the book is to correct the basic error of trying to decide whether Kant accepts or rejects Christianity, or this or that Christian doctrine. But that question, however we may answer it, gets Kant’s project entirely wrong. His aim regarding revealed Christianity is not simply to accept or reject it but ultimately to accept it while interpreting it critically.

*Kant’s Moral Religion* was written under the influence of my undergraduate religion teacher at Reed College, Daniel L. Deegan. Deegan died very young from cancer, before my dissertation was even completed, so that my first book was dedicated to his memory. One of his classmates at Yale Divinity School in the 1950s was my friend Van Harvey, who has given me much-valued comments on parts of this book. I have also received helpful comments, advice, and questions from Andrew Chignell, Karl Ameriks, Alyssa Bernstein, Sandra Shapshay, Samuel Kahn, Arthur Ripstein, Michael Morgan, Olga Lenczewska, Kimberly Brewer, Desmond Hogan, and the following students at Princeton University: Brendan Kolb, Carrie Pritt, Enoch Kuo, Rochhuhathanga Jongte, Cole Diehl, Asad Zafar Haider, Alejandro Naranjo Sandoval, Haley Brennan, and Kevin Zhou.

## Cover Image

Cover image: *Königsberg, Löbenicht*, 2009, signed hand-printed woodcut by Sebastian Harwardt.

“At six o’clock Kant sat down at his desk, which was a simple, ordinary table, and read until dusk. At this time, which he found so conducive to thought, he would meditate on what he was reading, if it was worth that, or he would sketch out what he intended to say in his lectures the following day, or he would work on something meant for publication. Then, whether it was winter or summer, he would sit by the stove from which he could see through his window the Löbenicht steeple. He would contemplate it while meditating, or rather, let us say, he would rest his eyes on it. He could not emphasize enough how good for his eyes this was – how suitable the distance of the object was for this purpose. His daily gaze in the twilight accustomed his eyes to it. But eventually some poplars in his neighbor’s garden grew to such a height that they hid the steeple, which left Kant unsettled, and disturbed his meditation; so he asked that the poplars be pruned. Fortunately, the owner of the garden was a generous person who loved and respected Kant, and for his sake he sacrificed some of his poplar boughs, making the steeple visible once more, so that Kant could once again meditate undisturbed.”

E. A. C. Wasianski, *Immanuel Kant in seinen letzten Lebensjahren* (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1804), pp. 8–9.