Kant and Secular Transcendentalism.

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This dissertation is a product of my labours and therefore an original work. I am solely responsible for any errors it may contain.

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Abstract.
This writing argues that some embedded moral and religious linkages in Kant’s metaphysical thought have been unobserved in much recent philosophical commentary, something we may attribute to the de-emphasis of metaphysics within significant parts of the contemporary academic world, combined with a lack of awareness of the religious milieu within which he worked. Paradoxically in the light of this, and based on the religious content I find in the first *Critique* and elsewhere, I explore what I perceive to be Kant’s attempt to steer traditional religious doctrines and practice into a secular, individualised, scientifically congruent, completely independent and universally acceptable format. From this, I develop the idea that an appreciation of these efforts to reform earlier theological thought allows for a more complete and coherent interpretation of critical philosophy than has previously been available, with application, for example, to a heightened understanding of the employment of the idea of things in themselves. The primary notion involved in this amended reading is the primacy Kant gives to practical reason.

On this reading, Transcendental Idealism reverses the relationship between mind and nature, in that the natural world of appearances in its totality is now seen to have its being contingently within the mind as a perceived manifold of appearances, though not as an innate or permanently indwelling structure. As a corollary, this reverses the usual metaphysical principle that humans, possessing self-awareness and existing as thinking subjects or *Gemüter*, have embodied minds or souls; rather, we can now have the transcendental view that the human body, as matter and appearance, is ensouled, existing along with all other appearances within the mind.

The argument continues with an analysis of Kant’s attempted synthesis of science and religion through the positioning of practical reason. This includes the human capacity for authentic moral decision-making, something only possible for a mind not subject to the causal constraints of the natural world. As such, I present what I call the ‘view-from’ reading of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, in which I draw from his writings the implication that the human mind does not maintain a place in its own representations, and may be considered within transcendental reflection as a point of view. Because of this, we can think of mind as a non-corporeal thing in itself of which we can have no predicated cognition, whose attendance is a possible accompaniment of all experience, and something whose presence as soul we
may accept for the purposes of moral praxis. I also argue that such an account in no way commits Kant to any form of spiritualism, since the mind/matter dichotomy dissolves through the realisation that matter is mere appearance, and therefore mind content only, as is the idea of soul, which does not posit the existence of any entity and is of regulative use only. On this reading the mind or soul is an idea whose acceptance is made necessary by normative ethics and for us remains unknown as it is in itself.

Kant’s practical extension of reason derives from the demands of the moral law, that is, the categorical imperative in its various formulations, for which the reward for virtue and submission to duty is uncertain within nature. This creates the moral necessity for the ideas of continuing personal existence and an *ens realissimum* in order to ensure the ultimate possibility of happiness and justice within a community of rational beings. Such ideas are not made available through the inferences of theoretical speculation, but from the exercise of practical reasoning. The subjection of theoretical reason to the practical enables these to speak univocally, in that theoretical reason, while precluded from the conclusions of the practical, must acquiesce to them and by doing so fulfil the demands of reason for totality and the possibility of happiness.

The moral law gains equal scientific status to the theoretical content of science through the realisation that the dynamics of nature, considered transcendentally, result from the influence of things in themselves, among which we now include free human volition. Consequently, the inferences drawn from the moral law also take on this scientific standing, resulting in a minimalist set of justified rational and secular religious beliefs expressed as the Canon of Pure Reason.

Ultimately, I argue, Kant reduces all forms of human experience to mental content, either as intuited perceptions, or as concepts and ideas. Beginning with this idealist underpinning, I see him attempting to provide a more coherent and unified account of the human condition than is available in other metaphysical or religious systems. Further, I conclude that he was concerned with a unique metaphysical development, and that as we read him a lucid theological reform agenda becomes apparent. In this way, I construe Kant’s writings as offering a new and secular deist outlook that eschews atheism, theism, unwarranted belief systems, and the demands of those endorsing a continuance of the long-standing schism between religious thought and the disciplines of science.
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