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THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF KANT'S *RELIGION*: "PURE COGNITION OF" OR "BELIEF IN" GOD

Pamela Sue Anderson

In my response-paper, I dispute the claim of Firestone and Jacobs that "Kant's turn to transcendental analysis of the moral disposition via pure cognition is perhaps the most important new element of his philosophy of religion" (*In Defense of Kant's Religion*, 233). In particular, I reject the role given—in the latter—to "pure cognition." Instead I propose a Kantian variation on cognition which remains consistent with Kant's moral postulate for the existence of God. I urge that we treat this postulate as regulative. So, in place of pure cognition, "belief in" God grounds our hope for perfect goodness.

A Challenge to IDKR and A Defense of Kant

In Defense of Kant's Religion (IDKR) is a great source for—amongst other things—engaging a range of critical, contemporary readings of Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Criticisms of Kant's *Religion* are brought together in a polemical and provocative manner which readily enhanced the "Authors meet Critics" session of the 2009 Society for Christian Philosophy; this included an early version of my response as a friendly Critic. In the present version of that response, I focus more squarely on the critical significance given to "pure cognition" and related uses of "cognized" and "cognizing" in *IDKR*. My question is, would Kant agree with the fundamental and specific role that Firestone and Jacobs give to pure cognition?

At one point Firestone and Jacobs explain that "cognition" as the English translation of the German *Erkenntnis* means "to come to know" or "to know" (*IDKR*, 109). They add that when *Erkenntnis* is translated into

This paper is a reworking of the response which I gave to the Society of Christian Philosophers of Religion in the "Authors Meet Critics" session on Chris L. Firestone and Nathan Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008) at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, in Montreal. I would like to thank both the Society and the authors, Firestone and Jacobs, for re-igniting the interest of contemporary philosophers of religion in Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (trans. George di Giovanni in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. George di Giovanni and Allen W. Wood [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 39–216). This means not only rekindling my own interest, but that of philosophers of religion, theologians and other contemporary philosophers who work on Kant.



English as “cognition” in Kant’s texts, it is commonly read as a synonym for knowledge; this is the case even when “knowledge” is the English translation of *Wissen*, not *Erkenntnis*. They also point out that in 1933 Norman Kemp Smith translated both *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen* “knowledge” in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (IDKR, 109–110 and 249 n18). But, instead of following Kemp Smith’s translation of *Erkenntnis* as knowledge for both empirical and pure knowledge, Firestone and Jacobs prefer empirical and pure cognition; their use of cognition is meant to stress the process of coming to know. They distinguish the cognitive process from the product of cognition; and the product is *Wissen*, i.e., knowledge. In fact, their point about translation is not new. Already in 1997 Paul Guyer and Allen Wood published the most recent translation of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which *Erkenntnis* is generally cognition and *Wissen* is knowledge. Instead, the question is whether Firestone and Jacobs contribute anything new concerning cognition to philosophical debates about Kant’s *Religion*. Or, are they simply mistaken about pure cognition as a highly distinctive process of coming to know in *Religion*? If a mistake, then we must further question Firestone and Jacobs’s assumption that pure cognition is different from the process of empirical cognition and from the product, whether empirical knowledge or practical knowledge. As I will show, neither of the latter in Kant can be “pure” in the sense of without the *a priori* forms of sensibility.

I have chosen to assess critically the comments of Firestone and Jacobs themselves concerning pure cognition in IDKR (105–115) precisely because this conception appears fundamental and original to Firestone and Jacobs’s own reading of Kant’s *Religion*. It is pure cognition which they take to form a link between the *Religion* and the *Critique of Pure Reason* (IDKR 109–119).

So, my main focus is what seems original in Firestone and Jacobs’s reading of Kant, and not so much their defense of Kant’s *Religion* against criticisms. I have chosen to engage Firestone and Jacobs themselves rather than their “prosecutors,” and so not to engage directly their selection of Kant critics in contemporary philosophy of religion. My focus on the possibility of Firestone and Jacobs’s achieving something original enables a critical discussion of the fundamental significance of pure cognition to their overall defense of Kant’s *Religion* (see especially IDKR 6, 41, 63, 105–119, 125, 155, 168–170, 233–234, and 254 n41). There is not space here to elaborate the fundamental significance of pure cognition each time it appears in IDKR. Yet in what I discuss, I would like to remain a friendly critic of Firestone and Jacobs’s interpretation of Kant, especially of the cognition which they identify as pure.

Pure cognition as used by Firestone and Jacobs could be a catch-all label. It seems to take on a significant role in relation to Kant’s other conceptions in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. For example, Firestone and Jacobs give pure cognition the role of coming to know Kant’s transcendental ideas, regulative principles, pure *a*

priori postulates, rational faith and moral religion (*IDKR* 105–124; cf. Kant 1997, A642–649/B670–677 and A822–829/B851–857). This role is not wholly misplaced. In fact, their conception could have the originality of a new “Kantian” (rather than Kant’s own) conception of a process for achieving (practically) what is otherwise inexplicable. Nevertheless, if this is the goal, it would help readers to know that Firestone and Jacobs’s conception of pure cognition is a “variation” (or, something similar) on Kant’s own philosophy.¹ Admittedly, Firestone and Jacobs find the distinction between pure cognition and empirical cognition in one of his *Lectures on Metaphysics* (cf. *IDKR*, 112–113).² Even so, a more substantial defense of the necessary conditions for this distinction between an empirical and a pure process of coming to know in Kant’s *Religion* would need to be given, while remaining consistent with the conception of cognition in Kant’s first and second *Critiques*.

My challenge is to provoke further discussion of the large questions raised by the pivotal role given to pure cognition in *IDKR*. Is this role compatible with Kant’s architectonic of pure reason? Is it compatible with the relation of his empirical realism to transcendental idealism? And is it compatible with his moral and critical philosophy?

These large questions are impossible to answer adequately in a short paper. Nevertheless, my questions about Firestone and Jacobs’s “Kantian” conception raise at least a serious, general objection; that is, the Kant of the three *Critiques* would be unequivocal in rejecting any suggestion that pure cognition of “the idea” of God could serve as a rational justification for knowledge of God’s existence or for knowledge of “the highest good in the world.”³ As Kant’s *Religion* makes clear: “‘There is a God, hence there is a highest good in the world,’ . . . is a synthetic *a priori* proposition.”⁴

When it comes to cognition as a process and knowledge as the product, Firestone and Jacobs fail to distinguish what Kant says at points as part of his explanation of the pure nature of cognition and his own overall arguments in the first two *Critiques* and the *Religion* about “the unmoveable boundaries” (*unveränderliche Grenzen*) of human sensibility.⁵ To demonstrate this, I will offer salient quotations from Kant’s own texts which go counter to Firestone and Jacobs’s conception. The perplexing question for my reading is how Firestone and Jacobs can be so definite that pure cognition of “the

¹In describing their Kantian conception as a “variation” on Kant’s own philosophy, I take a term from A. W. Moore, *Noble in Reason, Infinite in Faculty: Themes and Variations in Kant’s Moral and Religious Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2003).

²Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 29: 945.

³Kant, *Religion*, 6:6*.

⁴Ibid.

⁵For further discussion of Kant’s use of “boundaries” (*Grenzen*) and “limits” (*Schranken*) in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, see Pamela Sue Anderson, “Metaphors of Spatial Location: Understanding Post-Kantian Space,” in *Kantian Metaphysics Today: New Essays on Time and Space*, ed. Roxana Baiasu, Graham Bird, and A. W. Moore (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 167–182.

prototype of the pure moral disposition"⁶ is possible for Kant, despite the boundaries of sensibility Kant himself fixed for human cognition. Without hesitation, Firestone and Jacobs boldly conclude that "Kant's turn to transcendental analysis of the moral disposition via pure cognition is perhaps the most important new element of his philosophy of religion" (*IDKR*, 233).

At times, I think that Firestone and Jacobs have simply misunderstood Kant's own references to (pure) cognition, as if "transcendental analyses" could explain the purity of the two activities of (i) coming to know and (ii) unpicking the non-empirical; that is, "the human mind [is able] to grasp the prototype's moral perfection" (*IDKR*, 168). This grasp of the mind sounds like what Kant himself would call "intellectual intuition."⁷ I will contend that, on the one hand, no object of human knowledge can ever be perfect, non-spatial and eternal. For human beings, "pure cognition" is not possible, but synthetic *a priori* cognition is.⁸ The object of human cognition requires both the *a priori* forms of intuition and the pure *a priori* concepts of understanding; transcendental analysis cannot generate human knowledge. I cannot grasp perfection; the latter would require both the sensible forms of intuition and the *a priori* concepts of understanding, plus the power of synthesis. Kant's critiques of pure and practical reason aim precisely to set boundaries to both empirical and pure cognitions for human subjects. At most, we human subjects can postulate the existence of a divine being who would be unconstrained by the boundaries of sensibility; but to be consistent with Kant's writings, we cannot, in Firestone and Jacobs's terms, "cognize" this being or its divine (pure) moral disposition as pure theoretical or pure practical knowledge (here I assume that "cognize" is not a synonym for "think," which has a technically different role in Kant). At most we give a regulative role to a transcendental idea and, ultimately, to the pure practical ideal of moral perfection.

On the other hand, I would also remind readers that time and space as synthetic *a priori* forms of intuition for Kant constitute the unmoveable and un-traversable boundaries for human cognition. Within these fixed boundaries of space and time, intellectual intuition is impossible. Yet, by analogy, human reason can *think* that a non-spatial and a non-temporal being, i.e., a divine, eternal being, would have intellectual intuition. Kant himself asserts that "intellectual intuition" belongs solely to "the original being;" yet it can never pertain to "one that is dependent as regards both its existence and its intuition (which determines its existence in relation to given objects)."⁹

At the outset of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant stipulates the demanding standard for anything pure. Consider two passages where Kant sets out these standards:

⁶Kant, *Religion*, 6:63, 6:66, 6:82–84; cf. *IDKR* 166–170.

⁷Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer, ed. with Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), B72.

⁸Kant, *Religion*, 6:6^{*}.

⁹Kant, *Critique*, B72.

Among *a priori* cognitions, however, those are called **pure** with which nothing empirical is intermixed. Thus, e.g., the proposition "Every alteration has its cause" is an *a priori* proposition, only not pure, since alteration is a concept that can be drawn only from experience.¹⁰

To the critique of pure reason there . . . belongs everything that constitutes transcendental philosophy, and it is the complete idea of transcendental philosophy, but is not yet this science itself, since it goes only so far in the analysis as is requisite for the complete estimation of synthetic *a priori* cognition.

. . . [And] although the supreme principles of morality and the fundamental concepts of it are *a priori* cognitions, they still do not belong in transcendental philosophy; for, while they do not, to be sure, take the concepts of pleasure and displeasure, of desires and inclinations . . . which are all empirical in origin, as the ground of their precepts, they still must necessarily include them in the composition of the system of pure morality in the concept of duty, as the hindrance that must be overcome or the attraction that ought not to be made into a motive. . . everything practical, insofar as it contains incentives, is related to feelings, which belong among empirical sources of cognition.¹¹

When Kant himself describes either a proposition or the principles of morality as "pure," he means that they contain nothing empirical; no empirical intuitions can be contained in a pure proposition. Nevertheless, as readers of Kant will be aware, synthetic *a priori* cognition serves Kant as a necessary condition for cognition of any object which requires both concepts and intuitions. Even if Firestone and Jacobs stipulate that "pure" cognition comes via "transcendental analysis" (*IDKR*, 233) Kant's "system of pure morality" has to be conditioned by synthetic *a priori* cognition.

In Kant's critical philosophy, the necessary role of the synthesis of sensible intuitions by pure *a priori* concepts constitutes a limitation for human cognition, but no such role and limitation are necessary for divine cognition. Sensibility sets unalterable boundaries for the very idea of "pure cognition" (as opposed to transcendental conditions for synthetic *a priori* cognition). Precisely because human cognition is limited by space and time, it always remains unlike pure cognition of an original being; the latter is by definition non-spatial and non-temporal. A divine being would simply not conform to, or be restricted by, these necessary, pure *a priori* forms of sensible intuitions for human theoretical and practical knowledge. These can be seen in the fact that the very concept "God" contains no sensible intuitions, i.e., nothing of spatial-temporal experience; as a result, God's own intuition would be "intellectual." In this light, it remains impossible for us to have either empirical knowledge of a divine (original) being or synthetic *a priori* knowledge of God. It is then only on moral grounds that Kant "postulates" the existence of God (and of the hoped for immortality). But God as a postulate of pure practical reason is only "cognize-able" practically in the sense of serving as a regulative

¹⁰Ibid., B3.

¹¹Ibid., A14–15/B28–29.

principle of the perfect goodness and the full rationality, which guides moral action; and Kant is clear in distinguishing between regulative and constitutive knowledge. Kant's crucial contention at this stage is the following:

In general, if, instead of [extending to] the constitutive principles of the cognition of supersensible objects into which we cannot in fact have any insight, we restricted our judgment to the *regulative* principles, which content themselves with only their practical use, human wisdom would be better off in a great many respects, and there would be no breeding of would-be knowledge of something of which we fundamentally know nothing.¹²

The problem with Firestone and Jacobs's assuming that practical knowledge is pure cognition is that, to repeat, "everything practical, insofar as it contains incentives, is related to feelings, which belong among empirical sources of cognition;"¹³ and so, practical cognition cannot be strictly pure in the sense of without any imposition of sensibility. One possible way around this problem of inconsistency in *IDKR* would be to treat Firestone and Jacobs's pure cognition as a "variation" on Kantian cognition in the first and second *Critiques*. However, the problem persists even when Firestone and Jacobs claim that pure cognition is "in the human mind," as if human knowers could have intellectual intuition. This would be impossible, since "where one conceives of an object that is not only not an object of intuition for us but cannot even be an object of sensible intuition for itself, one is careful to remove the conditions of time and space from all of its intuition."¹⁴ Kant is clear that we, as humans, have distinctively human "limitations" (*Schranken*) and "boundaries" (*Grenzen*), due to sensibility, but that these would not restrict "the original being." In his words,

In natural theology, where one conceives of an object that is not only not an object of intuition for us but cannot even be an object of sensible intuition for itself, one is careful to remove the conditions of time and space from all of its intuition (for all of its cognition must be intuition and not **thinking**, which is always proof of limitations). But with what right can one do this, if one has antecedently made both of these into forms of things in themselves, and indeed ones that, as *a priori* conditions of the existence of things, would remain even if one removed the things themselves?—for as conditions of all existence in general they would also have to be conditions of the existence of God. If one will not make them into objective forms of all things, then no alternative remains but to make them into subjective forms of our kind of outer as well as inner intuition, which is called sensible because it is **not original**, i.e., one through which the existence of the object of intuition is itself given (and that, so far as we can have insight, can only pertain to the original being); rather it is dependent on the existence of the object, thus it is possible only insofar as the representational capacity of the subject is affected through that.

¹²Kant, *Religion*, 6.71.

¹³Kant, *Critique*, A15/B29.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, B71–72.

It is also not necessarily for us to limit the kind of intuition in space and time to the sensibility of human beings; it may well be that all finite thinking beings must necessarily agree with human beings in this regard (though we cannot decide this), yet even given such universal validity this kind of intuition would not cease to be sensibility, for the very reason that it is derived (*intuitus derivatives*), not original (*intuitus originarius*), thus not intellectual intuition.¹⁵

Again Kant is clear; although intellectual intuition is attributable to “the original” being, it is not attributable to a human being. Moreover, Kant himself never elevates human knowledge to that of divine knowledge. Of course, for Kant, humans can “think” more than they can “know.” But thinking is not cognizing. To claim that either cognition of original being or knowledge like that of God is a human possession would fly in the face of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant never gives up these fundamental features of intuition or cognition. We can have no way to justify knowledge independent of our inner and outer sense. Coming at pure cognition from different directions, we always come back to the same point in Kant: human knowledge could not be without the *a priori* forms of sensible intuition. If it existed, intellectual intuition could be the possession only of a being which is not restricted by space or time.¹⁶

The additional argument of Firestone and Jacobs that there is a “cognizing” of, as presented in Kant's *Religion*, “the prototype of perfect humanity” (*IDKR* 168; also see 167–169) equally fails to recognize that a pure moral disposition for a human subject could not—according to Kant's principles in the first *Critique* and in the *Religion*—result from pure cognition. Moral dispositions of human subjects would have to be shaped by duty, hence, also by both emotions and reasons for action which make human beings moral and which require empirical sources of knowledge. To recall the words of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, no concepts which “contain in themselves anything empirical” are allowed to enter into (pure) transcendental philosophy; and this means no empirical concepts can be pure.¹⁷ Moreover, to repeat, “all that is practical, so far as it contains motives, relates to feelings, and these belong to the empirical sources of knowledge.”¹⁸ Thus there is no getting around the fact that human experience for Kant is a product of both concepts and intuitions; and these empirical concepts and intuitions require the necessary *a priori* conditions which make this experience possible. Even our cognition of “the prototype” of perfect humanity would come up against fixed boundaries to what can be known.¹⁹ Human cognition in Kant just cannot escape the pure *a priori* concepts of understanding and the *a priori* synthetic forms of sensibility.

¹⁵Ibid., B72.

¹⁶Ibid., B72.

¹⁷Ibid., A14/ B28.

¹⁸Ibid., A15/B29.

¹⁹Kant, *Religion*, 6:61–6:68.

In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* Kant remains consistent in what he says elsewhere about (cognition of) the perfect moral good, or “the holy one.” In *The Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that

What is more, we cannot do morality a worse service than by seeking to derive it from examples. Every example of it presented to me must first be judged by moral principles in order to decide if it is fit to serve as an original example—that is, as a model: it can in no way supply the prime source for the concept of morality. Even the Holy One of the gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before we can recognise him to be such.²⁰

Similarly, in the *Religion*, Kant endorses

the thought that [a] divine human being . . . must attune our mind to admiration. . . . Yet he himself could not be presented to us *as an example to be emulated*, hence also not as a proof that so pure and exalted a moral goodness can be practised and attained *by us*.²¹

Kant goes on to explain the above in a footnote, demonstrating that the pure moral disposition could not be the product of a cognitive process, or of Firestone and Jacobs’s pure cognition:

we always need a certain analogy with natural being in order to make supersensible characteristics comprehensible to us . . . although through reason we cannot form any concept of how a self-sufficient being could sacrifice something that belongs to his blessedness, thus robbing himself of a perfection. We have here (as means of elucidation) a *schematism of analogy*, with which we cannot dispense. To transform it, however, into a *schematism of object-determination* (as means for expanding our cognition) constitutes *anthropomorphism*, and from the moral point of view (in religion) this has most injurious consequences.²²

I take the above passages to mean that Kant’s conception of human cognition is unable to come to know the supersensible; restricted as it is to sensibility, human cognition can at most rely upon reason to “form a concept” in order to comprehend moral perfection, while not “expanding our cognition;” the danger of putting the supersensible, or divine, perfection into human form is illusion (i.e., anthropomorphism).

In light of the above response, I would like to state the heart of my challenge to Firestone and Jacobs. This challenge has been directed most squarely to the role which they give to “pure cognition,” in order to solve conundrums which they find in other readings of Kant’s *Religion*. Whether we take pure cognition as a Kantian variation which Firestone and Jacobs develop from their own reading of his texts or a misunderstanding of Kant’s own conception of the human process of coming to know, I have

²⁰*The Moral Law: Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. H. J. Paton (London: Hutchinson, 1951).

²¹Kant, *Religion*, 6:64–6:65.

²²*Ibid.*, 6:65n.

not found their notion helpful to judge the "coherence" and "lasting significance" of Kant's *Religion*. Instead I urge readers to proceed with caution when it comes to their constructive proposal concerning the role of cognition as the pure process of coming to know. This caution is directed at Firestone and Jacobs's "defense" of the following:

Chapter 4 begins this defense by focusing on key resources in the critical philosophy and in *Religion* itself that are important preliminary considerations for understanding the shape of *Religion* and its theological talk. They are Kant's *notions of pure cognition*, the two experiments identified in the Second Preface of *Religion*, and *the moral disposition*, which is a concern throughout the *Religion*. (*IDKR*, 6–7; emphasis added)

In particular, Firestone and Jacobs seem to assume that pure cognition of what is empirically unknowable is rendered possible by Christ as "the prototype" of the pure moral disposition. According to their "defense" in *IDKR*, this pure cognition has to do with what is in the human mind. Yet Kant himself makes clear, as my selection of quotations have shown, that human cognition is not divine or pure in the sense of without sensibility. Instead, the Christian narrative about "the descent of the prototype" can only be thought by human beings in analogical terms. I have tried to demonstrate with selections from Kant's texts that anything more is a decidedly un-Kantian presumption.

At this point in my response, it should be apparent that Firestone and Jacobs misunderstand Kant when they presume that pure cognition comes via a "transcendental analysis" (*IDKR*, 233). Something similar could be said of their claim about "cognizing the prototype" via a "transcendental incarnation" (*IDKR*, 164–165).²³ These sorts of "transcendental" claims seem un-Kantian, in depending on intellectual intuition of a prototype, i.e., Christ as God and man. Strictly speaking, this would be impossible, as shown above in Kant's terms, for human cognition. In following Kant, pure cognition could not come by way of transcendental analysis of either God in Christ or perfect moral goodness in human form. Firestone and Jacobs may believe that when an idea such as the prototype of the pure moral disposition is held in the human mind, then it can be cognized in its purity.²⁴ However, their claim to "cognize" the prototype of humanity in the mind does not sound like Kant, but possibly more like a Platonic or subjective idealism.

The positive sense of my challenge advocates that we read Kant in his own philosophical terms as both a transcendental idealist and an empirical realist. The result would be to confront both the limits and boundaries

²³Note that Jacobs argued earlier that Kant "requires transcendental incarnation commended by practical reason in order for this cognition to have universal validity" (*IDKR*, 254 n 41); see Jacobs, "Kant's Prototypical Theology: Transcendental Incarnation as a Rational Foundation for God-Talk," in *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006), SS 1–2.

²⁴Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's Religion*, 155–180.

of Kantian cognition as first set out in his *Critiques*. To these constraints can be added the productive role of incomprehensibility in Kant's arguments in the *Religion*; incomprehensibility also has a crucial role in Kant's *Groundwork* and in the first and second *Critiques*. Accepting Kantian incomprehensibility would force readers to reconsider, whether being guilty or innocent of the incoherence found by Firestone and Jacobs in "indicting" Kant, they have taken into account the necessary role of sensibility in setting limits and being a boundary itself to human cognition.

My conclusion is that Kant's *Religion* cannot be "indicted" for failing to have, as Firestone and Jacobs suggest, "lasting philosophical significance to the field of philosophy of religion" and then defended on the grounds given (*IDKR*, 6–7). As apparent in this response, I have not been convinced that *IDKR* correctly interprets "pure cognition" as Kant's conception; similarly, neither Kant's regulative principles nor his practical postulates can be "cognized" and become "objects of conviction" (although we might have convictions about God, freedom and immortality, these would just not be objects). In other words, I do not see how it can be true that "Throughout the first *Critique*, Kant's consistent concern is that we realize that what cannot be known in theory can, in principle, be cognized and become objects of conviction on other grounds" (*IDKR*, 112).

Unlike Firestone and Jacobs, my alternative defense of Kant takes cognition to be technically different from "belief in" God. While human cognition would remain the preserve of Kant's rational-sensible knower and moral-religious agent,²⁵ neither an empirical example of "the Holy One" or a human example of being "well-pleasing to God" could be objects of human knowledge. Instead, I suggest that contemporary debates about Kant in philosophy of religion would be better off if they focused on "belief in" God, freedom and immortality. The practical postulate of God's existence (along with the other two postulates) would, then, be treated not as propositional "beliefs that" (or convictions that) God exists, but as "belief in" the idea of God which serves a practical purpose. Although we cannot have any empirical or synthetic *a priori* knowledge of God, freedom and immortality, they nonetheless play highly significant regulative, as distinct from constitutive, roles for human action. Holding regulative principles is similar to "belief in" God, which serves as a guide for moral action. Admittedly, my use of belief in would be a variation on Kant's own work.

The crux of my criticism has been that Firestone and Jacobs rely upon a problematic conception of "pure cognition" which has not been satisfactorily defended, if it can be defended, as Kant's own conception. Perhaps, instead it is a variation on Kant's philosophy. Yet to see the problem with the role of cognition here, let us consider the postulate of immortality. Is this "cognized"? No, it is not cognized in the sense of constitutive knowledge. Instead a different variation could be compatible with Kant's

²⁵Pamela Sue Anderson and Jordan Bell, *Kant and Theology* (New York and London: Continuum, 2010).

transcendental idealism, his empirical realism and his practical philosophy, that is, a variation that treats Kant's transcendental ideas in terms of belief in God, freedom and immortality. The latter is not the same as treating Kant's transcendental ideas as "objects" of any sort of cognition. The crucial difference is that Kant's transcendental philosophy gives the necessary conditions for cognition, but it cannot "cognize" ideas or "grasp objects" of human knowledge. Let us take the role Kant gives to the idea of immortality to illustrate my point.

Kant's practical vindication of the postulate of immortality is not intended to establish its truth; it is cognition of empirical objects (only) which grounds truth. Instead the practical vindication of the idea of immortality starts from our moral experience and specifically our awareness of not being fully rational; we are aware of both our imperfections and our irrationality. If we are to be virtuous, it is up to us as rational agents to act for the sake of duty alone; yet perfect goodness is always unachievable in this life. The postulate of immortality gives us at most hope for achieving perfect goodness.

We do not always act as we ought to: we never act in a fully rational and perfectly good way (even if we did, we could not know it). For Kant, the source of this failure is not an empirical matter. Instead, as he demonstrates in the *Religion*, human irrationality—as evil—is radical and inscrutable; that is, it is beyond our comprehension and yet it is not superficial but profound and pervasive. There can be no pure cognition of the origin of radical evil; and so, it is not clear how Firestone and Jacobs could treat evil as, in Kantian terms, an object of conviction. Parallel to this is the problem of treating the prototype of the pure moral disposition as an object of pure cognition. We cannot cognize a prototype, and so Kant employs analogical terms to say that the prototype of the pure moral disposition "descends from heaven." So, neither empirical nor pure cognition can give us knowledge of this prototype. Although practically the narrative of the prototype can guide human action as portraying a regulative principle at work, no knowledge can be derived from a human example of this prototype.

To end this response, allow me to repeat the central claim of Firestone and Jacobs. I have endeavoured to dispute the last line here:

we have argued that Kant's *Religion* is equally amenable, and perhaps more so, to a holistic and linear interpretation—one where its arguments are understood to build on one another by unpacking underdeveloped concepts from his critical philosophy in ways that are intricate and insightful, and in ways that are not only coherent, but also religiously and theologically affirmative. Kant's turn to transcendental analysis of the moral disposition via pure cognition is perhaps the most important new element of his philosophy of religion. (*IDKR*, 233)

Rejecting the role given to pure cognition in *IDKR*, I urge that we remain faithful to Kant's critical philosophy and treat his three postulates as the necessary grounds for the possibility of moral experience. We should

either (1) follow Kant and accept the boundaries and limitations which he sets for human cognition or (2) propose a Kantian variation on cognition which takes his moral postulate for the existence of God as regulative. One variation on core themes in Kant would be to treat the postulate of, like belief in, God as our hope for perfect goodness, i.e., the highest good.

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