

viewpoint, rather than being a threat to Christians.

Endnotes

- ¹ One could refer to many Christian epistemologist here, including Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Bill Alston, John Greco, etc.
- ² Plantinga makes similar claims in his 1989-90 Stob Lectures, "The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship" Published as a pamphlet by Calvin College and Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990.
- ³ Kant is clear that he does not mean to say that we make up an otherwise illusory world with our mind: "I am saying, then, that the intuition of external objects and the self-intuition of the mind both present these objects and the mind, in space and in time, as they affect our senses, i.e., as they appear. But I do not mean by this that these objects are a mere illusion" (B69).

References

- Alston, William. (1996). *A Realist Conception of Truth*. Cornell University Press.
- Kant. (1787). *Critique of Pure Reason* (2nd ed.).
- Kant. (1979). *Lectures on Ethics*. tr. L. Infield. London: Methuen and co. Ltd.
- Kreeft, Peter. (1988). "The Pillars of Unbelief — Kant" *The National Catholic Register*. (January - February).
- Palmquist, Steven. (1989). "Immanuel Kant: A Christian Philosopher?" in *Faith and Philosophy Journal* 6.1. (Januar) 65-75.
- Plantinga, Alvin. (2May.2005). "Advice for Christian Philosophers". *Truth Journal* .Vol.1. 1985. ch. IV.
From <http://www.leaderu.com/truth/truth10.html>.
- Plantinga, Alvin. (1982). "How to be an Anti-Realist" in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*. 56.1 (September).
- Stillwell, Shelley. (1998). "Plantinga and Anti-Realism" in *Sythese*. 78. 87-115.
- Westphal, Merold. (1990). "Taking St. Paul Seriously: Sin as Epistemological Category". in *Christian Philosophy by Thomas Flint*. Notre Dame. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Westphal, Merold. (1993). "Christian Philosophers and the Copernican Revolution". in *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*. edited by C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal. Grand Rapids. MI: Eerdmans Press.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. (1998). "Is it possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover From Kant?" in *Modern Theology*. 14:1 January.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. (1996). "Between the Pincers of Increased Diversity and Supposed Irrationality" in *God, Philosophy and Academic Culture*. edited by William J Wainwright. Atlanta: Scholars Press. 13 -20.

the world in the same way or as well as God does. Westphal suggests that part of the reason Plantinga and others might associate Kant with a humanistic non-theistic philosophy is that “many commentators on Kant are not especially interested in theism, and some, I suppose, are positively allergic to it. The result is that the theistic character of Kantian idealism is often overlooked entirely and almost never emphasized. Humanists often treat Kant as if he were a humanist” (Westphal, 1993, p.96). But Westphal claims “the humanist reading of Kant does great violence to the text, while a textually responsible reading develops an important theistic theme”(p.96).

Westphal suggests a version of Kant’s anti-realism, which he calls a Theist-Pluralist Creative Anti-realism. This he distinguishes from what he calls Kant’s Theist-Universalist version. Both views hold that the thing-in-itself is the thing as known by God. Kant’s is universalist because he thinks that all people look at the world in the same way — with a universal perspective. Westphal’s Theist-Pluralist creative anti-realism is Pluralist because it recognizes that different people have different starting points, a priories, or presuppositions by which they experience the world. In addition, Westphal suggests also that not only subjectivity but sinfulness affects the way in which we experience the world. This notion makes no sense to those who think that sin is a noun — meaning an act which is not appropriate. But Westphal means it in something more like the Augustinian sense — as a condition of turning away from God, wanting to ignore God, not being able to pursue God. One might also think of sin here as an Aristotelian or Thomist — as a not-properly-functioning due to a corruption of our will. Plantinga himself has talked about this as transworld depravity. However you speak of it, having our epistemic faculties infected by sin is the condition of seeing things in a skewed fashion due to a systematic suppression of truth rooted in selfish desires which consequently provides us a skewed understanding of reality.

Conclusion

It seems that Kant, while criticized by many Christian philosophers in the United States, is in fact a friend, not a foe, of the believer. It seems that anyone who wants to take seriously the realities of the situatedness of our knowing would want to adopt something close to Kant’s antirealism. Westphal’s version, which incorporates sin and the plurality of possible viewpoints, seems to be quite compatible with a Christian

we would be even more baffled than before. In other words, God's knowledge is likely different in kind, not only in quantity.

Kant clearly thinks that the arguments for God's existence won't provide certainty. But this does not preclude belief. In fact, Kant says that belief in God does not require certain knowledge that God exists. (Kant, 1979, p.81) Kant's purpose is not to undermine belief, but rather, to undermine pretensions of those who think they know more than they do. As David Palmquist says,

For Kant's criticisms are not intended so much to close the books on all all theoretical arguments for the existence of God as to curb the pretensions of those who mistakenly believe such arguments can prove (what no argument can ever prove) that the transcendent is knowable as such, without ever having to become immanent. (1989, p.69)

What does this mean for the believer? If I am stuck in my historical finite situatedness, then what? Some philosophers, like Kierkegaard, have suggested that one cannot have faith if one has certainty, and that trust is only possible when one is vulnerable. SO perhaps this finite situatedness is not bad news but good news for Christians. That, it seems, is the approach of Merold Westphal towards Kantian Anti-realism.

Christian Philosophers Can Be Kantians: Merold Westphal

Westphal writes,

Should Christian philosophers be favorably or unfavorably disposed toward Kantian idealism? I want to suggest that they should be favorably disposed and that there are important affinities between Kantian idealism and Christian theism, important resources in the former for expressing themes essential to the latter. (1993, p.162)

Westphal says that Kant's theory is essentially theistic, because the thing-in-itself is known only by God. While we are unable to know the thing-in-itself, our noetic restrictions would, presumably, not apply to God. God could know the Truth as it is in itself, although as long as we have human minds, that would be inaccessible to us. Of course, this seems to go along quite well with the Christian view that we do not see

matter of mere feelings, not reason:

Kant is largely responsible for this way of thinking. He helped bury the medieval synthesis of faith and reason. He described his philosophy as “clearing away the pretensions of reason to make room for faith” — as if faith and reason were enemies and not allies. In Kant, Luther's divorce between faith and reason becomes finalized. (Kreeft, 1988)

Kreeft sees Kant to be the source of the division between faith and reason, which develops into the liberal theologies of the 19th and 20th century. Kant is responsible for the rise of feeling-oriented popular psychology in churches. One thinks of Schliermacher, the theologian of feelings par excellence when Kreeft says,

Kant thought religion could never be a matter of reason, evidence or argument, or even a matter of knowledge, but a matter of feeling, motive and attitude. This assumption has deeply influenced the minds of most religious educators (e.g., catechism writers and theology departments) today, who have turned their attention away from the plain “bare bones” of faith, the objective facts narrated in Scripture and summarized in the Apostles' creed. They have divorced the faith from reason and married it to pop psychology, because they have bought into Kant's philosophy. (1988)

On the face of it, it might seem that this view of reality would fit pretty well with Christianity. Pascal thinks God, as infinite, is incomprehensible to our reason, Descartes thinks that God can do the impossible, as does Luther. Certainly Aquinas would say that my knowing is different than the epistemic abilities of Angels, and God. Similar — in some ways, of course — but ultimately quite different as well. On the traditional Christian view, humans are fundamentally different from God. God is infinite, we are finite, and that chasm will never be crossed. Of course now we see in a mirror dimly, and then will know face-to-face, according to Scripture, but this does not entail that we will become Godlike, or understand things as God does. Often one hears people say that they look forward to heaven when they will be able to ask God questions, as though they will question God as Socrates planned to question Homer in the afterworld. But it seems likely that even if we ask God our questions, and He provided us an answer, that

Above all, however, [we the value of] such a metaphysic if we take into account the inestimable advantage of putting an end, for all future time, to all objections against morality and religion, and of doing so in the *Socratic* manne, vix., by the clearest proof of the opponents ignorance. . . . Hence the primary and most important concern of philosophy is to deprive metaphysics, once and for all, of its detrimental influence, by obstructing the source of its errors. (Kant, 1787, p. Bxxxii)

In short, Kant wants to show the limits of reason, so that philosophers cannot claim to disprove Christian faith. While some think that this critical project is without merit, Kant claims that this is like saying the police are useless:

To deny that this service rendered by the critique has a positive benefit would be like saying that the police provides no positive benefit; after all, one might say, the main task of the police is only to put a stop to the violence on whose account citizens must fear each other, in order that everyone may carry on his business calmly and safely. (p. Bxxv)

While the noumenal realm—the room protected by keeping reason out of it—is empty, Kant says “there is as yet nothing to keep us from filling in that room, if we can, with practical data of reason”; indeed, reason summons us to do so” (p. B xxii).

Some Christians have found Kant’s project, while well-intentioned, to be ill-conceived. Many Christian scholars see Kant to be the source of modern uncertainty, and so, the culprit responsible for anti-realist claims that we construct reality. Kant admits he is suggesting a giving up of all the projects to prove with undeniable certainty that God exists, that we have free will, or that reality conforms to my mind. But he says this is of little importance to most people:

The loss affects only the monopoly of the schools in no way does it affect the interests of the people. . . . The schools raise a loud cry about the danger to the public if one tears up the webs they have spun, even though in fact the public has never taken notice of these webs and hence can never feel the loss of them (pp. Bxxxv-xxxvi)

Peter Kreeft, Catholic philosopher from Boston College, blames Kant for the loss of truth-seeking in theology. In short, Kant made faith a

Plantinga suggests that the easiest way to explain how that statements are true or false without being apprehended by any human mind is to adopt a theism, by which things would be true or false even if there were no human minds, because God would know those things. Plantinga admits that this notion comes from Augustine and Aquinas. He quotes from Aquinas who says, “Even if there were no human intellects, there could be truths because of their relation to the divine intellect. But if, *per impossibile* there were no intellects at all, but things continued to exist, then there would be no such reality as truth.” (*De Veritate* Q. 1, A.6 RESPONDIO) So if one is to be an anti-realist, Plantinga suggest, one would need to be a theistic creative anti-realist—God’s mind keeps the truths intact, even when no human mind is conceiving it. But Plantinga seems to dismiss this idea. Fortunately, Merold Westphal develops it plausibly, as we will see.

Kant’s Faith-Defense Project

Kant’s project of giving us certainty of how we must know instead of what we know was his resurrection of the enlightenment project of gaining certainty, after Hume’s devastating critique. Kant could provide universal rules of how we must see the world. This phenomenological project provided certainty at the expense of leaving ultimate reality unknowable. Rather than proving that our cognition conforms to objects, he proved that objects must conform to our cognition. (Kant, 1787, p. Bxvi) It is in this way that he protected faith from reason, as he says, “I therefore had to annul *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*” (p.Bxxx). He wanted to stop metaphysical speculations by those who fail to reflect on the limits of their epistemic abilities. Some people “reason with ease about things of which they understand nothing and into which, moreover, neither they nor anyone else in the world will ever have any insight” (p. Bxxxii). These limits are not temporary, but structural, and so Kant’s project is to show that we can know with certainty that these things will always be beyond our knowledge. This would be done by showing the necessary ways in which we must experience the world. To speculate about how the world is beyond these necessary conditions for our knowledge is ridiculous, since that would be the project of knowing the way that we cannot know. His goal, of course, was ostensibly to protect faith. He says:

I don't say Kant clearly *drew* this conclusion; indeed he may have obscurely drawn the opposite conclusion; . . .

Again, the Kantian claim that we cannot know about the world in itself apart from our noetic structures, seems to be a part of Kant's philosophy which Plantinga ignores. Plantinga makes his most moderate claim about Kantianism when he sums up:

6) The fundamental thrust of Kant's Copernican Revolution is that the things in the world owe their fundamental structure and perhaps their very existence to the noetic activity of our minds.

Certainly the appearances of objects to our minds do depend on our minds — appearances not only require something appearing, but something to appear too — otherwise how could they appear *to us*? But in another sense, Kant's reference to the thing X in itself which is unknowable to us as well as his refutation of Berkeley's idealism show us that he clearly thinks that there is a world apart from us which exists, whether or not we know anything of it. Plantinga's characterization of Kantian creative antirealism, while popular among American Christian Philosophers, appears to be spurious. Kant certainly never claimed that we create reality. Rather, our perception of reality is framed by our epistemic capacities. It is one thing to say that we cannot know reality except by our own structures of knowing. It is quite another to claim that we actually create reality with our minds. Plantinga, it seems, is attacking a straw man — a Kant which he has created with his mind— but not a Kant existing in Kant's writings.

Now despite all of his criticisms of the antirealism he sees in Rorty and Putnam, Plantinga in fact points out the very reason why anti-realism seems plausible when he asks,

How could there be truths totally independent of minds or persons? Truths are the sort of things persons know; and the idea that there are or could be truths quite beyond the best methods of apprehension seems peculiar and *outré* and somehow outrageous. What would account for such truths? How would they get there? Where would they come from? How could the things that are in fact true or false propositions, let's say—exist in serene and majestic independence of persons and their means of apprehension? How could there be propositions no one has ever so much as grasped or thought of? (1982, p.67)

abilities. But to take this as me giving (conferring) existence to stars and horses seems a very uncharitable interpretation.

Plantinga claims that Kant says space and time are not in the world as such (world in itself):

3) According to Kant, the whole phenomenal world receives its fundamental structure from the constituting activities of mind. Such structures as those of space and time, object and property, truth and falsehood — these are not to be found in the world as such, but are constituted by our own noetic activity.

What Kant says about space is that “we can never have a presentation of there being no space” not, that there is no space apart from my mind. Kant specifically says he does not know if the world-in-itself conform to my intuitions — perhaps there is space and time in the world apart from my knowing abilities. Kant’s point is purely agnostic — that I can know nothing of reality apart from my noetic abilities including the intuitions of space and time — so how could one possibly say that space and time are or are not to be found in the world as such?

Plantinga continues along these lines when he says,

4) Were there no persons engaging in noetic activities, there would be nothing in space and time, nothing displaying object property structure, nothing that was true or false.

In one sense, the claim that persons are needed for truth to exist appears obviously true, since truth, as a property of beliefs, must have beliefs of which to be a property. It is odd to say “nothing in space and time” when speaking of Kant, of course, since a Kantian will say that we don’t know if space and time exist in the world-in-itself or not, and without minds, we certainly wouldn’t be experiencing anything via our intuitions of space and time. If there were no minds to conceive of the world in terms of the intuitions of space and time, then of course nothing would be able to be conceived in terms of space and time, but this is obvious.

Plantinga also seems to think that Kant must believe that nothing exists apart from minds:

5) Kant’s view implies that there would be nothing at all if it weren’t for the creative structuring activity of persons. Of course

question are not ontologically independent of persons and their ways of thinking and behaving.

But Plantinga is wrong here. For Kant, the unknowable thing-in-itself “x” is independent of persons, but it is unknowable apart from minds. They are ontologically independent of persons, yet epistemologically (in terms of being known) they require that we know them in order for them to have any intelligibility in our perceived world. They exist apart from us, but they are not known apart from us. Kant says “What may be the case regarding objects in themselves and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility remains to us entirely unknown. All we know is the way in which we perceive them. That way is peculiar to us . . . even though it applies necessarily to all human beings” (Kant, 1787, p.42).³ As Patricia Kitcher points out, Kant’s point is not to say that we affect metaphysical reality ‘out there’,

Metaphysical error results when we confuse our “projecting” of the order of nature with the discovery of such an order. Alternatively, error arises through the confusion of a principle of the systematic unity of nature, which merely regulates our search for laws of nature with a metaphysical principle describing what nature is like. (Kant, 1787, p. lvi)

Kant’s project is really about how we know the world, not how the world in itself is. He is agnostic in the most literal sense of the word towards the world out there apart from our knowing. This is the realm we cannot know about. Kant instead focuses on the epistemic structures, and how these in turn regulate how we think about the world.

Consider a second statement by Plantinga

2) Kant didn’t deny, of course, that there are such things as horses, houses, planets and stars’ nor did he deny that these things are material objects. Instead his characteristic claim is that their existence and fundamental structure have been conferred upon them by the conceptual activity of persons.

Again, Plantinga is wrong in his characterization of Kant. Kant does not say that my mind makes horses exist. Nor does my mind make the plant grow, or make the house 10 meters tall. Kant would say that I can only know of these things through the intuitions of space and time, and so my perspective of the world is restrained to my conceptual/noetic

his article, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy", Plantinga emphasizes the Christian's role as a critic of secular viewpoints. The three particular targets he suggests are: naturalism, creative anti-realism, and relativism. Christians, says Plantinga, should show why naturalism, relativism and anti-realism all lead to problematic outcomes. At the very least it is essential that we help our students see the difficulties with positions which seem to be inherently flawed, and one of the best ways to do that is to make sure students see the results and conclusions of particular strains of thought.²

Plantinga is quite explicit in his condemnation of Kantian anti-realism:

creative anti-realism is presently popular among philosophers; this is the view that it is human behavior-in particular, human thought and language-that is somehow responsible for the fundamental structure of the world and for the fundamental kinds of entities there are. From a theistic point of view, however, universal creative anti-realism is at best a mere impertinence, a piece of laughable bravado. For *God*, of course, owes neither his existence nor his properties to us and our ways of thinking; the truth is just the reverse. And so far as the created universe is concerned, while it indeed owes its existence and character to activity on the part of a person, that person is certainly not a *human* person. (1985, ch.IV., p11)

However, in another setting, Plantinga, in fact, has argued that the only way to be an antirealist is to be a theist (1982, p.70). Plantinga describes Kant's anti-realism, yet it seems that throughout all of these characterization and criticisms, Plantinga simply ignores Kant's claim that we cannot know about the noumenal realm. Kant doesn't say that we make up the ontological structure of things in the world. His project is actually epistemological, and his claim is that, while an object may only be able to appear to us in a certain way, what it is like apart from my perceptions of it is something I can know nothing about. That is far from saying that my mind makes the object what it is, or constitutes it.

It seems, in fact, that the key reasons that Plantinga rejects Kant are based on a faulty understanding of Kant's claims. Consider the following assertions which Plantinga makes about Kantian Anti-realism:

- 1) The Kantian anti-realist doesn't deny the existence of an alleged range of objects; he holds instead that the objects of the sort in

particular situation my memories were mistaken, and then I can continue to believe as I did before — I can believe my senses generally don't deceive me. In other words, my epistemic obligations are not to provide arguments ahead of time, but only in the cases where I seem to end up with mistaken outcome beliefs, or other such situations where my antagonists have reasonable claims against my assumptions.

We can think of many examples: Suppose that I think my pants are blue, because they appear blue to me. Suppose that they are in fact green, but I am color blind, and do not realize it. So if I ask my friend if he likes my blue pants he may say "those are green" and I might say "what? Are you color blind? These are obviously blue!" We might go to someone else to ask their opinion and suppose they say with no hesitation that my pants are quite obviously green. Now I have two reasons to start to doubt that I am seeing things correctly. Plantinga calls these defeaters. So suppose I try to explain away these two defeaters by claiming that these two friends of mine are color blind. This may suffice for the moment, but suppose that we poll the entire university, and everyone except one man who admits he is color blind says that the pants are green, not blue. At this point I need to seriously doubt my belief, unless I can prove that there is reason to doubt this great number of defeater-accounts. But this is no problem for my general belief that when I see something, I am correct in thinking that it exists. I will not, for example, distrust that when I see red or yellow or black that I am seeing those colors correctly — I may continue believing that without proving it each time. I also will, when I see a table, believe a table is there, and I can do so with warrant — the fact that I cannot see green color has nothing to do with whether or not I can see tables accurately. In other words, as long as I can account for the defeater (I am color blind to green, that is why I failed to see reality accurately that time) I may continue to believe that what I see exists.

Plantinga goes a bit further than Reid, and claims that I am epistemically justified to believe in God, because I have experiences which make me think God is listening, God is with me, God is near, etc. When I have these experiences, says Plantinga, then I may rightly assume God is in fact there. Experiences of God may with warrant lead to belief in God, because when I experience something, it is.

But Plantinga is not content to hold to his direct realism. He actually proclaims that the Christian Philosophers job should include the elimination of anti-realists. In other words, what good Christian philosophers should do is show the problems of Kantian thought. In

to the things we know about. This was his direct or naïve realism. What I see is what there is, and I see it as it is.

Kant was against this view. He was in this sense an anti-realist. He didn't deny that objects are as they appear. Rather, he denied that we could know whether or not objects truly did appear apart from us as they appear to us. Kant was unwilling to make this assumption that our knowledge conforms to things. Reason, he pointed out, certainly could not provide this for us. In this sense, Kant agreed with Hume that reason could not provide certainty with regard to whether our knowledge conforms to things. What we could know, instead, was exactly how things had to appear to us in order for us to notice them. In other words, if we could not gain certainty about the world 'out there' we could at least gain certainty about how that world must appear to us.

Alvin Plantinga

Catholics, of course, often reject Kant's philosophy as being too subjective (Kreeft, Gilson). But Protestant philosophers also often reject Kant. Much of Alvin Plantinga's philosophy parrots Reid's claims that we can trust our senses until we have reason to doubt them, and that we should begin with trust, not doubt, until we have reasons to not believe. Reid claimed that there were a number of 'first principles' which one could hold without arguing for them first, for example, he said that we should trust that our thoughts are ours, that the things we see exist, that we know truth from error, that we can trust our memories, and that the future will be like the past, without arguments ahead of time. Plantinga holds a very similar view, claiming that we have particular beliefs, which can be properly held (without doing anything epistemically blameworthy) without previous arguments. For example, I might believe I exist, or that I had breakfast, or that I am currently looking at a cup. But if you ask me for reasons why I think I am seeing a cup, I might only say "because I am seeing the cup" or perhaps "because I am having cup-like appearances" if I am a philosopher. There are no other reasons beyond the fact that I am seeing the cup, or that I have memories of eating breakfast. But the belief that 'when I see something, it is there' or 'when I have a memory of something, I can trust that it happened' which my confidence rests upon have no support themselves — they are accepted from the start, without any arguments ahead of time. Of course at times my memories might turn out to be false, and can be shown to be so, but in such a case, all I need to do is explain why in that

Epistemic Limits

In a famous article, Thomas Nagel discusses what it is like to be a bat — or rather — what we can't know about what it is like to be a bat. I often use this example in my class when discussing the limits of our knowing and how these affect what we know. Bats do not have eyes, so the world appears to them much differently than it does me. Dogs hear sounds I do not. I see colors they cannot. Kant is not the first, of course, to realize that my epistemic faculties affect the way in which I see the world, but he radicalized it and left a wake in which we still do our philosophy. While few of us would claim that the minds of all people contain 12 categories, and we may be suspicious of the very notion of universal reason that Kant claims all rational beings possess, and we may think that Kant failed to realize the historical and social context of his own reasoning, still Kant's influence is evident in our assumptions. The basic notion that we project ourselves onto reality so that our interpretation of our world is in part a product of our own mind is something which many philosophers find to be incontrovertible. That we cannot make sense of any thing-in-itself, but are stuck in the realm of thing-as-perceived. Our reason has limits and these limits restrict what we can know and how we know about the world.

Reidian Realism vs Kantian Anti-Realism

Despite Kant's influence on some, Christian philosophers in the United States have tended to reject Kant and embrace Reid's epistemology.¹ Thomas Reid, the Scottish Common-sense philosopher of the 1700's held to a naïve-realism. On this view there is simply an assumption that we perceive objects as they are — our perceptions agree with the things themselves, when we are properly functioning (i.e., not color blind, etc), and in the right environment (i.e., not under a dark-light, etc). On Reid's view, the solution to skepticism was twofold: first, the skeptical problems provided by Descartes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume started with an assumption that we should doubt until we have reasons to believe. Any potential beliefs were considered guilty until proven innocent, but Reid said this evidentialist criteria was flawed. The better approach, according to Reid, was to accept one's beliefs until one had reason to suspect them innocent until proven guilty. The other problem was that Hume *et al* thought that we perceive ideas, not things. Reid, instead, held that we perceive things directly — our knowledge conforms

Here I will examine the viewpoints of Christian American Philosophers for and against Kant, focusing on Alvin Plantinga (against) and Merold Westphal (for) Kant. I will argue that Plantinga and other Kant-antagonists like Kreeft and Wolterstorff underestimate the benefit of Kant for religion, and that Merold Westphal's more positive view of Kant is more in line with a traditional Christian understanding of humans, the world, and our epistemic limits.

I want to be clear about what I am not doing in this article. I am not claiming that Kant was a Christian, nor am I saying Christianity is important to Kant, nor am I saying that Kant's philosophy of religion is accurate, or that evidentialist arguments for God have no place. I am, rather, explaining the Christian Philosophers responses to Kant, and claiming that, contra Plantinga and others, Christians *can* and perhaps *should* adopt Kant's creative anti-realism.

For over 200 years religious thinkers have been wrestling with Kant. Is Kant a benefit to the religious, or does his philosophy undermine our religious belief? He claims to be protecting faith from reason, but the price paid for this protection was that religion was excluded from the realm of reason. Religion was protected from reasonable arguments by being outside the domain of reason un-reasonable. What is perhaps more fundamentally in dispute among Christians is whether Kant's anti-realism — his belief that our minds constitute the way that we see the world — is compatible with traditional Christian claims about God and revelation.

Kant's contribution to philosophy was not so much the particular categories he determined, nor his laws or his analytics. Rather, the long-lasting effect which Kant has had on a large portion of philosophy is his claim that our notions of reality are always interpreted as something — that we make possible our experiences by our epistemic apparatus — and these very means of knowing affect how we perceive and experience the world — and that we cannot know otherwise. Today, few would suggest that all people come equipped with Kant's 12 categories. Yet many would agree with Kant that our epistemic capacities have some effect on how we see the world, and we simply cannot see the world in-itself. In other words, I can only know the way I experience the world — claiming to have a direct unmediated access to reality is an impossible claim simply because I am not in the position to make the claim.

Kant: Friend or Foe of the Believer? Plantinga and Other American Christian Responses to Kant's Epistemology

Andrew Gustafson*

“Moreover, once we are beyond the sphere of experience, we are assured of not being refuted by experience” (Kant, 1787, B8).

Abstract

Plantinga, Wolterstorff and Westphal are three eminent Christian Philosophers in the United States today. This paper will examine Plantinga, Wolterstorff, and Westphal's response to Kant's anti-realist epistemology. While perhaps many Christian philosophers doing philosophy of religion in the United States follow the common-sense realism of Thomas Reid, some philosophers, like Merold Westphal, support a Christian-Kantian-Creative-Anti-Realism. I will criticize Plantinga's and Wolterstorff's position, and support Westphal's, arguing that Kant's epistemology does not harm religious belief but in fact supports it.

Key Words: Kant; Anti-Realism; Plantinga; Wolterstorff; Westphal; Epistemology

*. Bethel University, St. Paul, MN, USA. E-mail: gusand@bethel.edu.