



Does Tillich Have A Hidden Debt To Kant?

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Received: 20/03/2019 | Accepted: 15/04/2019

Abstract

After briefly recounting a strange, quasi-mystical experience I had while first reading Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, I devote most of this article to exploring various similarities between theories Kant developed and ideas more commonly associated with Paul Tillich. Hints are drawn from Chris Firestone's book, *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason*, which argues that my interpretation of Kant echoes themes in Tillich's ontology. Among the themes whose Kantian roots I explore are Tillich's theories of: God as the Ground of Being; faith as ultimate concern; courage as the proper life-choice in the face of the anxiety that naturally arises out of an honest response to the human situation, given our fundamental alienation from the divine; the crucial role of cultural symbols in bringing faith into historically realistic expressions; political forms as ideally self-negating; and love as a gift that we must express with power and justice in order to be efficacious. After considering whether Kant influenced Tillich more than Tillich ever admitted, I conclude by wondering if my own effort to develop an "affirmative" interpretation of Kant's theory of religion may have itself had a hidden influence from my prior reading of Tillich.



Keywords

Immanuel Kant, Paul Tillich, faith as ultimate concern, courage, symbols, self-negating politics, love as gift.

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▣ Palmquist, S. R. (2019). Does Tillich Have A Hidden Debt To Kant. *Journal of Philosophical Theological Research*, 21(81), 73 -88. doi: 10.22091/jptr.2019.4191.2093



People sometimes ask why, as I approach my 40th year of scholarly research, I cannot pull myself away from doing research on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, especially his interpretation of religion. The answer – insofar as I can plumb the depths of my own inward motivations – goes back to an uncanny experience I had in March of 1981, when I read through Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* for the first time, almost exactly 200 years after its initial publication. During twelve consecutive days when time seemed to stand still, I did little else but eat, sleep, and digest the ideas expressed in the first *Critique*. During that process, almost from beginning to end, I repeatedly felt that I *knew* what Kant was going to say on the next page. I do not mean that I knew what words would appear there, of course. Rather, I felt a deep, almost ineffable sense that, *if I understand Kant correctly*, then on the next page he should go on to argue *such-and-such*. And when I turned the page, sure enough, the claim I had anticipated would appear before my eyes, just as if it had been written especially for me – or even, perhaps, *by me!* During that heady fortnight as a 23-year-old, first-year doctoral student at Oxford University, I began to wonder whether this might be evidence for the Buddhist theory of reincarnation.

Three years earlier, as an undergraduate Religious Studies major at a Christian liberal arts college in California, I had attended a Contemporary Theology course that included a challenging introduction to Kant’s philosophy as part of its philosophical prolegomena. On the last day of the lectures on Kant, the professor sternly warned us not to be tempted by Kantian reason, exclaiming: “No single philosopher has done more damage to the Christian religion than Immanuel Kant!” The only three major theologians whose ideas were covered in the lectures, after the lengthy post-Kantian background to twentieth-century theology had been sketched, were Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Wolfhart Pannenberg. At the front of that class, taught in the spring semester of 1978, sat a triumvirate of my more vocal classmates, all of whom also eventually became professors of philosophy and/or theology. Most notable among them was Philip Clayton,¹ who went on to study under Pannenberg, carrying his mentor’s torch well into the twenty-first century. Upon Pannenberg’s death in 2014, Clayton wrote: “Two hundred years from now, historians of theology will describe the work of Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg as the two theological giants of the mid-20th century.”² Many contemporary philosophers and theologians, I

1. Clayton currently serves as the Ingraham Professor at Claremont School of Theology. Our two notable classmates in that Contemporary Theology class were Jim Taylor (Professor of Philosophy at our alma mater, Westmont College) and Kevin Vanhoozer (Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School).

2. Quoted from www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2014/09/07/wolfhart-pannenberg-1928-2014/, Clayton’s online obituary in honor of Pannenberg.

suspect, would need little convincing that Clayton omitted one crucial name!

Perhaps Clayton's glaring omission of arguably the greatest mid-twentieth-century theologian, at least as far as the depth of his philosophical grounding is concerned, is at least partially due to the way our teacher in that formative course portrayed *Paul Tillich*. I still vividly recall my shock, as I sat quietly at the back of the classroom, when our teacher ended his last lecture on Tillich by passing off his entire theology as hardly worthy of a response from Christian philosophers, given that Tillich was – so the professor claimed – *a self-confessed atheist*. My three older classmates (see note 1), who often engaged the teacher with frequent feedback from their vantage point in the front row, seemed to accept this harsh dismissal of Tillich as a foregone conclusion. I may not have completed the assigned readings on *Kant* that semester, but I had avidly completed the Tillich readings and was convinced that our beloved professor had badly missed the point of Tillich's theological system. It took me three more years and a trip across the Atlantic before I began to realize that he was wrong about Kant too. Still, that introduction to Kant, as *the* philosopher who changed the tide of Protestant theology for the following two centuries, planted a seed which, when fertilized in the soil of my natural tendency to go against the status quo, surely contributed to my fascination with the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1981, when it seemed to me that Kant was merely expressing in philosophical terms what I had already learned from my youthful immersion in the Bible.

Although most of my publications in the past 35 years have been on Kant,¹ I jumped at the chance to write a paper on Tillich when a colleague and former student, Keith Chan, told me he was co-organizing a Tillich conference in mid-2015. I immediately realized that this would be an ideal opportunity for me to stand back and take stock of how, if at all, my appreciation for Tillich's theology might have changed, after spending three and a half decades focusing my research on Kant's philosophical corpus. In the end, my need to put the finishing touches on my *Comprehensive Commentary* (i.e., Palmquist, 2016) around the time of the conference prevented me from getting “back to Tillich” as deeply as I had hoped. The present article, however, aims to fill many of those gaps by revising and extending that conference paper.

Ten years ago another former HKBU student, Chris Firestone, published a book entitled *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason*, in which he compared three recent Kant interpreters to three twentieth-century theologians. Somewhat to my surprise, and without prior consultation with

1. My first publication, Palmquist, 1984, dealt with the proper status and role of Kant's (alleged) “transcendental arguments” and argued that “faith” (*Glaube*) is not merely a practical/moral concept for Kant, but also plays a crucial *theoretical* role in his Critical system.

me, Firestone devoted his Chapter Six to my interpretation of Kant, comparing it with Tillich's theology via some reflections on Rudolf Otto's work on the nature of religious experience. Claiming that I, like Otto, view Kant's *Religion* book as a "fourth *Critique*" – which I do not! – Firestone argues that my Kant takes metaphysics and ontology far more seriously than many other interpreters have claimed – which I do! Perhaps the most relevant of Firestone's claims, for the purposes of this article, is that Kant (if interpreted through the perspectival framework I employed in *Kant's System of Perspectives*, *Kant's Critical Religion*, and various other publications) is actually far more mystically inclined than he has often been given credit for. As we shall see, one of Tillich's key criticisms of Kant was that he was overly formalistic and therefore lacked appreciation for the importance of religious *experience*; I have argued, by contrast, that Kant's whole philosophy can be regarded as the philosophical foundation for a "Critical Mysticism" (see especially Palmquist, 2019). While I do not agree with all of the claims and conclusions Firestone reaches in his study of the Kant–Tillich–Palmquist relation, his chapter does provide at least some *prima facie* evidence that the topic of this article is worth exploring.¹ I shall, therefore, adopt a two-pronged approach. First, I will briefly sketch seven areas of broad agreement that I detect between Kant's philosophy and Tillich's theology, focusing mainly on the Kant side of this equation since that is the material I know best. I shall then examine a broad range of Tillich's writings to ascertain the extent to which he himself acknowledged such similarities.

First, and – as far as ontology and metaphysics are concerned – surely foremost, Tillich's notion of God as "being itself" or the "ground of being" has obvious Kantian roots. In the first *Critique* Kant refers to God as one of the three "ideas of reason": as the synthetic term of the triad whose first terms are *immortality* and *freedom*, the idea of *God* constitutes the whole aim and content of metaphysics; yet our necessary theoretical ignorance of the objects to which these three ideas point creates a problem for us human beings which is by its very nature irresolvable. We cannot live meaningful lives *without* these concepts, according to Kant; yet no matter how hard we may try, we also cannot obtain certain *knowledge* of the *objects* that these ideas seem to designate. In other words, we can (indeed, we *must*) *think*

1. Further evidence appears in Love 2010, who emphasizes what he calls Tillich's "turn toward religious pluralism" (pp. 568-569; see also p. 572) and its roots in Kant's theory of religion. Love detects a clear parallelism between Kant's and Tillich's respective theories of religious conversion (p. 569), but argues that Tillich's appeal to "ultimate concern as the main criterion for judging religions" (p. 570) is significantly weaker as a tool for assessing the success of a given empirical religion in passing the test of rationality than Kant's own criteria for rational religion, as laid out in what I have called his "first experiment" in *Religion* (see Palmquist, 2000a, Ch. VII).

“God” as the “*ens realissimum*” (i.e., the most real being); but because of the very nature of what it would mean to *be* such a being-of-all-beings, we as embodied beings can never “intuit” God as such and therefore can never obtain empirical cognition of God as “a being”. Moreover, this God-concept that we *must* think but *cannot* know is inherently paradoxical: Kant insists that God’s nature must contain within it *every possible predicate*. Indeed, one of Kant’s first books, published 18 years before the first *Critique*, argued that God is the *ground* of all possibility. Tillich is assuming all of this, it seems to me, whenever he calls God the ground of being.

Without appreciating the depths of these Kantian roots of Tillich’s God-concept (as apparently my undergraduate theology professor did not), one is bound to misunderstand a second claim of Tillich’s, that God does not “exist”. For Tillich, this means that God does not “stand out” (*ex-sistere*) from the rest of being, because God is not a thing among other things, but is, as it were, the *background* out from which all existing things stand. As Kant put it, “existence” (*Dasein*) is one of the twelve categories: as the second category of “modality”, it predetermines that everything we can know as an “existing” object must, by virtue of that very claim, be regarded as *a* being within the phenomenal world, rather than (what Kant calls) a noumenal being, for a noumenal being is *self-existing*. According to Kant, the idea of such a self-existing being *just is* the idea of God. When Tillich claims that God does not “exist”, he simply means that God transcends the possibility of being known by the human mind; it does not mean that God is not *real* or *actual* (*Wirklich*). On the contrary, God for Kant – as, I submit, for Tillich – is *so ultimately real/actual* that even to use such terms runs into potential conflict with the limits of human language and reason. For both Kant and Tillich, God is a *presence* that can be experienced, even though the mode of such experience does not enable us to make a science out of it.

A third Kantian influence can be seen in Tillich’s highly influential account of faith in terms of *ultimate concern*. Although Kant never uses the term “ultimate concern”, he does employ similar *notions* throughout his book, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793/1794; hereafter *Religion*). For Tillich, genuine ultimate concern contrasts with *idolatry*, inasmuch as those who put their faith in what is not genuinely ultimate are, in effect, worshipping an idol. Kant develops just such a theory of idolatry, near the end of his book (*Religion*, p. 185; see also p. 199), when he claims that all human beings have a natural tendency to “make a God for ourselves” (p. 168); this is not necessarily a problem, Kant argues, *provided* that one subordinates this inevitable “anthropomorphic” concept of *what I think God wants me to do* to what Kant calls the “supreme” or “ultimate” (*oberste*) maxim, which is the only proper object of human “volition” (*Willkür*). In short, to aim in all our actions to make the “good principle” the highest commitment to which we

direct what Kant calls our “heart” (*Herz*) or “conviction” (*Gesinnung*) is the key to ensuring that we practice true religion rather than idolatry. Kant calls this “moral faith” and fully recognizes that it inevitably exists alongside what he calls “historical faith”. Contrary to the most common way of interpreting Kant, whereby he is portrayed as seeking to destroy Christianity and all other historical faiths, I read him as encouraging them to be fruitful and multiply, *as long as* the adherents avoid the idolatrous assumption that the God of historical religion is *above* and therefore a higher concern than, God as Ultimate.¹ Again, I believe anyone familiar with Tillich’s way of talking about faith (e.g., in his book, *Dynamics of Faith*) will easily recognize this emphasis on ultimate concern as *vintage* Tillich – though as Love 2010 rightly argued (see previous footnote), Tillich’s own employment of the term suffers from a problem of being rather diffuse and poorly defined, whereas Kant’s criteria for holding a particular concern to be genuinely ultimate are comparatively clear and precise (see Palmquist 2000a, Chapter VII, for details).

Fourth and more briefly, Kant explicitly appeals to *courage* in the form of what he calls “firm resolve [*festen Vorsatz*]” (*Religion*, pp. 24n, 49n), as the proper life-choice in the face of the inevitable “anxiety” of the human situation – and the very word Kant uses here is the now-familiar *ängst* (*Religion*, pp.24n, 146n), later popularized by Kierkegaard.² Although we are in one sense fundamentally alienated from the divine (namely, whenever we adopt the theoretical standpoint that aims at knowledge), in another, equally valid sense (namely, whenever we adopt the practical standpoint that aims at virtue), we have direct access to the presence of God within us, in the form of our awareness of the moral law. Of course, Tillich develops his concept of courage far more fully than Kant does, so a detailed look at Tillich’s portrayal of courage would inevitably reveal many differences from Kant’s; my point here is therefore not to imply that Tillich *copied* Kant, but only that there is more overlap than is often acknowledged.

Fifth, both Kant and Tillich emphasize the crucial role played by cultural symbols in bringing faith into historically realistic expressions. In *Religion*, Kant argues that, in the face of human ignorance of the transcendent, symbols are the only possible ways we have to grasp the reality that is God (*Religion*, pp. 64-5n). Kant himself illustrates, with numerous examples, how historically contingent symbols can effectively transmit the ultimate truth of religion. The irony here, of course, is that symbols are one and all

1. For a detailed defense of this reading of Kant on historical faith, whereby the latter serves as a necessary component of any lived religion and is acceptable as long as it serves as a vehicle for the pure rational faith (that is, moral religion) at its core, see Palmquist, 2015.

2. See especially Kierkegaard’s 1844 masterpiece, *The Concept of Anxiety*. For a discussion of the Kant-Kierkegaard relationship, see Palmquist, 2000b.

historical; yet they are somehow able to convey a truth that is eternal. They can fulfill this role, Kant insists, only if we interpret them in terms of what Kant calls their “inwardness”; once we begin to take our religious symbols literally, they become idols. And as Kant argues in the climactic penultimate section of *Religion* – a section of the book that few commentators seem to have read – idols are bound to serve as obstacles to a healthy conscience, rather than to empower us to have the strength to live in the power of inwardness that is human conscience. Obviously, Kant did not engage with the details of his own culture in anything like the depth that Tillich did with his; yet he gave his full blessing to those who do – *as long as* they do not treat the symbols of their historical tradition as their ultimate concern.

My sixth point of comparison will be far briefer than the topic deserves. In *Religion*’s Third Piece, Kant argues that humanity as a whole has a unique duty to develop what he calls an “ethical community”, and that the only possible way this duty can be fulfilled is if there is a God who can serve as the inward guarantor of the unity that is sought by those who join this ethical community.¹ As such, the ethical community can succeed, he insists, only if it takes the form of a *church*. Kant’s much-neglected theory of the church argues that, whereas those who set up specific religious congregations *must* employ some political structuring mechanism, they must also always remain aware that the proper essence of the “invisible church”, being ethical, is thoroughly non-political. As an ethical *community*, the church by definition has a political structure that is paradoxically *non-political*. With this in mind, Kant proposes a form of community-building whereby the basic principles of organization must be self-negating to serve their proper purpose.² This view, though condensed within a few tightly argued pages of Kant’s *Religion* and therefore very easy to miss, bears an uncanny resemblance to Tillich’s theory of theonomy, as advanced, for example, in his book, *Political Expectation*. Indeed, readers of the latter book who are familiar with Kant’s argument may have the impression that Tillich is fleshing out the viability of the very politico-religious ideal that Kant proposed.³

1. For a detailed analysis and defense of the unique and widely neglected argument for God’s existence that Kant presents in *Religion*, pp.96-98; see Palmquist, 2015.

2. As such, I argue in Palmquist 2017 that Kant’s theory of the church is essentially theocratic, with the proviso that typical forms of theocracy are coercive, whereas Kantian theocracy is *non-coercive*. For a detailed defense of such genuine (i.e., non-coercive) theocracy as a legitimate approach to religion in general, see Palmquist, 1993.

3. Tillich 1983/1971, pp. 18-22, begins his discussion of “Protestantism as a Creative and Formative Principle” (18) by explicitly comparing “Protestantism” with “Kantianism” (19): whereas the former employs a “prophetic criticism” that acknowledges a transcendent reality that makes itself known in the form of concrete symbols, Tillich (following Ritschl) portrays Kantian criticism as a totally abstract form of criticism that ultimately eschews *anything* concrete. For a summary of Tillich’s theory of theonomy and a defense of the claim that it is fundamentally theocratic (in the authentic,

Finally, Kant's focus on God's justice, whenever he discusses the nature and possible manifestations of grace, has caused many readers to think that Kant denies the need for any divine assistance whatsoever. In my view, however, nothing could be further from the truth. Kant's point, rather, is that grace, which is essentially a gift of *love* on God's behalf, lacks efficacy if it is not given in the context of *justice*. Moreover, in the Second Piece of *Religion*, Kant portrays the human situation as leaving us in need of grace precisely because of our lack of moral *power* – what Kant repeatedly calls human “weakness” (see *Religion*, pp. 29, 43, 59n, 103, 141). This line of comparison, as far as I am aware, has never previously been noted by interpreters of Tillich; fleshing it out in detail would, therefore, require a separate article focusing on this theme alone. For now, let it suffice to say that Tillich employs this very same triad of concepts in his masterful treatment of the same problem, entitled *Love, Power, and Justice*, and in each case portrays the three main concepts in ways that are compatible with Kant's portrayals – though demonstrating such compatibility is beyond the scope of the present article.

With the foregoing seven points in mind, I shall attempt in the remainder of this article to answer the following set of interrelated questions, suggested by the title. Did Tillich adequately acknowledge the influence of Kant on his own thought? Or was he in some sense unaware of it, perhaps not realizing *how much* of his openly acknowledged admiration for Schelling was actually rooted in Schelling's debt to Kant?¹ Or, perhaps, was Tillich aware of even this indirect influence but seeking to *hide* it for some reason? A full defense of the claim that some such form of debt was indeed *hidden* would require a book-length work. However, a quick overview of the references Tillich makes to Kant in his main books should enable us to make some initial suggestions as to what range of answers is possible.

In a 1960 lecture entitled “Philosophical Background of my Theology”, Tillich refers to Schelling as “my friend and teacher” (Tillich, 1989, p. 420). The same lecture devotes most of one paragraph to Kant, lumping him together with Aristotle as the two philosophers who provided the West in general with essential “philosophical tools” (p. 416), and who provided Tillich in particular with “philosophical discipline”. He then concisely admits that he took on board *two claims* from Kant: first, the epistemological theory of “the relationship of subject to object” (i.e., Kant's Copernican hypothesis); and second, his “understanding that the human mind is limited

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non-coercive sense; cf. previous footnote), see Palmquist, 1993, especially pp. 59-65. I also provide further details on Tillich's position in *Political Expectation* later in the main text of this article.

1. For one of the many aspects of Schelling's debt to Kant, see Vanden Auweele, 2019.

to the categories of time and space,¹ of causality and substance, of quantity and quality, and cannot go beyond these boundary lines in its own power.” He admits that these two influences “contributed to my understanding of existentialism” (p. 416), but ends his lecture by insisting (p. 420) that his theology “is not dependent on...Kant as many Protestants are.”

In line with this disclaimer, although many of Tillich’s books refer to Kant, they rarely include more than a brief mention (often entailing a misconstrual [see e.g., previous footnote]) of some specific aspect of his philosophy. For example, in *Systematic Theology* Tillich never discusses Kant’s philosophy in any significant detail, but does mention Kant 12 times in volume one (including three passing references to “Kantian(ism)” [pp. 6, 166n], which he takes to assume “[t]he duality ... between nature and freedom” [p. 232]), twice in volume two, and 17 times in volume three (including nine references to “Kantian(ism)” – most of these being merely passing references).² Each mention is brief and can be adequately summarized as claiming that, for Kant: “epistemology precedes ontology” (vol. I, p. 71), reason is finite and thus the purpose of the three *Critiques* is to describe our “critical ignorance” (vol. I, pp. 81-2),³ the categorical imperative is assumed to be empty and formal (vol. I, p. 89),⁴ our incessant questioning about the causes of things cannot be stopped

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1. Technically, of course, space and time are not categories for Kant, but pure intuitions. This is a typical example of Tillich’s tendency (mentioned below) to misconstrue Kant’s theories. However, in a similar passage in *Systematic Theology* (vol. I, p. 166n), Tillich does openly acknowledge that he is using the term “category” in a broader sense than Kant does.
 2. Other texts with only passing references to Kant include a lecture Tillich gave in 1963, in which he refers to “the self-restriction of the Kantian philosophy” (Tillich, 1996, p. 7).
 3. A footnote to this passage (Tillich, 1951, vol. I, p. 82n) offers one of Tillich’s rare clarifications that Kant should not be interpreted (and hence rejected) “only as an epistemological idealist and ethical formalist... Kant is more than this.” Tillich then gives a one-sentence summary of each *Critique*, each sentence suggesting (though not explicitly stating) that the three *Critiques* were a significant inspiration for Tillich’s own theology. Later, Tillich similarly praises “Kant’s co-ordination of the moral law with the starry heavens as expressions of the unconditionally sublime” (vol. I, p. 119). Unfortunately, in other contexts, Tillich seems to forget (or hide?) his own admiration for the Critical system. For example, Tillich, 1972, portrays Kant as if he wrote only the first two *Critiques* (p. 326), “and the neo-Kantian school added the aesthetic reason as a third, uniting the practical and the theoretical.” However, Tillich later (pp. 378-379) offers a clear account of Kant’s own view of “the beautiful”, as providing a *synthesis* of these two realms, and aptly acknowledges the consequent influence of Kant on the Romanticism that followed directly in the wake of the third *Critique* (see also pp. 384, 423).
 4. This is the aspect of Kant’s philosophy against which Tillich argues most consistently (and harshly). Tillich claims that, in fact, the “absolute” moral “demand” always arises in a “concrete” situation, and Kant’s formulations of the categorical imperative are no exception (Tillich 1951, vol. I, p. 104). For Tillich, this awareness of the necessary interplay between the absolute and the concrete is the key to understanding what he calls “revelation” (vol. I, p. 89). What is subject to debate is whether Tillich is rejecting Kant’s own ethics or Hegel’s highly formalistic caricature of it. Thus, Tillich laments “that those in the Kant-Ritschl line...in theology” have tended to downplay the importance of “mysticism” as a “corrective” to “the final revelation” (vol. I, p. 140). On the possibility of interpreting Kant’s philosophy as itself a form of (Critical) mysticism, just as Tillich sees the proper role of theology as both critical and mystical, see Palmquist, 2019.

merely by thinking of God as a final cause (vol. I, p. 196), a moral argument for God's existence shows "the presence of something unconditional within the self and the world" (vol. I, p. 206),¹ mathematics is a result of good luck (vol. II, p. 27), "the myth of the Fall of transcendent souls" has a humanistic meaning (vol. II, p. 37), the soul is non-substantial (III, p. 24), "the pure formalism of ethics" is not fully realizable (vol. III, p. 46), philosophy valiantly attempts (but fails) "to liberate the ethical norm from all concrete contents" (vol. III, p. 47), morality is "autonomous" from "religious commandments" (vol. III, p. 158), and time and space need to be treated "interdependently" (vol. III, p. 315). As such, Kant is one of three "predominantly essentialist philosophers" (vol. III, p. 203), yet was also one of three key "philosophical critics of metaphysical psychology" (vol. III, p. 411). Moreover, he understood "the question of the finite or infinite character of time and space" (vol. III, p. 317), for "the stringency of Kant's solution of the antinomies" suggests that "[i]nfinity is a demand, not a thing" [vol. I, p. 190].

Several of Tillich's other books have similarly scattered references to Kant. *The Protestant Era* has two citations: one a passing reference (Tillich, 1957b, p. 10), the other a brief mention of Kant's "abstract-formalistic" theory of conscience (p. 143). The only passage in Tillich's *The Religious Situation* that refers to Kant (Tillich 1956, pp. 71-74) is a sweeping generalization about his "critical method" being based on "the dominance of pure rational form" (p. 71), although he admits that Kant's own (especially later) writings exhibit "a tendency to transcend the critical Kant" (p. 71), thus giving rise to the whole tradition of German idealism. Likewise, *Political Expectation*, other than briefly praising Kant's Enlightenment commitment to autonomy (Tillich, 1983/1971, p. 70), refers to Kant only in a lengthy passage that discusses "Kantian criticism" as understood by Ritschl (pp. 19-22; see note 1 on p. 81, above); there Tillich quite inaccurately accuses Kant of being "allied...with theory against practice" (p. 19) and describes "Kantianism" as "the ideal of an abstract society which dissolves all concrete forms", alleging that "there is really no more impotent form of criticism than Kantian criticism" (p. 19). With a similar degree of empty rhetorical dismissal, Tillich shows a serious misunderstanding of Kant's judicial standpoint when in *The Courage To Be* he accuses Kant of ignoring "the bridge" that enables ethical and ontological concerns to be united

1. Tillich goes on to argue (1951, vol. I, p. 207) that, both for Augustine and Kant, "the starting point is right, but the conclusion is wrong. The experience of an unconditional element in man's encounter with reality is used for the establishment of an unconditional being (a contradiction in terms) within reality." But this objection, at least as applied to Kant, is grossly unfair, for Kant explicitly states that "God" must be regarded as a *regulative* idea and that the moral argument for God's existence holds *only* for our practical reason; theoretically (i.e., as far as the realm of *being* is concerned— which is the focus of Tillich's objection), God's existence retains a merely regulative status.

(Tillich, 1952, p. 3); ironically, aside from passing references to his “categorical [sic] forms” (p. 33) and his theories of human finitude and radical evil (p. 133), Tillich’s only other mention of Kant in this book is a brief nod to his theory of *genius* (p. 105) – which shows that Tillich was familiar even with the third *Critique*, despite his neglect of its all-important bridging function!¹

The evidence provided by this overview of relevant passages leads me to offer two tentative observations in answer to the foregoing set of questions. First, Tillich refers to Kant often enough to confirm without reasonable doubt that he was very familiar with Kant’s philosophy: he at least *thought* he understood Kant, so the claim that Tillich may have been directly *influenced* by Kant is surely plausible; indeed, despite his above-quoted disclaimer, Tillich could hardly avoid admitting such influence to at least a limited degree.² After all, what influential philosopher or theologian of the twentieth-century was *not* influenced by Kant?

Second, the possibility that Tillich was not just influenced by Kant but that he may have also been indebted in certain ways that he was either *unaware* of or perhaps sought to *hide* also has some plausibility – but only in a qualified sense. For in two books, *both published posthumously*, Tillich examines Kant’s philosophy in great detail. Large portions of his second doctoral dissertation, *Mysticism and Guilt-Consciousness in Schelling’s Philosophical Development*, present a detailed discussion of Kant’s philosophy; indeed, Kant features on roughly one-fourth of the pages. But Tillich’s explicit aim in these sections is to show how Kant’s philosophy is *lacking* in various respects that Schelling corrects. Most notably, the early Tillich’s Kant is entirely formalistic and has absolutely no interest in mysticism and religious experience as such (but see Palmquist, 2019). The Kant that emerges from these pages is very much the Kant *of* (i.e., as reinterpreted by) the German idealists – not surprisingly, given that theologians in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century knew of no other Kant than this one.³

1. I have been unable to find any references to Kant in Tillich’s more popular books, such as: *Dynamics of Faith; Love, Power, and Justice; The Shaking of the Foundations; The New Being; and The Eternal Now*. Even the course notes published as Tillich, 2016, make only one passing reference, to “Kantianism”, described as: “Appearance is the given product of the interrelationship between the thing in itself and the Ego in itself, both of which are unknown” (31, strikethrough in original).

2. For the main evidence of clear influence, see the next two works discussed below in the main text, where Tillich discusses Kant’s philosophy in great detail.

3. Thus, the masterful study of post-Kantian theology in Dorrien, 2012, concludes that the legacy of Kant that has traversed this liberal-idealist path has reached a dead-end in the early twenty-first century. However, as I point out in my review of his book (see Palmquist, 2014), Dorrien shows no awareness of the new, affirmative interpretations of Kant’s theology and philosophy of religion that have emerged in the past three decades. For an overview of the various types of affirmative

The second great exception to Tillich's tendency to engage with Kant only through a series of glosses is his monumental (but again, *posthumously* published) book, *A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*.¹ On nearly 10% of its 541 pages, the lectures transcribed in Tillich 1972 discuss Kant's philosophy, sometimes in considerable depth, referring to Kant repeatedly and in far too much detail for me to provide an adequate account here. Instead, I shall offer only a few key highlights. Part I (see previous footnote) refers to Kant in seven passages, spanning nine pages. After identifying Kant's "moral law" or "practical reason" with the Christian "Logos" (p. 8), his remaining mentions in Part I refer only in passing to Kant's rejection of the ontological argument (pp. 164-5, 194), to Abelard as prefiguring Kant's ethics in general and especially the claim that "nothing is good except a goodwill" (p. 171), to Kant's understanding of "nature" as "a realm in which physical law is valid" being "much more Calvinistic and Zwinglian" than Lutheran (p. 259), to the opening lines of Kant's *What Is Enlightenment?* essay, which Tillich endorses (pp. 288-9), and (without further explanation or critical qualifications) to "Kant's division of the world of knowledge from the world of values" (p. 292). Part II covers Kant's philosophy in far too much detail to summarize adequately, but because it aims to be primarily a *history*, a general overview of the topics covered will suffice for our present purposes. Four sections of Part II deal primarily with Kant: these are entitled "The Kantian Definition of Autonomy" (pp. 320-2f), "Kant, Moral Religion, and Radical Evil" (360-6), "The Synthesis of Spinoza and Kant" (pp. 370-1), and "The 'Back to Kant' Movement" (p. 511-3f). Skipping over Tillich's many passing mentions of Kant, most of which refer to Kant's relation to other philosophers, I shall conclude this overview by noting that, in a section called "The Attitude of the Enlightened Man" (pp. 341f), where Kant remains mostly unnamed but seems to be the primary model, Tillich refers at one point (p. 344) to Kant's theory of grace in *Religion*, which he believes Kant rejects as heteronomous, adding: "In this reasonable religion prayer was also removed, because prayer relates one to that which transcends oneself." As I have argued elsewhere (see especially Palmquist, 2010 and 1997), however, current affirmative interpreters of Kant recognize that

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interpretations that have developed since 1970, see Firestone and Palmquist 2006; in Palmquist, 2012, I assess the extent to which many of these approaches are genuinely affirmative.

1. This book (Tillich, 1972) originally appeared as two separate monographs: Part I was initially entitled *A History of Christian Thought* (1967), and Part II, *Perspectives on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Protestant Theology* (1968). The latter includes 43 of the 52 pages listed in the Index of Tillich, 1972 as referring to Kant. Because both parts of the book are based on lectures and were not approved for publication by Tillich himself, I will only briefly summarize this text's extensive coverage of Kant's philosophy.

Religion offers us a way to be religious that is far closer to the (quasi-mystical) ideal that Tillich himself promoted. (See Tillich, 1972, p. 455 for a similarly extreme and inaccurate account of Kant's view of miracles.) Explicitly reading Kant through the eyes of Fichte, Tillich says that for Kant (p. 442): "Religion is only an appendix to the moral imperative." Tillich remained unaware of the fact that Kant himself eschewed this reading of his religious views, for (as I have argued in Palmquist, 2016) Kant offered at least as much credence to the more theologically affirmative interpretation promoted by Gottlob Christian Storr.

What Tillich did not (and could not) see is that Kant scholars nowadays (cf. note 1 on the previous page) are beginning to see a Kant who was *not* the Kant of Fichte, Schelling, and the liberal theological tradition of German idealism:¹ this new interpretation reads Kant whole, recognizing that he was not the arch-formalist that nearly two centuries of interpreters, following Hegel's² caricature, took him to be. Perhaps when Tillich read the works of the Kant he was taught, he *picked up* themes that were *there* in the Kant that affirmative interpreters are now highlighting, but that had not been developed by that tradition. If so, then Tillich's theology can be regarded as one of the great theological *affirmations* of Kant's philosophy of religion. On the other hand, if I am correct that the most significant of the religious ideas that I have come to associate with Kant are *all* present in Tillich, then this does suggest one other possibility that I have not yet considered. And this final question I must pose to *myself*: Could it be that my own reading of Kant, and the whole "affirmative school" of Kant interpretation that I have sought to promote for the past 30 years (see e.g., Palmquist, 1989), is a *misreading* that has come about as a result of imposing my prior knowledge and admiration of Tillich's theology *onto* Kant's texts? Answering this question may require another 30 years of research!³

1. Boss, 2017, has convincingly argued that the most accurate reading of Tillich's *own* view of Kant is that he read Kant through the lens provided mainly by Fichte, but also by Schelling and Hegel. Boss opposes the claims of both Perrottet, 2012, that Tillich was mainly interested in the first *Critique*, and interpreters such as Davidovich, 1993, and Love, 2012, that Tillich was mainly interested in the third *Critique*. My argument in this article tends to support Boss' position *as an accurate reading of Tillich*, but, recognizes that the views espoused by Davidovich and Love represent the way Tillich *should* have viewed Kant—what I am here calling Tillich's *hidden debt* to Kant.

2. Incidentally, Tillich, 1972, assesses Kant as being "a more profound thinker" than Hegel, even though Hegel "created an epoch in the history of philosophy" more successfully than Kant did (p. 413).

3. An earlier version of this article was presented at the conference, "Ultimate Concern: Paul Tillich, Buddhism, Confucianism", held on 12-13 July 2015 at Hong Kong Baptist University. My thanks to the participants of that event for helpful feedback during the discussion that followed my presentation.

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