

A TERM UNSEEN, UNHEARD, UNSPOKEN
DEVELOPING A MINOR KANT APPROACH TO
DIE RELIGION

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ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the possibility of an alternative reading Kant's first text from *Die Religion Innerhalb Der Grenzen Der Bloßen Vernunft* (1793 *Über Das Radicale Böse In Der Menschliche Natur*). We argue that an approach is possible which centres the 'radical' term in Kant's argument, rather than treating the text within established ethical boundaries. We show how the assumption that Kant 'meant nothing' with the term *Radical* is grounded in a 'common sense' which is, at least partly, due to the history of the text's reception in the 20th century, spearheaded by Hannah Arendt. However, through the lens of Hardt and Negri's 'minor Kant' dictum, the space opens up for a hypothetical, rather than deductive construction of the text instead; meaning that, rather than defending a particular thesis, *Über Das Radicale Böse* is tracing the consequences of a particular conceptual construction. This reading presents us with a potential Kantian account of radicality itself. As a result, we argue that perhaps, rather than continuing to treat the radicality of evil as something commonly understood, an external demand which Kant must account for, *Die Religion* could be deployed as a way to challenge our contemporary understanding of radicality itself.¹

KEYWORDS: Radicality; Evil; Kant; Arendt

This essay seeks to challenge a popular assumption in contemporary continental philosophy regarding Immanuel Kant's *Die Religion Innerhalb Der Grenzen Der Bloßen Vernunft* (1793), and more precisely its famous chapter *Über Das Radicale Böse In Der*

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Menschliche Natur. Rather than restricting the book to an account of religion (strictly), and the text to account of evil or human nature (again, strictly), we seek to continue the post-factum distinction popularised by Hardt and Negri, between 'major-' and 'minor-Kant'. In contrast to the 'major' Kant, who writes 'stabilising', assurance-granting philosophy, the 'minor Kant' is "the bold, daring Kant, which is often hidden, subterranean, buried in his texts, but from time to time breaks out with a ferocious, volcanic, disruptive power."² This Kant, "for whom daring to know requires simultaneously knowing how to dare",³ penetrates the walls of Prussian censorship. We argue that this dimension opens up precisely when one considers another possible approach to the text, namely one which considers the *radicality* (of evil) as a philosophical concept itself. This reading thus faces a peculiar obstacle. *Über Das Radicale Böse* is a seminal text with an "immense and ever growing"⁴ body of scholarship, within whose bounds an author is seemingly able to explore just about any aspect of Kantian thought. Yet, despite a series of investigations into 'evil', 'human nature', 'religion', 'ethics', 'free will' and so on, *Das Radicale*, the only other titular term remaining, remains untouched. Or, more accurately, one consistently finds its potential dismissed in that same 'immense' body of literature, often *en passant* in a single line:

"'Radical evil' is defined by common sense..."⁵

"Kant is using the term 'radical' in the sense of 'rooted-in,' and not in [any other sense]."⁶

"'Radical Evil' does not refer to a special kind of evil that is especially 'radical'..."⁷

"'Radical Evil' then, is not the name of some special type of evil ... he is appealing to the original, etymological meaning of *radikal*. *There is no evidence Kant means anything more than this.*"⁸

² Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009, p. 17.

³ Hardt & Negri, *Commonwealth*, p. 17.

⁴ Stephen Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, West Sussex, UK, 2015, p. 6.

⁵ Martin Joseph Matušík, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope: Postsecular Meditations*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008, p. 8.

⁶ Paul Formosa, 'Kant On The Radical Evil Of Human Nature', *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2007, pp. 221–245, p. 225.

⁷ Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 284.

⁸ Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 28 (onze nadruk).

Nearly every secondary source consulted for this article makes it explicit at some point that the term ‘radical’ meant *nothing* to Kant, and as such *should not be paid any mind to*.⁹ It is “simply” and “strictly” a reference to the biblical *radix malorum est cupiditas* (‘greed is the root of all evil’), and “nothing more”.¹⁰ But how have we arrived at this certainty? One might assume that there exists some unspoken piece of literature which did investigate the concept of radicality in Kant and concluded it worthless, or which did hail it, but was proven bunk itself. Although it remains a question which text this could be (if it exists at all), scholars find it necessary to warn each other not to go down what is, effectively, a completely untraversed path. This becomes all the more comical, in our view, when those same articles on *Über Das Radicale Böse* then *do* employ the concept of radicality, for example:

“It is easier to fend off ideas that make you uncomfortable if you can see them as expressions of attitudes you know you can rightly reject than if their source appears to be a *radical principle* with which you cannot help agreeing. The demands of Kantian morality are *radical*.”¹¹

“The conclusion [(of this paper)] proposes to *radicalize* Kant’s notion of evil, not in the direction of a demonic connotation, but in a direction *indicated by Levinas*...”¹²

“So, although the motivations of Thomas More were undoubtedly “good,” the very formal structure of his act was “radically evil”: his was an act of *radical defiance* which disregarded the Good of community.”¹³

Kant’s text and its titular concept have been separated to such an extent that authors seemingly even go looking for it elsewhere. Expressions such as of the first kind by Wood betray a complete disregard of the possibility of a Kantian account of what would make a principle, or a moral demand ‘radical’ in the first place. Those of the second kind by De Wachter, completely seem to miss the irony in wanting to ‘radicalise’ his notion of evil (when it is presented as

⁹ One important exception here is certainly Steven Palmquist, who does *not* take this to be self-evident, but instead suggests the notion of radix (as root) ought to be connected Kant’s preferred metaphor of man as a tree; Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant’s Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, p. 84.

¹⁰ Pasternack en Fugate, “Kant’s Philosophy of Religion.”

¹¹ Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 335.

¹² Frans De Wachter, ‘Hoe Radicaal Is Het Radicale Kwade?’, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2003, pp. 33–57, p. 57 (our emphasis). This and all following quotations of De Wachter are translated into English.

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993, p. 96.

radicalised) and thinking that this could either be done in a ‘demonic’ sense or as laid out by another philosopher (and not the much more present third option – Kant). Lastly, those of the kind by Žižek go through considerable trouble to end up right where we started: with a notion of radicality which can be applied to concepts other than evil (without connecting the two).

The aim of this essay is as such to carve a new path to Kant’s text into already firmly treated academic ground, by demonstrating how current, unspoken assumptions in the literature have potentially led to certain missed insights. Our first anchor here will be the historiography of the text and its reception, which allows us to question what assumptions have been shaped within that discourse and their origin.¹⁴ Next, we explore the status of the term ‘radical’ in Kant’s writing, and how an approach which centres it, can find a place among the contemporary interpretations of *Die Religion*. Ultimately, we will defend the position that *Das Radicale Böse*, in the tradition set out by Hardt and Negri, can (and perhaps should) be explored as a *hypothetical* text which assigns a particular role to the term ‘radical’.

THE ESSAY, THE BOOK

The vast majority of literature surmises that Kant ‘published’ *Die Religion Innerhalb Der Grenzen Der Bloßen Vernunft*, with as its first section, ‘Über Das Radicale Böse In Der Menschlichen Natur’, in 1792. Only two sources¹⁵ discuss the text’s curious publication history of ‘submission and retraction’, even the English translation omits it.¹⁶ In doing so, others bypass an important reflection unto what intellectual historians like Quentin Skinner term “the illocutionary force” – the ever so difficult “somewhat Hegelian plea” to grasp element of the utterance itself.¹⁷ Kant was, generally speaking, not a religious man, despite his many religious

¹⁴ For all these observations and more, we make use of a (in our estimation) sufficiently large and representative selection of sources. One finds these grouped together in the bibliography.

¹⁵ Of those consulted for the purposes of this paper; Immanuel Kant, *De religie binnen de grenzen van de rede*, trans Geert Van Eekert, Walter Van Herck & Willem Lemmens, Boom, Amsterdam, 2010, pp. 254–257; Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant’s Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, pp. 1–7.

¹⁶ Excluding the usual Cambridge chronology of Kant’s life, Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, xxxiii–xxxiv.

¹⁷ Quentin Skinner, ‘Conventions and the Understanding of Speech Acts’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 79, 1970, p. 118.

alliances.¹⁸ So, what made Kant write? What struggle was so overwhelmingly his? Most are contented with a singular statement such as: "Religion was an unavoidable topic for Kant"¹⁹, but we are happy to trade this 'unavoidability' for a more uncertain starting point. Manfred Kuehn gives a number of suggestions for this religious consideration, including (1) Fichte's *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1792), which could have encouraged Kant to draw a clear line between himself and the upcoming 'Kantians' (Schultz, Reinhold, Fichte)²⁰, (2) a continuation of themes he raised in the third *Critique*²¹, and (3) an overdue return to the issues that had fascinated him during his disastrous Pietist upbringing.²² Though we don't want to exclude these explanations, they do not fully match up with the timeline of *Die Religion*, and particularly the peculiar role *Über Das Radicale Böse*. Though these are all excellent suggestions, they also still drive on that same assumption that *Über Das Radicale Böse*, because it is a part of *Die Religion*, fundamentally, is a text about religion, a topic which in turn is considered 'unavoidable' for Kant. This is the first of a long list of assumptions we would like to investigate in this essay.

Of course, 1792 wasn't Kant's first foray into religion. In lockstep with the literature, one could consider 1786 as a potential turning point. Not only is it the publication date of his contribution to the 'Lessing controversy' in *Was Heißt - Sich Im Denken Orientiren?* (1786), but, it also marks the end of Kant's "*Zeitalter der Aufklärung, oder das Jahrhundert Friedrichs*"²³.²⁴ Frederick II's subsequent short reign is often characterised as a return to older, stricter censorship, especially on religious matters. Under the leadership of Johann Christoph Wöllner, a

¹⁸ Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 250.

¹⁹ Erik Hanson, *Kant, Immanuel: Radical Evil* | *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., viewed 6 January 2020, <<https://www.iep.utm.edu/rad-evil/>>.

²⁰ Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, p. 364.

²¹ Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, p. 362.

²² Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, p. 250.

²³ AK AA 08: 40

²⁴ This and all future primary Kant citations will utilise the traditional method common in Kant scholarship, using on Kant, Immanuel, *Akademieausgabe von Immanuel Kants Gesammelten Werken*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900.

The format is Abbreviation, AA (Vol.-Number.): page[s]. Line[s].; the abbreviations are:

RGV: *Die Religion Innerhalb Der Grenzen Der Blossen Vernunft*

IaG: *Idee Zu Einer Allgemeinen Geschichte*

KRV: *Kritik Der Reinen Vernunft* (A/B)

Anth: *Anthropologie in Pragmatischer Hinsicht*

Rosicrucian whom the king himself had initiated into the order, the Ministry of *Kirchlichen Angelegenheiten* introduced new censorship measures, and only texts that proclaimed the state's orthodox views would be supported financially. This may not seem like the gruesome punishment one might associate with religious censorship, but it was precisely this influx of capital which fuelled the publishing houses, universities and other institutions on which the German intelligentsia relied.²⁵ Many 18th century thinkers thus had no choice but to obey the measures. But Immanuel Kant, who had cunningly invested his salary and thus acquired some financial self-determination²⁶, could take certain liberties where others could not. For this reason, Kuehn tacitly suggests that Kant was looking to write something of a political nature, to defend the freedoms gained under the previous Frederick (the Great).²⁷ However, deeming any 18th century Prussian text a *political* rather than a *religious* one solves very little for our purposes – one can assume the two topics to intertwine.

As mentioned earlier, the text has a peculiar publication history. 1791, Kant published a new text in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* with a theological subject: *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodicee*. As a result of that publication and others, the *Monatsschrift* was forced to move the journal to Jena in 1792, then part of the Duchy of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach. In turn, Kant again sent (in all likelihood)²⁸ four texts to the journal, asking the editors to acquire explicit permission from Berlin. Only one was admitted: *Über Das Radicale Böse In Der Menschlichen Natur*. Indeed, the censorship office is said to have thought that the text was too *philosophical* and academic in nature to be picked up by a wider literary audience. The others were deemed not philosophical, but theological. So, Kant requests all four essays back, submits them to a professor of theology in Jena, and has them officially declared to be philosophical in nature. He then compiles and publishes all *four* in 1793, in a book entitled '*Die Religion Innerhalb Der Grenzen Der Bloßen Vernunft*'. Notice also that he thus not only reclaims the already published article on radical evil, he is also said to have explicitly expressed that:

²⁵ Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, pp. 338–340.

²⁶ Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, p. 157.

²⁷ Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, p. 340.

²⁸ In this, we follow the reasoning of Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, 3.

"I did not want to hold back from the public the three essays, which belonged to [...] the article on radical evil."²⁹ As a result, Kant does end up being reprimanded by Wöllner in 1794. Kant carefully replies that he did not make any religious statements, only *purely philosophical* ones, and promised not to write similar essays as long as his lordship lived.³⁰ This is to reiterate that *Die Religion* and the *Das Radicale Böse* essay are *not* the same thing. *Das Radicale Böse* is not "the Religion text"³¹, as one sometimes finds written in the literature. It can however be said that Kant believed it was essential in a discussion of the limits of reason, so much so that he published it a second time.

We can also read this in Kant's response to the reviews of *Die Religion*, to be found in the preface to the second edition (1794), which has some considerable additions.³² Kant focuses in the new preface on exactly two reviews, this one by the theologian Gottlob Christian Storr (1746-1805)³³ and an anonymous one in the *Neueste Critische Nachrichten*. He clearly has much more appreciation for the comments of the former, which he does not address directly³⁴, than those of the latter, which he quickly and skilfully disregards. Storr's extensive rejoinder *Annotationes Quaedam Theologicae Ad Philosophicam Kantii De Religion Doctrinam* (1793), positioned Kant's critical project as a new defence of Christianity against the Enlightenment, contra Fichte's *Critik Aller Offenbarung* which saw both in the same vein.³⁵ The anonymous reviewer posited that the limits presented in *Die Religion* applied only to Kantian philosophy, and thus not philosophy in general.³⁶ Both reviews are at first glance very different, but actually share a hidden approach: both regard *Die Religion* as a consideration of the limits of critical philosophy itself. This is, we think, another indication that this was precisely the point that Kant

²⁹ Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, p. 365 trans. from Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 349.

³⁰ Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, pp. 361–364, 379–380.

³¹ Formosa, 'Kant On The Radical Evil Of Human Nature', p. 224.

³² Palmquist correctly notes how peculiar it is that these differences between editions go virtually unmentioned in the literature, especially given similar extensive studies concerning the first Critique. As in that instance, one can always argue that these new additions are vital to get a picture of what Kant considered to be the heart of the matter; Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, p. ix.

³³ The very same theologian who taught Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin at Tübingen.

³⁴ One potential explanation, following Palmquist, is that Storr's book was not yet translated into German, and that Kant preferred not to cite in Latin.

³⁵ Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, pp. 37–38.

³⁶ RGVA AA 06: 14

himself also considered central. Within the frame of intellectual history, the question of ‘illocutionary force of utterance’ is, in a sense, contextualised here by Thomas Gieryn’s famous notion of ‘Boundary Work’: as the modern scientist (which, in this context, includes Kant Newtonian notion of philosophy as science) is concerned with his/her disciplinary bounds, the productive act of writing and publishing always serves to reinforce these very disciplinary bounds.³⁷ Put another way: what philosophy can or cannot investigate, is in turn *also* something only critical philosophy can uncover.

Returning to Kuehn’s three suggestions (Kantianism, Judgement and Pietism), though all these reasons might still play a role, they still take *Das Radicale Böse* to be, because it is part of the *Religion*, about religion, the ‘unavoidable topic’. We argue however, considering the context just sketched, for *Religion Within The Limits of Reason*³⁸ as a *collection of several essays* on that other titular concept, *limits of reason*.³⁹ It is this concern which, right from the beginning with *Was Heißt - Sich Im Denken Orientieren?*, returns time and again. It also challenges the occasional assumption in scholarly literature that the *Religion* is a kind of unique whole, which can or should be separated from the rest of Kant’s critical project – and, perhaps more crucially, as a result, had no considerable impact on German philosophy in the century that followed.⁴⁰ However, this questionable ‘break in time’ cannot be separated from the remarkable explosion of academic study concerning both *Die Religion* and *Das Radicale Böse* in the 20th century. This, yet again, raises for us the topic of secondary literature and its common assumptions.

‘MAN IS NATURALLY EVIL’

So far, we discussed two hidden *ex negativo* implicit assumptions about what is *not* important in Kant’s *Das Radicale Böse*: (1) the use of the term ‘radical’, and (2) the potential structural relation between the projects of *Das Radicale Böse* and *Die*

³⁷ Thomas F. Gieryn, ‘Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists’, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 48, [American Sociological Association, Sage Publications, Inc.], no. 6, 1983, pp. 781–795; *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1999.

³⁸ See Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant’s Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, p. 517 for a discussion of the frequently excluded ‘Bloßen’ in translations, as in the bounds of ‘bare’ reason.

³⁹ Though any good Kantian will presumably argue such a distinction is unnecessary.

⁴⁰ E.g. See commentary in Kant, *De religie binnen de grenzen van de rede*, p. 255.

Religion overall. Nevertheless, one can also cautiously formulate a positive consensus. We start with the broadest possible interpretation: Kant's text is quite literally *On the Radical Evil in Human Nature*. This is more functional than appears at first sight. What 'radical evil', 'human nature', and even 'in' mean is of course the subject of debate, but one term is very consistently always interpreted in the same way: 'über', namely as *justification*. Kant's text must always answer a question: *why* evil is rooted in human nature? Some examples (with our own emphasis):

"These considerations ... [ought] ... to show *why* Kant thought it justifiable to attribute the propensity to evil to human beings and to claim that it is entwined so deeply in humanity as to be characterisable as innate."⁴¹

"Kant thinks he can explain *why* all of us freely adopt evil maxims."⁴²

"Kant's radical evil thesis addresses the deeper question of *why* we are the types of beings who are able to transgress the moral law in the first place."⁴³

Although this justifying slant may not seem too determinative at first glance, it nonetheless has numerous consequences. *Das Radicale Böse*, after a brief introduction, is divided into four titled sections: (I) '*Von der ursprünglichen Anlage zum Guten in der menschlichen Natur*', (II) '*Von dem Hange zum Bösen in der menschlichen*', (III) '*Der Mensch ist von Natur böse*', (IV) '*Vom Ursprunge des Bösen in der menschlichen Natur*'. If one assumes that Kant is justifying something, this is also how one should read these sections: as steps in a deductive construction, where the last point corresponds most closely to the central thesis. First, Kant posits that humanity has an '*Anlage*' ('predisposition') to the good and that it is 'original'. Humanity's relation to evil on the other hand is characterised as a '*Hang*' (a 'propensity', but we will often maintain ('*Hang*') towards it. Kant goes on to say that this is something man has '*von Natur*' ('from nature', 'naturally'), invoking a 'human nature'. Finally, he ends with an explanation of how evil 'sprang' into that human nature, something that has two meanings: "*Er kann entweder als Vernunft oder als Zeitursprung in Betrachtung gezogen werden.*"⁴⁴ This, the consensus goes, is the structure of Kant's 'argument', his justification for why human beings are 'evil down to their

⁴¹ Henry E. Allison, 'On The Very Idea Of A Propensity To Evil', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2002, pp. 337–348, p. 341.

⁴² Stephen R. Grimm, 'Kant's Argument for Radical Evil', *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2002, pp. 160–177, p. 171.

⁴³ Formosa, 'Kant On The Radical Evil Of Human Nature', p. 245.

⁴⁴ RGV AA VI: 38

roots'. Then, the interpretation varies depending on whether one considers this justification sufficient.

There is no doubt that this analysis of *Das Radicale Böse*, which assumes a deduction, a reasoned progression through *new* concepts, appears in just about every piece of literature. The scholar always outlines how one step differs from another, and then how Kant (successfully or not) bridges this distance. Analyses may differ in arrangement or conclusion, but almost *all of them* always talk about (a) why *Anlage* differs from *Hang* and (b) how one term would imply the other. The same applies to *Hang* and *Natur*, and *Natur* and *Ursprunge*. To further interpret Kant's reasoning, one often uses other concepts that are also used throughout *Das Radicale Böse*. By far the most popular of these are 'Willekür' ('arbitrariness') and 'Gesinnung' ('disposition'). 'Willekür' indicates a hitherto unmentioned but equally crucial step, namely the transition from Kant's Critical project to *Anlage*. The concept isolates free will/choice within the well-known Kantian 'Will', since it is, strictly speaking, already a *good will* by which we can and do obey the moral law. Indeed, we know that human beings must have a good disposition precisely because reflection reveals the free will (*Willekür*) to be a good one (*Will*). 'Gesinnung', a consequence of this *Willekür*, is used by researchers to signify that first crucial step from *Anlage* to *Hang*. Human beings, again very briefly stated, have an *Anlage* ('predisposition') to be good, but can have both a good and evil *Gesinnung* ('disposition') because of the *free will*. So, the most *original arbitrary tendency*, before we can even speak of a sensible *inclination*, must be one towards evil. This is the *Hang* towards evil.⁴⁵ In short, although far from all researchers, for example, share Allan Wood's (1942-) specific '*ungesellige Geselligkeit*' reading (see later) of Kant, few in the study area will contradict this brief summary of *Das Radicale Böse*: "*Kant's doctrine is that all the evil we commit has a common root in human nature, that the human will has an innate propensity (Hang) to make choices against the moral law.*"⁴⁶ It is in the same way that one reads the 'definition' of radical evil in the text, "*Dieses Böse ist radical, weil es den Grund aller Maximen verdirbt*"⁴⁷.

But why should we assume Kant is 'justifying' something (namely human

⁴⁵ How this *Hang* then became rooted in human nature (and what it entails) is in turn a more debated point that will be discussed further below.

⁴⁶ Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 284.

⁴⁷ RGV AA VI: 37

propensity towards evil) in the first place? There are two possible factors that may have resulted in this shared approach. First, of course, it would not be unusual for Kant to use a deductive structure to signify a justification.⁴⁸ Indeed, a philosophical text is 'deductive' when it mirrors a legal account, where an accused person accounts for his actions, with the end point being the judgment of the reader/judge. Yet we see few explicit references to this (as opposed to say, in the first Critique), which would make this explanation a shot in the dark. But perhaps there is an alternative historical explanation. It could be said that one particular philosopher provided the starting shot for this slant, and that this thinker then came to play a crucial role in that aforementioned revival of interest in *Die Religion* in the 1950s and 1960s – this would be none other than Hannah Arendt.

THE LEGACY OF EICHMANN

Earlier, we mentioned a 'remarkable' shared history between the various studies of Kant and radical evil, and that it began sometime in the mid-20^c century with an explosion of renewed interest. This suggestion is perhaps somewhat obscure, but certainly not unheard of, and seems to be shared by the few who are interested in it.⁴⁹ However, we go a step further by asserting that this is mainly due to Hannah Arendt and her critique of Kant's conceptualisation of radical evil in *The Origins Of Totalitarianism* (1951) – questioning if Kant's concept could, in short, adequately capture what had taken place at Auschwitz less than a decade ago (or not). Arendt's reading of Kant thus proves to be a fitting puzzle piece within an emerging philosophical paradigm, shared by thinkers such as Hans Jonas (1903-1993), Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), in which "after Auschwitz' we must rethink both the meaning of evil and human responsibility."⁵⁰ In *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944/1947), one reads at first, "Die Juden ... werden vom absolut Bösen als das absolut Böse gebrandmarkt."⁵¹ But when Adorno returns to the same subject after Arendt in *Negative Dialektik* he talks about "daß freie Menschen radikal böse handeln, so wie über alles von Kant vorgestellte Maß hinaus böse gehandelt wird."⁵²

⁴⁸ Mario Caimi, *Kant's B Deduction*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 14–16.

⁴⁹ Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, p. xiii.

⁵⁰ Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 4.

⁵¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik Der Aufklärung*, 204.

⁵² Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 216 (our emphasis).

Why Hannah Arendt holds Kant 'responsible' for Auschwitz is a question with multiple plausible answers. *Eichmann In Jerusalem* (1963) famously describes how, to her surprise, the titular Eichmann used "an approximately correct definition of the categorical imperative"⁵³ to justify his actions. Arendt uses "approximately" because he would rely on "what he himself called the version of Kant 'for the household use of the little man'."⁵⁴ This version of Kant would insufficiently take into account faculty of judging as the mediator between the incongruent frameworks of legal obedience and human autonomy. '*Judging*' was both the title of her unpublished book on Kant and her 60s lectures in New York on Kantian philosophy - an interest she developed after her confrontation with Eichmann.⁵⁵ Kant is thus for Arendt not only intimately chained to the tragedies of Nazi Germany, but moreover a name that deserves to be freed from those chains.

Those who would consider themselves strict Kant scholars might be understandably sceptical of identifying Arendt as a turning point. However, notice how the historiographical research of Palmquist (who also does not directly name Arendt), for example, traces the re-evaluation of *Die Religion* in the 20th century within Kant studies back to a new English translation published in 1960.⁵⁶ This edition was introduced by John Silber (1926-2012) with his now very famous paper *The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion*,⁵⁷ which heavily shares the critique of *The Origins Of Totalitarianism*. Silber, incidentally, would revitalise Arendt's approach within Kant studies a few decades later with his paper *Kant At Auschwitz* (1985). Consequently, one might notice that all the sources consulted always refer to either Arendt or Silber, more specifically the latter's 1960 or 1985 paper. So, in a sense, it is not out of the bounds of reason to say we are still stuck in an Arendtian moment. What makes this peculiar revival all the more curious is how limited Arendt's original remarks in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* actually are. The following is the full extent of what is asserted about Kant and radical evil

⁵³ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Classics, New York, 2006, chap. VIII.

⁵⁴ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chap. VIII.

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Ronald Beiner (ed.), Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, pp. vii-viii, 3-5, 165.

⁵⁶ Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, p. xiii.

⁵⁷ Allison, 'On The Very Idea Of A Propensity To Evil', p. 345; Zie o.a. ook nog steeds Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, pp. 400-401.

throughout the book:

"It is inherent in our entire philosophical tradition that we cannot conceive of a 'radical evil,' and this is true both for Christian theology, which conceded even to the Devil himself a celestial origin, as well as for Kant, the only philosopher who, in the word he coined for it, at least must have suspected the existence of this evil even though he immediately rationalised it in the concept of a 'perverted ill will' that could be explained by comprehensible motives. Therefore, we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand a phenomenon that nevertheless confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know. There is only one thing that seems to be discernible: we may say that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous."⁵⁸

Here, the central problem reveals itself: Arendt is undoubtedly responsible for the revitalisation of interest in the concept of 'radical evil' - but her description of this concept does not correspond at all to Kant's as outlined earlier. In fact, there is no reason to suspect that Kant aimed to describe any particular kind of event or phenomena, certainly not of the kind of Auschwitz. The literature agrees on this wholeheartedly, and that many authors would feel compelled to 'reprimand' Arendt, even decades later, seems reasonable. But the big surprise is that no one *actually does* to the fullest extent. There remains an affirmed notion that this Arendtian (and, in a way, Silberian) conceptualisation of 'radical evil' is fundamentally sound *and* important – regardless of Kant. It is deemed necessary that philosophers develop a theory of it, whether it would be called "modern evil"⁵⁹, "diabolical evil"⁶⁰, or simply "radical evil" again⁶¹. The only open question seems to be whether *Das Radicale Böse* is capable of producing such a theory. The ensuing discussion centres around Kant's explicit elimination of the possibility of "*teuflich*" ("diabolical") evil,⁶² by which he means "*das Böse als Böse zur Triebfeder in seine Maxime aufzunehmen*."⁶³: is this a necessary element for

⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1973, p. 459.

⁵⁹ Joan Copjec, 'Evil In The Time Of The Finite World', in Joan Copjec (ed.), *Radical evil*, Verso, London, 1996, pp. vii–xxviii, p. xx.

⁶⁰ John Silber, 'Kant At Auschwitz', in *Kant's Ethics: The Good, Freedom, and the Will*, de Gruyter, Berlin, 2012, p. 333.

⁶¹ Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 232.

⁶² RG V AA VI: 35

⁶³ RG V AA VI: 37

understanding 'modern evil' or not? A very clear division can be made between those who believe that this exclusion is a fatal mistake on Kant's part, and those who believe that it is not. To the former we count, for example, Richard Bernstein, Martin Matušík, John Silber, Henry Allison, Melissa Dearey, Slavoj Žižek and Joan Copjec, and to the latter Alenka Zupančič, Jacob Rogozinsky and Frans De Wachter.⁶⁴ Both certainly return us to this notion of 'diabolical evil'. Notable exceptions are Allen Wood, who simply disagrees with Silber's critique,⁶⁵ Alain Badiou, who shares our (emerging) critique of Arendt, but then (mistakenly, we believe) attributes this view to Kant himself.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, everyone recognises that if one were to work out such an Arendtian notion of evil, it would be different from Kant's. Thus, there is more of a consensus on what this speculative theory of evil *should* include than there is one on what Kant's own actually does.

INTRA BELLUM

Another consensus appears to be that, as Bernstein so memorably puts it, Kant "at war with himself" in his study of radical evil⁶⁷. The concept is "a scandal to [Kant's] admirers and a stumbling block to scholars"⁶⁸. This is said to be so because the classical articulation of radical evil, the notion that humans must be "naturally" evil given free will, appear inconsistent with equally classical interpretations of Kantian autonomy. Kant also often seems to suggest that no proof is necessary: "...darüber können wir uns bei der Menge schreiender Beispiele, welche uns die Erfahrung an den Thaten der Menschen vor Augen stellt, den förmlichen Beweis ersparen."⁶⁹ Thus, most secondary literature suggests that the concept of radical evil and/or Kant's texts in *Die Religion* have no place in ethics or logic, but in another philosophical subdiscipline. The primary candidate for this would be anthropology, since Kant argues in *Das Radicale Böse* that only this particular discipline can determine when something is natural to humans (as a species), and when it is not:

⁶⁴ This is, of course, a very broad schema, consider the section for more detailed citations.

⁶⁵ Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, pp. 400–401.

⁶⁶ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Verso, London, 2012, p. 62.

⁶⁷ Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Grimm, 'Kant's Argument for Radical Evil', p. 160.

⁶⁹ RGV AA VI: 32-33

"... kann nur weiterhin bewiesen werden, wenn es sich in der anthropologischen Nachforschung zeigt, daß die Gründe, die uns berechtigen, einem Menschen einen von beiden Charakteren als angeboren beizulegen, so beschaffen sind, kein Grund ist, einen Menschen davon auszunehmen, und er also von der Gattung gelte."⁷⁰

Allen Wood believes that one need not work through the entirety of Kantian *Anthropology* to grasp radical evil, positing that Kant's concept of 'unsociable sociability' (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*) suffices. We then also find this concept, for example, in *Idee Zu Einer Allgemeinen Geschichte In Weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784), where the philosopher describes it as follows:

"... Die ungesellige Geselligkeit der Menschen, d. i. den Hang derselben in Gesellschaft zu treten, der doch mit einem durchgängigen Widerstande, welcher diese Gesellschaft beständig zu trennen droht, verbunden ist."⁷¹

Thus, if radical evil is that *Widerstande*, it also has a positive effect, because "*die Menschen, gutartig wie die Schafe, die sie weiden, würden ihrem Dasein kaum einen größeren Werth verschaffen, als dieses ihr Hausvieh hat.*"⁷² Or as Wood writes: "[it] develops the capacities of the human species but at the cost of individual human beings."⁷³ So the two concepts do not coincide, but one does support the other; *die ungesellige Geselligkeit* describes to us (as an anthropological concept) how one as an individual is rooted in the evil of the species.⁷⁴ Stephen Grimm builds on Wood according to the anthropology thesis, though *ungesellige Geselligkeit* is only a part of the full picture for him. Taking sociability and culture as ground, Grimm holds, would exclude any 'pre-social' evil. In this sense, he takes Kant's expression of 'taking up (again)' much more seriously than Wood. "Society/culture 'adds to' our evil, or in Kant's words makes us 'evil again'."⁷⁵ For others still, like Paul Formosa, this demonstrates that the *Anthropology* is insufficient, and that Kant encourages us, with concepts such as radical evil, to free other notions like *ungesellige Geselligkeit* from their disciplinary limitations.⁷⁶

A second dominant approach is exemplified by Henry Allison. Like Wood,

⁷⁰ RGV AA VI: 25

⁷¹ IaG AA VIII: 20

⁷² IaG AA VIII: 21

⁷³ Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 293.

⁷⁴ In our current "epoch of nature", before Eternal Peace; Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 296.

⁷⁵ Grimm, 'Kant's Argument for Radical Evil', p. 173.

⁷⁶ Formosa, 'Kant On The Radical Evil Of Human Nature'.

he emphasises the temporal aspect of the form radical evil takes; what it implies for humanity changes as humanity gets closer to Eternal Peace. The difference is that he takes this to already be present in the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785).⁷⁷ For Allison, *Das Radicale Böse* is an expression of something that was perhaps insufficiently emphasised in *Grundlegung*, namely how incredibly difficult Kant considered it for man to follow the moral law:

"Must we really strive in apparently Sisyphean fashion after an unattainable ideal of holiness merely in order to become virtuous? ... Our perplexity only increases once it is realised that the first item in this agenda, the condition of even the pursuit of holiness, must be a radical break with the propensity to evil, which Kant characterises as requiring nothing less than a revolution in our cast of mind ... But how, we may ask, is such a revolution possible? ... Unfortunately, Kant himself is of *little help on the matter*, since he candidly admits that such a revolution is inexplicable, while also insisting that it must be possible, since we ought to undertake it."⁷⁸

It is thus not uncommon for authors to maintain that, even after these respective interventions, Kant *still* fails to adequately explain this and/or contradicts himself. Bernstein describes this as the well-known Kantian "*dialektischen Scheins*"⁷⁹, something we think we can know by means of reason, but must actually lie structurally outside the limits of reason: "The concept of radical evil ... seduces us into thinking that we can explain something that we cannot possibly explain."⁸⁰ For Frans De Wachter and Jacob Rogozinski, this is precisely the most crucial thesis. Rogozinski concludes that because the Kantian demands show themselves as so difficult to achieve in *Das Radicale Böse*, consequently, "if there is 'radical' evil in us, it is only proof that we are not so bad, and Kant will only have thought about our wrong to keep us from being absolutely wrong."⁸¹ De Wachter criticises this from a position in a way akin to Allison's in the literal sense: "Kant writes *Das Radicale Böse* not to appease our conscience, but to point out *that* we are appeasing our conscience."⁸²

Many, however, do not give Kant this (somewhat moralistic) benefit of the

⁷⁷ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's theory of freedom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 146–161.

⁷⁸ Allison, "On The Very Idea Of A Propensity To Evil," 346-47 (our emphasis).

⁷⁹ KRV AA B88

⁸⁰ Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 35.

⁸¹ Jacob Rogozinski, 'It Makes Us Wrong: Kant and Radical Evil', in Joan Copjec (ed.), *Radical Evil*, Verso, London, 1996, pp. vii–xxviii, p. 43.

⁸² De Wachter, 'Hoe Radicaal Is Het Radicale Kwade?', p. 42.

doubt. One of the most persistent claims is that Kant clashes because he sullies his otherwise pure philosophy with alternative intentions.⁸³ For many, the radical evil self is a "deplorable concession to the unenlightened misanthropic Christian doctrine of original sin."⁸⁴ There is thus "no doubt that he wanted to extract and defend what he took to be the moral rational core of Christian religious faith"⁸⁵, dixit Bernstein. These contemporary expressions are not too different in their views from Goethe's initial response to *Die Religion*, in a now-famous letter to Herder:

"Er hofiert der herrschenden Philosophie schon lange. Dagegen tat aber auch Kant seinen philosophischen Mantel, nachdem er ein langes Menschenleben gebraucht hat, ihn von mancherlei sudelhaften Vorurtheilen zu reinigen, freventlich mit dem Schandfleck *des radicalen Bösen* beschlabbert, damit doch auch Christen herbeigelockt werden, den Saum zu küssen."⁸⁶

However, this is not necessarily a problem for a third group of authors, who are concerned with the question of whether Kant *succeeds* in this *defence* (Matušík, Quinn). Or, to put it differently: to what extent is Kant engaging in "*quant à l'origine du mal, par rapport à Dieu ... fait une apologie de ses perfections, qui ne relève pas moins sa sainteté, sa justice et sa bonté, que sa grandeur, sa puissance et son indépendance*"⁸⁷, per the formulation of Leibniz's *Essais de Théodicée* (1710)? Earlier, we argued against the idea that *Das Radicale Böse* is a solely 'religious' tract; but the reverse operation is equally flawed – take Joan Copjec's starting point that "Kant's innovation was to link evil to human freedom"⁸⁸, when this has arguably been a definitive staple of scholastic philosophy.⁸⁹ Ironically, this *theodicy*

⁸³ As articulated by Grimm, but also Paul Guyer.

⁸⁴ Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 284.

⁸⁵ Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ Goethe, *Goethe's Werke*. Weimarer Ausgabe, IV, Bd. 10, p. 131-132.

⁸⁷ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Essais de Théodicée*, M.A. Jacques (ed.), Oeuvres de Leibniz, Charpentier, Paris, 1846, p. 44.

⁸⁸ Copjec, 'Evil In The Time Of The Finite World', p. xi.

⁸⁹ Consider: 'I also see that we have simultaneously resolved and answered what we planned to look into after the question what it is to do evil, namely why we do evil. Unless I am mistaken, we do it out of free choice of the will, as the argument we dealt with here has established.'; Aurelius Augustinus, 'On the Free Choice of Will', trans. Peter King, in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 29–30.;

And: "Therefore, free choice, as it defects from God, causes sin. And so God, although he causes free choice, need not cause sin."; Augustinus, 'On the Free Choice of Will', pp. 29–30.

approach allows for a much more direct investigation of the 'internal conflict' in the Kantian text (which remains this essay's primary concern), being allowing it be expressed as an *external* conflict. Can Kant be counted among the prophets, or not? In the literature, the answer largely depends on how one considers the theodicy tradition itself. Some, like M.J. Matušítk, approach it as a series in terms of increasingly sophisticated problem-solving. In this *consistency* approach *Die Religion* falls short, and the trail ends there: "by translating the religious mode of sin into the moral language of radical evil, Kant muddles the issue."⁹⁰ On the other end of the spectrum, authors such as Philip Quinn seek to emphasise as much "contrast" between different theodicies as possible; here "Kant benefits by the comparison"⁹¹. Though this *comparative* approach is, in an abstract sense, seemingly striving to do the opposite of this essay (read *more* theological development into the text), it ultimately performs a very inspirational operation. For the comparative analysis to function, it must strip its analysis of the text of any biases towards either a particular ethical or broader Kantian framework. It is therefore Quinn who, surprisingly refers to the radicality of evil in *logical* and *structural* terms, namely as a "metamaxim".⁹² It is this thread, in all three dominant approaches (ethical, anthropological, theological), which must be picked up again.

READING KANT AGAINST THE GRAIN

Now that we have an overview of the context of *Das Radicale Böse*, we can return to the symptom that piqued our interest: how the terms 'radical evil' and 'radical' play a strange role in contemporary literature. First, we demonstrate how this may have come about, relying on the many consensuses and histories we have uncovered in the previous sections. We then ask whether it is indeed true that there is no *illocutionary meaning* behind the use of the term 'radical evil'. We use these findings to update our own approach to the relationship between the term and Kant's use of reason. In the second subsection, we then retake the thesis that *Das Radicale Böse* is a 'logical text', as introduced by contrasting it with the

⁹⁰ Matušítk, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope*, p. 128.

⁹¹ Philip Quinn, 'In Adam's Fall, We Sinned All', *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1988, pp. 89–118, p. 112.

⁹² Quinn, 'In Adam's Fall, We Sinned All', p. 110.

generally accepted frameworks discussed in the previous section.

In our opening remarks, we identified a remarkable phenomenon in connection with Kant's *Das Radicale Böse*: literature does not only exclude the possible meaning of the term 'radical evil', it does so quite explicitly and repeatedly. These terms, it is claimed, would have been commonplace for Kant and unworthy of investigation. He might *just as well* have used 'innate evil', or 'sin', so to speak. Yet many authors find it necessary to keep repeating this point, while one cannot find anyone who has ever defended this first position. But why? In our view, this is inseparable from the fact that no one even blinks when Bernstein writes that that "[Kant's] analysis of ... radical evil is disappointing"⁹³. The same applies to the central question of Frans De Wachter's paper, *How Radical Is Radical Evil?* Both represent an underlying perception that Kant's conceptualisation is but a conceptualisation, these external demands apply before Kant even picks up a pen. Many refer to some, 'existing' object, separate from Kant, not a *concept* (or even a "metamaxim" per Quinn moments ago), but "*the phenomenon of radical evil*"⁹⁴. Earlier we contextualised this claim, on *modern evil*, as the legacy of Arendt. But what made Kant's evil 'radical' for Arendt? Simply the fact *that* it points to a particular phenomenon: "Kant, *in the word he coined for it*, at least must have suspected the existence of this evil, ... a phenomenon"⁹⁵. This idea, we propose, has never waded - even long after Arendt's reading has been dismissed. Whatever term one uses for *modern evil*, one continues to implicitly adopt Arendt's measure as the 'correct' use of radicality.

Thus, the question "How radical is radical evil?"⁹⁶ was able to persist - without anyone ever being able to formulate a proper answer. When one brings up the Holocaust or Auschwitz, it is invariably assumed, regardless of the subject or purpose of the publication, that this is the *de facto* example of radicality.⁹⁷ Alain Badiou is very aware of this (though he also places the blame for this on Kant):

"Although the idea of a radical Evil can be traced back at least as far as Kant, its contemporary version is grounded systematically on one 'example': the Nazi

⁹³ Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 36.

⁹⁴ Matušítk, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope*, 4 (our emphasis).

⁹⁵ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 459.

⁹⁶ De Wachter, 'Hoe Radicaal Is Het Radicale Kwade?'

⁹⁷ For example: Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, 4; Copjec, "Evil In The Time Of The Finite World," xxvii.

extermination of the European Jews. I do not use the word 'example' lightly."⁹⁸

'Radical' thus retains the connotation of 'really existent' or 'gruesome':

"There is a general consensus that Kant's concept of 'radical evil is *not radical enough* ... On the other hand, it can be shown that Kant's idea of radical evil ... is much more disturbing than is generally admitted."⁹⁹

"'Radical evil' is defined by common sense ... as gratuitous destruction and invidious violence."¹⁰⁰

"[Silber's] criticism is irresistible if, as is still sometimes done, we assume that radical evil is intended to designate extraordinary evil."¹⁰¹

Nearly *everyone* seems to recognise that Arendt is faulty in her presentation of Kant, but few connect it to a particular conceptualisation of radicality. Thus, we can also understand why people keep doing so explicitly a movement of exclusion, openly eliminating the importance of the term 'radicality' over and over again. The phantom, the text that no one quotes and everyone responds to, is Arendt's *Origins Of Totalitarianism*. Consider:

"'Radical Evil' does not refer to a special kind of evil that is especially 'radical'..."¹⁰²

"'Radical Evil' then, is not the name of some special type of evil (*as Arendt maintains*). And it is certainly not a form of evil that we 'cannot conceive' ... he is appealing to the original, etymological meaning of *radikal*. *There is no evidence Kant means anything more than this.*"¹⁰³

What authors are in fact attempting here is very explicitly create distance between Kant and Arendt, without having to distance oneself from the importance of *modern evil*. The only way to do this is by yanking the term 'radical' away from Kant and treating it as an external requirement. It would be an external phenomenon, determined allegedly by *common sense*, but actually so by Arendt. One can do this by falling back on the word 'root'.

Though Kant utilises 'radical', it is assumed he could just as easily have written '*wurzel*'. After all, it is 'simply' a reference to the Biblical *radix malorum est*

⁹⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 62.

⁹⁹ De Wachter, 'Hoe Radicaal Is Het Radicale Kwade?', p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Matušík, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope*, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ Allison, *Kant's theory of freedom*, p. 347.

¹⁰² Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 284.

¹⁰³ Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, 28 (our emphasis).

cupiditas ('greed is the root of all evil', Timothy 6:10), and thus *strictly* 'ordinary' Christian phraseology.¹⁰⁴ But is this actually true? If so, one would have to maintain that this late-18th-century Prussia '*das radicale Böse*' is a very commonplace translation of 'the root of evil'. However, we ourselves could not find any known source of Kant's inspiration that refers to anything *radical*, let alone *das radicale Böse*.¹⁰⁵ We also know which edition of the Bible Kant personally used, namely a then very recent (1751) edition of the Luther translation.¹⁰⁶ This contains the relevant line from the Bible, "*radix malorum est cupiditas*", written as "*eine wurzel alles übels*"¹⁰⁷. So nowhere does read the terms 'radical' or 'böse'. The full passage is, of course, about money, "*Denn geiz ist eine wurzel alles übels; welches hat etliche gelüftet, und sind vom glauben irre gegangen, und machen ihnen selbst viel schmerzen.*"¹⁰⁸ *Das Radicale Böse* does not talk about money at all, nor does it contrast itself with the broader themes of Timothy 6. Kant refers to Timothy, but not this section (3:16 and 4:1)¹⁰⁹. So why should it be assumed that Kant is referring to this passage? From everything thus, we hold it *is* appropriate to draw special attention to the concept of 'radical evil', as we have adequately demonstrated that this has so far remained undiscussed in the literature for reasons which ought not be binding.

CONCLUSION – THE MINOR KANT OF THE RADICAL

In this essay, based on the historical context of the text, we first stressed the centrality of *limits of reason* in *Das Radical Böse*, followed by a possible account of how this came to be overtaken with another concern (the phenomenon of modern evil) in scholarly literature. We identified three dominant approaches to

¹⁰⁴ Pasternack and Fugate, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion."

¹⁰⁵ A negative proposition is of course difficult to decidedly prove. We have been unable to find confirmatory evidence anywhere, no matter how often it is assimilated without citation. In the bibliography, the reader will find some of the main sources of inspiration for Kant (both according to the *Akademie Ausgabe* and the recent Bloomsbury translations), plus a few more of our proposals; we can claim with certainty the term does not appear in these works at all.

¹⁰⁶ Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, p. xxviii.

¹⁰⁷ Martin Luther, *Biblia, das ist: Die ganze Heilige Schrift Alten und Neuen Testamentes*, Hieronymus Burckhardt (ed.), Im-Hof, Basel, 1751, p. 1131.

¹⁰⁸ Luther, *Biblia, das ist: Die ganze Heilige Schrift Alten und Neuen Testamentes*, p. 1131.

¹⁰⁹ RGV AA VI: 36, 138

the text: an *ethical* approach (Allison, De Wachter, Rogozinski, Zupančič), an *anthropological* approach (Wood, Formosa, Grimm) and a *theodicy* approach (Matušík, Quinn). Dominant in all three, but particularly the first two, is a fear for a potential danger in *Das Radicale Böse*, something which would result in Kant contradicting himself. For natural scholarly reasons, one then proceeds to avoid this danger at all costs – otherwise the entirety would be, after all, "metaphysically objectionable".¹¹⁰ Because *Das Radicale Böse* does not announce a break, literature seems tasked with the burden to recuperate it in some way, to *justify* the very existence of the text by showing that its conclusion is already present in Kant's *Grundlegung of Anthropologie*. As a result, *Das Radicale Böse* is never truly allowed to add anything new. But considered from the framework of the Minor Kant, mentioned at the opening of this text, it allows us to frame Kant's 'war with himself' in *Das Radicale Böse*. What Hardt and Negri call upon us to do, especially with Kant's smaller tracts, are to pay special attention to the ways in which the Prussian philosopher approaches a given problem. If we read *Das Radicale Böse* as a minor text, the space also opens up for a hypothetical reading. We can pay attention to *how* Kant *develops* certain concepts, rather than their outcome strictly.

Our argument that a concept to which more attention should be paid is 'radicality' in particular, is grounded on two elements. First, as demonstrated in the previous section, we believe there is ample reason to question the often-repeated assumption of it effectively being a 'dead' or flatly uninteresting term. To add to this argument – something else secondary literature has ignored wholesale is that Kant uses the term 'radical' elsewhere too, namely in *Anthropology* and the first *Kritik*:

"Er ist wie ein Rausch ... die einen inneren oder äußeren Seelenarzt bedarf, der doch mehrenteils keine radicale, sondern fast immer nur palliativ, heilende Mittel zu verschreiben weiß."¹¹¹

"Die comparativen Grundkräfte müssen wiederum unter einander verglichen werden, um sie dadurch, daß man ihre Einhelligkeit entdeckt, einer einzigen radicalen, d. i. absoluten, Grundkraft nahe zu bringen. Diese Vernunftseinheit aber ist bloß

¹¹⁰ Allison, 'On The Very Idea Of A Propensity To Evil', p. 337.

¹¹¹ Anth AA VII: 252.

hypothetisch. Man behauptet nicht, daß eine solche in der That angetroffen werden müsse, sondern daß man sie zu Gunsten der Vernunft..."¹¹²

It is this second quote in particular, from the first *Kritik*, which is very telling about his potential intentionality of the term 'radical'. A radical concept is something we look for *zu Gunsten der Vernunft*, for the sake of reason itself. This certainly finds a place in Kant's minor writing. The quote concludes Kant's discussion of the "*hypothetische Gebrauch der Vernunft*", which is when we use reason to try to make sense of "*problematischer Begriffe*".¹¹³ As discussed, plenty of the literature agrees that the term 'radical' does not, for Kant, concern something 'really exists' (whether it is indeed 'encountered'). But one can take it a step further: 'radical' says something about a concept one turns to when one thinks through a difficult hypothesis. A new possibility thus suggests itself: reading *Das Radicale Böse* not as a text with a purpose determined by the secondary author (a good expression of Christian sin, an anthropological thesis, etc.) in which radical evil plays a *role*, but as a logical/hypothetical text. One starts from a certain point of view and develops its consequences. In so far as this outcome clashes, appears as a 'war with himself' for Kant, it should be (from the minor perspective) not be seen as a failure, but rather as something to be named. The name given to this very tension by Kant, we argue, is 'radical'. Or, to put it differently, Kant presents us with a text wherein the very *concept* of evil is *radicalised*. As a result, the dominant framework can be reversed. Rather than wondering if Kant or his concepts are in any (sufficiently) way 'radical' in a way we assume to understand, we can ask the opposite question: are our contemporary notions, to which we ascribe a 'radical' status, deemed for the field radicals and radicalism, even up for the scrutiny put forward to Kant? Are they capturing something which at the conceptual level can be called 'radical' per *Die Religion*?

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¹¹² KrV AA B677 (our emphasis).

¹¹³ KrV AA B677

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