

# **Kant and the Nature of Doctrine: A Rule-Theory Approach to Theological Reasoning**

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## **A Promissory Note**

In order to promote the interests and purposes of the Scriptural Reasoning Network, this essay is the first in a series on how particular thinkers—those who have impacted the practice of SR—can be utilized for teaching philosophy within a Christian institution of higher education. While these essays will involve both pedagogical reports and philosophical argumentation, I intend them to be more pedagogically useful than philosophically substantive. This first essay concerns the work of Yale theologian George Lindbeck in relation to Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Idealism, and the second one—which will come out in volume 16, number 2 (2017)—relates the work of Duke theologian Stanley Hauerwas to how I teach logic in a United Methodist institution of higher education.

## **Introduction**

Philosophy and religion majors at Southwestern College tend to read and study Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in PHIL 221: History of Philosophy around the same time that they read and study George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* in REL 220: Introduction to Christian Theology (taught by my colleague, Dr. Jackson Lashier). After several conversations with these majors about the relationship between Kant's epistemology and Lindbeck's theological reasoning, I offer this essay as a guide for my students—as well as for other professors whose students might be learning Kant's philosophy alongside Lindbeck's post-liberalism.

My thesis is clear and straightforward: contrary to popular belief within contemporary theology, that post-liberal theologians intend to overcome all aspects of modern philosophy, George Lindbeck offers a rule-theory approach to theological reasoning that deeply resembles Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Idealism. Once some very basic definitions and details are explained from Kant's Transcendental Idealism, then Lindbeck's theological method becomes much more illuminating.

This essay proceeds as follows: first, I give my own account of Lindbeck's argument in *The Nature of Doctrine*; second, I explain the most basic details of Kant's Transcendental Idealism—and, for the sake of clarity, I rely on the interpretations of Kant's Transcendental Idealism found in the work of Henry Allison and Hilary Putnam;<sup>1</sup> third, I analyze Lindbeck's rule-theory through the basic details of Kant's Transcendental Idealism; fourth; I offer three Kantian insights to help improve upon Lindbeck's post-liberalism. I conclude—and deliberately

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<sup>1</sup> While there are other interpretations of Kant's first *Critique*, I think Allison's and Putnam's interpretations are the most helpful for pedagogical purposes.

do not begin this—with some scholarly brush clearing about how philosophical labels work (or usually do not work well) within theology.

### **Lindbeck on the Nature of Doctrine**

George Lindbeck writes:

The novelty of rule theory...is that it does not locate the abiding and doctrinally significant aspect of religion in propositionally formulated truths, much less in inner experiences, but in the story it tells and in the grammar that informs the way the story is told and used. From a cultural-linguistic perspective..., a religion is first of all a comprehensive interpretive medium or categorical framework within which one has certain kinds of experiences and makes certain kinds of affirmations.<sup>2</sup>

Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* constructs a rule-theory in order to understand the nature and purpose of doctrine. While the content of doctrines are provisional, for Lindbeck, the rules for doctrine are not provisional. The content of Christian doctrine can and should change, but the rules for doctrine are not changeable and remain stable throughout the Christian tradition. Lindbeck argues against (a) a cognitive-propositionalist model for Christian doctrine where both the content of doctrine and the rules for doctrine are completely stabilized, and he also argues against (b) an experiential-expressivist model for Christian doctrine where neither the rules for doctrine nor the content of doctrine stay the same over the course of the Christian tradition. Within the experiential-expressivist model, the content of Christian doctrines and the rules for doctrine are mere interpretations of religious communities' or an individual believer's feelings, inner life, or subjective experiences. Lindbeck posits a rule-theory for the nature of doctrine that he calls the cultural-linguistic model, which serves as an alternative to both cognitive-propositionalism and experiential-expressivism. In this essay, I equate Kant's use of the word "judgment" with Lindbeck's use of the word "affirmations," because it seems that an affirmation involves an act of judgment within a particular ecclesial body.

Lindbeck writes that Christian doctrines are communally authoritative teachings concerning "beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity" of the Church throughout the Christian tradition.<sup>3</sup> Doctrines, as communally authoritative teachings, are necessary for a community to identify as a specific community ("Lutheran," "Methodist," "Roman Catholic"). Without doctrine, a community would not know its identity because it would not have its communally authoritative teaching necessary for its identity. However, for Lindbeck, there needs to be some kind of framework "within which Christians know and experience."<sup>4</sup> Such a framework is what maintains both *continuity* and *unity* throughout the histories of ecclesial bodies. Lindbeck writes, "To the degree that religions are like languages, they can

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<sup>2</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 80.

<sup>3</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 74.

<sup>4</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 84.

obviously remain the same amid vast transformations of affirmations and experiences.”<sup>5</sup> Doctrines are better understood as being the result of *grammatical rules*, since doctrines can change but the rules for doctrine remain constant.

According to Lindbeck, the rules within Christianity begin with the biblical narratives. Lindbeck writes, “In the case of Christianity, the framework is supplied by the biblical narratives interrelated in certain specified ways.”<sup>6</sup> Lindbeck does not specify how biblical narratives might provide an emphasis on some rules or others within different ecclesial bodies, but it certainly works this way. The term that Christians use for these differences is “canon-within-a-canon.” So, perhaps an unfair sketch to make a point: Roman Catholics might emphasize rules gathered from the Book of Acts and the Petrine epistles; Lutherans might emphasize rules gathered from the Pauline epistles (especially Galatians); and Methodists might emphasize rules gathered from the Sermon on the Mount (“Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” [Matthew 5:48]). These epistolary and sermonic narratives offer a “categorical framework within which one has certain kinds of experiences and makes certain kinds of affirmations.”<sup>7</sup>

To consider a framework that brings different ecclesial bodies closer together in terms of a shared set of rules: reciting the creeds serves as an example for Lindbeck’s argument. A rule-theory allows for creeds to have the status that church bodies have given to them but with the caveat that such a status remains paradigmatic. A rule-theory can uphold dogmatic claims but “leaves room for both doctrinal development and doctrinal ‘dedevelopment.’”<sup>8</sup> A rule-theory allows for doctrine to be both *contingent* and *necessary* for particular communities of faith: *contingent* in the sense that the content of the doctrines can change, but *necessary* in the sense that there must be continuity to the doctrine in order for a particular community of faith to be *that* particular community of faith (i.e., “Lutheran,” “Methodist,” “Roman Catholic”). Creeds remain a rule for doctrine, but that does not guarantee that the content of doctrines will have the same result within all ecclesial bodies.

No matter the ecclesial body, rules must remain stable in order for doctrines to remain authoritative despite the changes that are made to the content of those doctrines. If doctrine is both contingent and necessary for particular communities of faith, then the rules for the nature and purpose of doctrine must provide the *necessary conditions* for how doctrines change and evolve over the course of the Christian tradition—the contingencies involved with doctrine. The rules for doctrine must remain the same in order for a particular community of faith to identify as *that* particular community of faith. If the status of doctrine is paradigmatic, then the status of the rules cannot be paradigmatic but *set* and *stable*. In the sense that they are set, they are *a priori*. In the sense that they become *stabilized*, they are necessary for the unchanging conditions for doctrine.

Such is the method of George Lindbeck’s rule-theory for the nature of doctrine. I argue that it serves as a theological appropriation of Immanuel Kant’s Transcendental Idealism. Kant’s

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<sup>5</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 84.

<sup>6</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 80.

<sup>7</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 98.

Transcendental Idealism, which is found in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, works as a formal rule-theory. For Kant, necessary and stable conditions have to be in place in order for *thinking* or *thought* to be possible at all. In this sense, Kant's Transcendental Idealism serves as a precursor to Lindbeck's rule-theory. In particular, Lindbeck inherits from Kant's philosophy the argument that there must be necessary and stable epistemological conditions for Christian doctrines to be intelligible and possible. Christian doctrines within theology, for Lindbeck, are communal versions of thinking in Kant's sense of how thinking becomes intelligible and thought becomes possible.

### Basic Definitions and Details for Kant's Transcendental Idealism

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* provides a training exercise in how to ask the question of *what we are doing* when we think, rather than asking the question of what objects are in the world. The accomplishment of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is found in how he surmises the necessary conditions for making judgments about what we are doing. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the attempt to give a complete account of the epistemological conditions of possibility, which is the *transcendental* aspect of it, without considering the traditional philosophical question concerning nature of objects, which is the *idealist* aspect of it—hence Kant's Transcendental Idealism. Kant develops the necessary conditions for knowledge. Kant avoids making dogmatic claims about what is in the world completely independent of human ideas or thoughts about the world. Most important in my explanation of Kant's philosophy concerns rule-theory: rules are the stable conditions of possibility for both *experiences* and *judgments* in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. This argument helps us make sense of the nature of Christian doctrine.

Similar to Lindbeck's positioning of other models—cognitive-propositionalism and experiential-expressivism—Kant, too, constructs his rule-theory as an alternative to other theories. Most importantly, Kant positions himself in relation to empirical realism and transcendental realism. Empirical Realism (a) fails to consider the conditions of possibility for knowledge, (b) assumes that sense perceptions are sufficient for knowledge, and (c) asserts the traditional philosophical claim that the nature of knowledge concerns objects—not ideas. Transcendental Realism articulates the foundations for knowledge but still asserts the traditional philosophical claim that the nature of knowledge concerns objects—not ideas. While this does not match up with Lindbeck's understanding of cognitive-propositionalism and experiential-expressivism, it proves helpful that both Kant and Lindbeck position other models and theories in order to construct their respective rule-theories.

Hilary Putnam reads Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as an attempt to formalize logic for the purpose of making rational thought possible. If logic can be formalized, then informalities will have a firm grounding. About Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Putnam writes:

Indeed, logic has no metaphysical presuppositions at all. For to say that thought, in the normative sense of *judgment which is capable of truth*, necessarily conforms to logic is not to say something which a metaphysics has to *explain*. To explain anything presupposes logic; for Kant, logic is simply prior to all rational activity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 247.

Logic provides rules that are set and stable, and these rules make it possible for thinking to occur. These rules are not revisable because they provide a secure foundation for content, and the content becomes revisable.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the communal aspect of Lindbeck's emphasis on ecclesial bodies, the place where content gets revised remains in the contours of the mind of the individual rational agent. Other than that difference, however, Kant and Lindbeck both emphasize that rules ought to be understood as set and stable.

In the words of Henry Allison, Kant defines a *concept* as “a universal representation, or a representation of what is common to several objects, hence a representation *insofar as it can be contained in various ones*.”<sup>11</sup> Because of the generality of concepts, Allison further clarifies, “a concept can refer to an object only by means of features that are also predicable of other objects falling under the same concept.”<sup>12</sup> Kant's definition of concepts relates to a version of *conceptual realism* because concepts can and do refer to objects, but only if the particular object shares in the general feature of the concept.<sup>13</sup> Instead of making a claim about how concepts only inform us about objects, Kant turns concepts into *rules for judgment*. Kant explicitly makes this argument when he says that there can be “no other use of...concepts than that of judging by means of them.”<sup>14</sup> Kant continues with a characterization of concepts as “predicates of possible judgments.”<sup>15</sup> If concepts are rules for judgment, then concepts are not ‘given’ within sense experience but are ‘made’ through the active use of concepts themselves.<sup>16</sup> This activity is what Kant calls “the understanding.”<sup>17</sup>

While we have established how Kant provides a rule-based approach to judgments, what about a rule-based approach to experience? Rules, for Kant, become the *conditions of possibility*

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<sup>10</sup> Putnam says that the “doctrine of the revisability of logic would...be anathema to Kant” (Putnam, *Words and Life*, 249).

<sup>11</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004), 78.

<sup>12</sup> Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Westphal offers the clearest explanation for this claim (see Westphal, *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism* [New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 42-52). Westphal also provides one of the most interesting critiques of Allison's interpretation of Kant's Transcendental Idealism (see 123-125).

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. by Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), A68/B93. (This citation is the standard method of quoting both the first and second editions of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*: A68 [pagination of first edition]/B93 [pagination of second edition].)

<sup>15</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A69/B94.

<sup>16</sup> If pragmatism is understood through the corollary that beliefs are rules for actions, it seems that it would follow that the best way to describe *concepts* pragmatically is to describe them as rules for judgment—which Kant does. To consider both beliefs and concepts as rules can be helpful for contemporary philosophy and theology because it avoids both a sort of Cartesianism and a kind of psychologism—both of which place beliefs and concepts either non-reductively in the mind alone (Cartesianism) or reductively in the inner workings of the brain (psychologism).

<sup>17</sup> About “the understanding,” Kant writes, “It is, therefore, just as necessary to make the mind's concepts sensible—that is, to add an object to them in intuition—as to make our intuitions understandable—that is, to bring them under concepts. These two powers, or capacities, cannot exchange their functions. *The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing*. Only from their unification can cognition arise” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A50-51/B74-76; emphasis added).

for experiences. Rules are *a priori* in the sense that they are determined prior to experience, and *a priori* rules for thinking must be in place in order to make sense of our experiences. Rules are necessary for both experiences and judgments because experiences and judgments have to maintain conditions in order to have the possibility for making sense. For Kant, both experiences and judgments are aspects of thinking. Any thinking that takes place without the necessary conditions—provided by the *a priori* rules—remains illogical, non-sensical, and unintelligible. This type of reasoning cannot be called thinking at all because, in Hilary Putnam’s words, “illogical thought is not...thought at all.”<sup>18</sup> In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant’s transcendental idealism serves as a rule-theory that gives the conditions of possibility for both experience and judgment. As a rule-theory, it establishes the necessary conditions of possibility for experience, judgment, and even for thinking. In Kant’s transcendental idealism, the necessary conditions become the rules for thinking. While experiences and judgments remain contingent, the conditions for having experiences and making judgments are unchanging.

### A Rule-Theory Approach to Theological Reasoning

Returning to George Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine*, my argument concerns how *a priori* rules provide the framework that makes *judgments about God* and *religious experiences* possible.<sup>19</sup> They are *a priori* in the sense that they are determined prior to religious experience, and they have to be in place prior and provide guidance for making orthodox judgments about God. In this section, I address a rule-theory approach to religious experience, then I explain a rule-theory approach to making judgments about God.

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<sup>18</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life*, 247.

<sup>19</sup> For the record, a rule-theory approach to theological reasoning potentially works against my argument found in *Narrative Theology and the Hermeneutical Virtues: Humility, Patience, Prudence*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2015), which defends a virtue-centered approach to theological reasoning. In that book, I argue at length to defend the following claim: if Hans Frei’s expectations and goals for biblical hermeneutics are going to work within pedagogy and scholarship, then we need a virtue-centered approach to hermeneutics. At times throughout the book, I assert that Frei shares with his Yale colleague George Lindbeck the aim of “intratextuality” for the study of the Christian theology and the philosophy of religion. For the purposes of the argument of the book, this assertion remains non-problematic. There has been much discussion, however, on the importance of clarifying the differences between Frei’s and Lindbeck’s theological reasoning. I concur about the importance of this task. If read in relation to *Narrative Theology and the Hermeneutical Virtues*, the present essay contributes to the task of clarifying the differences between Frei’s and Lindbeck’s theological projects. My contribution would be, specifically, a philosophical one: Frei’s version of post-liberalism requires virtue-centered reasoning; Lindbeck’s version of post-liberalism seems to resist virtue-centered reasoning and, instead, offers a rule-theory approach to theology. Traditionally, rule-theory and virtue theory stand at odds against one another. The clearest statement of these two theories being at odds with one another can be found in G. Scott Davis’s book on the ethics for warfare: “Virtue..., understood in the Aristotelian sense, has no place..., for appeals to rules and obligations, formal frameworks, and value choices....Talk of...formal theories fosters the view that shaping our lives is either arbitrary or out-of-control, and this opens up the gates of indifference, indulgence, and despair. When this happens [when we turn to rule-theory], we lose the ability to take pride in ourselves, and we admit the contemptible as the norm. Virtue cannot thrive in such a community [bound only by rules]” (Davis, *Warcraft and the Fragility of Virtue: An Essay in Aristotelian Ethics*, with a new Foreword by Jacob L. Goodson [Eugene, OR: Cascade Press, 2012], 109). In “Taking Rules Seriously,” however, Hilary Putnam demonstrates how the two theories might complement one another (see Putnam, “Taking Rules Seriously,” *New Literary History* 15, no. 1 [1983], 193-200).

Rules become necessary for religious experience because, as Lindbeck says, “it is necessary to have the means for expressing an experience in order to have it.”<sup>20</sup> Religious experiences that take place without the necessary conditions in place are private experiences. As such, they remain unintelligible—or “conceptually confused”—*as religious experiences*. Experiences, themselves, cease to be *intelligible as experiences* if an individual does not follow the necessary conditions for those experiences to make sense. In other words, *we do not even know that we have an “experience” if we do not have the rules in place to make sense of that experience*.

Reflecting on making judgments about God, Kant’s philosophy proves quite helpful. Kant’s Transcendental Idealism requires a kind of epistemic humility—where knowers need to recognize their limits on what they can know about objects. I believe that this is one way to understand the motivation for Lindbeck’s rule-theory approach to theological reasoning: Christians need to recognize their limits on what they can know about God. Set and stable rules ensure this type of epistemic and theological humility. Furthermore, Kant discusses the differences between divine and human knowledge and provides human knowers with a way to be *good human knowers* rather than *bad divine knowers*. I claim that Kant’s shift to the anthropocentric serves as a *good theological* move because it renders human knowledge as human and not divine. In this sense, Kant maintains a strong Creator/creature distinction in his Transcendental Idealism. For both Kant and Lindbeck, Church leaders and serious Christian laypersons ought to deliberate about what the necessary *a priori* rules are in order to help Christians make sense of their religious experiences and to sustain a proper framework for making faithful and sound judgments about the triune God. Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and Lindbeck’s post-liberalism provide ways to regulate metaphysical and theological claims made within the Church.

### **How Transcendental Idealism Strengthens Lindbeck’s Post-Liberalism**

How does Kant’s Transcendental Idealism provide more philosophical substance to Lindbeck’s rule-theory approach to theological reasoning? I have two ways forward to recommend for post-liberal theologians, and they relate to deepening the criticisms of the two models identified by Lindbeck: cognitive-propositionalism and experiential-expressivism. First, relying even more on insights from Kant’s Transcendental Idealism—as interpreted by Hilary Putnam—strengthens the post-liberal critique of experiential-expressivism. Second, John Milbank’s suggestion that post-liberalism should embrace a version of cognitive-propositionalism—for the sake of being more “ontological”—renders theological reasoning less logical and, therefore, more problematic.

Lindbeck’s critique of experiential-expressivism is that it (experiential-expressivism) mistakenly interprets doctrine as “nondiscursive symbols” of feelings, inner sense, or subjective experiences. As a correction to this model, Lindbeck recommends his cultural-linguistic model, which argues for religion being understood as a “categorical framework within which one has

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<sup>20</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 37.

certain kinds of experience.”<sup>21</sup> Lindbeck’s critique of experiential-expressivism would be strengthened through a demonstration of how rule-theory leads to the possibility of an objective account of experience. Putnam spells this out and even begins with two examples:

If I look at a building, I may observe the top of the building before I observe the bottom of the building, but I cannot infer that the top of the building existed before the bottom of the building did. But if I see a ship sailing down the river, and I first observe the ship passing under a bridge and then I observe the ship passing by a dock farther down the river, I do infer that the ship’s being under the bridge temporally preceded the ship’s passing the dock. The Kantian explanation is that my very conception of the ship as an object is bound up with a whole system of laws (“rules”), and given my total system of knowledge I am able to interpret the two experiences in the case of the ship as corresponding to the time order in which the events occurred. When I look at the building I apply a different part of my knowledge—different laws as well as different initial conditions—and I conclude that I am simply seeing in a different order things that have continued existence.... I know that I can see the different parts of the building in any order I choose; but I cannot see the events in the case of the ship in any order I choose. Kant’s conclusion is that it is only by interpreting my experiences with the aid of...laws [rules] that I am able to understand them as giving me an objective world with objective...relations.<sup>22</sup>

The analogy for post-liberal theology requires professors and students to consider how some aspects of ecclesial life are like looking at a building from top-to-bottom, but making the correct inference that the building must have been built from bottom-to-top. Other aspects of ecclesial life are like observing a ship that moves from under a bridge to a dock and making the correct inference that ship does move from under the bridge to the dock. To state the analogy with more specificity: understanding some religious experiences might involve counter-intuitive inferences like the one required for the building, while other religious experiences require linear inferences like the one required for the ship. Each of these relates to the “categorical framework” or the set of rules in different ways, but both rely on the same “system of laws” or “rules”—a system that remains set and stable.

Lindbeck argues against a cognitive-propositionalist model for Christian doctrine because he thinks that such a model makes both the content of doctrine and the rules for doctrine completely stabilized. The radical orthodox theologian, John Milbank, claims an agreement with Lindbeck’s post-liberalism with the exception that Milbank wants to return theological reasoning to a version of cognitive-propositionalism. Milbank writes:

However, a rigorous understanding of the implications of [Lindbeck’s] thesis will show that more importance must be given to propositions, and so to ontology, than Lindbeck appears to allow... [because] one cannot abstract, as Lindbeck tries to do, a few simple rules.... ‘Rules’ are, in effect, speculative interpretations of the implicit assumptions of the narrative, and the articulation of these assumptions will necessarily engage with the conceptual resources available at a particular historical time, which then become an inescapable part of the Christian inheritance...as Lindbeck implies.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 80.

<sup>22</sup> Putnam, *Words and Life*, 105.

<sup>23</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Second Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 384 & 387.

Milbank wants more metaphysics, more “ontology.” Because of this, he wants a post-liberalism alongside a cognitive-propositionalism for the purpose of stabilizing the doctrines themselves. A reader of Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory* might come away with the sense that, for Milbank, the content of doctrines have more stability than the rules for doctrine. Milbank reduces rules to mere “speculative interpretations” and then seems to discard them.<sup>24</sup>

From a Kantian perspective, Milbank’s move risks allowing illogical content. Following Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, Putnam makes the point that we should “never waver...from the view that even *formal* meaning must conform to the laws of logic.”<sup>25</sup> Putnam mentions the need to constantly be aware of “the deep difference between an *ontological* conception of logic, a conception of logic as descriptive of some domain of actual and possible entities, and Kant’s... conception [of logic]”—which makes logic “the form of coherent thought.”<sup>26</sup> Content cannot be coherent without logical form, and Milbank’s version of cognitive-propositionalism risks doctrinal content being incoherent and illogical because it lacks logical form. Lindbeck’s rule-theory approach to Christian doctrine and theological reasoning gets theologians closer to securing coherence of doctrinal content. To secure coherence of doctrinal content necessarily involves and relates to rules remaining secure and stable.

Putnam’s way of articulating the connection between logic and metaphysics, between logic and ontology, strengthens Lindbeck’s overall goals for post-liberal theology:

Indeed, logic has no metaphysical presuppositions at all. For to say that thought, in the normative sense of *judgment which is capable of truth*, necessarily conforms to logic is not to say something which a metaphysics has to *explain*. To explain anything presupposes logic; for Kant, logic is simply prior to all rational activity.<sup>27</sup>

Lindbeck’s critique of cognitive-propositionalism ought to be understood as a critique of putting the cart (doctrinal content) before the horse (logical rules): logic ought to be and remain prior to doctrinal content.

### Conclusion

An aspect of Milbank’s critique of Lindbeck that I deeply appreciate is that Milbank identifies Lindbeck’s post-liberalism as a version of Kantian philosophy. Milbank claims, “One has to pass from Lindbeck’s ‘Kantian’ narrative epistemology of scheme and content to a ‘Hegelian’ metanarrative which is ‘a philosophy of history’, though based on faith and not reason.”<sup>28</sup> I find that putting debates in contemporary theology into the philosophical context of

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<sup>24</sup> Milbank accuses Lindbeck of “discarding” the content of doctrines (see *Theology and Social Theory*, 387).

<sup>25</sup> Putnam, *Words and Life*, 247.

<sup>26</sup> Putnam, *Words and Life*, 247.

<sup>27</sup> Putnam, *Words and Life*, 247.

<sup>28</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 390.

German Idealism proves quite helpful for actually implementing the insights of contemporary theologians and for understanding what is at stake within contemporary theology.

Not all theologians, however, are willing to play along, by which I mean, in philosophical terms, that theologians tend to block roads of enquiry because of an over-commitment to labels. For instance, an anonymous reviewer wrote the following words as a response to the argument in the present essay:

I don't understand how to read Lindbeck as a kind of Kantian rule-theorist, rather than a Wittgensteinian rule-theorist. Wittgenstein is not addressed at all, which seems odd, in light of Lindbeck's explicit appropriation [of Wittgenstein's philosophy]. Lindbeck has been *accused* of Kantian formalism, but that does not make him a Kantian.<sup>29</sup>

This comment strikes me as both superficial and unhelpful in the sense that it discourages any exploration—outside of an author's own descriptions and intentions—of the “family resemblances” (Wittgenstein's phrase!) between how theological arguments are made and how philosophers prescribe theological argumentation or thinking in general. Theologians—even the most sophisticated ones, like George Lindbeck—do not always see how their thinking and writing relate to other philosophical positions, and readers should not simply take an author's word on such important claims as which philosophical positions guide their thinking and writing.

In response to Lindbeck's self-description of being “Wittgensteinian,” it seems to be a matter of fact that Lindbeck does not attend to the logic of the grammar of theological doctrines in the way that Wittgenstein proposes throughout the *Philosophical Investigations*. Lindbeck, however, oftentimes considers the *conditions* and *frameworks* for making theological doctrines intelligible and sensible—which has its philosophical correlate in Kant's Transcendental Idealism.

Rather than engaging with my argument—which teaches “how to read Lindbeck as a kind of Kantian rule-theorist”—the reviewer employs philosophical labels as a way to express a lack of understanding. While I worry less about the understanding of this particular reviewer, I fear for students in religious studies and theology courses whose professors block critical investigations into potential connections between philosophical theories and theological ways of reasoning. Yes, it is accurate that Lindbeck takes on the label of “Wittgensteinian,” and yes, it is accurate that Lindbeck makes no claim about borrowing from or thinking with Kant's Transcendental Idealism.<sup>30</sup> Should these two accuracies become the end of the story for analyzing, evaluating, and investigating connections between philosophical theories and Lindbeck's post-liberal theology?

My point is a pedagogical one. In PHIL 221: History of Philosophy, I teach G. W. F. Hegel's Absolute Idealism and Ludwig Wittgenstein's Linguistic Idealism (a phrase I borrow

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<sup>29</sup> Not written by a reviewer for the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*.

<sup>30</sup> In fact, Lindbeck makes an egregious error by positioning Kant as representative of the “experiential-expressivist” model. Lindbeck fails to take the importance of logic within Kant's philosophy seriously enough. In relation to the arguments of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant would not assert that doctrines are “nondiscursive symbols” of inner feelings. The point of this essay, however, is not to argue against Lindbeck in a kind of proof-texting way, but to re-describe his post-liberalism in terms of a Kantian rule-theory.

from Elizabeth Anscombe’s helpful interpretation of Wittgenstein’s philosophy<sup>31</sup>) immediately after teaching Kant’s Transcendental Idealism. Those Philosophy and Religion majors who take PHIL 221: History of Philosophy in the same semester that they take REL 220: Introduction to Christian Theology make connections between Lindbeck’s post-liberal theology and *Kant’s* philosophy—not Wittgenstein’s. This is the case even with Lindbeck telling his readers—these students—that he is “Wittgensteinian.” Should professors shut down this critical moment and say, “No, Lindbeck claims to be ‘Wittgensteinian,’ not Kantian, so say no more about this connection between Kant and Lindbeck”? I think not! Professors should say, “Very interesting—Lindbeck describes himself as ‘Wittgensteinian,’ yet you see Kantian Transcendental Idealism at work in Lindbeck’s theological reasoning. Say more!”

The present essay is my own attempt to “say more” about connections between Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and Lindbeck’s post-liberal theology. Perhaps undergraduate students taking courses in both Christian theology and the history of philosophy will find these connections useful.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps my own argument can be used as a foil for an undergraduate student to make a case for why Lindbeck’s post-liberalism is, in fact, more “Wittgensteinian” than “Kantian.” Perhaps professors will stop blocking roads of enquiry and encourage undergraduate students to make further—and yet unknown—connections between philosophical theories and theological ways of reasoning.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Anscombe, “The Question of Linguistic Idealism,” in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: Collected Philosophical Papers, Volume I* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1981), chapter 13.

<sup>32</sup> After reading and studying Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine*, I recommend going next to Nicholas Adams’s “Confessing the Faith: Reasoning in Tradition,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas & Samuel Wells (New York: Blackwell, 2006), 209-222.

<sup>33</sup> I began researching this project while I was in Nicholas Adams’s graduate seminar, “God and Knowledge in German Idealism” (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, Spring 2006). Professor Adams allowed me to write on connections between Kant’s and Hegel’s philosophies with Lindbeck’s and Milbank’s ways of theological reasoning. I put the research away for eight years. In Spring 2014—while teaching PHIL 221: History of Philosophy for the first time at Southwestern College—conversations with Lindsey Graber, Paul Mata, and Daniel Reffner brought me back to this research. In Spring 2017, several students brought their “hunches” to my attention about the connection between Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and Lindbeck’s post-liberal theology, which led to the motivation needed to complete the project in essay form. I am grateful to Nicholas Adams, Lindsey Graber, Paul Mata, Daniel Reffner, Ashley Tate, and two anonymous reviewers (only one of them was quoted in the body of the essay) for comments, questions, and suggestions on earlier manifestations of this research. Mistakes remain my responsibility.